

IN SEARCH OF THE DAILY SUN'S RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

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ABSTRACT

One of the most significant media events of the past decade has been the founding of the Daily Sun, a tabloid aimed at the low-income black market. This newspaper has become the nation's best-selling daily within a year. Through a qualitative analysis of the newspaper, it was found that it concentrates on soccer, sex, horror, personal tragedies and traditional African beliefs (including witchcraft). However, the Daily Sun is not a tabloid in the British Sun tradition: it does not publish pin-up pictures of girls or celebrity scandals. It also carries substantial news and columns which can be described as self-help or "developmental". The Daily Sun has thus, to some extent, adapted the tabloid genre, which in the past has been equated with one-dimensional scandal journalism. It is argued that although aspects of the Daily Sun may not live up to the ethical expectations of traditional Western journalism, its success in reaching a new market of readers who did not read a newspaper previously must be acknowledged. As such it has created a new public sphere where a section of the population has found a place where some exchange of information and views can take place.

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INTRODUCTION

In the years prior to 1990, South Africa's media landscape was to a large extent determined by the constraints and needs of the old order locked in an ideological conflict (cf. Hachten & Giffard 1884; Tomaselli, Tomaselli & Muller 1987; Burns 1990; Beukes 1992; Grogan & Barker 1993). This also inhibited what South Africans thought possible and necessary media-wise. Post-apartheid changes, more specifically those dictated by economic imperatives and the ANC government-driven transformation of the media, have subsequently resulted in sweeping changes to ownership and editorial composition (cf. Berger 2001; Teer-Tomaselli & Tomaselli 2001; Froneman 1995; Froneman 1997; Froneman 2006). While the jury is still out on the question of content changes, any cursory glance through most papers reveal any number of changes. Market forces also came to the fore much stronger, as was the case world-wide, resulting in some "dumbing-down" in order to attract readers, viewers and listeners in an increasingly competitive industry.

One of the most significant recent events in South Africa's media industry has been the founding of the *Daily Sun*, a daily tabloid aimed at the lower-income (LSM4-6) black market (cf. Moodie 2005). This newspaper has — with its innovative diet of home-brewed populism and developmental material — become the nation's best-selling daily within a year and has shot up to a circulation approaching 500 000. In the process it has eschewed traditional news agendas and arguably redefined the genre of tabloid journalism. It has certainly given the South African media landscape an added African flavour.

While much has been written about the new wave of tabloid journalism in South Africa, it has been overshadowed by ethical, professional and commercial arguments (cf. Coetzee 2004; Davis 2004; Malan 2004; *Sarie* 2004; *Beeld* 2005; Du Plessis 2005; Shevel 2005; Van der Westhuizen 2005; Moodie 2005; Froneman 2005). This has contributed to some understanding of tabloid journalism, but has shed little light on the content and editorial feel of the big success story, the *Daily Sun*.

To get more insight into the *Daily Sun*'s recipe for success, the following contextual and content-specific questions are addressed in this article: First, *what media trends prevailed in pre-democratic South Africa?* As this was the context from which the *Daily Sun* emerged, it is important to briefly explore. Second, *what convinced the publishers to start a new chapter in South Africa's newspaper market?* A clear-cut answer may be difficult to find, but we could find some pointers. Third, *what are the general characteristics of "tabloid" newspapers?* This forms the theoretical framework for the attempt to answer the main research question: *what are the unique ingredients of the Daily Sun?* In answering the latter question, we could get more insight into the innovative, sometimes provocative but commercially very successful journalism of publisher Deon du Plessis and his team.

MEDIA TRENDS IN PRE-DEMOCRATIC SOUTH AFRICA

Prior to the first fully democratic elections in 1994, South Africa was a conflict-ridden country. This was particularly so in the two decades prior to the unbanning of the ANC and its leaders in 1990 (cf. Giliomee 2003:578-625). The media landscape reflected the

nature of this divided, authoritarian society: ownership and control lay predominantly with the state (broadcast media) and four white-controlled groups (print media); editorial leadership rested, with few exceptions, with white males; and the content reflected, to a significant extent, apartheid structures and patterns, even though many of the white-owned media were very critical of the apartheid regime (cf. Tomaselli, Tomaselli & Muller 1987; Louw 1993).

