

Through the Lens of Editors' Critique: Unraveling the Cultural Significance of '*Brite life*' Magazine's Cover Design

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Being a sub-editor is both varied and difficult at the same time and its critical part lies in mastering the art of editing huge articles into the prescribed word-limit for magazine publication and news production. To master the art of editing, one has to consider carefully various factors like the word-count, use of proper words and putting them down with the right font size and style, point size, paragraph styles, correct picture for display and then combining it together for an effective magazine layout. In my practice critique, I will reflect on how my usage of Adobe InDesign has influenced the layout pattern for all three features to a professional standard, the skills implemented for sub-editing and designing my spread and the choice of pictures for its production. It also analyses a journalist's motivation and justifies the choice of magazines along with such language that shall attract a good number of audiences. And in doing so, I heavily relied on the techniques and the academic suggestions given throughout the Advanced Journalism Skills module.

With relation to my previous module on News and Feature writing, I wrote two features; one on the excessive use of ready-made foods and the other on the early arrival of Christmas in England. But, working as a group for the Advanced Journalism Skills module, we had to look for a single theme with content that had links between our features. With the recurring theme of lifestyle in our features, we came up with *Brite life* as the name for our magazine focusing on food and lifestyle issues. To gain prominence and exposure, it is a good idea to follow news values that dictate the place for locating stories in a magazine. With the main lead on the 'darker side of pub life', I used my piece on the 'excessive use of ready-made foods' discussing how too many food shops and supermarkets in Brighton sell instant ready-to-eat foods as the second lead to support the first. As a group, we researched life in Brighton and the way in which *The National Trust magazine* featured its articles under columns like

food, lifestyle, culture, leisure and environment, thus, helping in fixing the tone of our supposed publication.

For our picture selection, we heavily relied on *The National Trust*, which specializes in collections of beautiful photography because a sub-editor should also know the proper layout of images along with the right content. Though as a group, we had individual selection of copyright pictures that are neither offensive nor gives a hint at any kind of advertisement of products. The primary role of recognizing the tone of a magazine publication is important to confirm the uniformity of its stories, copy and the matching of design. Thus, a sub-editor is expected to be cautious enough to ensure that the magazine works to its particular niche as the demographic target of audiences are important for a story to be sourced, and the audience, in turn, informs the manner of reading the copy (Knoll, 1984).

Not being sure of how my feature shall appeal to the audience was discomfoting, however, I learnt how a sub-editor has to edit articles in order to cope up with the requirements of a magazine, from my course. As Orwell (1946) promotes the use of strong verbs to add a motion and a dynamic dimension to our effective writing, I produced my feature such that it advocated the same principle. Bearing in mind the academic sources helped me to a great extent for the proper subbing and laying out of my magazine as initially, I had problems in deciding the design of my layout; where to put the headline and what would be an ideal position for fitting in the images for the sake of a good audience. A sub-editor also should be able to identify the genuine and illegal errors in the art of editing to keep up with the ethics of journalism and the possibility of low-risk assessment for a smooth production. According to Baxter (2012), it is the sub-editor who defends on behalf of the writers to save them from legal suits. My feature had the

content of a global outlook and I ensured not to provide any unscrupulous and wrong information because it would have then compromised with my morals of being a sub-editor.

Beginning the process, the first thing that I did on consideration was to alter my headline from ‘excessive use of ready-made foods’ to a title that would be more-catchy in pulling attention, thus changing it to ‘Ready and easy, but not healthy’. The font style was Minion Pro Bold with size 38 point on 18 point. Having decided on the title, I implemented most of what Wheeler says, “feature pages often use the different layout techniques from the rest of the paper. [...] Drop capitals and pull quotes may also be used to dress up the pages. [Pictures] will most likely be bigger [...]. Expect to see graphics where appropriate to add understanding to a story, and fact boxes supplying extra useful information to the reader” (2009: 158). The feature spread was divided into 4 columns using the text boxes, each with a 3 mm indent; two columns each on the first and the second page of my spread. The use of indents gave the text boxes a clean and nicer look. For the purpose of accuracy, I created my own paragraph styles naming them ‘body copy’ and ‘headline copy’, which, in turn, helped in similar styling of paragraphs on the next page of the spread. The body copy font was in Times New Roman with a 9 on 10 point except the first alphabet of the introductory paragraph, which for the purpose of being focused was enlarged than the original size. On the first spread, underlying the first text box on the left, I used a pull quote, as agreed by our group to accord with my feature article. I designed the pull quote with a grey-colored quotation mark in Times New Roman and on a 142 point along with Japanese dots on point 5, thus, giving the quote a more distinct look at its base.

