

AQA A LEVEL SOCIOLOGY

# MEDIA

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## TOPIC COMPANION



## AQA A LEVEL SOCIOLOGY COURSE COMPANION:

### MEDIA

This A Level Course Companion has been designed specifically to support teaching and learning, taking a systematic approach closely based on the AQA specification. The media companion takes each point from the specification and breaks it down into sections. Each section makes a clear link to the specification, provides a checklist of what needs to be known and then explains key content, using both classic and some more contemporary studies and examples.

The sections are:

- The new media
- Ownership and control of the media
- Globalisation and the media
- Selection and presentation of the news
- Media representations of age, social class and ethnicity
- Media representations of gender, sexuality and disability
- The relationship between the media and audiences.

Each section includes regular evaluation of theories, studies or perspectives. This is written in the explicit and developed way that students would need to try to emulate in the exam. Each section concludes with a list of possible exam questions along with expert examiner hints. While potential questions are endless (especially in relation to specific wording and the items) all the types of questions that could be asked are included, providing opportunity to write about all the core content.

There is a separate section specifically for the “outline and explain” 10 mark questions because, for Paper 2 Topics in Sociology, these always involve applying knowledge from one area of the subject to another and therefore the questions do not clearly belong in any one section.

It is important to remember that in sociology you are encouraged to apply themes, knowledge and analysis across topic areas, including between different substantive topics. When attempting questions from one section, you should always be aware that you can and should use information from other sections. Two key features of this companion help to facilitate this synoptic approach. These are:

- "making the link": where a connection between content in this module and that of another is explicitly explored.
- "links to core themes": where AQA's core themes of socialisation, culture and identity, social differentiation and power and stratification are applied to each area of the specification.

The language is designed to be reader-friendly, yet packed with key terminology and the sort of academic style that A Level students need to develop in order to excel in their exams.

## THE NEW MEDIA

**Specification: sociological explanations of the new media and their significance for an understanding of the role of the media in contemporary society**

### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Identify, outline, explain, analyse and evaluate the concepts of:

- media, new media, mass media, neophiliac, cultural pessimist

Identify, outline, explain, analyse and evaluate:

- sociological views on the nature of digital media and its significance in society today
- the growth of new media
- the diversity of new media
- how new media is used and controlled.

### What are the new media?

The term **media** refers to the predominant means of communication (such as television and newspapers), particularly of mass communication, hence the term **mass media**. The **new media** are those types of media that use digital technology (e.g. social media and the use of the internet). This is as opposed to “old media”, which refers to traditional forms of media, such as print media (e.g. newspapers and magazines), television and radio. While all are examples of mass media, the potential audience for new media is much larger than traditional media forms like newspapers. The term new media particularly relates to **digital media**: media encoded into a machine-readable format, such as an MP3 files, for example. However, while a CD, DVD or CD-ROM contains digital data, these are now old-fashioned, arguably redundant technology. What might reasonably be considered “new” is always changing. For our purposes, new media is best understood as media that uses digital technology and the internet.

This includes (but is not restricted to):

- Social media sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, etc.
- The streaming of video and audio files, including both commercial film and music and user-generated media content (such as the videos on YouTube).
- Digital/satellite and “smart” television (especially those that facilitate some interactivity).
- Computer games and particularly online gaming.
- Apps for mobile telephones and tablets.

New media includes **social networks**: forms of software that allow people, groups and companies to connect and share information such as photographs and text. Companies such as Facebook, SnapChat and Instagram are all forms of social networks. There are also **virtual communities**. These networks of individuals who share information across an online community. The individuals in the community may share similar interests or goals, such as an online gaming community or followers of a particular blog. Such communities may well be hosted on a social networking platform (for example, it might be in the form of a Facebook group).

Some old media today exists in new media formats (for example newspaper’s websites often involve multimedia approaches to the news, not just an online version of the printed articles); televisions have become “smart”; digital radio provides further opportunities to interact and to see as well as hear; e-books might have web-links or other features that make them more than just a screen version of the printed page.

The key features of this new media are:

<b>Convergence</b>	It is increasingly the case that one device can be used to access a wide variety of media. For example, a mobile phone can be used for watching films and videos, listening to music, accessing social media, reading books, reading newspapers, accessing websites, etc.
<b>Interactivity</b>	New media formats often facilitate more interaction than old media. The audience is able to engage. For example the “red button” on digital or satellite television, or being able to tweet a live TV or radio programme (and perhaps have that tweet read out or appear on the screen).
<b>Audience/user power</b>	Interactivity also gives more power to the audience. Indeed, in some new media formats, the audience is probably better described as the “user” as there is some erosion of the gap between media producer and media consumer. The audience can use streaming and catch-up services to watch the television programmes they want to watch when they want to watch them (for example) but they are also able to influence media content through their interaction, or even create and share the content themselves.
<b>Accessibility</b>	Increasingly, new media is free media. Once people have the devices and the broadband internet access, they are able to get instant access to a vast array of media content, much of which is also free. While this can be great for the audience, it does raise issues about how media producers make money, with a move towards subscription services and significant amounts of advertising.

Sociologists are not all in agreement about the extent to which the move towards new media is really a very significant or revolutionary change.

## Evaluating the view that the new media is revolutionary

- While some would argue that such changes have been transformational, **Cornford and Robins (1999)** argued that new media developments are evolutionary, rather than revolutionary. They argue that interactivity was present in older media forms, such as letters pages in newspapers, or write-in television programmes like Points of View. Furthermore, they suggested that new technology built on existing technology rather than being completely revolutionary.
- Similarly, **Boyle and Haynes (2004)** have argued that new media have added to what was available from old media rather than replacing it (you can still watch television in the old way, as well as streaming and catch-up services on top of this). Both studies note that the main change, in terms of new media, is the speed of communication
- However, it is worth noting that new media has continued to develop very rapidly since both these studies. For example, Cornford and Robins pointed out that people accessed the internet via telephone cables (which is old technology) but increasingly this is not the case.
- Another way in which some have suggested the significance of the new media may be overstated is in relation to the inequality of access to it, although again this is something that is changing very rapidly. New media is used much more frequently by young people than older people, for instance. Some suggest this can lead to a **digital underclass** because important tasks like banking, shopping, paying road tax, registering to vote or getting a passport are done online.

## Attitudes to the new media

### KEY STUDY: Curran & Seaton *Power Without Responsibility* (2003)

Curran and Seaton have written about the role of the media in society over a number of years, and in 2003 updated their research to consider the role of the new media.

They identified big differences in the attitudes of individuals to new media, and categorised these as two groups:

**Neophiliacs:** These are people who are positive about the benefits of the media. Neophiliacs believe that new forms of media (e.g. social media) have led to an increased amount of choice for consumers and has also led to the revitalisation of democracy and democratic engagement. How has it done this? By giving audiences control over the media they consume (through interactivity and choice) and increasing engagement in other aspects of society too. The Arab Spring, for example, was partly sparked by interactions through the new media, such as Facebook or mobile phone messaging platforms.

**Cultural pessimists:** These are people who are critical about the new media. For instance, cultural pessimists argue that the development of the internet has led to us living in an increased state of surveillance. Companies like Facebook and Google use individual's data to help target advertising. The recent Cambridge Analytica scandal adds significantly to this sort of analysis. There are also concerns about such media exposing people to crime, in terms of identity theft, for instance. Cultural pessimists would argue that the new media has all the disadvantages of the old (controlled by big corporations, can have negative influences on audiences, etc.) but brings a great many new extra disadvantages along with it, not least the prevalence of inaccurate information. Some point to Wikipedia as an example of something that appears formal and authoritative but can actually be amended by anybody.

### MAKE THE LINK: MEDIA AND CRIME

In the sociology of Crime and Deviance, we consider the ways in which the new media has increased the opportunities for crime (cybercrime) and how it forms part of a globalisation of crime. This material is very relevant here and adds weight to the arguments of cultural pessimists. However, the way new media can be used for surveillance does also improve the abilities of agents of social control to solve and prevent crime too (monitoring discussions in chat rooms, tracing fraudulent payments, etc.)

## Who controls the new media?

One important debate about the new media is the question of who controls it. For neophiliacs, the new media is democratic and bottom up. It is the public who are in control of it. A more negative take on a similar perspective is that really nobody is in control of it: it is anarchic and full of "fake news" and potential dangers. **Andrew Keen (2007)** argues that the new media's democracy makes it. The apparently uncensored freedom of new media – and particularly of the internet – can be seen as full of opportunity or danger or indeed a bit of both. Postmodern sociologists would recognise this contradiction at the heart of the internet.

However, some would question just how free the new media really is. In fact, it is – in much the same way as the old media – dominated by a relatively small number of large corporations. A company like Google, for instance, acts as a gatekeeper, as most online media content is accessed through its search engine. Similarly, while YouTube and Facebook and similar sites are made up of user-generated content these platforms are owned by large corporations (indeed YouTube is also owned by Google) and while it is

practically impossible for them to control and censor all that content, the content is used to generate advertising revenue and to gather data so that advertising can be appropriately focused. As such, cultural pessimists would suggest that there is really the worst of both worlds: there is a largely unregulated repository of content, much of which is misleading, offensive or both, which exists as by-products of marketing organisations.

All of this does further question the accuracy of some of the key features of new media previously mentioned. If user power, accessibility and interactivity are overstated, how new is new media really?

### MAKE THE LINK: Globalisation

In all sociology topics we are asked to think about the impact of globalisation on society and to consider the topic in a global sense, as well as the specific UK examples (there is a section devoted to just that later in this companion, in relation to the media). One of the important engines of globalisation is new media and the way that it has transformed communication and social interactions.

As such, ideas about the new media are fundamental to globalist theories, and postmodernist ideas about the ways in which society has been transformed. Through the new media, anyone in their bedroom can be a transnational corporation, buying and selling with people anywhere in the world. Our ideas of time and space are transformed when we can talk with someone, live and free, anywhere in the world. These changes are full of opportunities and risks.

We can also link this to Beck's idea of the **risk society**.

## Links to Core Themes

- The new media can be linked to the various core themes, especially **culture and identity** (with the idea that the new media might play a part in creating a global culture) and also **power** in relation to many of the concerns of cultural pessimists and the role new media might play in surveillance.