An important exception was the so-called alternative press, which was non-commercial and activist by nature. Although these publications pushed the boundaries of what was possible in terms of strict media laws and regulations, the media in general had no choice but to exercise self-censorship and tread a very fine line (cf. Tyson 1993). This was reflected, inter alia, in the small, front-page plugs employed by many English-language newspapers stating that the content of the publication was restricted in terms of the emergency regulations and other laws (cf. Grogan & Barker 1993:229-248; Diederichs & De Beer 1989:104-105).

These restrictions specifically inhibited reporting and comment on the conflict which beset the country. On 2 February 1990 the then state president, F.W. de Klerk, lifted the emergency regulations. Although many laws stayed on the statute book for some time (and some even up to this day), the mist lifted overnight and a climate of freedom of speech emerged. This opened the door to free political debate and a general free-for-all media situation. Sex magazines that were banned up till then flooded the market and the political alternative press soon disappeared (cf. Diederichs & De Beer 1989:132-133). A new era had dawned with new challenges and possibilities, but not without a new set of ideological rules and government-enforced objectives. This, however, placed no limitation on media companies to explore new markets with a single-minded profit-driven motif. However, initially only one media house grasped the potential of a new, populist daily aimed at the working-class black population who had particular needs but no media champion.

A NEW MARKET FOR TABLOID JOURNALISM?

South Africa does not have a strong history of populist newspapers bent on exclusively publishing trivial, sensational news — yellow-press newspapers which could be called, for want of a better term, *tabloids*. Certainly there have been racy, down-market weeklies through the years, e.g. *Post/Weekendpost*, a paper aimed at the Indian population and still going strong after 50 years. Its present editor, Brijlall Ramguthie (2006), describes its early days as follows:

Back in the mid-fifties, *Post* was launched as a racy read, spiced with a great deal of sex, soccer, and robust news reports that left very little to the imagination. The Immorality Act, particularly, with its ‘cop-in-the-boot’ stories which revealed explicit evidence of the forbidden love-across-the-colour-line shenanigans of whites and blacks (Indians included) was given top priority. And the tabloid sold like the proverbial ‘hot bhajia’, an Indian delicacy.

At the same time the *Post* was founded, the Afrikaans weekly *Landstem* (later incorporated into *Dagbreek*) found a niche as a populist paper (in broadsheet format), while the *Bantu World* found a populist market in the townships of the 1950s, although not quite in the *Daily Sun*'s mould (Thale 2002; Harber 2006). In all instances the papers had a narrow, ethnically defined market, supporting the view that scandals tend not to travel well over cultural barriers (Thomlinson 1997:71).

The country's dominant Sunday papers (e.g. the *Sunday Times* and *Rapport*) include tabloid-style reporting in every issue, although they offer a mixed bag of more serious journalism as well to cater for a very diverse readership (Naudé & Froneman 2002), but the success of the tabloid-style *Sunday Sun* was important. It was not entirely groundbreaking, but its editor, Phalane Motale, has claimed with some justification that the *Sunday Sun* was the mother of the new-generation tabloids (Berger 2005).

But the country had never seen a tabloid-style daily. This changed when Naspers (through its subsidiary Media24) launched the *Daily Sun* on 1 July 2002, eleven months after the successful launch of its tabloid stable mate, the *Sunday Sun*. The driving force behind both papers, Deon du Plessis, claims that they (the publishers) were innovative in the sense that they

caught the right time (to launch the *Daily Sun*), when people were less political. We sensed that the market had moved on and we were talking to the sons and daughters of the revolution in a sense. They were off the barricades and into improving their lives (Barron 2004).

