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COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MULTIMODALITY IN BRITISH TABLOID AND BROADSHEET NEWSPAPERS

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Abstract. The present study examines multimodal strategies in British tabloid and broadsheet newspapers within contemporary media discourse. It focuses on the interaction of verbal and visual semiotic resources in British journalism and their role in pragmatic influence, ideological framing, and stylistic organization of news texts.

The empirical corpus includes 120 articles published between 2023 and 2024 in *The Guardian*, *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *Daily Mail*, and *The Sun* (24 articles from each newspaper). The study applies multimodal discourse analysis, stylistic analysis, and qualitative content analysis. The research explores the communicative functions of photographs, headlines, typography, color schemes, page layout, infographics, and digital interactive elements in constructing readers' perception and emotional engagement. The findings demonstrate that tabloids prioritize emotionally intensive and visually dominant strategies, while broadsheets employ analytical, information-oriented multimodality. The results confirm that multimodality functions as a key mechanism of persuasion and ideological representation in contemporary British journalism.

Key words: British newspapers, broadsheet press, media discourse, multimodality, pragmatics, tabloid press, visual communication.

Introduction. Contemporary journalism has undergone significant transformation due to digitalization and media convergence. News discourse can no longer be understood as purely verbal, as meaning is constructed through the interaction of linguistic, visual, spatial, and digital semiotic resources.

Multimodality refers to the integration of multiple communicative modes within a single semiotic structure (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). In media discourse, meaning emerges through the interaction of text, image, typography, and layout, which jointly guide interpretation and shape audience perception (Jewitt, 2014).

Recent studies further emphasize that multimodal literacy has become a key component of media communication in digital environments, where meaning is constructed through the interaction of textual, visual, and technological resources (Serafini & Reid, 2019). British newspapers provide a particularly relevant context for multimodal analysis due to the traditional distinction between tabloids and broadsheets. Tabloids such as *Daily Mail* and *The Sun* rely on emotional intensity and visual dramatization, while broadsheets such as *The Guardian* and *The Times* emphasize analytical structure and informational balance.

The results also support discourse-oriented approaches that view media texts as complex communicative systems in which linguistic, pragmatic, visual, and contextual factors interact in the construction of meaning (Mammadov, 2018; Mammadov, 2026).

The relevance of this study lies in the growing importance of visual communication in journalism and the need for comparative analysis of multimodal strategies across newspaper types.

The aim of the article is to identify and compare multimodal strategies employed in British tabloid and broadsheet newspapers and to determine their pragmatic and stylistic functions within contemporary media discourse.

The novelty of the study lies in the fact that unlike previous studies focusing primarily on either visual communication or political discourse, the present research provides a comparative analysis of multimodal strategies in both tabloid and broadsheet newspapers within a unified analytical framework.

Materials and Methods. The corpus consists of 120 articles published between January 2023 and December 2024 across five British newspapers: *The Guardian*, *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *Daily Mail*, and *The Sun*. The dataset includes 60 broadsheet and 60 tabloid articles. Articles were selected using purposive sampling based on thematic comparability (political, social, and cultural news) and the presence of both textual and visual elements. The analysis applies multimodal discourse analysis, visual grammar theory (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), and qualitative stylistic interpretation. Attention is given to headlines, imagery, typography, layout, and infographics as integrated semiotic resources.

Theoretical Foundations of Multimodality. Multimodality is understood as the interaction of multiple semiotic modes within a unified communicative system (Bateman et al., 2017). Media texts integrate linguistic and visual resources to construct meaning beyond verbal language alone.

Multimodal analysis enables researchers to examine not only the structural organization of media texts but also their ideological and pragmatic dimensions (Machin, 2007; O'Halloran, 2011). O'Halloran argues that multimodal discourse analysis provides a systematic framework for investigating how different semiotic resources interact in the production of meaning within complex communicative environments. A significant contribution to multimodal theory was made through the development of the concept of visual grammar, which conceptualizes visual communication as a structured semiotic system comparable to language (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). From a critical discourse perspective, multimodal structures also serve ideological and pragmatic functions, shaping perception and reinforcing particular interpretations of social reality (Fairclough, 1995; Machin, 2007).