## Possible Exam Questions

### Item M

Some sociologists argue that the new media has many positive effects on society. They would point to shifts in terms of who controls the new media in the favour of the audience or users. They would also look at the way that the new media is able to change society itself, including in countries where historically people have had few opportunities to question the powerful and the status quo.

1. Applying material from **Item M**, analyse **two** ways in which new media can be said to be democratic. (10 marks)

*Exam hint: You need to identify two hooks in the item to develop in this response. The first could be “who controls the media” and the idea that audience or users are in control could be explored/developed. The second would be “change society itself” and the role of new media in social change (perhaps using the example of the Arab Spring) would be appropriate.*

### Item M

Most people focus on the way that the arrival of the internet and digital content has radically transformed the media in such ways as becoming much more interactive as well as handing over power

to the users or the audience. However, some sociologists argue that the speed and extent of these changes has been overstated.

2. Applying material from **Item M**, analyse **two** ways in which the growth of new media could be said to be evolutionary rather than revolutionary. (10 marks)

*Exam hint: Again, find the hooks. They are less obvious in this item as the question is about ways in which the growth of the new media might have been evolutionary rather than revolutionary, but then the item is largely about radical or revolutionary change. However, the item does provide hooks that can be inverted (i.e. the idea that the new media has NOT become “much more interactive” or has NOT really handed over “power to the users or the audience”).*

### Item N

Sociologists disagree about the extent to which the development of the new media has been positive for society. While some point to positive features, like increased access and choice, and more power in the hands of the audience, others are concerned about the power of corporations, the risks of what might happen to individuals' data and the dangers of fake news.

3. Applying material from **Item N** and your own knowledge, evaluate the view that new media technologies have had a beneficial impact on society. (20 marks)

*Exam hint: There is more in the item than is immediately obvious. Spend a little time “mining” the item for possible sociological content and concepts. This might seem quite a tricky question to answer at first. Have a go at it after first learning about the new media, but try again later in the topic as content from other sections will go a long way to improving and enhancing a possible response (especially the section on globalisation).*



## OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL OF THE MEDIA

**Specification: sociological explanations of the relationship between ownership and control of the new media**

### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Outline, explain, analyse and evaluate

- A range of sociological perspectives on the ownership and control of the media
- Patterns of media ownership
- The extent to which owners control the media, compared with alternative groups

### Who owns the UK media?

A statistic is often shared on social media that “five billionaires own 80% of the UK media”. Who are these five people? Supposedly, Rupert Murdoch (owner of News International), Richard Desmond (who was the owner of the Express), Viscount Rothermere (owner of the Mail) and the Barclay Brothers (owners of the Telegraph). These billionaires are indeed, key players, and there is no doubt that the ownership of the mainstream media in the UK is concentrated in very few hands.

Certainly, a very small number of corporations own the bulk of media companies. News UK (part of News International owned by Rupert Murdoch), the Daily Mail and General Trust (run by Viscount Rothermere) and Reach PLC (formerly Trinity Mirror, whose CEO is Simon Fox and who have now bought the *Express*) own over 70% of the newspaper market in the UK. Even regional newspapers are now owned by a small number of newspaper groups, rather than run locally and independently. Other key players, outside newspapers, are Sky (controlling interest, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, part of News International owned by Rupert Murdoch – although this many change quickly as Disney are interested in the company), ITV (CEO Carolyn McCall) and Channel 5 (owned by US media giant, Viacom). There are also other important players in media production, such as Disney (who may soon own Fox) and online communication (such as Facebook and YouTube). YouTube is owned by Google. There are also a couple of important public service organisations. By far the largest is the state broadcaster, the BBC. There is also Channel 4 which is also publicly owned, but there are regular discussions about privatising it. While it is possible to overstate the power of these **media moguls** in the UK, after all newspaper sales have been falling rapidly for many years, and many more people get their news from the BBC, their dominance of the newspaper market is undeniable. The term **media mogul** refers to an individual who owns a significant share of a media company, arguably providing them with significant control over that company’s media content. The classic example is Rupert Murdoch, who owns a number of newspapers and TV broadcasting companies around the world. **Curran** (2003) points out that it has always been this way: in 1937 four men owned approximately half of all newspapers sold nationwide (including local newspapers).

Some features of media ownership in UK today include:

- **Horizontal integration** This is where a media company will expand, often by buying or merging with competitors in a similar section of the market to them.
- **Media convergence** This is where different media corporations join with other companies to offer a product or service. For example, Microsoft’s Windows operating system is used on Samsung mobile phone technology. This is in contrast to Apple, that uses its own software system in its phone technology.
- **Global conglomerates** This refers to companies that consist of a lot of different businesses/interests that may operate on an international level. Many media companies have businesses across different countries.



The big sociological debate about the ownership of the UK media is about whether this picture of a media owned by a handful of billionaire barons is still accurate, and also whether those who own the media also control it.

## Marxist views on the ownership and control of the media

Traditional Marxists argue that those who own the media also control it. They note that the media is owned by members of the bourgeoisie: very wealthy business owners. They argue that these bourgeois owners instruct editors and journalists to put across particular messages to the audience. These messages spread the **dominant ideology** which seeks to justify the power and privilege of the bourgeoisie. Through this, the media is able to contribute towards creating a **false class consciousness**.

This idea of **direct** control by owners is sometimes described as the **manipulative/instrumental approach** and is associated with the writings of **Ralph Miliband**. He argued that the editors and journalists in newspapers and other media organisations depend on the owners for their jobs and therefore will not use any apparent autonomy they may have to resist the dissemination of bourgeois ideology.

There certainly are examples of owners directly interfering with the content of the media. Richard Desmond, former owner of the *Express*, apparently regularly visited the newspaper offices making clear demand of what should be included. While Rupert Murdoch claims he only took large, long-term decisions (such as which party the paper would support at a general election or what their view on the European Union should be) former editors of his have suggested a much more hands-on approach. Andrew Neil, who edited the *Sunday Times* for Murdoch, has said that Murdoch was the de facto “editor in chief” of the *Sun* and, despite not seeing himself in that role for the *Times* or the *Sunday Times*, nevertheless he did make direct interventions (such as insisting that no articles were published that would offend the Malaysian prime minister of the day).

**Curran** (2003) found lots of evidence of owners directly manipulating media content. In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, “press barons” were quite open about their propagandist role, and also that there have always been a lot more Conservative-supporting newspapers than those critical of that party, which reflects them serving the interests of their wealthy owners. He argues that in the later 20<sup>th</sup> century and today owners are, if anything, even more interventionist, with again Rupert Murdoch being the obvious example.

Furthermore, politicians clearly believe media moguls to have a great deal of control over media content because they try to get on the right side of them! Tony Blair famously flew to Australia to meet with Rupert Murdoch and was rewarded with the support of the *Sun*. Several years later, David Cameron repeated this with the same outcome.

## Evaluating traditional Marxist views

- One criticism of traditional Marxist theories of the ownership and control of the media comes from neo-Marxists, who point out that the bourgeois owners of media companies do not have time to micro-manage media content. Traditional Marxists suggest the owners have a clear political view and a clear set of economic interests and ensure that their media companies project those views and disseminate an ideology that supports their interests. But in reality, owners can have so many business interests that they can really only control the big picture, leaving real control of media content down to editors. Even the editors of large publications or programmes cannot control everything and give some autonomy to their journalists.
- A further criticism comes from pluralists who argue that proprietors are predominantly businessmen, not editors. **James Whale** (1997) argues that “media moguls” are busy dealing with global business matters, not what story to run in a particular national newspaper. A journalist who

has written extensively about media control, Roy Greenslade, asks the question, why would you own a newspaper if not to try and put across your opinions? But pluralists have a clear response to that: to sell them and make lots of money. If the aim of media owners is to make money, then their interest in the content of the media does not relate to ideology or politics but to the more basic question of what will sell. Owners might intervene sometimes in media content, but they will do so because they want to ensure good sales figures. Even Curran, whose research provides some evidence to support the Marxist perspective, argues that Rupert Murdoch's interventions in his publications are more based on commercial needs and sales than being part of the ideological state apparatus.

- Many sociologists always question the idea of a passive audience who are delivered the dominant ideology from above, which is discussed in more detail in a later section.

## Neo-Marxist views on the ownership and control of the media

Neo-Marxists agree with Marxists that the role of much of the media is the dissemination of bourgeois messages and ideology. However, they argue that this is not because of the the owners micromanaging the day-to-day content, but because the editors and many of the journalists come from privileged backgrounds too, and of course they were employed by the owners or the company who generally choose to employ people whose opinions and values are a good fit with their own. When Rupert Murdoch or Richard Desmond were choosing editors for their papers, they did not pick revolutionary socialists after all! They chose people who shared a similar worldview to themselves. As such, there is no need to micromanage an organisation: it will put across the ideology of the owner because that ideology is shared by most of the journalists and editors.

The Glasgow University Media Group (GUMG) found that, in the 1970s, the vast majority of journalists working in the national media were white, middle-class (usually upper middle-class) men. In their research into media content over a great many years, they have identified numerous examples of the media taking the side of the powerful in various disputes, even when the media is apparently attempting to be neutral and objective. They see these two things as entirely connected: the media takes a generally conservative line on the issues of the day, because the people who make the news come from a section of society that is generally conservative (and benefits materially from maintaining the status quo). The social diversity of the newsmakers has not changed as much as we might think. Guardian columnist Owen Jones sparked controversy among his fellow journalists when he described the media as a privileged “closed shop”, but the statistics he quoted are quite clear. 51% of top journalists in Britain are privately educated, compared with 7% of the population. Only 19% of top journalists went to comprehensive schools, compared with 90% of their readers. 94% are white; 55% are men. Indeed, Jones suggests this is getting worse rather than better, as the decline of local newspapers has removed one route that working-class people could take into a journalism career.

For neo-Marxists, the journalists and editors are not necessarily consciously disseminating the dominant ideology, in order to create false class consciousness. Instead, the ruling-class have established what Gramsci calls **hegemony**. Through this process, bourgeois ideology becomes viewed as common sense. Alternative views are often seen as either extremist or ridiculous. This **hegemonic approach** contrasts with the traditional Marxist manipulative/instrumental approach. The GUMG also acknowledge that staying within the “common sense”, middle-of-the-road set of views is also down to commercial considerations: an attempt to offend as few viewers or readers as possible.

