

Vogue

(July 2021)

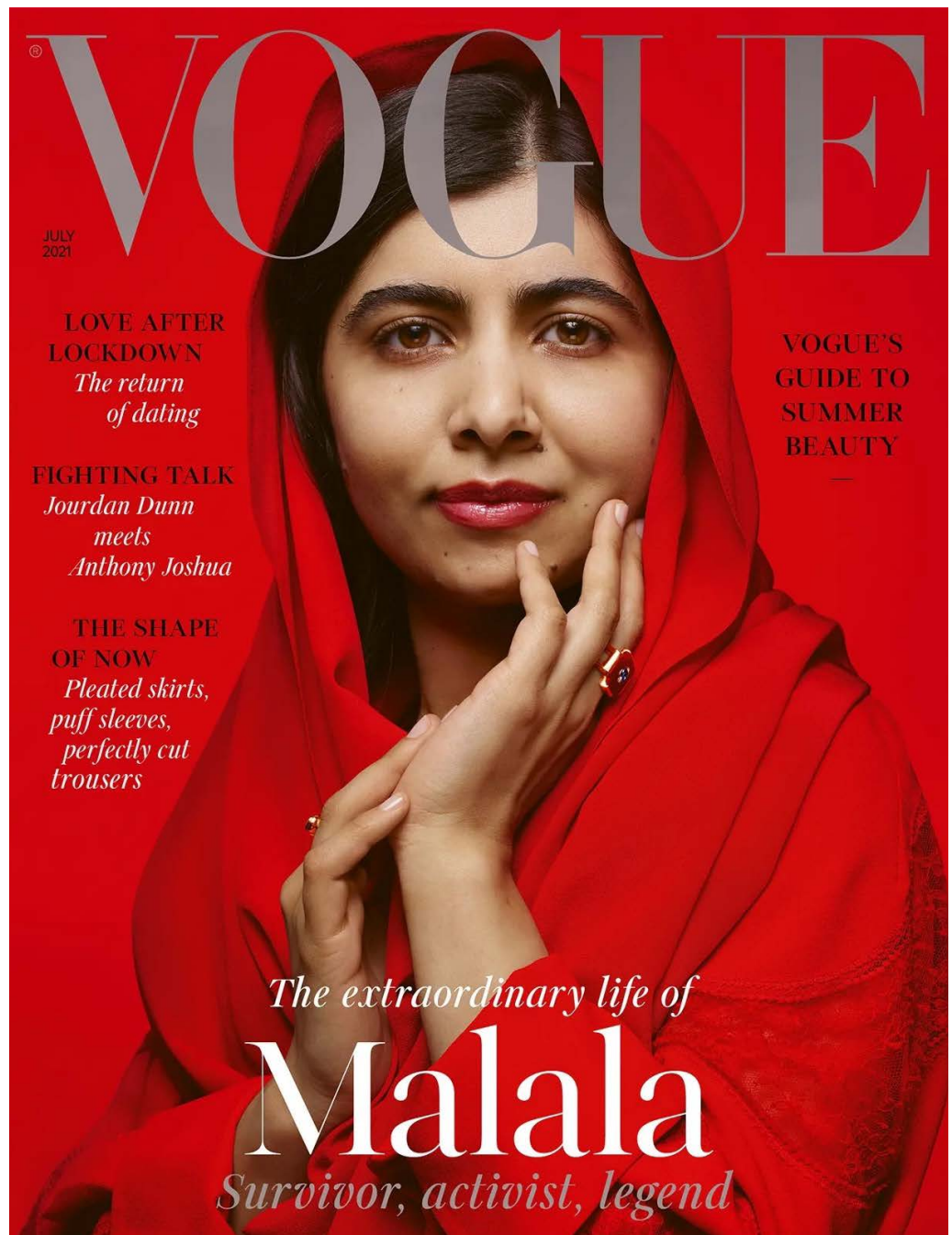
Malala Yousafzai Front Cover

GCSE Component 1: Exploring the Media

Focus areas:

