

BREXIT REFERENDUM AND MEDIA COVERAGE: AN APPRAISAL

Syeda Anum Aftab

Abstract

On June 23, 2016 the British people voted to leave the EU in a nation-wide referendum. Politically the vote brought with it greater uncertainty and instability not only domestically but regionally. This warranted a broader examination of events that led the UK towards this decision. Popular narrative holds immigration, economy, and a highly bureaucratic European Union as the core reasons.

This study analyzes the significance and influence that media coverage exerted during the Brexit vote. This paper undertakes content analysis of influential newspapers at local, regional, and international level under the theoretical domain of 'agenda setting', 'propaganda' and 'manufacturing consent'. It appraises the role played by regional and local press in managing and creating perception amongst general public vis-à-vis UK membership in the European Union. According to several surveys and statistics, media propagated misinformation and populist narratives that eventually tilted the result in favor of exit.

Keywords: Brixit, Media role, Agenda setting

One report found that pro-remain coverage focused mostly on public views of Britain's EU membership.¹ On the other hand, immigration and corruption within the EU institutions received extensive coverage on pro-leave platforms. The issue of sovereignty received less attention than immigration in overall media reporting. The focus of media attention remained a small group of individuals whose utterances come under heavy scrutiny. The report finds that Boris Johnson and David Cameron,

¹ David Deacon, Emily Harmer, John Downey, James Stanier, and Dominic Wring, "UK News Coverage of the 2016 EU Referendum", Loughborough University's Institutional Repository, Report 5 (6 May–22 June 2016).

belonging to leave and remain camps, respectively dominated the press. Other sections of civil society like academics, foreign statesmen, and experts merely 2%, 5%, and 11% of the reporting respectively. The findings also concluded that almost 60% of the articles and editorials supported the leave campaign.

Another survey found that for most of the people, the major source of information on Brexit remained the media.² Around twenty percent of the people identified the newspapers as their primary source. Majority of people deemed the coverage unbalanced and misleading.

There are several theories that explain how media covers issues with certain aims and objectives. In *Manufacturing Consent*, Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman explores media's relationship with society, culture and existing power structures. Their propaganda model enlists filters through which information gets to the public namely, ownership, advertising, news makers, and news shapers. According to Chomsky, media is controlled by corporations and power elites who use it to further their own self interests. People who express dissentient views are not taken with much enthusiasm or appreciation. Through deliberate filtering of information people's focus is diverted away from real issues to what the elites want. "Media defends the economic, social, and political agendas of the privileged groups that dominate domestic society, the state, and the global order".³

Another idea, closely related to Chomsky's concept, is theory of agenda setting proposed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972.⁴ According to them, "in choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff, and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality".⁵ In other words the media has the power to implicitly dictate the most important issues to the public. The Agenda setting theory states that the media does not always project the truth instead it shapes the reality. Through deliberate filtering of information, media sources frame issues to

² Azad Zangana, *UK Referendum on EU Membership: The Risks of Brexit* (London: Schroder, 2016).

³ Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (Random House, 2010).

⁴ Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw, "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media", *Public Opinion Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (1972): 176-187.

⁵ *Ibid.*

influence public thinking. “The mass media set the agenda for each political campaign, influencing the salience of attitudes toward the political issues”.⁶ Reading the vote against this theoretical background, we are bound to attain useful insights regarding the role of media in influencing the referendum.

Content Analysis

The print media played a significant role in the referendum. The issues which dominated the press were given more focus in broadcast and radio.⁷ This shows that despite the waning power of press in the era of social media, the newsprint still sets the agenda. Most of the issues, slogans, and narratives as regards to the referendum were decided and shaped by the print media. Eighty two percent of newspaper articles about the referendum favoured Brexit when circulation and “strength of papers’ endorsements” are taken into account.⁸ No other medium beats this figure. British newspapers were overwhelmingly in favour of Brexit, with *The Mail*, *The Sun*, *Telegraph*, *Express* and *Star* accounting for four times as many readers and anti-EU stories as compare to their pro-remain rivals. A time frame of one week prior to referendum i.e, 16-22 June has been considered for detailed content analysis of press coverage.