## Evaluating neo-Marxist views

- Traditional Marxists would question the idea that journalists themselves necessarily share the right-wing views of their owners. The left-wing Labour MP, Dennis Skinner, tells a story about marching with striking miners through London and journalists at the *Daily Express* cheering them on from their office windows, despite the newspaper regularly printing articles attacking the miners' union leaders and strikes. This, therefore suggests the more traditional Marxist approach – the owners forcing their agenda onto the journalists and therefore onto the audience – may be more accurate.
- Pluralists, such as **James Whale** (1997) would argue that the views and approaches contained within mainstream media is not a result of the social background of editors and journalists, but instead a result of the market demands of the audience. If some positions, attitudes and values are more prevalent in the media than others, it is because those are the ones that audiences demand.
- Pluralists would further point out that there is a diverse array of media companies and media outlets. While the most popular might present a particular worldview, there are plenty of other media outlets that present alternative worldviews. The parts of the audience that want to read/hear that already can do. If they appealed to more of the audience, they would take over from other organisations as the popular, well-known newspapers or channels.
- It is very hard to prove that the media helps to establish hegemony, just as it is hard to establish if people are manipulated or indoctrinated. Just because people agree with some of what they read in a newspaper or watch on television, does not prove a causal relationship. After all, pluralists would argue that the media provides those views and values in order to satisfy audiences, rather than the other way around.

## Pluralist views on the ownership and control of the media

Pluralists dismiss the idea that the media moguls and press barons control media content. They argue that editors and journalists are professionals with ethics and integrity who would not allow themselves to be manipulated by owners in the way suggested by Marxists and neo-Marxists.

They are not, then, overly concerned about the concentration of media ownership: this is not a sinister ideological plot, but rational economics. Companies want to maximize profits and minimize costs, and the formation of conglomerates, horizontal and vertical integration and globalization of media companies facilitates this. They do not see such developments as cultural imperialism or capitalist dominance, but as the functioning of the free market. They would, however, be concerned, if such developments led to a complete monopoly: their theory depends on there being genuine choice for consumers.

Furthermore, they argue that it is not the owners who control the media, nor the editors or the journalists: it's the audience. Pluralists point out that the audience has a lot of choice in terms of what it wants to consume, particularly today with new media providing a very wide range of different viewpoints and approaches. As such, it is important for media companies to offer the audience what they want, in order to keep them as their customers. In a free media market, the companies must meet the demands of the customers. In this way, the audience actually has a lot of control over the media content which they consume.

This is a view that sees the audience as very active. While neo-Marxists would claim to place more agency on the part of the audience than traditional Marxists, pluralists would criticise both. They argue that the audience are active choosers, exerting real control over the media through their consumer choices. In this sense, the media is **demand led**. Due to the vast range of options to access various forms of media (e.g. media message can be enjoyed on mobile phones, tablets, TV, online subscription services, YouTube and so on), audiences are able to select what they want easily and this determines the success and failure of a product or service. That product or service will only survive if it can generate an audience.

Pluralists also see this as being very important, as they argue that the mass media is an essential ingredient of a modern liberal democracy. Most voters get most of their knowledge and information about the democratic choices they are expected to make from the mass media. It is essential, therefore, that they are able to be informed by the media, and not manipulated or indoctrinated.

### Evaluating pluralist views

- Marxists argue that the audience is manipulated and the media deliberately creates false needs. As such, they are not making a free choice when they decide one newspaper or television channel over another. If the media is able to manipulate people into buying certain products through advertising, that must include media products. Media outlets spend a lot of time advertising for themselves: trailing future programmes, or teasing the content of the next day's newspaper. From a Marxist perspective, then, people are manipulated into buying a product which then manipulates them further.
- Marxists and neo-Marxists would go further and suggest that it is not just people's needs that are false, but people's choices too. Barnett and Weymour point out that, despite there being hundreds of television channels, there is not really an offer of greater choice: there is just lots of the same thing. The same is true, to a lesser extent, with newspapers, with most popular papers holding similar positions and transmitting similar values. As such, people are not really influencing media content in a meaningful way when they make their market choices, because the choices are not really about the content. People will choose one channel over another because of branding, or because of whether or not they like the presenter, rather than them approving or disapproving of the general nature of the media content, or the values it puts forward. This is sometimes referred to as **the fallacy of choice**. The same researchers also suggest that the media market has tended to result in a **dumbing down** of media content. Indeed, this is part of the reason why there is so little choice, because in order to keep hold of enough audience members and keep advertisers happy, programme-makers appeal to "the lowest common denominator", making visually appealing, unchallenging entertainment programmes. These, in turn, act as an opium of the masses: further contributing to false class consciousness.
- There are also neo-pluralists, like Davies (2008) who argue that in contemporary society it is harder for journalists and editors to be the neutral reliable professionals that pluralists imagine. However, while a lot of output might lack fact-checking and in fact reveal bias, there is still choice and audiences can pick the media they prefer.

### Postmodern views on the ownership and control of the media

Postmodernists argue that significant changes in the nature of society – the move from modernity to postmodernity – have fundamentally changed the nature of ownership and control. They argue that it is, today, impossible to argue that owners or editors control the media.

One aspect of their reasoning about this is very similar to that of the pluralists: the extent of choice that the audience has over the media they wish to consume. Today, that choice is greater than ever.

Postmodernists talk about **media saturation**. In a society where people are exposed to media messages all day, every day, from every possible quarter, it is impossible for individual owners or editors to control what is out there. It is uncontrollable. In this respect, the audience is the group who has the most control over media as they have some freedom to choose which media they consume. Having said that **Baudrillard** suggests that media saturation is such that we increasingly cannot distinguish between real life and a media version of real life (what he calls **hyperreality**).

**Levene** argues that ownership of the media is not concentrated but rather fluid. What does he mean by this? That there is so much media, and the gap between producer and audience has been so eroded, that people can easily reject any hegemonic messages from the powerful and create their own narratives

instead. People can use social media platforms like Facebook or Twitter to put across their own narratives (what neo-Marxists might call counter-hegemony). They are not controlled by the media, they themselves control the media, sometimes directly campaigning against the owners of the platforms they are using. The fluidity of this is further illustrated by the fact that professional journalists and editors will often construct articles entirely from messages on Twitter, or online comments: the audience making their own narratives and subsequently influencing “official” narratives.

## Evaluating postmodern views

- Levene is probably far too optimistic about the ability of audience members to control the narrative and bring about change. Of course there are examples of audience-led messages gaining prominence, but ultimately whether they break through into general consciousness is still down to whether mass media editors and journalists choose to report on it or not. Otherwise such messages often exist in a **social media bubble** where messages appear to be “liked” and “shared” very widely, but they are largely circulated among a self-selecting community who already agree with each other.
- Media saturation can give *more* power to owners, editors and journalists. If people genuinely can’t distinguish between reality and a media construct then that suggests a great deal of power on the part of those who have power within the media. Furthermore, many have commented that this situation encourages an ever more passive audience, rather than a more active one, anaesthetized by the fallacy of choice.

## Public service broadcasting

In the UK, there are parts of our media that are not owned by private companies or **media moguls** but are instead owned by the government. These are the BBC and Channel 4 (although the possible privatization of Channel 4 is regularly discussed). While Channel 4 still generates its revenue from selling advertising (and is therefore clearly subject to commercial pressures from advertisers) the BBC is funded by the license fee. Everyone who owns a television in the UK, or watches live broadcasts on the BBC’s “on demand” service iPlayer, on a computer or other device, must purchase a TV License. While the organisation is state owned, the government keeps it at arm’s length. While some state broadcasters in other countries are clearly propaganda outlets for the government, the BBC operates largely independently of state interference. Neo-Marxists, like the GUMG, would point to the fact that the BBC’s hierarchy is made up of wealthy, white men with (small c) conservative views and therefore do not need to be state-directed to produce media content that largely supports a conservative outlook and marginalizes radical or alternative viewpoints. Having said that, both the left and the right regularly accuse the BBC of being biased against them, so allegations of BBC bias need to be viewed in that context.

However, critics of the BBC have suggested that, despite not being subject to quite the same commercial constraints of other companies, the company has followed a familiar path of “dumbing down” its content in recent years. Similarly with Channel 4, whose original remit was to deliver minority-interest and alternative media content, but was soon focusing on Hollyoaks and Come Dine With Me instead.

Although, as we shall see in the section on the news, there are examples of the government influencing BBC content, it is generally a good example of how editors and journalists determine media content. Based on the GUMG’s research into BBC broadcasts of industrial disputes and other issues, this adds weight to the neo-Marxist idea of the media exercising hegemonic control, rather than owners directly manipulating everything from above.



## Links to Core Themes

- This topic primarily links to the core theme of **power**. Most sociologists agree that the media is a powerful institution, and therefore the issue of who controls that institution is hugely important. What we think about this is partly determined by what we think about power in society more generally. Those who see society as being hugely unequal and dominated by powerful groups within it, tend to see the media as being an instrument of those powerful groups, whether that be the ruling class or the patriarchy. Those who view power in society as being more evenly distributed will tend to concentrate on how the public are able to exercise control over the media, rather than the opposite.

## Possible Exam Questions

### Item M

Some sociologists argue that it is not owners and editors who control media content, but instead the audience: media companies just give the audience what they want in order to sell papers or gain viewers and therefore make money. However, it can be questioned how much real competition there is in the media market.

- Applying material from **Item C**, analyse **two** criticisms of the view that the audience controls the content of the mass media. (10 marks)

*Exam hint: Most of the item is describing the pluralist view that the audience controls the content of the mass media, therefore it takes a bit of digging to find two hooks to develop into two criticisms. One is clear at the end: the extent of real competition. This can be developed in relation to the fallacy of choice and related content. There are a couple of options for the other criticism. The clearest is “owners and editors...control media content” developed with some examples of them doing just that. An alternative is “make money” as sales is not the only way companies make money, they also have to keep advertisers happy.*

### Item M

Marxists argue that media is owned and controlled by wealthy, powerful people from the ruling class rather than by journalists, editors and production teams. They reject the idea that the audience is really in control of the media.

- Applying material from **Item C**, analyse **two** criticisms of Marxist theories of the ownership and control of the media. (10 marks)

*Exam hint: This is a similar style question to the previous one and the item offers similar hooks. “The audience is really in control” is a clear hook. “Journalists, editors and production teams” is another.*

### Item N

Some sociologists argue that those who own media companies are members of the ruling class and they use their power to disseminate ruling-class ideas to the rest of society. Others question whether those who own media companies are necessarily those who have all the power, separating ownership and control.