- **Media language**
- **Representation**
- **Media contexts**

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Product context

- Vogue was first issued in New York in 1892 as a high society diary before it was bought by American publisher Conde Nast in 1905. Conde Nast made it into a women's fashion magazine, though still aimed at the upper classes. They also created different overseas versions: British Vogue was launched in 1916.
- Vogue is still produced by Conde Nast and continues to be successful in the UK, despite dwindling print sales in the magazine marketplace. Edward Enninful was appointed editor in December 2017. A former model, he brought with him a strong social media following. He has made some important changes to the content and representations featured in the magazine, which have not only increased digital subscriptions and stabilised print sales of the magazine but have also influenced significant changes in the wider magazine marketplace. In 2021, British Vogue had an average circulation figure of 191,000 issues of the print magazine each month. Vogue claims to have 5.3 million digital subscriptions and a social media following of 14.3 million.
- Vogue is classed as a glossy, monthly, women's lifestyle consumer magazine. *"British Vogue is the authority on fashion, beauty and lifestyle, and is a destination for women to learn, be challenged, inspired and empowered. Under Edward Enninful's unmatched global editorial status, British Vogue has become the undisputed Fashion Bible in the United Kingdom and is leading the cultural zeitgeist worldwide, powered by purpose."*
(SOURCE: MEDIA PACK https://cnda.condenast.co.uk/static/mediapack/vg_media_pack_latest.pdf)
- Vogue is aimed at ABC1 fashion and style conscious women who are educated, sophisticated and wealthy. Whilst it traditionally targeted an older female audience of 30–45-year-olds, you could say that this audience has now broadened to appeal to, inspire and empower younger readers too, as well as a much more culturally diverse audience, under the influence of the new editor.

- Vogue is still hugely dependent on advertising revenue. Most of its pages are adverts for high-end consumer brands. To appeal to advertisers, Vogue emphasises the wealth and status of its ABC1 readership who spend an average of £8k a year on fashion and over a thousand pounds a year on cosmetics.

Media language

How media language creates and communicates meaning:

Vogue is a mainstream magazine, so it uses the typical codes and conventions of print to construct the front cover. Over a long period of time, Vogue has also acquired its own unique house style so that its brand identity is instantly recognisable.

- The same classic Didot font has been used for the VOGUE masthead since the 1950s; perhaps it is now better known as the Vogue font. The all-uppercase serif font gives it a classic, architectural look, an aesthetic that commands respect. Tall, slim and sculpted, the letters proclaim their own statuesque style. The word *vogue* means something that is trendy or popular.
- The VOGUE masthead is always capitalised and centrally placed, like a banner across the top of the magazine. In this edition, the masthead is laid over the forehead of the cover model, Malala Yousafzai. Perhaps she is an unlikely cover model for a fashion magazine, but this effect immediately anchors her as a Vogue star, in combination with her caption: 'Survivor, Activist, Legend'. The use of the same silver-grey colour for this caption and the Vogue masthead links and reinforces that message: Malala is a Vogue role model.
- On the cover you can see the limited colour palette of red, silver-grey, black and white, which suggests the confidence of a sophisticated design that is associated with a high-end magazine. The use of the dominant colour red in this context suggests celebration, joy, luxury, power and strength, a call to action to identify with Malala, the survivor/activist/legend. The understated silver-grey and gentle glint of gold from her jewellery give a sense of elegance and glamour.

- The main coverline, the caption of Malala’s own name, is the brightest text on the page. The white clearly contrasts with the red background celebrating her name and her status. Malala’s name and her importance is highlighted and framed by the italicised text: “The extraordinary life of” in white and “Survivor, activist, legend” in silver. This offers a measured sense of symmetry with the masthead at the top.

The composition of the front cover follows the principles of traditional design. Applying the rule of thirds, the masthead at the top and the centred Malala captions at the bottom frame the main image of Malala symmetrically, enhancing her status. While the focus on the eyes seems slightly high for the rule of thirds, the graceful hand gesture leads the viewer back to look Malala in the eye, making her centre of attention. This format, together with the flow of text at the top and bottom, follows the traditional Z-rule.