Elsewhere Du Plessis argued: "Previously nobody cared much for this section of the market." (Media24 News, April 2004) So perhaps it was a newly evolved market or simply one waiting to be exploited.

A sunny, non-political approach was espoused right from the first issue of the *Daily Sun*. In an editorial the paper stated: "Like you, we are optimistic... Our newspaper is bright, optimistic, cheerful and positive" (*Daily Sun*, 1 July 2002). In an editorial on its third birthday, the *Sunday Sun* elaborated on this, predicating its views on the fact that the *Sunday Sun*, *Daily Sun* and the new Afrikaans weekly tabloid, *Son*, all have "an unmistakable tabloid attitude" (*Sunday Sun*, 1 August 2004). Hereby the *Sunday Sun* correctly implied that tabloid journalism was more about "attitude" than the A3 format. After all, many serious newspapers world-wide have for years been published in A3 or "tabloid" format; many more are changing to smaller (compact) formats at the moment (Whelan 2005).

The journalistic objective was thus to reach a new market of working people, readers whose interests had purportedly not been served in the past, by offering something different.

The *Daily Sun* and other tabloids have become an important segment. While there was some debate, e.g. at the annual general meeting of the South African National Editors' Forum (Sanef), about the place of tabloids, a media release by Sanef described the

tabloids as “a vibrant element of the changing media landscape” (Berger 2005). The market had spoken, although not all journalists were convinced

TABLOID JOURNALISM: A UNIVERSAL BUT DIVERSE PHENOMENON

Much is written about tabloid journalism, but there is some diversity in opinion on what it entails. To place the discussion of the *Daily Sun* within some journalistic context, a few general remarks are offered followed by some features drawn from mostly British tabloid newspapers. This will demarcate the field to some extent, but also emphasise the fact that not all tabloids are the same, as alluded to by the *Daily Sun*'s publisher when he referred to a few specific differences between his paper and the *British Sun* (Barron 2004).

Tabloids clearly do not refer to all newspapers published in tabloid format (A3); it refers to journalism with a populist, i.e. broad or mass appeal, published mostly in A3 (or similar) or magazine format. This form of journalism is commercial to the extreme and “often overemphasizes immediate-reward types of information in order to sell” (Hiebert, Ungurait & Bohn 1991:417). They add:

Crime and violence almost always outweigh and outdraw stories of good deed, constructive action, peaceful progress, and orderly dissent. The aberrations of society — the odd, the unusual, the unique — are more often the subject of news than the normal events. Tabloid journalism lends itself to this kind of selectivity.

One can argue that *most* journalism tends to focus on the unusual, but tabloid journalism takes this to the extreme, concentrating almost exclusively on the weird, bizarre and personal, particularly if it concerns “celebrities” (cf. Rayner, Wall & Kruger 2001:223) It sensationalises the trivial and ignores the really “important” news, i.e. the news regarded by serious mainstream papers as important (cf. Bennett, Slater & Wall 2006:156). But these overtly commercial newspapers touch the masses and provide easily-digestible information and entertainment. McQuail (1994:16) surmises that commercialization has resulted in:

A new kind of paper: lighter and more entertaining, emphasizing human interest, more sensational in its attention to crime, violence, scandals and entertainment, and having a very large readership in which lower-income and lower-education groups are overrepresented.

Rayner, Wall & Kruger (2001:223) suggest that we describe a tabloid as:

A compact newspaper... designed to appeal to a mass audience. Tabloids, particularly at the lower end of the market, are associated with sensationalising the trivial event rather than with comprehensive coverage of national and international news.