Local: *The Sun*

The Sun is the most widely read newspaper in Britain with 1.7 million circulations,⁹ owned by News Group Newspapers Ltd., which also publishes *The Times* and *The Sunday Times*. *The Sun* came out in full support of leaving the EU by publishing £96,000 worth of posters, a perfect manifestation of front page political endorsement. The group had to register as official ‘Leave’ campaigner owing to election commission rules. It is important to note that historically the paper has been euro sceptic. Trevor Kavanagh, the daily’s associate editor, explained that Brexit is “a

⁶ Maxwell E. McCombs, Donald Lewis Shaw and David Hugh Weaver (eds.), *Communication and Democracy: Exploring the Intellectual Frontiers in Agenda-Setting Theory* (Psychology Press, 1997).

⁷ David Deacon, Emily Harmer, John Downey, "UK News Coverage of the 2016 EU Referendum".

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Louise Ridley, "Which Newspapers Support Brexit in the EU Referendum?", *The Huffington Post*, 21 July 2016.

long and legitimate campaign” going back over 40 years¹⁰. Following aspects were prominent in *the Sun’s* coverage of EU referendum:

Rupert Murdoch, owner of *News Group Newspapers*, is well known media mogul and euro sceptic. For four decades he has been a strong opponent of European integration and regulations. He commands considerable political influence owing to his vast corporate power. He is known to use his newspapers and channels to exert his political influence.¹¹ This explains why *the Sun* went all out in support of Leave campaign disregarding its role of a dispassionate watchdog. Its coverage was consistent with Murdoch’s worldview. The role of a manufacturer of consent played by *the Sun* becomes more evident when stories that were contrary to Murdoch’s view remained less visible.

The paper was much vocal about the policies and stances of the Leave campaign without questioning their validity. Even before declaring its support, the paper published more news about Leave, while Remains’ narrative lacked coverage. Take the case of a news item which laid down prospective bills to be tabled by Leave campaigners if Brexit happens.¹² Proposed laws were incognizant of legalities as later turned out but the paper did not publish any corrigenda. David Cameron’s claim of changing the EU through staying was given coverage in only one article.¹³

Most of the op-ed pieces claimed that “leaving EU will save sovereignty, reign in migration, and boost economy”¹⁴. How this would happen was not addressed. The analysis shed light on only one side of the coin. For example, talking about economy, it claimed “When we joined the EEC in 1973, the then members made up 36 per cent of the world economy. Today it’s 17 per cent and falling almost by the minute – making our

¹⁰ “We Urge our Readers to BeLeave in Britain and Vote to Quit the EU,” Trevor Kavanagh on Pro-Brexit Stance, *The Sun*, 13 June 2016, see <https://www.thesun.co.uk/video/news/the-suns-associate-editor-trevor-kavanagh-on-pro-brexit-stance/>.

¹¹ Andy Beckett, “Murdoch’s Politics: How One Man’s Thirst for Wealth and Power Shapes Our World by David McKnight – Review”, *The Guardian*, 20 February 2013.

¹² Robert Fisk, “Taking Back Control: Here are the Six New Laws the Leave Campaign Wants to Pass after Brexit”, *The Sun*, 16 June 2016.

¹³ Tom Dunn, “David Cameron Pleads with Voters to Choose Remain so UK can Reshape EU”, *The Sun*, 20 June 2016.

¹⁴ Patrick Minford, “10 Reasons why Choosing Brexit on June 23 is a Vote for a Stronger, Better Britain”, *The Sun*, 22 June 2016.

inability to trade freely across the oceans an increasingly serious problem”¹⁵. However it failed to identify several other causes behind it. It did not mention how the UK has had been free to have independent deals with states.

The question of UK’s membership of EU depended on several factors. *The Sun* seemed to focus more on immigration, economy, and sovereignty. Most of the news items were about these issues. Topics such as Lisbon treaty, euro zone, post-Brexit Britain etc were not covered. A clear pattern of agenda setting based on three issues was identified.

In its declaration of support for Brexit, *The Sun* introduced the jargon of ‘Be-Leave Brexit’. It also used value based and judgemental words for EU by labelling it ‘dictatorial Brussels’ and “greedy, wasteful, bullying and breathtakingly incompetent in a crisis”.¹⁶ It heaped all this vitriol without giving sound and detailed evidence. The analysis seemed oblivious to media ethics.