Others also point out that some media organisations in the UK are not owned by wealthy individuals.

- Applying material from **Item D** and your own knowledge, evaluate the view that the power of the mass media is concentrated in the hands of a few. (20 marks)

*Exam hint: There's quite a lot in this item, which can help generate some ideas for the content of the essay. You just have to "translate" it into sociology. (E.g. the "some sociologists" referred to initially are Marxists, the ruling class are the bourgeoisie, "ruling-class ideas" is the "dominant ideology", etc. Remember you are evaluating the view put forward in the question, so you should consider arguments that the power of the mass media is NOT concentrated in the hands of a few, as well as those that suggest it is.*



## GLOBALISATION & THE MEDIA

*Specification: sociological explanations of the media, globalisation and popular culture.*

### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Outline, explain, analyse and evaluate the impact of social policies on families introduced by

- The nature of global culture
- The significance of global media and global culture in contemporary society
- The effects of globalisation on the media and on popular culture
- Debates relating to cultural imperialism.

### The media and global culture

**Globalisation** refers to the increasing interconnectedness of all the countries in the world. This interconnectedness exists in such areas as economics and business, politics, technology and culture. Sociologists who argue that a process of globalisation is occurring are known as **globalists** and globalists can be further divided into **hyper globalists** and **pessimistic globalists**. The former see globalisation as an overwhelmingly positive feature of contemporary society, while the latter see it as a damaging and dangerous process. There are also sociologists who question whether globalisation is really happening at all, and those who question the extent to which it is inevitable and irreversible. **Lechner and Boli (2005)** argue that increasingly we can talk about

**Strinati (1995)** argues that the media today is a global industry, and it is a global industry that promotes (through advertising and the promotion of brands and logos) other global industries. Together this creates a global culture. Because of the internet, as well as satellite and cable television channels, media content genuinely can be transmitted, almost instantly, to almost everywhere in the world.

**McLuhan (1962)** wrote about the **global village**. This is the idea that, through global communications (which have clearly developed a great deal since he was writing!) we have neighbours all around the world. We no longer always need the filter or gatekeeper of a professional media production to hear about what's happening on the other side of the world: through new media we can hear it instantly and from the source.

The internet, in particular has influenced this development, as discussed by **Flew**. It has developed the extent to which we understand a **shared** global culture. Increasingly our norms and values are global rather than national, and the news increasingly offers a global outlook rather than just focusing on national issues.

The important question for sociologists is whether these changes are positive or negative. Have we seen an enrichment of culture around the world through **hybridisation**, or does the West dominate the globalisation of culture, in a process often described as **cultural imperialism**?

### Cultural imperialism

A number of sociologists, including **Nicola Fenton**, have suggested that the globalisation of the media has led to cultural imperialism: the Western world dominating the rest of the world through the media and the marketing of its own cultural products. It is suggested this happens in a number of ways:

- **Global conglomerates**. These are companies that combine various business interests and operate on an international level. Many media companies own businesses across different countries (for example Rupert Murdoch's News Corp, which owns newspaper, television and radio companies in

several countries). In this way, large media companies can dominate the media market in different countries.

- But they don't need to, in order to reach the audience. Through global communications and new media, big media conglomerates do not need to own the local businesses in order to dominate the local schedules or to reach global audiences. First, media companies like Fox (which is part of News Corp – although this could soon change), Disney, Warner Brothers, etc. make films and programmes that are viewed all around the world. They are aggressively marketed and distributed, made with big budgets and big stars, and allow these companies to completely dominate media production in the world. McBride (1980) suggests this deluge of Western-created media changes the culture and values of countries elsewhere in the world. One impact of that cultural shift is to stoke demand for Western products.
- **Advertising.** The internet in particular has revolutionised how products are marketed around the world. Through new media such as Google and Facebook, companies who can pay for expensive marketing packages dominate what people see and read on an everyday basis, all over the world. Companies like Coca-Cola and McDonalds are everywhere. The term “cocacolanisation” was developed in the post-war period, describing the way American movies and music helped to fuel the sale of Coca Cola around the world, spreading American hegemony with it. George **Ritzer** wrote about “McDonaldisation” – a concept that suggests that one impact of globalisation is the world is becoming more-and-more like McDonalds: standardised and low-skilled.
- **Cultural homogenisation.** This is the idea that local cultures are killed off by globalisation and the whole world becomes the same, with the same shops, films, television programmes and brands. This idea was expressed clearly by Naomi Klein (2000) in her book *No Logo*.
- These ideas suggest that the globalisation of media and culture is effectively and simply **Americanisation**.

## Cultural Hybridisation

However, some sociologists, including many postmodernists, argue that this **pessimistic globalist** view is too bleak. They suggest that in fact culture moves in **multidirectional flows** not just from West to East. An example which is often used is Bollywood films: not only are they popular in many countries outside India, they have influenced Western culture too, with Hollywood films incorporating Bollywood-style features and some Bollywood stars crossing over into Western culture. **Sreberny-Mohammadi** (1996) points out that, as well as India, South America has a strong media industry.

By hybridisation, sociologists mean that local cultures, global cultures and alternative cultures have mixed, sometimes creating something new (a hybrid culture), sometimes existing side-by-side as **cultural diversity**. This optimistic **hyperglobalist** view sees cultural globalisation as a force for good, then, where cultural globalisation adds to our cultural options and enriches culture rather than displaces it.

Even Ritzer's McDonalds example can be criticised, as McDonalds does not actually just export its American menu and experience and replicate it in every other country. In Delhi, the Big Mac is replaced by the Chicken Maharaja Mac, in Egypt you can order falafel. Hyperglobalists, then, point to McDonalds as an example of a global brand responding to local culture rather than obliterating it.

Cultural hybridisation is sometimes suggested as a halfway house between the idea of cultural divergence (what Huntington calls a clash of civilisations; the entrenching of mutually exclusive and incompatible regional cultures) and cultural convergence (cultural homogenisation, where the whole world becomes effectively the same.)

The idea of a cultural divergence or a clash of civilisations is also worth noting as a criticism of the concept cultural homogenisation: while Western culture is dominant in many ways, there is strong resistance to

this in some places, with a revival of fundamentalism and nationalism. One aspect of these sorts of movements is often to reject Western media. However, they also increasingly use new media technology to spread their message and organise their campaigns. For example, ISIS made significant use of YouTube and Twitter to recruit people to their fundamentalist terrorist movement.

## Evaluating cultural hybridisation

- Some sociologists, including **Curran**, have suggested that postmodernist and pluralist hyperglobalists fail to take into account economics and economic inequality in their analysis. The West dominates global culture because of its economic power. It co-opts some aspects of other cultures if it is able to exploit it for a profit.
- Western consumers like to buy the exotic and therefore features of local cultures that can be marketed as exotic will be (and always have been, since the earliest days of Empire). Again, that is a long way removed from the sort of equality suggested by the concept of multi-directional flow.

### MAKE THE LINK: New Media

The globalisation of the media has been rapidly accelerated by the development of new media. While all technological innovations in the 20<sup>th</sup> century have contributed to the globalisation of the media, especially the use of satellites for broadcasting, it is the digital revolution of recent years that has been most revolutionary.

For this reason, when answering questions about globalisation and the media, it is a good idea to include content from the new media section, and the same is true the other way around. Debates about globalisation are important to a detailed and well-developed response to questions about the new media.

## Links to core themes

- This links very clearly to core themes of **culture** and **identity**. The concept of culture is not a straightforward one. What exactly do we mean about it? It is at once a term which refers to ways of life, ideas, values and behaviour, but also to arts and leisure pursuits. It is in this way separate from economics or politics, and yet all are closely intertwined. The idea of a global culture, then, is hugely important. Is there now a single way of life, set of ideas and values across the whole world? If so, what impact does that have on people's identities?

## Possible exam questions

### Item M

Some sociologists argue that media globalisation, and the consequent globalisation of culture, is really cultural imperialism: the domination of global cultures by the West. In this view, local cultures are obliterated, leading to cultural homogenisation and Americanisation.

Applying material from **Item I** analyse **two** criticisms of the view that the globalisation of the media is a form of cultural imperialism. (10 marks)

*Exam hint: This is a tricky question because of the item. The item is telling us all about globalisation of the media as cultural imperialism and does not suggest criticism. In other words, the hooks need to be turned on their head in order to answer the question. So "local cultures are obliterated" could be developed with reference to nationalist/separatist/fundamentalist resistance to cultural imperialism.*

*“Cultural homogenisation” could be developed in terms of contrasting it with cultural hybridisation.  
“Americanisation” could serve as an alternative hook, in relation to other centres of cultural production, such as Bollywood.*

**Item N**

Some sociologists are pessimistic about globalisation in general and the globalisation of the media in particular. They worry about the erosion of traditional and local cultures and that Western culture will become dominant, in order for big media businesses – often based on America – to make lots of money.

Others are more positive, saying that culture flows in many directions, and increasingly we enjoy a mix of cultures.

Applying material from **Item N** and your own knowledge, evaluate the view that globalisation of the mass media has had a positive impact on society. (20 marks)

*Exam hint: This is quite a nice general essay, and the sort that could well be asked about media and globalisation. The item and the question nicely sets up a classic debate between globalisation of the media being a good thing: establishing a positive, global culture, with cultural hybridisation, etc. vs. a negative vision of cultural imperialism, homogeneity and potential conflict.*

## SELECTION & PRESENTATION OF THE NEWS

**Specification: Sociological explanations of the processes of selection and presentation of the content of the news.**

### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Outline, explain, analyse and evaluate sociological explanations for:

- The social construction of news
- Influences on and the regulation of the news and news content

### The Social Construction of News

While the news is (in broadcast media, at any rate) presented as objective, factual and the simple conveying of reality, it is in fact a media product like any other, subject to many pressures, influences and constraints. What is broadcast, or written up, as news each day is a social construct: different stories could have been told, but this complex range of practical, ideological, cultural, economic and social factors result in the particular stories that are told being told, and in the way that they are told.