In digital journalism, multimodality is intensified through interactive and multimedia elements, further expanding the communicative complexity of news discourse. Contemporary online newspapers increasingly encourage audience participation through comment sections, reader feedback mechanisms, and interactive communication formats. Such developments transform traditional newspaper discourse into a more dialogic form of media communication, where readers become active participants in the construction and circulation of public opinion (Richardson & Stanyer, 2011).

Pragmatic Functions of Multimodality in British Newspapers. The pragmatic dimension of multimodality is closely associated with mechanisms of audience influence, emotional engagement, and ideological framing within contemporary media discourse. British newspapers actively employ multimodal resources in order to guide readers' interpretations of political, social, and cultural events. In this context, visual and verbal elements function not independently but as interconnected components of persuasive communication.

Researchers in media discourse studies emphasize that multimodal organization significantly affects the cognitive and emotional perception of information (Fairclough, 1995; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Visual composition, typography, photographs, color schemes, and page structure contribute to the formation of evaluative meanings and ideological positioning within newspaper discourse.

Tabloid newspapers generally prioritize emotionally intensive and sensational forms of communication. Their multimodal strategies are primarily aimed at attracting immediate attention and generating strong affective responses from readers. Broadsheet newspapers, by contrast, tend to emphasize analytical interpretation, informational credibility, and contextual explanation through more restrained multimodal organization.

One of the central pragmatic functions of multimodality is persuasive influence. Newspaper layouts, visual framing, and typographic organization shape readers' perception of events and reinforce particular ideological interpretations. During Brexit coverage, for instance, British newspapers

employed different multimodal strategies reflecting their editorial orientations and communicative objectives. Research on Brexit-related newspaper discourse demonstrates that visual representations often function through multimodal metonymy, where political figures, national symbols, and institutional imagery are used to construct broader ideological meanings and persuasive narratives (Tasić & Stamenković, 2022).

The Daily Telegraph frequently incorporated patriotic visual symbolism, including national flags, emotionally expressive political photographs, and visually dominant headlines. Such multimodal strategies contributed to the construction of ideological narratives associated with national identity and political sovereignty. The interaction of visual and verbal framing strategies in British political journalism strengthens ideological positioning through patriotic imagery and typographic emphasis (Marriner, 2005). In the analyzed article, bold headlines, emotionally expressive photographs, and symbolic national imagery reinforced persuasive interpretation and intensified readers' emotional engagement.

For example, *The Daily Telegraph* article "Sunak gambles on snap poll" (*The Daily Telegraph*, 23 May 2024) combines a large central political photograph, a hierarchically organised page layout, and visually salient headline typography. The front-page design places particular emphasis on the image of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak during the announcement of the general election, while the headline structure reinforces the idea of political risk and strategic decision-making. The interaction between visual framing and verbal messaging contributes to the construction of political narratives associated with leadership, national stability, and electoral responsibility. The multimodal organisation guides readers' interpretation through the coordinated use of imagery, typography, and textual argumentation while preserving the analytical style characteristic of broadsheet journalism.

In contrast, *The Guardian* generally employed more restrained visual structures that emphasized analytical interpretation and socio-political complexity. Its multimodal organization often included informational diagrams, analytical infographics, and balanced compositional layouts designed to contextualize political developments rather than provoke immediate emotional reactions. Such visual organization reflects the newspaper's orientation toward explanatory journalism and interpretative depth.

For example, *The Guardian* article "Twelve charts that show how Labour won by a landslide" (*The Guardian*, 5 July 2024) integrates multiple statistical charts, electoral maps, and data visualisations to explain the outcomes of the UK general election. The article presents voting patterns, turnout dynamics, and constituency-level results through structured graphical representation rather than emotionally charged imagery. The interaction between verbal commentary and visualised data facilitates analytical interpretation and supports readers' understanding of complex electoral shifts, exemplifying the explanatory multimodal strategies characteristic of quality journalism.