Malala is shown in a medium close-up shot that draws attention to both her facial expression as well as her body language and attire. The headscarf she wears indicates her culture and her religion and is an essential part of her identity: Malala is a survivor because she was shot in the face by the Taliban for being a 15-year-old Muslim girl who was seeking an education. (She has since graduated from Oxford.) She engages the reader with direct eye contact and a slight smile – a mode of address that is personal and welcoming but confident and self-assured. She is at a level angle with us: we are invited to get closer to her, to identify with her, but also admire her and look up to her as a role model, a legend even.

On the cover, you can see how the captions used to anchor the cover model elevate her status and importance. “Survivor” suggests she has overcome being a victim and is now a powerful “activist”, taking a political stance to drive her own “extraordinary” narrative forwards. At the age of just 23, she has achieved the accolade of a “legend” in less than 10 years.

The coverlines on the left-hand side all follow the same chic minimalist design, a black uppercase headline with an italicised subheading in white to draw the reader into what is more familiar territory for women’s lifestyle magazines: fashion, romance, celebrities.

Vogue asserts its authority here to show you how to get back into the dating game, with ‘LOVE AFTER LOCKDOWN’, and to tell you what is in fashion in ‘THE SHAPE OF NOW: how to keep up, what to do and what to buy’. The use of alliterative language (with Ls) is a rhetorical device that tells us that Vogue is an authority on the subject.

The important coverline on the right-hand side, ‘Vogue’s Guide to Summer Beauty’, affirms Vogue’s authority as the fashion bible. Sitting on a red background, just above Malala’s shoulder, it doesn’t need to say any more. It balances the layout with the design of the left-hand side coverlines.

The coverline ‘FIGHTING TALK’ broadens the reader’s appeal from fashion fans of the model Jourdan Dunn to sporting fans of the champion boxer Anthony Joshua. This is another unlikely feature for the magazine but shows how Vogue is widening the scope of its more traditional readers, whilst possibly appealing to new readers who wouldn’t expect a heavyweight boxing champion in the pages of Vogue. It demonstrates how Enninfu is taking his readers by surprise and leading the way.

Possible areas for further investigation:

- High production values are part of Vogue’s branding, and using Nick Knight as star photographer emphasises this. You could research his other work as a photographer and the recognition and accolades he has achieved.
- Explore the selection of Jourdan Dunn and Anthony Joshua. What do they represent? Why have they been paired together in an interview? Who do you think this article would appeal to?

Representation and contexts

Social, cultural and historical contexts:

- To show a Muslim woman wearing a headscarf on the cover is highly unusual, even today. Historically, the editors of mainstream women’s magazines claimed that featuring models of colour on their front covers badly affected sales of the magazine. Black and Asian models were underrepresented to such an extent that there was little evidence to support their claim: it was simply accepted as fact. Naomi Campbell has famously challenged the industry for

this systemic racism throughout her career, advocating wider diversity for all, from the 1990s through to the 21st century. She was the first Black cover model on Vogue in many of its international editions, and she first featured on the cover of British Vogue in December 1987. Black models on the covers of Vogue UK were few and far between. According to The Guardian newspaper, between the August 2002 edition of British Vogue (with Naomi Campbell as the cover star) and 2014, a period of 12 years, “146 covers have been shot, edited and distributed to newsstands and not one has featured an individual black model.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/black-model-british-vogue-naomi-campbell-racism>

Conde Nast would have deliberately addressed this when they appointed Edward Enninful as editor in 2017, not only the first man to edit the magazine but also the first Black person. Since then, Vogue covers have celebrated diversity not just through race and ethnicity but also age, gender and size. Naomi Campbell has joined Ed Enninful’s board of directors at Vogue.

- In April 2018, British Vogue’s cover featured a group of models of all colours, ages and sizes, and included the first model to wear a hijab as a symbol of her religion. It got everyone talking about it, prompting wider cultural awareness of issues of representation. “You might not care about fashion but having women of colour represented on the UK cover of the fashion bible is a big deal. This is how true diversity happens” wrote Chitra Ramaswamy.