Taking on what Frost (2003) says about images, “a picture is not worth a thousand words, but should be worth more than the text that would fit in the same space”, I chose three pictures for my spreads that would give a clear focus to the readers in terms of being relevant to my context and depth of meaning. But the journey of picture selection was not easy. For the picture to go along with the headline, I had difficulty at the first place in choosing such an image that would encapsulate the idea of ready-made foods, as a whole. With a variety of food images labelled ‘Made in China’ or the mention of

languages from other countries, or even the advertisement of a product with a particular store in which it is sold, it was hard to distinguish between them. After careful consideration of keeping the content right and avoiding the offense of being a racist, I picked the headline image which had a wide display of various ready-to-eat foods in general and two other images; one of ready-made burgers and the second one of ready and cooked foods for covering my second spread. I kept the headline image large in order to interest the readers at the onset. The image on the top right of the second spread was made to ‘fit in proportionally’ due to the small space available after the feature was placed. For the final image at the bottom right, I used the rectangle tool box and fitted in the image centrally. With the pictures being finalized, I, now, wanted to place a picture caption box mentioning the location of the pictures as it helps in reading the magazine better and informs the reader about the connection of pictures to the text. The font style used for the caption content was Arial regular with 8 on 10 point and in blue to match with the color of the rectangle tool box used at two corners of the spread. I also used a single bold line by the side of the caption box to avoid the readers’ attention from overlooking it. Both the pull quote and the picture caption box were saved in the InDesign library for the purpose of dragging it to its exact place at the time of designing the spread.

In order to ensure the subtlety of design, it is important to be coherent as Holmqvist (2005) says that a reader’s eye follows the natural way of tracking to decide on how a magazine looks and reads. The spread layout should construct on the gravity of the page whereby the entry of a reader is the top-left side of the page and falls towards the bottom right side. Most newspapers and magazines use this excessively where the left-hand side bottom becomes less important. This point by Holmqvist, though, contradicts the position of my pull quote towards the bottom left, I used Leckner’s concept (2012) of drawing the reader’s eye around the spread by using some kind of optical signal, thus, using an enlarged-sized letter at the start of my introductory paragraph. The issue of designing a spread along with various factors like proper use of images to mark the ‘entry’ of readers seemed quite complicated. The design of a magazine also has to be consistent with the text because mixed

paragraphs often result in misunderstanding the interpretation of the feature's copy.

Thus, the role of sub editors and page designers in keeping the design of the magazine inherent is to do with their responsibility, definitely. Our magazine, *Britelife*, by exploring lifestyle issues, reflects how a sub-editor plays its role accurately and in minute details. Using elements like text boxes with proper indents helps the feature space to 'breathe' and look clean (Dong Hyun Lee 2007). With a proper space between the lines, the feature copy also hints at interrogation and creativity instead of a hard news agenda. Although the design has nothing to intrude into the subject of the feature, it enhances the meaning and the effect of a feature to a great extent, the two fundamentals of good layout patterns. Magazine designs are also differentiated by the variety of fonts available. News with factual information and less deviation are often put in serif font with the serifs guiding the readers through huge texts. However, we designed our spreads in *Britlife* using Times New Roman for the sake of soothing the visual effect of the readers.

To conclude my essay, I would like to add a few more things that I experienced in this module. Initially, I found the use of Adobe InDesign difficult in terms of remembering the various tools and their implementation as per their functions. It was until the last few days before the submission of our group project that I found it really hard but thorough practice gave me confidence, along with academic sources taught by our tutor during the course. The module being designed in the manner of covering most of InDesign's applications every week made learning easier and with no rush. There is no doubt in the fact that different news values determine the making of a successful feature spread and I was successful in choosing one such feature, that is an issue of ongoing concern these days. In my opinion, the Advanced Journalism Skills module has not only helped me in shaping my role as a journalist, but also equipped me with the skills of an editor and a sub-editor. I learnt how being a sub-editor, one has to go through the entire process of reducing articles to their prescribed word-count, in keeping up with the demands of both the journalist and the publication along with proper display of pictures. Thus, *Britelife* in making its own niche stands as an example of good sub editing practice.