

Dunk Mail?



Right-wing hate-rag or a successful paper with its finger on the pulse of the national conversation? Andrew McCallum investigates.

The *Daily Mail* is loathed by large numbers of people. 'Typical *Mail* reader,' critics of its perceived world view often sneer. The term is intended to produce an image of someone older, probably in the provinces, white and with conservative views. By implication they are deemed xenophobic, homophobic, racist and blind to the realities of the modern world.

The powerful emotions stirred up by the *Daily Mail* (its readers are passionately loyal too) make it interesting for media students to examine closely. What is its audience and how is this audience positioned? What institutional forces shape it? Can a newspaper really be homophobic and racist when operating within the terms of the regulatory press authority, IPSO (Independent Press Standards Organisation)?

Audience

At a time when newspaper readership is falling dramatically, the *Daily Mail* has maintained a healthy circulation, selling over one million copies daily. The average age of its readers is 58, the oldest for a national paper. The majority are women, making up 52-55% of the total. It takes a right-wing, pro-business, low taxation editorial stance, and is socially conservative. This means, among other things, that it promotes what it perceives to be traditional British values, warns against too much immigration and believes in the importance of individual responsibility. It is known as a 'mid-range' newspaper. This means its journalism lacks the depth and detail of broadsheets (*The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Telegraph*), but it contains much longer pieces and carries more serious news stories than tabloids like *Sun* and the *Daily Mirror*.

The front page from Wednesday 5th September, 2018, is in keeping with the above. The banner at the top speaks to an older, female readership. The tone is more akin to a glossy women's magazine than a newspaper, the euphoric 'Yes, yes, YES!' referring to an opinion piece about the first female orgasm to be shown in a BBC drama.

In contrast, the main headline covers serious news, a report into wealth

inequality by a think-tank led by the Archbishop of Canterbury. The language leads the reader to question the report's findings and recommendations. The 'Tax Storm' is of the *Mail's* own making, given readers are unlikely to have known anything about the report before coming to the front page. The word 'handouts' implies that the young people receiving them are undeserving, while the quotation marks around 'super-tax' casts doubt on the merits of such a policy.

The captioned heading in the bottom right-hand corner positions the paper as the defender of moral values (and of traditional media) against Facebook (new media). It encourages readers to see newspapers, and the *Mail* in particular, as ethically superior to social media upstarts.

Reading the whole newspaper complicates the messages given out by the front page. Primarily, this comes from a double-page spread written by the Archbishop of Canterbury himself. This uses several hundred words to justify the very report that the front page questions. The questioning stance is returned to on page 8 with an opinion piece titled 'Yes, Welby is right to help poor. But this tax grab fills me with fear'. This echoes the paper's lead editorial on page 18, 'Will Welby's taxes really help the JAMs [Just About

Managings]? The language here, though, is far from the extremism of which the paper is often accused. For example, it concludes:

'With the best will in the world, the *Mail* cautions against treating Mr Welby's economic prescriptions as Gospel. But certainly he deserves credit for opening a national debate.'

Institutional Forces Shaping the *Daily Mail*

Institutional forces shaping the *Mail* might usefully be split into three categories: the *Mail's* role as an institution in its own right, a significant player in the print journalism landscape; its place within the larger DMG Media publishing group, sitting alongside other publications; its position in relation to regulatory and legal frameworks acting on newspapers.

The *Daily Mail* as an institution

The *Daily Mail* might be ridiculed by opponents, but a reading of the September 5th edition shows that it takes itself seriously as a newspaper that reports and comments on hard news. Giving space to Justin Welby to justify the report into wealth inequality suggests it wants its readers to be well informed, even as it tries to guide their opinions, primarily through the use of columnists. It presumably sees itself as a publication that people buy in order to be informed, as well as to be entertained.

It does not always offer different perspectives on the same story. The front page Facebook story is

The average age of its readers is 58, the oldest for a national paper. The majority are women, making up 52-55% of the total. It takes a right-wing, pro-business, low taxation editorial stance, and is socially conservative.

Daily Mail
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 2018
www.dailymail.co.uk
65p

SARAH VINE
PAGE 19

Yes, yes, YES! Older women are finally calling the shots on TV

Archbishop calls for £9bn inheritance 'super-tax' to fund £10k handouts to the young ++ He wants to hammer Amazon and Starbucks ++ And demands watchdog to curb online bullies

WELBY WEALTH TAX STORM

By Simon Walters

WEALTHY families should pay more tax to help the poor, the Archbishop of Canterbury declares today.

In a major intervention sure to spark controversy, Justin Welby says he wants to rake in an extra £9billion a year with a shake-up of inheritance tax.

Multinationals who dodge their dues would also be hit. Proceeds would fund a higher minimum wage and pay for £10,000 handouts to help the young buy homes.

The recommendations come in a report - co-written by the Archbishop - that says Britain's economy is broken. Demanding radical action to reduce 'damaging wealth inequality', its key proposals include:

- Higher capital gains tax and taxes on dividends - netting up to £27billion a year;
- A £13billion-a-year corporation tax hike;
- The creation of a £186billion 'Citizens Wealth Fund' by 2030.