For example, *Daily Mail* frequently employs expressive facial imagery, close-up photographs, and visually contrasting compositions in its coverage of celebrity scandals and political controversies. Contemporary tabloid discourse often relies on emotionally framed visual representation in order to intensify sensationalist interpretation and maximize audience engagement. The visual emphasis on facial expressions, conflict, and emotional tension contributes to heightened reader involvement and reinforces evaluative framing.

A representative example can be observed in the *Daily Mail* article "More than 24,000 migrants have now crossed the Channel this year after another 700 were intercepted" (*Daily Mail*, 22 September 2024). The report combines a prominently positioned headline with large-scale photographs depicting migrants arriving on the British coast after being brought ashore by Border Force vessels. The visual emphasis on crowd size, facial expressions, life jackets, and geographical proximity reinforces the evaluative framing of migration as a pressing social and political issue. The interaction between the headline and photographic imagery contributes to emotional engagement and exemplifies the multimodal persuasive strategies characteristic of British tabloid journalism. Through the coordinated use

of visual and verbal elements, the article intensifies the perception of urgency and public concern frequently associated with migration coverage in the British popular press.

Broadsheet newspapers, by comparison, generally utilize more context-oriented and informationally balanced visual representation. Images are integrated into broader analytical narratives and typically function as explanatory supplements rather than purely emotional triggers. Photographic material in broadsheets is often combined with statistical graphics, informational diagrams, and contextual commentary that support analytical interpretation.

Typography also performs an important pragmatic function within British newspaper discourse. Large capitalized headlines, contrasting fonts, and bright visual accents in tabloids intensify emotionality, urgency, and dramatic effect. For instance, *The Sun* frequently employs highly expressive headline constructions characterized by evaluative language, concise syntax, and persuasive framing. The headline “*It Is Time for a Change*”, published on 3 July 2024 during the UK general election campaign, illustrates how a short and emotionally resonant slogan can function as both a political message and a persuasive multimodal device aimed at attracting immediate audience attention and encouraging ideological alignment (*The Sun*, 2024). Such typographic organization contributes to dramatic framing and creates an immediate emotional response.

Broadsheet newspapers, on the other hand, generally prefer restrained typography, balanced visual hierarchy, and compositional moderation. Their typographic organization reflects the conventions of analytical journalism and contributes to the perception of informational reliability and institutional authority. Consequently, multimodal organization in British newspapers functions as an essential mechanism of pragmatic influence, shaping audience interpretation through the interaction of verbal, visual, and compositional resources.

Stylistic Differences Between Tabloid and Broadsheet Newspapers

The stylistic organization of British newspapers demonstrates substantial differences in multimodal composition, verbal structure, visual hierarchy, and pragmatic orientation. The distinction between tabloids and broadsheets is manifested not only in journalistic content but also in the stylistic principles underlying media text construction and audience engagement.

Contemporary scholars emphasize that newspaper style is inseparable from multimodal organization. According to Machin, visual composition, typography, image placement, and page structure function as ideological and stylistic mechanisms shaping readers’ interpretation and perception (Machin, 2007). Within this framework, tabloids and broadsheets represent two distinct communicative models in British journalism.

Tabloid Newspapers

Tabloid newspapers prioritize emotional expressiveness, visual dominance, and sensational presentation. Their stylistic organization is designed to attract immediate attention, intensify emotional involvement, and maximize audience engagement.

The principal stylistic features of tabloid newspapers include oversized and emotionally charged headlines, intensive use of photographs, fragmented information structures, simplified syntax, colloquial vocabulary, dramatic visual contrasts, and a clear prioritization of visual impact over analytical depth.