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/apr/03/halima-aden-why-a-model-wearing-a-hijab-on-the-cover-of-vogue-matters>

- In terms of its political historical context, this issue was published at a time when British and American troops were preparing to leave Afghanistan for good, in August 2021, after a twenty-year battle to combat al-Qaeda and extremist terrorist following the attacks of 11 September 2001. The Taliban were taking control of the country and there were concerns for the safety of people left behind. Malala was making her voice heard on an international stage, calling for world leaders to protect humanitarian

rights and work for peace and democracy in Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries. In a Newsnight interview (August 2021), she expressed her concerns for the physical safety of women and girls in Afghanistan, their access to education and their freedom to work. Although there is no direct reference to this on the cover, Malala is recognised as an education activist opposed to the Taliban, and the news media were full of stories discussing concerns about the plight of ordinary Afghan people following the evacuation at this time. The activist caption on the cover anchors this.

Listen to this interview with Malala on her fears for the rights of Afghan women and girls:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p09sfp7d>.

Representations of ethnicity and gender:

- As a female education activist of Pakistani origin, Malala seems like an unlikely cover model for the fashion bible. The editor explains their choice: she is an inspirational figure who has achieved so much, against all odds, at such a young age. In the introduction to the issue, Enninful writes “*When it comes to people I admire, Malala Yousafzai is right at the top. At 23, the world’s most famous university graduate has already lived so many lives. Activist, author, tireless campaigner for girls’ education, daughter, sister, student and survivor. It’s hard to believe it was only a decade ago that she was a young teenager with a passion for learning, living in Pakistan’s Taliban-controlled Swat Valley, blogging about her experience for the BBC and giving a voice to girls denied the right to learn. A near-fatal attempt on her life in 2012 – or what she calls “the incident” – brought her to Britain for specialist surgery. But she didn’t stop there.*”

(SOURCE: Editor’s letter, Vogue issue July 2021
<https://www.vogue.co.uk/news/article/malala-vogue-cover>)

- The construction of Malala’s representation includes the choice of the colour red for her outfit, headscarf and lipstick all merging with the warm red background. You could explore various cultural codes for what the colour red symbolises. In this context, the red is joyous, strong and powerful. One important connotation

for Malala’s religion and culture is that red is a colour of celebration, often the colour used for marriage.

- The headscarf Malala wears, a dupatta rather than a hijab, is an important part of her cultural identity. In the interview inside the magazine, she explains that the headscarf is a “cultural symbol for us Pashtuns” and represents her roots as a Sunni Muslim of Pashtun ethnicity. She continues, “And Muslim girls or Pashtun girls or Pakistani girls, when we follow our traditional dress, we’re considered to be oppressed, or voiceless, or living under patriarchy. I want to tell everyone that you can have your voice within your culture, and you can have equality in your culture.” The way the soft fabric is gently folded over her neck and shoulders creates a classic elegant look that is iconic and even gives it a mythic status, which links with the caption “legend”. In contrast, her lipstick, nail polish and gold jewellery suggest that she is also at home in her new culture, living as a confident young woman in Britain today.

(SOURCE <https://www.vogue.co.uk/news/article/malala-vogue-interview>)

- The graceful positioning of her hands, following the flow of the fabric of the scarf, could be seen as an expression of femininity and as a gesture of both thoughtfulness and modesty. It could also suggest the importance of hand gestures in traditional Indian dance.
- The light catching her eyes as she looks out towards the reader to meet our gaze suggests a personal, direct and honest connection: that she is a figure to be trusted. This encourages us to aspire to be like her, an extraordinary and iconic young woman.

Areas for further investigation:

- Look at the awards Edward Enninful has received since becoming a trailblazing editor at Vogue.
- Compare how British magazine covers have celebrated cultural diversity on their covers in response to Ed Enninful’s lead.
- Research Malala’s achievements since “the incident”.
- You could research how different audiences responded to this Malala Vogue cover. Once again, Ed Enninful got everyone talking about it, but not everyone liked it.