In clear favour of Leave campaign, *the Sun* acted as a gate keeper against information and activities of the Remain camp. The filtering of information was evident when the likes of Boris Johnson and Nigel Farage were given more coverage than David Cameron, Jeremy Corbyn, or Nicola Sturgeon. Only two news item on statements from the EU leaders were published with judgemental and conclusive headlines. One headline said “stick it up your Juncker” for Jean Claude Juncker’s views on EU referendum. His warning for British voters that there would be no second chance was labelled as “threat” and “infuriating”.¹⁷ It did not mention how invocation of the EU membership is irreversible as per Lisbon treaty.

Indifference to minority and cultural sentiments was explicit as no coverage was representative of the minorities campaigning in Scotland or Northern Ireland. These areas were clearly against Brexit which explains why *the Sun* chose to ignore them. The debate was presented more as an issue for English people.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ “We Urge our Readers to be Leave in Britain and Vote to quit the EU on June 23”, *The Sun*, 13 June 2016.

¹⁷ Tom Dunn, “Stick It Up Your Juncker: Brussels bigwig Jean-Claude warns Britain there’s ‘no second chance’ if UK turns backs Brexit”, *The Sun*, 22 June 2016.

There was negligible female representation in reporting and op-eds. The women voice or female opinion clearly lacked in *The Sun's* coverage. However, it showed gender sensitivity when Labour MP Jo Cox was murdered in cold blood in June 2016. Despite being in Remain campaign, the paper was dismayed at her death and said, "This referendum campaign has gone far beyond a frank and honest debate. Supporters of both Remain and Leave routinely cross the line".

Regional: *The Economist*

The Economist is an English-language weekly magazine published by the Economist Group with circulation of 1.5 million. *The Economist* supports free trade, globalization, free immigration, and cultural liberalism; the ideals antithetical to Brexit. It targets highly educated readers and claims an audience containing many influential executives and policy-makers. Its classic liberalist leanings were evident in its coverage of the EU referendum. It declared its opposition to the leave campaign. Following aspects were evident of *Economists* coverage of the EU referendum:

The Economist was comprehensive and informed in its analysis. It published several issue briefs focusing on different dimensions of the Brexit. Despite being against Leave campaign, it presented facts and information of issues held important by all stakeholders. It revisited history to trace roots of prevalent euro scepticism in Britain¹⁸. The issue of sovereignty¹⁹, economy²⁰ and immigration²¹ were explained in detail and context. It also touched upon issues which were ignored by local papers like security, post-Brexit deal, agricultural community, the probability of Irish and Scottish independence etc.

Though the paper was against Brexit, it limited its opposition to objective and reasoned argument. If it argued that Brexit would be bad, it stated its reasons. It disagreed with notion that the EU membership causes loss of income to the British people. "Most estimates of lost income are small, but

¹⁸ "The Roots of Euroscepticism", *The Economist*, 12 March 2016.

¹⁹ "Dreaming of Sovereignty", *The Economist*, 19 March 2016.

²⁰ "The Economic Consequences", *The Economist*, 09 April, 2016.

²¹ "Let them not Come", *The Economist*, 02 April, 2016.

the risk of bigger losses is large”, it argued statistically²². The use of value based words and jargon were also absent in its coverage.

In its coverage, the paper made clear distinctions between myths and facts. The issue of red tapism in the EU was much politicised and talked about at local level. For instance, it was erroneously claimed that EU regulations were always forced upon unwilling governments. *The Economist* stated “analysis by the London School of Economics finds Britain siding with the majority in 87% of EU votes. On climate change and financial regulation, Britain has led the push for tougher action. When businesses complain about red tape, they even find that the government has added extra rules to “gold-plate” those from the EU. The costliest burdens are home-grown not EU-inspired.”²³ The coverage seemed to be long sighted and visionary as it delved upon the subject of withdrawal²⁴; something which was not even discussed in local media before referendum.

Though its aim was to explain things in detail for its readers, there seemed to be an overdose of analysis lacking any original reporting. An analysis helps reader in making an informed decision but it also influences or directs that decision. Reporting, on other hand, presents facts in the form of data that are independent from an individual’s judgement and can only be adjusted to a certain extent without compromising the integrity of the information.