In order to discuss the content of the *Daily Sun* within the context of “tabloid journalism”, it is useful to list some of the most salient features. It is important to distinguish from the outset between outright “downmarket” tabloids (i.e. “red tops” such as *The Sun* and the *Daily Mirror*), and the somewhat more sophisticated *Daily*

Mail and *Daily Express* (Rayner, Wall & Kruger 2001: 23). These papers have different target audiences, resulting in tabloids with a different feel, style, tone and emphasis. (In South Africa one would have to distinguish between the *Daily Sun*, *Sowetan* and arguably the *Citizen*.) Some features of the tabloids are:

Strong visuals. Tabloids typically use visually strong lay-out, i.e. big, bold headlines (often in upper case) and strong use of pictures and illustrations (cf. Bennett, Slater & Wall 2006:177; Rayner, Wall & Kruger 2001: 223). Given the smaller format of the newspapers, the headlines and pictures appear even larger.

Snappy headlines. The downmarket British tabloid press is known for its snappy emotive headlines, invariably with an intended pun (e.g. Bisch! Bash! Bosh!) (*Daily Mirror*, 4 November 2005; Bennett, Slater & Wall 2006:178). Exclamation marks are often used to heighten the impact.

Sex and sensation. Tabloid journalism aims at entertaining the lowest common denominator, more often with exclusive disclosures of celebrities' trivial trials and tribulations (cf. Rayner, Wall & Kruger 2001:223). To secure exclusives, some tabloids have huge resources available to pay for informers and/or interviews (cf. BBC News 2001). Scandals involving the pillars of society are regarded as prime material (*Sarie* 2004), but sports, TV and other show business celebrities provide a steady stream of scandal, with headlines and sub headlines such as *Cruel Kerry. Star confesses stealing best pal's lover – then taunts her over phone* (*News of the World*, 19 February 2006). This is a very personal type of journalism, even intrusive.

Low-grade tabloids typically run unconfirmed stories and peddle in half-truths. Stories with sexual innuendos is often used blatantly to sell papers, but not all low-brow tabloids follow the *Sun's* recipe of topless page-three girls (cf. *The Sun*, 26 October 2005; (e.g. *Daily Mirror*, 4 November 2005; Froneman 2004).

Sport and TV. Sport and TV provide diversion to the masses and get huge coverage in all tabloids (Chippendale & Horrie 2005:38). This provides subeditors with countless opportunities to write eye-catching headlines such as *YOU'RE A CHEAT, DROGBA* (*The Mail on Sunday*, 5 March 2006) and *AGONY! Smith fights for his career after horror injuries...* (*News of the World*, 19 February 2006).

Informal, easy to read text. Tabloids prefer shorter stories with short sentences and short paragraphs. Slang understood by their working-class readers is often used (cf. Bennett, Slater & Wall 2006:177-178).

Populist politics. Tabloid newspapers often shun hard politics, except when a political figure is involved in some real or fabricated scandal. But tabloids can give a voice to the "ordinary people" (through letter pages) and by creating moral outrage and panic (e.g. the *Daily Express* with its front-page headline on 12 January 2006: *How many perverts are in our schools?* and the *Sun's* splash coverage of money spent on art: *£9 ENOUGH TO GIVE YOU AN ART ATTACK* [26 October 2005]). Rayner, Wall & Kruger (2001: 223) suggest that tabloids often "pander to populist opinion, e.g. by encouraging xenophobic attitudes to foreign countries and their people".

Tabloids can indeed be very patriotic. Austria's highly popular *Kronen Zeitung* combines "bare-breasted pimps, lowbrow cartoons, and opinion in rhyme" with

an almost dadaist collage of stories fanning fears that Vienna is being swamped by undesirable refugees, editorials tinged with anti-Semitic innuendo, and articles trivializing the Holocaust (Wise 2002).

In Britain the *Daily Express* and *Daily Mail* are both politically and socially conservative, but eschew the sex-scandal fare of, e.g., the *Sun* (cf. Glover 2005; Chippendale & Horrie 2005:28-29). Notably the *Daily Express* launched a television advertisement campaign highlighting its stand on "real values" regarding tradition, progress, good manners and its stand against anti-social behaviour (*Daily Express*, 12 January 2006).