The Sun regularly constructs highly expressive headlines aimed at generating emotional immediacy and dramatic effect. For example, the headline “*CHAOS*” (*The Sun*, 23 May 2024), published following Prime Minister Rishi Sunak’s announcement of a snap general election, illustrates the use of syntactic brevity, evaluative framing, and visually dominant typography characteristic of British tabloid journalism. The one-word headline functions as a powerful interpretative frame, encouraging readers to perceive the political situation through the lens of instability and uncertainty. Combined with large-scale visual imagery and prominent page design, the headline reinforces emotional engagement and contributes to the sensationalist representation of political events frequently associated with

tabloid discourse. The visual organisation accompanying such headlines further amplifies dramatic framing and strengthens the persuasive impact of the publication.

Similarly, *Daily Mail* frequently employs multimodal dramatization through the interaction of expressive headlines, emotionally charged photographs, and contrasting visual composition. For example, the article “More than 1,000 migrants cross Channel in a single day” (*Daily Mail*, 3 September 2023) combines a prominently displayed headline with large-scale photographs of migrant boats and visually dominant page design. The interaction of quantitative emphasis, evaluative lexical choices, and emotionally salient imagery reinforces a sense of urgency and crisis. Migration-related coverage in British tabloids often combines evaluative lexical structures with visually dramatic framing strategies designed to intensify ideological polarization and emotional tension. Large-scale images, contrasting visual elements, and expressive photographic framing contribute to the construction of emotionally persuasive narratives and shape public perceptions of migration-related issues.

Another characteristic feature of tabloid discourse is the personalization and dramatization of political communication. Political figures are frequently represented through close-up emotional photographs, expressive facial imagery, and simplified interpretative frameworks that reduce political complexity to individualized emotional narratives.

Fragmentation also constitutes an important stylistic characteristic of tabloids. Information is typically divided into short paragraphs, highlighted quotations, visually isolated textual blocks, and simplified informational units. Such organization facilitates rapid reading and corresponds to the logic of digital media consumption and audience scanning behavior.

In online versions of tabloid newspapers, multimodality becomes even more intensive through the integration of video fragments; animated visual elements; interactive hyperlinks; embedded social media content; click-oriented visual design.

Consequently, tabloids construct a highly dynamic multimodal environment aimed at maximizing emotional response, audience interaction, and continuous reader engagement.

Broadsheet Newspapers

Broadsheet newspapers demonstrate a more restrained, analytically oriented, and informationally structured multimodal organization. Their stylistic structure is generally associated with credibility, intellectual authority, and interpretative depth.

The principal stylistic features of broadsheets include balanced visual hierarchy; moderate use of photographs; extended analytical commentary; informational infographics; complex syntactic structures; neutral and formal vocabulary; restrained typography; structured compositional organization.

Unlike tabloids, broadsheets employ multimodal resources primarily to support analytical interpretation and contextual explanation rather than emotional dramatization.

For instance, the article “July was world’s hottest month on record, climate scientists confirm” (*The Guardian*, 8 August 2023) illustrates the role of multimodal organization in constructing analytical environmental reporting. The article combines documentary photography, statistical climate data, and explanatory textual commentary, creating a balanced multimodal structure that supports readers’ understanding of complex environmental processes. Visual and textual elements function together as complementary resources contributing to informational credibility and interpretative depth.

Similarly, the article “Monday was hottest day for global average temperature on record, as climate crisis bites” (*The Guardian*, 4 July 2023) demonstrates how visual imagery and data-driven reporting are integrated within broadsheet journalism. The interaction of documentary photographs, scientific statistics, and restrained visual hierarchy facilitates analytical interpretation while maintaining the newspaper’s characteristic informational style.

Environmental reporting in broadsheet newspapers often integrates statistical graphics, diagrams, and contextual visualizations that contribute to informational depth and analytical interpretation. In such cases, visual elements function as explanatory mechanisms intended to clarify complex political, environmental, or economic processes.

In addition, *The Times* employs analytical visual structures in political and economic reporting. A notable example is The Times article “Inflation drops to 2.3%, raising hopes of rate cut” (*The Times*, 22 May 2024), where statistical data, numerical indicators, and a restrained visual hierarchy are integrated into the article design. The presentation combines verbal explanation with economic data and graphical elements that facilitate readers’ understanding of complex financial developments. The multimodal organisation supports analytical interpretation by coordinating textual commentary with visualised information, thereby enhancing the accessibility of economic reporting while maintaining the objective and informative style characteristic of broadsheet journalism.