One influence on how the news is socially constructed is what Galtung and Ruge (1965) refer to as **news values**. This refers to the way in which journalists and news corporations attach significance to a particular story and judge its ‘newsworthiness’. Different journalists and news corporations will prioritise stories based on a number of different pieces of criteria. Different values might prevail in different organisations or at different times. However, stories are much more likely to be pursued and published if they are:

- Unexpected
- About well-known and important people
- “bad news”
- Timely – current stories are best
- Simple
- Brief
- “Big”
- Able to be personalized
- Has continuity from stories that have already been told
- Familiar – stories based close to home are preferred, for instance
- About “elite countries” (rich countries in the West, such as the USA)

Since Galtung and Ruge were writing, what is deemed newsworthy has changed. Celebrity news is now much bigger (I suppose we could debate whether celebrities are important, but it is unlikely that Galtung and Ruge would have thought them so) and there is a bigger focus today on *good news*. Furthermore, it has become increasingly important for stories to be visually interesting, as increasingly video footage is deemed to be an important element of the news, rather than just words and perhaps still pictures. Other factors that have become more important include ensuring that advertisers are not offended or alienated by any political or otherwise controversial messages in the news (as argued by **Bagdikian**, 2004). **Jewkes** (2004) updated the news values, adding the importance of celebrity, graphic images and the involvement of children as features that would ensure a story was included in a bulletin or newspaper.

However, watching the news over a period of time, these values are quite easily observed. A lot of UK news time is spent covering elections in the USA, for instance; much more so than on countries that are much closer to us, like Sweden or Portugal, and as for small countries on the other side of the world, many are not reported on at all (unless there is some simple or unexpected bad news to tell!)

Practical constraints also influence what ends up being presented as news. Tight deadlines and limited budgets mean that some stories are much more attractive to journalists and editors than others. As such, stories that are easily accessible will be preferred to ones that are in distant countries. However, if a newspaper or television programme has a permanent or regular correspondent in a particular city or country, then news stories there may well be reported that might otherwise not have been deemed important enough based on usual news values. Editors can get value for money from their correspondent if they can report on a story where they are based, rather than sending another journalist elsewhere. As such, while correspondents are there, we might see rather a lot of news from Iraq, for example, and might therefore be forgiven for thinking that very little is happening there some years later, after the correspondents have moved on elsewhere.

Television programmes in particular depend on being able to get useable video footage relating to a news story, and so are likely to reject stories that happen in far-off and inaccessible places.

Journalists also have a number of contacts and “experts” who they speak to about particular topics, therefore leading to them often having rather a limited range of views. This is again a practical consideration (as it is quick and cheaper to contact the same people each time) but also might have political and ideological foundations too. People are also unlikely to ask the opinions of people’s whose views they consider to be significantly outside the mainstream (unless, as is sometimes the case, their views are themselves the news).

News stories can be handled briefly or extensively (with varying levels of analysis and investigation) not because of the merits or complexity of the story but because of the amount of time available in a news bulletin or space on a page.

News stories will also often simply reproduce a well-drafted press release, rather than involve any actual journalism at all. Politicians and political parties, for example, when announcing a new policy or initiative, will produce a press release, with a choice quotation and perhaps a relevant photograph, and many newspapers will simply reproduce that copy as a brief article, without any criticism or investigation at all. **Davies** (2008), a neo-pluralist, calls this “churnalism” and found that, in a fortnight in 1997, 80% of stories in two newspapers were made up of that sort of article, rather than generated by journalists.

Two other ways that journalists are able to assist with the social construction of the news is through **agenda setting** and **gate keeping**.

**Agenda setting** is where journalists and other media professionals such as editors decide what is considered significant or not in terms of the news. This will range from international stories to news from a national level. Different news corporations will set different agendas, as the content presented will differ depending on the audience and the priorities of the corporation itself. The agenda setting, both in terms of the selection of news and the angles taken, may well be done subconsciously.

**Gans** (1979) also says that editors act as **gate keepers** because they literally decide what is news and what is not. This is essentially a filtering process. Sometimes this will be based on practical considerations (such as space on a page) and other times it will be political or cultural or based on news values.

## Evaluating traditional views on the social construction of news

- It is clear that the news is not simply an unedited reflection of everything that happened on a given day. In that sense there is no question that the news is socially constructed.
- Sometimes news programmes try to take a step back and have a less strong editorial hand. For example, Euronews has a “Without Comment” feature where some news pictures from the day are



shown without any comment. However, journalists and editors still choose which pictures to film, show and give that treatment to. Similarly, 24-hour news channels may go live to a speech or event and stay on it without comment for some time. But again, they are still choosing what to show and what not.

- However, some Marxist sociologists would suggest that the process is less to do with news values and more to do with straightforward ideology. They would argue that the agenda-setting and gate-keeping practices are intended to transmit ruling-class ideology, or to establish **hegemony**. They would see the choices about which news should be broadcast, and which voices heard, as being entirely political. This sort of highly-political construction of the news has been observed in many situations by the **Glasgow University Media Group (GUMG)**.
- However, pluralists like **Jones (1986)** argue that actually the news does fairly reflect reality. He researched radio news broadcasts and concluded that there was a balanced, even-handed discussion of industrial disputes (quite the opposite of the GUMG conclusions).
- It is also worth bearing in mind that the media often target the powerful and the news can expose corruption and abuse of power. This is presented as an argument against the idea that the news is created and dominated by the powerful (i.e. the ruling class) but a counter-argument to that is that not all powerful people are targeted and exposed by the media, and those who are might be the victim of political agendas.
- Some of the practical restrictions on news have changed due to modern technology. Partly this is because it is possible to use smaller, more compact cameras and microphones and to transfer large files in a short space of time. However, it is also the case that individual citizens and audience-members do some of the journalism themselves. This is because people carry little digital movie cameras around with them all the time, and can instantly upload them to platforms that can be accessed anywhere in the world. Better quality footage and commentary is also produced by amateur and self-employed citizen journalists.
- However, while audience members could watch any of this from the comfort of their own home, if they can find it on social media, professional editors will still act as gatekeepers to this sort of media content. So if a story is deemed newsworthy, or if the pictures are interesting or dramatic enough, then the stories will be shown.
- It is also worth bearing in mind that, while people in most parts of the world have access to smartphones or other methods of recording video footage, it is by no means universal and events in some regions and countries are still likely to go unrecorded.

## Regulating the news

In the UK, the press is regulated by a body called IPSO (which stands for Independent Press Standards Organisation) which replaced the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) which was shut down in the wake of the Leveson Inquiry. Both are voluntary organisations, set up by the newspaper industry itself, to engage in self-regulation.

### The Leveson Inquiry

In 2011 there was a widely-reported scandal that journalists at the *News of the World* (which was owned by Rupert Murdoch and was essentially the Sun on Sunday) had been hacking the mobile phones of people connected with news stories. Many of these were celebrities, but it included members of the public too, and even a murder victim, Milly Dowler (and hacking her phone hampered the police investigation, because they thought she had checked her own telephone messages). The subsequent outcry about this hacking scandal and associated cases of law-breaking and corruption, led to a high-profile public inquiry.



It was called for by then prime minister, David Cameron, and presided over by Lord Justice Leveson. After a long inquiry a number of key proposals were put forward, including:

- Replacing the PCC with a new regulatory body
- For the body to be independent (not a state regulator) but to be backed up by legislation
- The intention was that the public would be confident that complaints would be taken seriously, but also that the press would be confident that the government would not interfere with their freedom.

In fact, the recommendations were followed by a bitter argument between politicians and newspaper editors about these criteria. Newspaper editors were reluctant to have any sort of legislation underpinning the complaints procedure, for fear that future governments might amend the legislation in order to interfere with the press. David Cameron agreed with the editors that he did not want legislation, while the leaders of the other main political parties (then Ed Miliband and Nick Clegg) wanted to implement Leveson in full. This meant there was a split in the government, as Nick Clegg was deputy prime minister at the time. The politicians reached a compromise, wanting the new body to be established by royal charter, essentially allowing for regulation of the regulator.

Most newspaper editors rejected this idea and established IPSO in defiance of the government. A royal charter established the PRP which has formally recognized an alternative regulatory body. However, only small publications are regulated by the rival organisation (Impress) while most newspapers are self-regulated by IPSO. This means that many campaigners argue that Leveson has not been implemented, and are calling for Leveson 2.

The press have good reason to resist what they see as **state regulation**:

- Freedom of the press is seen as one of hallmarks of a democratic society
- The idea is that journalists should be able to hold the powerful to account, and therefore should be free from government interference.

However, the events leading up to Leveson showed that often it is the press themselves who need to be held to account. There were various occasions where the press were working with the press or the government against members of the public, rather than challenging powerful people on behalf of the public. Also, the PCC had clearly failed to properly regulate press behaviour, and the public need confidence in its successor.

Broadcast journalists are regulated separately from the press. They are regulated by OFCOM (a government regulator) and the BBC is further regulated by the BBC Trust. In the UK, broadcasters are held to a different standard from the press. Broadcasters (both commercial channels and the BBC) have to be balanced and unbiased. These rules become even stricter at election times, when there are strict rules about mentioning all candidates, and giving parties and candidates broadly equal (or representative) screen time.

Newspapers, on the other hand, are free to be as partisan as they like. Most newspapers are known to be supportive of a particular political party (e.g. the Daily Mail backing the Conservative Party, and the Daily Mirror backing Labour). Some papers do change their allegiance, such as the Sun, which backed Labour during the Blair era, or the Guardian, which is usually Labour but has sometimes advocated a Liberal Democrat vote.

For state regulation	Against state regulation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Press abuses, especially in the tabloids</li> <li>• Intrusive paparazzi and invasions of privacy</li> <li>• Lack of accountability (“protecting sources”)</li> <li>• OFCOM and the BBC Trust both work well and reflect public concerns, rather than censorship on behalf of the government of the day</li> <li>• They are independent of the government, politically</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A free society needs a free press</li> <li>• Journalists must feel free to challenge and expose the powerful, including government ministers</li> <li>• Self-regulation works</li> <li>• Any state involvement in regulation is a “slippery slope” to greater state control and censorship</li> <li>• Politicians have indicated that the security services would like greater powers to prevent the press from publishing certain stories</li> </ul>

Although the UK media is not heavily censored in the way it is in some other parts of the world (such as China, for instance) there is some censorship already. In terms of the press, there is very little state interference in what is published (although the security services do issue D-notices that determine that some stories are sensitive in relation to national security and there is an arrangement between newspaper editors and governments that such issues are respected). Of course, while the press is effectively independent of government, newspapers are often very partisan, and therefore Conservative-supporting newspapers will often cooperate with Conservative governments, and Labour newspapers with Labour governments, and all papers want to have a reasonable relationship with government ministers in the hope that this will give them access to good stories and exclusives. More often it is not the government that prevents some stories from being published but the courts. Some individuals manage to get court orders ensuring that they cannot be named in articles in relation to certain controversies (usually celebrities). These are known as super-injunctions. In an era of global media, such injunctions can seem ridiculous, as stories are often widely reported in other countries, while British newspaper editors are restricted.