Tips on getting on with life. Populist tabloids are geared to improving readers' lives and provide tips on topics such as dieting (*Daily Mirror*, 4 November 2005), abortion (*Daily Mail*, 17 February 2006), careers (*Daily Mail*, 19 January 2006), and relationships (*Daily Express*, 12 January 2006).

From the above we can conclude that tabloids indeed differ in execution, but they are, broadly speaking, newspapers with populist appeal and a certain style and content. The question remains: What are the unique ingredients of the South African *Daily Sun*, if any?

RESEARCH METHOD

In order to ascertain what the unique content of the *Daily Sun* is and how it compares with the above generalised characteristics of the tabloid press, two weeks' issues of the *Daily Sun* were qualitatively analysed, i.e. ten consecutive issues (19 July 2004 to 30 July 2004). This was done in order to provide a valid sample of the journalism produced by the *Daily Sun*'s editorial staff, which could be analysed and described contextually with reference to the broad framework discussed above. The analysis of the papers is supplemented by comments offered by other analysts.

As the main objective was to get a feel for the editorial mix, not every item is described or analysed. Given the exploratory nature of this project, the analysis was done to specifically determine:

- if the front-page reflected a tabloid-style, populist news agenda;
- how it was presented (size and nature of headlines as well as photos);
- if and to what extent the inside pages were an extension of the front-page agenda;
- what prominence was given to sports and TV;
- if the text was written in an easy, punchy style; and
- if the paper provided self-help advice and/or services to readers.

THE DAILY SUN'S FORMULA FOR SUCCESS

Media analyst Anton Harber (2004) has described the *Daily Sun* as a “raunchy, crude tabloid, filled with stories of two-headed babies, people falling into pit latrines and very little politics”. But he added that there are some “surprising things about it”. This impression supports publisher Du Plessis’ claim that the *Daily Sun* is a “carefully planned mix of so-called sensation and an effort to compensate for what our readers missed out on in their school years” (*Beeld* 2005). The following analysis will give an indication if these impressions and claims are accurate.

From the analysis the following front-page lead stories emerged (headlines written in upper case or lower case as in the paper):

- *ANOTHER SOCCER SHOCKER!* (19 July)

Allegations of theft against a top soccer official were reported. This reflected the importance of working-class black South Africans’ favourite sport. Next to the lead was a photo of a (black) South African who had won the Miss Deaf World 2004 competition.

- *BITTEN TO DEATH IN SEX ORGY!* (20 July)

Two men and a woman beat up the victim after a “group-sex orgy”. He was also throttled and bitten by the woman – which explains the somewhat erroneous headline. The front-page also carried a story on an alleged bid to unseat the CEO of the Professional Soccer League.

- *KNOZA: DON'T BLAME ME* (21 July)

This was another soccer story, a follow-up on the previous day’s second lead.

- *HIGH VOLTAGE HORROR!* (22 July)

Ten security men “cruelly burned” after a steel scaffold hit power lines.

- *The story that should shame SA!* (23 July)

A 17-year old boy alleged that he killed his younger brother to save him from having to go days without food. The intro stated: “Anger and concern swept the country...” over the killing.

- *HAVE THEY NO SHAME?* (26 July)

“Thugs have vandalised a cemetery, destroying the tombstones of family ancestors,” the intro stated.

- *Soccer uproar!* (27 July)

Several stories, including two concerning money, were rolled into one for the lead.

- *WHOSE WIFE ARE YOU?* (28 July)

The subheadings warned: *Check up! You could be married to an alien.* The latter referred to foreigners who were fraudulently married to South African women without their knowledge.

- *GRANNY DIES OF SORROW* (29 July)

The intro stated: “Granny’s body trembled in a last terrible dance of death as the rope slowly strangled her.” The granny hanged herself, but the report added that she “also died of sadness...”, opening the door for the somewhat misleading headline.