The Economist gate keeping of information on EU referendum was systematic and uniform. As mentioned above, it addressed all sides of the debate in its analysis and reporting.²⁵ Hence, no significant trace of framing of issues was evident. But it seemed to filter foul and unethical language used by the campaigners. It was considerate to the grievances, sentiments, and plight of minorities and immigrants in its coverage. It dedicated special issue briefs to address Scottish, Irish and agrarian concerns.²⁶

²² “The Economic Consequences”, *The Economist*, 09 April, 2016.

²³ “Yes, we have no Straight Bananas”, *The Economist*, 28 May 2016.

²⁴ “If it were done”, *The Economist*, 4 June 2016.

²⁵ “City Blues”, *The Economist*, 7 May 2016.

²⁶ “Immigration”, *The Economist*, 02 April 2016.

International: *The New York Times*

The New York Times is an American daily newspaper with huge global circulation. Its target audience is college graduates and high income earners. Being an international paper, it did not give extensive coverage to this referendum. Editorially, the paper has liberalist leanings. It supports globalization and free markets, which was antithetical to the populist driven Brexit campaign in the UK.

Lack of original reporting was evident as most of the coverage focused on various aspects of the issue instead of reporting the actual events. The referendum was the subject of editorials and opinions, not news items. As mentioned above, analysis cannot be void of author's subjectivity and perceptions. This can influence reader's opinions.

An effort of framing of issues and agenda setting seemed to be there as it published articles that implicitly supported EU membership. For instance, one article talked about market liquidity and how it could be hastened under Brexit.²⁷ The issues held important by Leave campaign were framed as exaggerated and misplaced.²⁸

There was evidence of value based words in most of the editorials²⁹ with one labelling referendum as a "choice between worse and bad".³⁰ This might create more confusion for the reader. Talking about the notion that Brexit would unleash wonders of free market economy, the paper said "free-market fantasy that has always and everywhere proved delusional".³¹ The coverage also got sentimental by making passionate appeals to its readers to support democracy, peace, and peaceful coexistence. However, the usage of words and expressions remained neutral and objective in news items.³²

²⁷ Swaha Pattanaik, "Brexit Vote Spurs Concerns over Market Liquidity", *The New York Times*, 20 June 2016.

²⁸ "Nationalism and the Brexit Vote", *The New York Times*, 20 June 2016.

²⁹ Jim Yardley, "Regardless of Brexit, Expert Say "EU Must Rethink Status Quo". *The New York Times*, 18 June 2016.

³⁰ Paul Kurgman, "Fear, Loathing and Brexit", *The New York Times*, 17 June 2016.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Stephen Castle, "Anti-immigration Poster Denounced by Top Brexit Advocate", *The New York Times*, 19 June 2016.

The coverage focused mostly on views and concerns of common people. The paper did not give much space to issues central to this referendum. The tone of reporting presented the grievances of the non-English parts of the UK as legitimate while those of English ones were dismissed as emotional sentiments.³³ The spirit of objective and reasoned analysis was missing as it blatantly took sides in favour of the Remain camp. The quantity and quality of reporting highlights the Remain campaign while Leave was seldom touched upon. There seemed to be a filtering of any information that could put membership in a bad light.

The paper made claims about doomsday scenario post Brexit without giving sound substantiations. For instance, “this United Kingdom of four nations may be split in the end, with England and Wales voting narrowly to leave and Scotland and Northern Ireland voting heavily to remain”³⁴; also “Brexit could End London’s Reign as Europe’s Financial Hub”.³⁵ It straightaway levied blame on British press for Brexit’s appeal while absolving EU or UK government of all the blame.³⁶

Comparison among local, regional and international media coverage

All three newspapers differed in their target audience which explains the stark contrast in their reporting. *The Sun*, a tabloid paper, catered to the understanding of the matured and the aged. *The Economist* targeted policy makers and educated class (elite) with aim to bring real policy changes. *The New York Times* catered to domestic American audience who had little interest in Brexit in the wake of US elections at home. The nature of target audience also explains why they filtered information, set agenda, and frame issues in certain way.

Another difference in coverage of EU referendum by three newspapers was in the quantity and quality of articles over an issue. Quantity in terms of number of articles or opinions published and quality in terms of in depth analysis and research on particular aspect of referendum. *The Sun*, clearly

³³ Steven Erlanger, “European? British? These ‘Brexit’ Voters Identify as English”, *The New York Times*, 16 June 2016.