Defenders of press freedom and opponents of state-backed regulation could point to some examples of direct government interference in television broadcasts that could be said to be on political grounds. For example, a number of reports and documentaries relating to the northern Irish troubles were either temporarily or permanently blocked. Bizarrely, there was a broadcast ban on members of paramilitary groups and Sinn Fein politicians which meant that actors had to “re-voice” their comments during broadcasts of interviews or speeches. A Channel 4 late-night discussion programme called *After Dark* invited the Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams to appear. It was a live discussion programme that had its fair share of controversy over the years, but Channel 4 withdrew the invitation, because other guests refused to appear. However, the Independent Broadcasting Authority (the regulator before OFCOM was given the role) said that it would have cancelled the programme. However, one of the reasons the IBA was wound up was because of government anger that it did allow the broadcast of a documentary, *Death on the Rock* about the SAS shooting of three unarmed members of the IRA in Gibraltar. As such, it is clear that the government wanted more censorship of television broadcasts.

While these examples suggest that the newspaper editors and journalists might have reason to fear state regulation, it is also worth bearing in mind that tabloid newspapers were among the loudest voices saying that *Death on the Rock* should not have been broadcast, so the belief in the freedom of the press does not, perhaps, extend to a belief in the freedom of all journalism!

## Links to Core Themes

- This links most notably to power. News journalists and editors often see their role as holding the powerful to account, but it is worth noting that they too have power. The power to choose what to report and what to conceal. While pluralists and neo-pluralists would argue that decisions over what not to broadcast would be practical rather than political and that there is a diversity of newspapers so political views absent from one would be present in another, there is another perspective. Marxists in particular see the media as working on behalf of the ruling class to preserve the status quo. As such, they would expect that, despite often sensational and dramatic stories, the voice in the news is essentially a conservative one, hostile to radical voices and new ideas.

## Possible Exam Questions

### Item M

In the wake of the News of the World phone-hacking scandal, some argued that the government should step in and regulate the news media to prevent misbehaviour and “fake news”. In the end, enquiries recommended a more rigorous form of self-regulation, in the light of arguments about important freedoms.

Applying material from **Item C**, analyse **two** criticisms of the view that the government should regulate the selection and presentation of the news (10 marks)

*Exam hint: You need to find two hooks in the item and develop them. Here two possible hooks are “self-regulation” and “important freedoms”. From here a clear point could be developed to suggest that self-regulation could be sufficiently effective and another than freedom of the press was an important feature of a free society.*

### Item N

Some sociologists would suggest that the news is a fair, balanced and unbiased reflection of what has happened in the world on any given day. However, there are clearly many pressures on journalists and editors that impact what is included in a newspaper or news bulletin.

Other sociologists argue that the news is deliberately manipulated to achieve certain political objectives.

Applying material from **Item N** and elsewhere, evaluate the view that what appears in the news is an accurate reflection of social reality. (20 marks)

*Exam hint: Don't ignore the item. It's always worth doing a little mining in there. Which sociologists would suggest it was fair? (And remember you can pick up on issues of balance and bias). What pressures are on journalists and editors? Who thinks it's part of a political agenda? Unpicking what's in the item can help generate a lot of useful comment to include in your essay.*

## MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF AGE, SOCIAL CLASS AND ETHNICITY

**Specification: sociological explanations of media representations of age, social class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and disability.**

### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Outline, explain, analyse and evaluate sociological explanations for:

- The nature, causes, trends and significance of media representations
- Changes in the way certain groups are represented in the media.

### Media representations of age

Sociologists are interested in the way in which various age groups are represented in the media, in particular children, youths and the elderly.

When sociologists consider media representations in general, they are interested in the extent to which the media **Stereotypes** various groups: that is, makes certain generalisations or assumptions about those groups (for example, that youths are rude and disrespectful, or that the elderly are a burden). These stereotypes can be created and reinforced by media representations.

Stereotype of childhood	
<b>Cute</b>	Representations of childhood are generally quite positive, even if they are stereotypical. Babies and toddlers, in particular, are generally represented as being very cute and appealing (particularly in television advertisements).
<b>Consumers</b>	Chandler (2006) talks about <b>pester power</b> . Children's television, and particularly the advertisements in between the programmes, treat children as consumers, selling them all manner of toys, holidays and consumer products. Companies know that children are likely to ask the parents for these products, and that parents will not want to let their children down. This often leads to poorer parents getting into debt to buy their children the consumer products they want.
<b>Little angels</b>	Often children are represented in an idealised way, as being innocent and without malice. This particularly the case in older television series and family fiction.
<b>Little devils</b>	Often today, the opposite is the case, and children are represented as "cheeky monkeys" or worse! This is still often a reasonably positive representation: these characters are funny and appealing, yet naughty (like Bart Simpson).
<b>Victims</b>	In the news and also in drama series, children are often victims of crime, including murders and abductions.
<b>Prodigies</b>	Children in the media are also often brilliant at something, such as maths or a musical instrument. News and magazine programmes often report on such child prodigies and they also make interesting characters in fiction.
<b>"Accessories"</b>	Celebrity reporting often includes children, not as interesting individuals in their own right, but as "accessories" or "extras" alongside their famous parents or guardians.

Representations of **youth** on the other hand tend to be much more negative than that of children.

There are **two** main ways the media represents youth: the first is to **socially-construct** youth culture and identity; the second is to portray the youth very negatively as a source of social problems.

### How the media socially-constructs “youth”

Since at least the 1950s, a youth media industry has sought to create youth culture through its media products, and this industry has grown and grown and expanded into other areas.

The two clearest examples of this are **popular music** and representations of **fashion** (through magazines or other media sources).

Often popular music is associated with a particular subculture, so becoming a fan of the music tends to go alongside fashion choices, and certain norms, values and attitudes.

Furthermore, social media platforms today are hugely influential on youth identity and lifestyle.

These different media companies go a long way to creating the concept of youth and what it means to be a teenager in the UK today. While pluralists would argue that such products are primarily giving youths what they want, reflecting their identities and responding to market need, many sociologists would argue that the media does much more than simply reflect youth culture. It makes it.

### How the media attacks “youth”

- **Moral panics** When **Stan Cohen** (1972) first coined the term moral panics, it was in relation to rival youth subcultures: the mods and the rockers, and the media reaction to clashes between the groups on bank holidays in seaside resorts. Cohen explained that the youths were turned into **folk devils** and many subsequent moral panics have focused on youth culture too, from punks, to drug-taking ravers, to “hoodies”.
- The media often presents youths engaging in “bad behaviour” of various sorts (underage drinking, drug taking, petty crime, etc).
- **Wayne et al** (2007) researched the content of news programmes across the main channels in one month and found that 82% of news items concentrated young people and violent crime (either as perpetrator or victim).
- They further found that young people’s own perspectives or views on a news item were only sought in 1% of cases.

The **elderly** tend to be portrayed rather negatively in the media too, although it is not universally the case. According to **Newman** (2006) upper/middle-class elderly people (particularly men) are often portrayed as being in leadership positions or elite occupations: presidents, judges and businessmen. Male news anchors are often older men. The reason for this is, apparently, that the audience trust an older male voice, with grey hair lending authority. However, it has often been noted that these older male newsreaders are often paired with a much younger female. Women are often moved from “front of camera” roles at quite a young age (around 40) and, similarly, actresses get much fewer roles the older they get. So media representations of age intersect with representations of social class and gender.

Often, however, old age is represented in a negative way and as a phase of life to be delayed and avoided (for example advertising for beauty products that disguise the signs of ageing, etc.)

Stereotypes of old age	
<b>Grumpy</b>	A very regular media stereotype of elderly people is that they are “grumpy”. For example, the sitcom <i>One Foot in the Grave</i> and the main character Victor Meldrew. A popular series <i>Grumpy Old Men</i> was followed up with <i>Grumpy Old Women</i> . Although these were people self-defining as such, it still fits this well-established stereotype.
<b>A burden</b>	Often elderly people are represented as a burden. The ageing population is often discussed in news and current affairs programme as a problem. They are presented both as a burden to society (in economic terms) and to their families.
<b>Infantile</b>	Elderly people are often presented as childlike in the media, rather than as older adults. This is sometimes in the way they are presented in comedies, for example.
<b>“Demented” or confused</b>	Elderly people are often presented as being mentally challenged in various ways, either being a little muddled or confused right through to suffering from dementia. This is often used in a comedic way in entertainment programmes, and only occasionally treated seriously (in medical dramas for example).
<b>Second childhood</b>	An alternative to showing elderly people as confused or a burden, is that older adults are often represented as enjoying a second childhood. This often involves people doing things that they would have liked to have done when they were younger and didn't. This is influencing a growing genre of television programme (such as <i>The Real Marigold Hotel</i> ).

The latter trend might be part of a reorientation of representations of old age in the media. After all, media companies and marketing agencies are beginning to see older adults as a section of society with more money and leisure time than most, and therefore it makes sense to present them positively and in such a way that attracts them. For example, **Lee et al** (2007) noted that older adults in advertisements (although nowhere near as prevalent as young people) are generally represented positively, as healthy, active people with a wide range of interests, enjoying a “golden age”. **Robinson et al** (2008) found that older viewers were attracted to advertisements that presented their own age group positively: as vibrant and intelligent. Media representations that poked fun at older adults were not liked by any age group.

## Media representations of social class

In this section we will consider media representations of the **very rich**, the **middle class**, the **working class** and media representations of **poverty**.

Media representations of the very rich	
<b>Celebrity</b>	The media takes significant interest in the very rich, often treating them as celebrities. <b>Nairn</b> (1988) gives the example of the Royal Family, whose life is treated almost like a soap opera, with the media taking a great interest in minor aspects of their every-day life. Similarly, royal events are always treated as national events in the media. An opinion poll showed that two-thirds of people in the UK were not interested in the wedding of Prince Harry and Megan Markle, but you would never know that from watching UK television or reading UK newspapers in the weeks surrounding the event. Even outside “public figures” like the royals, other rich people are treated as celebrities, such as very successful entrepreneurs. This view is particularly put forward by neo-Marxists.