- *SICK!* (30 July)

This was a hard news story on what was labelled South Africa’s “healthcare crisis”. Subheadings added: *Doctors and nurses quitting; Non-private patients lose out* (i.e. ordinary people who have to make use of state health services); *Water and power cuts loom; Waiting time getting longer; More HIV and TB infections.*

Three of the ten headlines thus focussed on soccer, while sex and personal tragedies made up the bulk of the other headlines. This is typical of low-grade tabloids, particularly the half-truths of the headlines *BITTEN TO DEATH IN SEX ORGY!* And the very personal *GRANNY DIES OF SORROW*. The dimension of horror came to the fore in the story headlined *HIGH VOLTAGE HORROR!* Note in many instances the use of an exclamation mark, in step with the over-the-top approach adopted by tabloids. But the *Daily Sun* shuns the clever puns associated with British tabloids.

The story on marriage fraud got an typical tabloid treatment: *WHOSE WIFE ARE YOU?* Thereby female readers were drawn into a hard-news story in a very personal way. Likewise the headline *SICK!* drew the reader into a hard-news story (on the crisis in health services). These two stories indicate that the *Daily Sun* was not shy of running with some hard news, but they treated it in a way which probably made it more interesting for their particular readership. It is clearly populist and aimed at creating moral outrage. A few graphic pictures of dead or mutilated people were published (e.g. front page, 26 July), in step with some tabloids’ focus on the gruesome.

Each issue had approximately six inside news pages, including one devoted to African and world news. Prominent news stories included: *Drunks drive residents mad* (19 July); *Massive tavern shut-down* (20 July); *Baby dies at crèche* (23 July); *Family left with nothing* (23 July); *Jailbird ex guns down mom-to-be* (26 July); and *Task team to probe corruption* (30 July).

The *Daily Sun* also carries a pull-out sports section which concentrates very strongly on the major sports supported by the black working class: soccer, as well as horseracing. Cultural and TV news is catered for in another pull-out called the *Sunbuzz*, while a weekly motoring page, a lively readers’ letters page, horoscope, crosswords puzzle, Lotto news and diverse other features make up the package. The newspaper carried no daily opinion-editorial page, but occasionally published a brief *DAILY SUN SAYS*

comment piece (e.g. 27 July). Unlike its older sister, the *Sunday Sun*, no page-three pin-up girl is published, in step with Du Plessis claim that the *Daily Sun* was “far more conservative in some areas (than British tabloids) and far less in others” (Barron 2004).

The paper can thus be described as a very lively mix of news and features, all specifically selected to fulfil the mostly unintellectual information/entertainment needs of its chosen target market, namely “the (black) guy in the blue overall” (Du Plessis 2005). Bloom (2006) describes this (successful) focus on the neglected black worker as follows:

This focus on an individual, on a particular South African who for centuries has been nameless and ignored, is way more than metaphorical. The *Daily Sun* editorial charter is driven by a long and growing list of things that matter to this person. And if there is one secret to the paper’s record-smashing sales growth, that’s probably it.

The focus on the individual has a very personal dimension in the form of advice columns as well as other items which can be placed under the general rubric of developmental journalism, i.e. journalism aimed at the political, social, cultural and economic upliftment of the general population. The paper’s appeal has been enhanced by regional editions with local news.

Publisher Deon du Plessis rightly insists that the *Daily Sun* is not a replica of the British tabloid press. A less conservative aspect of the *Daily Sun* includes its frequent references to witchcraft. “*The Sun* in Brittain would poke fun at that. We wouldn’t because that’s part of the society we serve” (Barron 2004). A number of items were identified in the ten issues supporting Du Plessis’ remarks, e.g.:

Witch axed to death (19 July);

Evil fire follows family (20 July);

The witch is back, and she wants her snake! (20 July); and

Murder suspect: she was a witch (30 July).

While attention is given to witchcraft and the paranormal, the paper carries a daily verse from the Bible and devoted a page to this question posed by a reader:

How can I be born again? (22 July).

The paper also awarded a prize to a letter arguing:

Sex is worth waiting for (22 July).