³⁴ Stephen Castle, “Choosing ‘Brexit’ could Leave the Kingdom Less United”, *The New York Times*, 17 June 2016.

³⁵ Stephen Lubben, “Brexit could End London’s Reign as Europe’s Financial Hub”, *The New York Times*, 17 June 2016.

³⁶ Martin Fletcher, “Who is to Blame for Brexit Appeal, British Newspapers”, *The New York Times*, 21 June 2016.

in favour of Brexit, published large number of articles on the subject but most of them lacked quality. *The Economist* published a series of issue briefs containing deep research and analysis on various aspects. *The New York Times* lacked quality and quantity both as it found hard to communicate a technical and complex foreign affair to domestic audience.

The three papers had different ideological and political leanings. This explains why they took certain positions and justified them. The divergent narratives being propagated at all three levels also seem to be guided by their positions. *The Sun* going all out against the EU membership takes root from its years of euro scepticism. *The Economist* opposing Brexit stems from its classic liberalist and pro globalization editorial stance. *The New York Times* support of the EU originates from its liberal and anti populist leanings.

The agenda setting initiatives by the three papers were quite evident in the coverage. *The Sun* through the quantity of articles about immigration, sovereignty and anti EU views seemed to set agenda in favour of Brexit. *The Economist* through its comprehensive reporting aimed to set agenda against Brexit as its every article projected Brexit a disastrous decision for EU and UK. *The New York Times* tried to set agenda against Brexit by publishing articles on probability on breakdown of UK, erosion of UK's dominance of EU economy etc.

There was a clear pattern of conflictual instead of collaborative reporting at all three levels. There was stark contrast in the issues which they considered important. The common issues were also presented differently by the three of them. *The Sun* talked about sovereignty in terms of invasion and dictatorship by the EU. It presented immigrants as thieves stealing the rights of local people. It attributed all the ills of British economy to the EU membership. *The Economist*, in stark contrast, was more comprehensive in its reporting. Possible second Scottish referendum on independence and the prospects for Ulster's unification with the Republic of Ireland dominated the pages of *the New York Times*. How Brexit would create political and diplomatic hurdles for the US in Europe was not touched upon.

The media coverage betrayed negativities. Each side painted the future in dark colours. *The Sun* prophesized a doomsday scenario where continued

membership of the bloc would annihilate the UK as a nation. *The Economist* presented the referendum, a democratic right of the British people, as an inappropriate initiative. *The New York Times* downplayed the event as merely the culmination of English anxieties that failed to address the minority view.

The Sun's coverage focused mainly on views of the media and corporate elites. How common man felt about referendum was not much talked about. Its coverage was more of 'he-said, he-responded' nature with less focus on real issues. *The Economist* coverage was primarily of expert's opinion with in-depth analysis on different aspects of the Brexit. *The New York Times* coverage relied more on popular opinion instead of reporting the elitist opinion.

Impact of media coverage on government's decision making

The referendum was held by the Conservative party under the pressure from the eurosceptic media, politicians and public. The UK government, led by David Cameron (Prime Minister) and George Osborne (Chancellor), was spearheading the official Remain campaign called 'Britain Stronger in Europe.' Cameron suspended 'collective responsibility' to give freedom to Conservative Ministers and MPs to campaign for whatever side they wanted. This decision was influenced by media and political pressure.³⁷ The UK government spent £9.3m on leaflets to promote the value of staying in the EU. Of that, almost £3m of the total budget was spent on the accompanying website and "digital promotion." The leaflets were sent to every household. This invited public and media criticism.³⁸

Leaflets held that the UK would enjoy a special status in a reformed EU. It retained the pound. It would not join the euro. It would keep control of its borders. The EU membership gravitate international investment to the UK. It also gives UK access to trade deals with over 50 countries around the world. The EU membership means opportunities, jobs, and greater economic security for the people of the UK. Leaving the EU would risk the UK's prosperity; diminish its influence over world affairs; jeopardise

³⁷ Hughes, Laura Hughes, "EU Referendum: David Cameron Forced to Let Ministers Campaign for Brexit after Fears of a Cabinet Resignation", *The Telegraph*, 05 Jan 2016.