The report, drawn up by the Left-leaning Institute for Public Policy Research, calls for inheritance tax to be scrapped and replaced by a gifts tax.

An individual would be able to receive £125,000 over their lifetime - with any further gifts subject to income tax. The tax-free threshold for an entire estate is currently £325,000, or £650,000 for a couple.

The report points out that many families avoid death duties by exploiting a rule that allows gifts to become tax-free after seven

Turn to Page 6

Lucy McHugh: Police cannot access suspect's social media account

After Mail shames Facebook over Lucy murder, Met chief says: Hand over password

SEE PAGES 10-11

It is important to recognise that the *Daily Mail* does not publish 'Fake News'. It cannot do so because it is subject to British libel laws, as well as being signed up to IPSO, which intervenes when its Editors' Code of Practice is breached.



Image by Gizem Kirdagli

given a double-page spread on pages 10-11 which is highly critical of Facebook. Nonetheless, this lengthy article is well-researched, drawing on multiple sources. It is complemented by another opinion piece on page 18: 'Facebook's callous refusal to help police investigate a girl's murder prove it is bereft of humanity'. The space given over to this story is indicative of the *Mail's* institutional role as a national newspaper. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, have eaten hugely into advertising revenue streams, and have also become popular sources for news: the *Mail* has an institutional interest in denigrating Facebook, which operates under different, less stringent, regulatory rules to newspapers.

DMG Media Group as an institution

The *Daily Mail* is part of the DMG Media group, which also includes the *Mail on Sunday*, and *MailOnline*. The relationship between the three is relatively complicated. For example, during the referendum about membership of the European Union (Brexit), the *Daily Mail* came out on the side of Leave, while the *Mail on Sunday* was on the side of Remain. To complicate matters further, the then editor of the *Mail on Sunday*, Geordie Greig, has just taken over at the *Daily Mail* from long-standing editor, Paul Dacre. Observers are watching keenly as the *Daily Mail* shifts away from its committed Brexit stance. It seems that Greig has been given editorial freedom by

the newspaper's owners. My hunch is that the *Daily Mail* is being firmly positioned as an institution embodying traditional journalistic values. This would include being run by editors free to decide editorial lines without interference. In appointing Greig as editor, perhaps the owners are indicating to readers that the paper is strong enough to accommodate a change of direction – not lightweight, morally questionable, and undirected like Facebook.

MailOnline occupies a different space entirely. While it shares stories with the two print publications, its relentless focus on celebrity gossip has made it a global phenomenon, the most-visited English language online newspaper site in the world, attracting over 15 million global readers daily.

Like the print publications, it is funded by advertising; in contrast, however, this is linked directly to clicks on a particular page. Consequently, it is more focused on getting these clicks than on the quality of its stories. Its success might, paradoxically, be the reason for the *Daily Mail* maintaining its hard news focus with a degree of balance: the publishers want each publication to occupy different niches in order to appeal to a broad range of advertisers.

Legal and regulatory frameworks

It is important to recognise that the *Daily Mail* does not publish 'Fake News'. It cannot do so because it is subject to British libel laws, as well as being signed up to IPSO, which intervenes when its Editors' Code of Practice is breached. This deals with issues such as accuracy, invasion of privacy, intrusion into grief or shock, and harassment.

This isn't to say that the paper still cannot take editorial lines that are offensive and inflammatory to many. Stop Funding Hate, for example, is a group set up specifically to campaign for companies to withdraw adverts from the *Daily Mail* (along with the *Sun* and the *Daily Express*) primarily because of its anti-immigration stance. It has had some success, Lego being the highest profile company to remove funding. Those opposed to the *Mail*, though, are taking issue with its bias rather than outright falsehoods.

In contrast, social media platforms do not face legal or regulatory censure for

allowing fake news to be posted on their sites. Facebook now runs an advertising campaign in the UK that declares 'fake news is not our friend' yet still allows fake news stories to stay on its platform. It has simply committed not to featuring such stories at the top of its news feeds.

When faced with such facts, it is perhaps time to avoid knee-jerk condemnations of the *Daily Mail*. Yes, it can be offensive and inflammatory, but there is an argument that fake news has not taken hold in the UK as strongly as in the United States, precisely because we have institutions like the *Daily Mail* – legitimate, regulated, if highly-opinionated voices in opposition to a more liberal agenda. The September 5th edition, to be honest, wasn't particularly inflammatory at all – Facebook supporters aside. There were no stories about immigrants and the lead story featured genuine depth and balance. This might have been an aberration. It might have been because non-*Mail* readers are more likely to remember inflammatory headlines but not read the rest of the paper. Or it might even be because September 5th marked the day when Geordie Greig took over as the paper's new editor.

.....
Andrew McCallum is the Director of The English and Media Centre.

Mail Online occupies a different space entirely. While it shares stories with the two print publications, its relentless focus on celebrity gossip has made it a global phenomenon, the most-visited English language online newspaper site in the world, attracting over 15 million global readers daily