Economic journalism in broadsheet newspapers typically combines data visualization, structured page composition, and analytical commentary in order to facilitate interpretative understanding rather than emotional reaction. Visual components therefore function as supplementary informational resources supporting textual analysis.

Broadsheets also demonstrate greater lexical complexity and syntactic sophistication. Their discourse frequently incorporates expert quotations, statistical references, analytical argumentation, intertextual references, and institutional terminology.

Typography in broadsheets is generally restrained and organized according to principles of informational hierarchy and compositional balance. Headlines tend to be descriptive rather than sensational and are designed to communicate informational relevance instead of emotional urgency.

For instance, *The Daily Telegraph* frequently employs visually balanced layouts and moderate typographic emphasis in political reporting. Political articles often combine institutional visual design with relatively formal linguistic presentation, thereby reflecting ideological positioning while maintaining analytical structure and institutional credibility.

A representative example can be observed in *The Daily Telegraph*’s coverage of the UK general election announcement on the front page published on 23 May 2024, where the newspaper combines a prominent political photograph of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak with a structured headline hierarchy and restrained typographic composition. The layout emphasizes clarity and informational hierarchy rather than sensational disruption, while the visual framing supports themes of political leadership, national governance, and electoral responsibility. The interaction between visual arrangement and verbal presentation reflects the broadsheet’s tendency toward controlled ideological signalling within an analytically structured format.

Comparative Perspective. The comparison of tabloid and broadsheet newspapers demonstrates that multimodal stylistics directly reflects broader communicative strategies, editorial ideologies, and audience expectations.

Tabloids primarily prioritize emotional immediacy, sensational framing, visual dramatization, simplified interpretation, and rapid audience engagement.

Broadsheets, by contrast, prioritize analytical depth, informational credibility, contextual explanation, balanced multimodal organization, and interpretative complexity.

Despite these distinctions, both newspaper categories increasingly integrate digital multimodality into online journalism. Interactive graphics, multimedia storytelling, hyperlinks, video content, and social media integration have become common elements of contemporary British newspaper discourse regardless of newspaper type.

Therefore, stylistic differences between tabloids and broadsheets are manifested not only at the verbal level but also through multimodal organization, visual composition, typographic structure, and pragmatic mechanisms of audience influence.

Discussion. The findings show that multimodality functions differently in tabloids and broadsheets due to editorial ideology and audience expectations.

The study also demonstrates the increasing convergence of traditional journalism and digital storytelling practices, where multimodal narrative strategies contribute to audience engagement and

participation across digital platforms (Page, 2018). Tabloids rely on emotional amplification, visual dramatization, and simplified framing to ensure rapid engagement. Broadsheets prioritize analytical depth, informational credibility, and contextual explanation.

However, digital journalism has led to partial convergence of these strategies. Both newspaper types increasingly use interactive graphics, multimedia content, and online visual storytelling. This suggests that multimodal strategies are no longer strictly determined by newspaper category but are increasingly shaped by digital platform affordances and audience behavior. Multimodality therefore functions not only as a stylistic feature but also as a mechanism of ideological construction and audience engagement.

Conclusion. The study confirms that multimodality is a fundamental feature of contemporary British newspaper discourse. Tabloids and broadsheets differ significantly in their multimodal strategies: tabloids emphasize emotional intensity and visual impact, while broadsheets prioritize analytical structure and informational clarity. The interaction of verbal and visual elements serves as a key mechanism of pragmatic influence and ideological framing in media discourse. Digital transformation has intensified multimodal complexity across all newspaper types, leading to hybrid forms of journalistic communication. Multimodality should therefore be understood as both a stylistic and ideological mechanism shaping contemporary media interpretation. The findings should be interpreted with regard to the corpus size and the selected group of newspapers.

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