³⁸ Matt Dathan, "'Return to Sender!' As the Government's £9m Pro-EU Leaflet begins to Land on our Doormats Today, Many are being Sent Straight Back to Downing Street", *The Daily Mail*, 11 April 2016.

national security by reducing access to common European criminal databases and result in trade barriers between the UK and the EU.

Media trends versus government policies

The press coverage of EU referendum and government official stance stood in stark contrast with each other. The relationship between the two appeared more conflictual than collaborative in nature; the effects of which were quite evident in the aftermath. The calls for second referendum surfaced a few days after UK voted to leave the EU. An online petition signed by millions of people was filed against the government. The government rejected the petition amidst claims of fraud and manipulation.³⁹

Immediately after the vote, Prime Minister David Cameron announced his resignation. He declared himself unsuitable to lead Britain after Brexit. However, this decision was not taken impulsively. Weeks before vote, the press started discussing his resignation as only get away for him in case of Brexit.⁴⁰ The public backlash and dismay over election results also gave cold feet to Boris Johnson, lead Brexit campaigner, who declined to run for Prime Minister.

The opposition party too come under heavy fire. The leader, Jeremy Corbyn, was accused of half heartedly campaigning for the Remain camp. *The Sun* projected him as a disguised Brexit supporter.⁴¹ The press criticised his leadership and campaign skills. A no-confidence motion was submitted which triggered a leadership election. Nevertheless, he decisively won the re-election.

The press covered the issue of immigration and withdrawal in a confused manner. Later, the government was to do the same when it provided policy insights after the vote. The negative coverage of immigration in the press made government wary of formulating any policy which could invite

³⁹ Allen Felix, "3 Million Signatures Calling for 2nd Referendum is Facing Fraud Probe", *The Sun*, 26 June 2016.

⁴⁰ Josh Pettit, "Will David Cameron be Forced to Resign if We Vote to Leave the EU?", *The Sun*, 21 June 2016.

⁴¹ Allan Tolhurst, "Jeremy Corbyn Gives another Boost to Brexit Camp after Defending Controversial EU Rules on Free Movement", *The Sun*, 15 June 2016.

further media scrutiny. The prevailing uncertainty over the issue reflected in the government's silence and confusion.

The isolationism which UK government faced after Brexit in Europe was not acknowledged or supported by the local media. It was not even considered before the Brexit vote. The regional and international media was more supportive to Britain's isolationism in Europe. The UK government could not decide its foreign policy options with clarity due to lack of support at the domestic level.

The only thing that brought the government and the press together on one page was the murder of a female Labour MP Jo Cox. Her death brought consensus within the press regardless of their political leanings. Extremism and thuggishness were unanimously condemned. Following the incident the government suspended all campaigns.

Key findings

- The case of EU referendum is an example of CNN effect phenomenon. Immense public and media pressure forced the government to hold a referendum and stick to its result. The way David Cameron resigned afterwards shows the effect of sustained media. The narrative built by the press explains why Theresa May coined the term of 'Hard Brexit' and vowed to pursue it.
- Agenda setting was evident in the quantity and quality of news items on particular issues. A survey conducted by *Observer* on British attitudes and beliefs about Europe, found that immigration, economy, and sovereignty were most important issues for Brexit supporters.⁴² As mentioned above, these issues were extensively covered by local, regional, and international media.
- Development Communication theory considers mass media as a tool to facilitate social development through engaging policy makers and stakeholders. The *Sun's* media coverage was void of expert opinions and in-depth analyses on core issues. Thus, the development communication was absent in its reporting. *The Economist*, on the other hand, seemed to play this role well.
- Propaganda model's three filters, ownership, sourcing, and ideological fear, were conspicuous in media coverage of the

⁴² Jim Mann, "Britons and Europe: The Survey Results", *The Sun*, 20 March 2016.

referendum. The ownership of media house determined the tone and stance of *the Sun*. The nature of words used for Brussels and the Remain camp indicate that the line between campaigning and propaganda became blurred. Pro Leave headlines had positive words while pro-Remain had negative. Apparently ideological fear dictated reporting of all three newspapers where each feared the triumph of other.

- Under immense media manoeuvring the decision making on the sensitive issue of EU membership was flawed. A referendum might be a democratic exercise but a major decision like Brexit should not just rely on sensationalism. The decision to leave or stay should have been guided by a detailed policy analysis, economic evaluation and negotiation. The parliament should have been the platform for such a step, not media houses.