<b>Over-representation</b>	The very rich and their interests are also greatly over-represented in the media. The very rich represent a very small proportion of the population and yet media coverage of luxury cars and luxury holidays, that are only of practical interest to this small minority, is considerable. This is noted by <b>Newman</b> (2006). Wealth is certainly represented as deserved, rather than as part of a “chaos of rewards”.
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<b>Media representations of the middle class</b>	
<b>Over-represented</b>	The middle class is probably even more over-represented than the very rich. Property programmes, for example, are exclusively aimed at middle-class and upper-middle-class viewers. The budgets that people have, and the properties that are looked at, are far out of the reach of most viewers. Furthermore, the characters in sitcoms and dramas are overwhelmingly middle class. To a large extent, middle-class culture is presented as <i>normal</i> .
<b>Dominant</b>	A clear reason for this is that the middle class is very dominant in the media industry. This is particularly evident in terms of presenters on television programmes, but also in other aspects of the industry too. Guardian journalist Owen Jones has described the media as a “closed shop” for the upper/middle class.
<b>Anxiety</b>	The middle class are also often represented as being anxious about contemporary society and prone to moral panic. This is partly because certain publications, such as the <i>Daily Mail</i> , are aimed at middle-class readers, and tend to run these sorts of stories on subjects such as immigration, youth culture and terrorism.

<b>Media representations of the working class</b>	
<b>A problem</b>	Again, Newman notes that working-class individuals are often represented and stereotyped as a problem in the media. This might be in terms of working-class youth subcultures, or stories about welfare cheats or criminals. Working-class lives are presented as marginal and problematic rather than as the majority of the population. This includes in the representation of industrial struggle, as the Glasgow University Media Group found, with workers (and their representatives in trade unions) being represented as awkward and a problem, in contrast with employers who are presented as reasonable (for example, the employers make offers, while the unions make demands). <b>Owen Jones</b> has written about the “demonization of the working class” in his book <i>Chavs</i> .
<b>Shallow / unintelligent</b>	Working-class people are also represented as being unintelligent or shallow. Serious analysis is presented as being for the middle-class whereas the shallower content of a newspaper like the Sun is aimed at the working class. Characters in shows are often presented as unintelligent or indeed as violent and prejudiced (e.g. Phil Mitchell in <i>EastEnders</i> ). The representation of working-class people as being socially-conservative and holding bigoted views is very deeply embedded, despite the historic association between the working class and the political left.



	<b>Butsch</b> (1992) argues that working-class men are generally represented as flawed in dramas, although they are often accompanied by intelligent and sensible working-class women.
<b>“Salt of the earth”</b>	Although the representations of working-class people are often very negative, there is also the “salt of the earth” representation: working-class people as simple but decent “normal” people. Although this is clearly a more positive representation, it is still a stereotype that risks being somewhat condescending (coming as it does usually from middle-class writers and producers).  However, it is worth noting that there is a significant quantity of media products out there that represent working-class life positively or realistically, often produced by writers and film-makers with a pro-working-class political message (e.g. <i>Kes</i> , <i>Brassed Off</i> , <i>The Fully Monty</i> and <i>Pride</i> .)

<b>Media representations of poverty</b>	
<b>Marginalised and dehumanised</b>	Poverty is often dealt with in the media in a very impersonal way, focusing on statistics rather than individual stories of living with poverty. <b>McKendrick et al</b> (2008) found that poverty was marginal in the media: there was very little exploration of the causes of poverty. (For instance, <b>Cohen</b> noted that the link between the poverty of some and the wealth of others is more-or-less ignored in the media).
<b>Entertainment</b>	At other times, poverty is used as entertainment. “Reality” programmes like “Benefits Street” and dramas like “Shameless” ignore the real lived experience of poverty, instead representing a life in poverty as a source of entertainment.

## Media representations of ethnicity

The main sociological concern about media representations of ethnicity is that they contribute to and reinforce racist stereotypes about minority-ethnic groups. **Akinti** (2003) argues that media discussions of minority-ethnic groups focuses too much on problems – like crime, drugs, educational under-achievement, gangs, etc. – while the positive contribution of minority-ethnic groups to UK society is presented much less.

**Van Dijk** (1991) conducted a content analysis study looking at a vast number of newspaper articles over a number of years and across several countries. He found a number of key stereotypical negative news stories about black people. Other sociologists have noted that many of these stereotypes are also applied to other minority-ethnic groups (e.g. increasingly to Muslims):

- **Black people as criminals:** Particularly tabloid newspapers tended to portray black people as criminals, involved in gangs and drugs.
- **Moral panics about black people:** A number of moral panics are generated by media representations of black people. There is **Stuart Hall**'s famous study (*Policing the Crisis*) which looked at the “black mugger” as a folk devil. More recently **Watson** (2008) has noted similar moral panics, for example linking “gangsta rap” to gun crime. In 2018, the police began taking videos of a particular musical genre (“drill music”) offline because of alleged links to knife crime.
- **Black people as threat:** Van Dijk found that black people were often represented as a threat to the majority population. This representation is also clearly applied to other minority-ethnic groups and is increasingly applied to asylum seekers and to Muslims. **Poole** (2000) particularly notes a demonisation of Islam and Muslims, with a media focus on negative stereotypes about the religion.
- **Black people as dependent:** Again, this stereotype has probably moved on from African-Caribbean

people to other minority-groups, in terms of groups living in the UK. Van Dijk was also interested in the representation of black people around the world, and noted that problems in countries in Africa were represented as the fault of people from those countries (e.g. overpopulation or tribal conflict) rather than focusing on the various ways in which Western countries cause problems in the developing world).

- **Black people as abnormal:** Rather as middle-class culture is presented as normal, in the UK (and other Western countries) white is presented as normal, and minority-ethnic groups are therefore presented as abnormal in various ways. Reporting is **ethnocentric**. This again can today perhaps be best applied to Asian minorities in the UK: the reporting of practices such as arranged marriages ignores ways in which such practices have developed and changed over time, instead preferring easy and negative stereotypes, focusing on “otherness”. **Amelie et al** (2007) write about Muslim women and the wearing of the veil, and particularly about how the wearing of the veil is reported in the media.
- **Black people as unimportant:** Van Dijk suggests that media reports imply that black lives matter less than white ones. It has been suggested that there is **institutional racism** in the media. For example, it has been suggested that the violent murders of BAME people are reported on much less extensively than similar killings of white people. Reporting of disasters and atrocities also appears to be much more extensive when reporting white casualties.
- **Invisible black people:** Finally, Van Dijk suggests that black people are largely absent from the media (other than in these various negative ways) perhaps playing minor roles in dramas. There is also the risk of **tokenism** – a black character being included simply to ensure that there is one.

While, as have seen, some of what Van Dijk found is still relevant, and can be applied to other minority-ethnic groups, the media has changed since 1991. There are certainly more BAME characters in dramas and comedies (and not just “tokens” or people playing stereotypical roles) and there certainly more black and Asian faces in TV presenting, for example newsreaders. However, if there have been improvements in these ways, why is there still so much negative, stereotypical reporting?

Many point to the ethnocentric nature of the media industry, how many managers, editors and journalists and writers are white (and indeed middle-class and middle-aged) and so they, naturally, perceive their own lived experience as “normal”. While Marxists and neo-Marxists argue that the media deliberately demonises minority groups in the media in order to create scapegoats and establish false class consciousness. Others suggest that it is subconscious. However, pluralists would counter-argue that media companies are producing the media that people want to watch. If there is a lot of stereotypical material in the media, that is – at least in part – because the audience demands it and expects it. The media does reinforce prejudice in society, but it also reflects it.

## Links to Core Themes

- This topic links to the core themes of power, stratification and social differentiation. These sections are all about the different groups in society, who has power, and also how identities are developed and influenced through the media.

## Possible Exam Questions

### Item M

Working-class people feature heavily in the media, for example in television soaps and in comedy shows. However, the writers, editors and producers tend to be middle class (although they might have working-class backgrounds) and so do not necessarily show a very accurate picture of working-class life.

Applying material from **Item M**, analyse **two** ways in which working-class people are represented in the media today. (10 marks)

*Exam hint: Find the hooks and develop them into two ways. For example, “might have working-class backgrounds” could lead to a discussion of writers from working-class backgrounds representing the working class positively, for political reasons, whereas “not...a very accurate picture of working-class life” could be developed in a number of ways (e.g. demonization of the working class).*

### Item N

Some sociologists have explored the idea of moral panics and particularly in relation to some minority-ethnic groups. While the media plays a part in this, through stereotypical and sensationalist reporting, some sociologists argue that the media largely tries to represent reality.

Applying material from **Item N** and your own knowledge, evaluate the view that the mass media is responsible for creating moral panics around particular ethnic groups in society. (20 marks)

### Item N

Some sociologists argue that the media deliberately marginalises and the demonises the working class. Others suggest that stereotypes of the working-class occur because of the dominance of middle-class people in the media industry. Others point to an increasing number of working-class individuals in the media and more positive portrayals.

Applying material from **Item N** and your own knowledge, evaluate the view that the mass media offers a negative portrayal of working-class people. (20 marks)

*Exam hint: with both these essays, it is important to establish a theoretical framework or core debate, to ensure that there is sufficient material to develop and hit the high marks. Which sociologists argue that the media creates moral panics? Who would disagree? Why? What evidence is there? The same sort of questions can be asked about the negative portrayal of working-class people. Who argues this? What evidence is there? What alternative views exist?*

## MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF GENDER, SEXUALITY & DISABILITY

**Specification: sociological explanations of media representations of age, social class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and disability.**

### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Outline, explain, analyse and evaluate sociological explanations for:

- The nature, causes, trends and significance of media representations
- Changes in the way certain groups are represented in the media.

### Media representations of gender

Traditionally, sociologists have written about how the media reinforces gender stereotypes and cultural assumptions through the way it represents men and women: men as dominant and women as subordinate. This reflects a patriarchal view of society.