This is a conservative dimension not usually associated with tabloids, but not without precedent.

Articles helping readers to get more from life (i.e. “developmental” news) do get frequent space. Stories such as *Don’t be mean, be clean* (21 July) and *What the RAF (road accident fund) can do for you* (22 July); *Go for prostate cancer test* (23 July); and *Kids jabbed for polio* (27 July) are supplemented by the *Sun Solutions*, *SunDefender*

and other columns. These items correlate with those found in some (but not all) British tabloids and is part of a very calculated recipe (Coetzer 2004).

As Du Plessis points out, many of the *Daily Sun*'s detractors, when talking about its high content of sex, violence and, at times, the bizarre, are only looking at the front section of the paper – not the bulk of the newspaper, which is devoted to what can loosely be termed life skills, usable information and more.

This section of the paper could also be described as useful “get-on-with-life information for an emerging lower-middle class” (Harber 2004).

The *Daily Sun* thus provides its readers with a very comprehensive package, excluding longer reportage and opinion pieces. Serious political reporting and anything with a party-political flavour are shunned, although it could rightly be argued that it focuses on real problems at grassroots level. As Harber (2006) opined:

If you look at the *Daily Sun*, it has no conventional politics, in the sense of party or parliamentary activity. It is not filled with the pronouncements of politicians and officials. It is filled, however, with the pictures and voices of ordinary township folk who are not often represented in our media.

Whatever criticism may be levelled at the *Daily Sun*, the above analysis (and Harber's comments) contradicts the remark by Davis (2004) that “... (South African) tabloids offer very little useful news or information”. The *Daily Sun*'s news coverage may be biased against major news as perceived by other more serious dailies, but it does give a brief overview of major news.

However, in many other instances the *Daily Sun* is typically tabloid: its focus on gruesome, sometimes bizarre news, its shocking headlines; the shunning of important news in favour of the trivial; the punchy, personal style aimed at drawing the reader into the story on an emotional level; the very strong emphasis on sports of interest to black working class readers (soccer and horseracing); and the recurrent references to witches and the evil aims the paper squarely at the lower end of the black market. Most importantly the English used is simple and devoid of jargon which would not easily be understood by its readers.

CONCLUSIONS

The *Daily Sun* provides an easy, even entertaining read for readers with a low literacy level. As such they are expanding the readership base of South African newspapers. After the first five to seven news pages, which can be termed lowbrow but not without any substance, the paper surprises with its useful content. The newspaper is visually bright and the style racy, but chooses to be relatively conservative in some respects, e.g. the lack of pin-up girls. The paper also chooses to highlight constructive letters, particularly those that take a strong moral stand. Most sentences and items are short, keeping the readers' literacy in mind. It is indeed a paper for “the (black) guy in the blue overall”, as emphasised by Du Plessis (2005).

By ignoring formal politics to a large extent, it turns away from past conflict politics and looks at the future — a future which demands that each individual must make the best of life. It is not overawed by the glamour and riches of the new (black) ruling elite and focuses on ordinary (black) people who have yet to experience the fruits of the political liberation. As such the *Daily Sun* caters for people who are not quite in the mainstream. They inhabit a world in which traditional African beliefs regarding witches, evil spirits and demons are very real.

While serious ethical questions can be addressed at certain aspects of the *Daily Sun* recipe, its circulation figures and huge personal response by readers indicate that it has become a media home to a group of people at the fringes of society. The *Daily Sun* is in many respects a typical populist tabloid, but it deviates to some extent from the recipe employed by other tabloid publishers. The *Daily Sun* has thus given a new dimension to tabloid journalism, thereby challenging us to revisit preconceived views of this genre. More importantly, it has created a new public sphere where a section of the population has found a place where the “exchange of information and views on questions of common concern can take place so that public opinion can be formed”, as Dahlgren (2002:195) summarises Habermas. This places a heavy responsibility on the publishers.

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