Representations of women	
<b>Symbolic annihilation</b>	This term was first used by <b>Tuchman et al</b> (1978) to describe the way women are effectively left out of media discourse: their achievements are ignored or minimised; their interests and pursuits trivialised and devalued. A good example comes from <b>Newbold</b> who researched sports reporting and found that women's sport was marginalised and also sexualised.
<b>The cult of femininity</b>	There is plenty of sociological research, particularly from the 1970s and 1980s to show that the media presents an ideal of womanhood that women were encouraged to aspire to: the "domestic goddess". <b>Ferguson</b> (1983) found, for example, that women were encouraged through magazines to focus on their appearance, their marriage, their domestic roles and raising their children, as opposed to other possible aspirations.
<b>Sex objects</b>	<b>Wolf</b> (1990) focuses on how the media represents women as sex objects, for men's gratification. A particular body image is presented as ideal and anything short of that is a "work in progress". This is also referred to as the <b>beauty myth</b> . This idea suggests that women are used in the media for the <b>male gaze</b> . This issue has also been linked to the issue of body image and eating disorders.
<b>Conflicted working mothers</b>	The media usually represents women in domestic and marginal roles. Where women are workers, especially working mothers, they are often represented as being highly conflicted, worrying about not fulfilling their main, domestic role. As working fathers are not represented in the same way, there is a clear inference here that it is normal for men to go to work and for women to stay at home.

There is, however, a clear alternative narrative that suggests that, today, women are empowered by media representations, rather than oppressed by them.

Women empowered by the media	
<b>Transgressive roles</b>	It has been suggested by many sociologists, including post-feminists, that media representations reflect the way society has changed for women. Since the 1970s and 1980s, women are much more likely to be focused on their careers, and career women now feature much more centrally, and positively, in the media. Liberal feminists argue that these representations are yet to catch up with social change, but that there has definitely been progress.
<b>Sexually powerful</b>	The idea of women as passive “sex objects” in the media, including in advertising, has changed. <b>Gill (2008)</b> suggests that women are not much more likely to be shown as powerful, using their sexuality to get what they want. There is a debate within feminism about whether this is a positive development as radical feminists in particular argue that patriarchy has convinced women that they are in control, but really it is the men who are getting what they want (sexualised images of women).
<b>Independent</b>	There is a lot of focus in the media on independence and aspiration for women and girls. Pop music is a particular source of this, with singers like Beyoncé, Taylor Swift and Lady Gaga often singing about women’s independence and control. Also, various research about women’s magazines (including <b>Gauntlett (2008)</b> and <b>Winship (1987)</b> ) suggests that things have changed since <b>Ferguson’s</b> research, with a greater emphasis on young women choosing their own path in life.

**McRobbie** thinks that the apparent greater equality in the media today has been overstated. There is an *illusion of equality* which is supported by media representations.

It is also important to consider media representations of men. Traditionally, this has emphasised physical strength and dominance. Masculinity has been represented in the form of action heroes and super heroes, as well as capable, dominant breadwinners or leaders of various sorts.

However, postmodernists have noted that, from the 1980s, magazines aimed at men and some depictions of men in the media have instead focused on men’s vulnerable side, encouraging them to get in touch with their emotions. There is the concept of the **new man** and the media construct of the **metrosexual** (focusing on fashion, appearance and less traditionally masculine traits).

**Connell (2005)** writes about **hegemonic masculinity**: this is the idea that there is a particular view of masculinity – of being a “real man” – that is dominant in Western culture. That view includes both gender hierarchy (real men are above women in the hierarchy) and a hierarchy among men: boys should aspire to become “alpha males”. This measure of manliness is centred on physical strength, competitiveness and success and other masculinities are excluded or ridiculed. This masculinity is clearly shaped by the media, and while there has been a positive creation of less toxic masculinities in the media, it is complex and contradictory. Yes, magazines have encouraged men to take more interest in fashion and appearance, but there is still an emphasis on traditional masculinity and the objectification and sexualisation of women in media aimed at men. A celebrity like David Beckham is presented as a “new man” in relation to his family commitment and as a “metrosexual” for his fashion sense, but he is rendered acceptable to hegemonic masculinity on account of have been good at sport and for marrying a Spice Girl. This contradiction was discussed by **Whannel (2002)**.

While the concept of hegemonic masculinity suggests that there are different masculinities out there, but one concept of it has managed to remain dominant in society, partly through the media, there is a

suggestion that the more positive aspects of this masculinity (hard work, providing for your family, etc.) have been eroded in society today. This relates to the idea of a **crisis of masculinity** where the precise role for men in society is in crisis or flux. Men do not need to do all the work or provide for their families, necessarily, and the danger in that situation is that **hegemonic masculinity** is replaced with **toxic masculinity**. That is that all that is left are the negative aspects of hegemonic masculinity: aggression, violence, misogyny and homophobia; boys who are brought up to bottle up their emotions and prove that they are physically and sexually as “good” or “better” than other boys.

Clearly there is a great deal in the media that seeks to challenge toxic masculinity, with male characters in drama series getting into trouble by behaving in such ways, and being rewarded for expressing their emotions. But boys do get a muddled picture from the media, as a great deal of what they see and read – especially on social media – encourages toxic norms too. **Gauntlett (2008)** talks about **retributive masculinity**: there is a lot of media out there that very much reasserts traditional masculine traits such as *Top Gear* or some comedy panel shows and sports entertainment shows as well as some magazines. While Gauntlett generally sees the choice of masculinities that boys can choose from to be a positive feature of contemporary society, there is a danger that choice leads to confusion and conflict and feeds a crisis of masculinity.

## Media representations of sexuality

Just as Tuchman talked of the **symbolic annihilation** of women, some sociologists have pointed to the same process in relation to homosexuality. Traditionally homosexuality has been either stereotyped or completely absent from mainstream media and lesbianism in particular has been almost completely absent. **Batchelor** notes that, in the media, heterosexuality is normal and homosexuality is always exceptional or unusual in some way.

However, there is certainly evidence that that is changing. While once homosexuality would not be referred to on prime-time TV. When Anna Friel kissed a girl in *Brookside* (a TV soap) in 1994 it was considered a ground-breaking moment: the first lesbian kiss on UK TV, before the watershed. Since then, however, most TV soaps have had gay characters, and not all of them highly stereotypical or simply present to explore a particular social issue (although many have performed that role, to facilitate a storyline about AIDS, or a storyline about sexual orientation and Islam, for instance). Gay kisses are certainly less “shocking” than they were just 20 years or so ago, and references to homosexuality are now quite mainstream (including on entertainment shows like *Strictly Come Dancing*). However, many of the key stereotypes noted by sociologists in the 1980s and 1990s remain:

- **Campness.** Homosexuality is often associated with camp humour. Male gay TV personalities are often known for a particular type of camp humour. While many such performers are hugely popular and successful, the way in which homosexuality is normally presented in a camp way in the media does reinforce some negative stereotypes about gay men.
- **Association with HIV/AIDS.** Particularly in the 1980s, reporting of HIV/AIDS focused strongly on the gay community and further supported a stereotype of gay men being particularly promiscuous. AIDS was reported on in a less sympathetic way in relation to gay men than for other sufferers, in a sense suggesting that they had brought the disease upon themselves.
- **Temporary.** There is also a media stereotype where homosexuality is presented as something temporary: a phase (especially for lesbians who might not have “met the right man” yet).

While some of these stereotypes are historic and **Gauntlett** has noted that things have improved in this area and that this might be helping attitudes in society more generally, there is still a lot of stereotypical representation in this area, including presenting lesbianism for the male gaze, for example.



## Media representations of disability

**Barnes (1992)** identifies 12 commonly recurring representations or stereotypes of disability in the media. These are:

- **Pitiable / pathetic.** Barnes argues that disabled people are often presented as in need of pity and totally dependent on the good will or charity of others. This is often used in drama to make non-disabled characters more relatable and likeable. Images of disabled children are used to elicit an emotional response in the audience.
- **Object of violence.** While it is true that disabled people do experience violence and therefore this could be a reflection of reality, aimed to support disabled people, Barnes argues that this is often sensationalised, again showing disabled people as entirely dependent and incapable.
- **Sinister/evil.** Villains in dramas often have a disability, including many Bond villains, for example.
- **Curious / mysterious.** Sometimes disabled characters are present merely to add a bit of mystery. Barnes calls this “disability voyeurism” where disability is presenting as fascinating and different (which often links to the decision to include disabilities in the construction of fictional villains).
- **“Super cripple”.** Barnes uses this term to refer to the representation of disabled people as being hugely brave and determined to be able to cope with their disability. Although this seems like a positive representation, Barnes argues that it is over-sentimental and ignores the social nature of disability, viewing it only as an individual struggle.
- **Object of ridicule.** Often disabled people are the butt of jokes. Particularly impairments of speech or learning difficulties are represented in this way, e.g. the Ricky Gervais character Derek.
- **Their own worst enemy.** Barnes suggests that



## Links to Core Themes

- This area of the topic clearly links to issues of **power**, **stratification** and **social differentiation** as well as **identity**.

## Possible Exam Questions

### Item M

The media is often accused of being a male-dominated industry. Media productions also seem to reflect patriarchy, with women often being incidental to storylines or portrayed in a negative way. Some would point out that audiences, including women, seem to accept these representations.

1. Applying material from **Item C** analyse **two** reasons why women are negatively stereotyped in the media. (10 marks)

*Exam hint: Find the two hooks, and then develop them into two “reasons” that directly answer the question. For example, “A male-dominated industry” and “audiences...accept these representations” are two possible ones to work on. Which sociologists argue the industry is male-dominated? Which puts more power in the hands of the audience?*

### Item N

Some sociologists argue that negative gender stereotypes are often created and reinforced by the media, through the way men and women are represented. Others point to how the media can also successfully subvert and challenge stereotypes.

2. Applying material from **Item D** and your own knowledge, evaluate the view that mass media encourages negative gender stereotypes. (20 marks)

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE MEDIA AND AUDIENCES

**Specification: sociological explanations of the relationship between the media, their content and presentation, and audiences.**

### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Outline, explain, analyse and evaluate:

- a range of theories and models relating to the effects of the media on audiences
- methodological debates about how to research the effects of the media.

### The media and their audience: a theoretical framework

Functionalists, Marxists and feminists would all argue that the media performs a role where it seeks to shape the norms and values of its audience. For functionalists this is part of secondary socialisation: an important part of creating a value consensus and social solidarity. Through the media, people become more aware of the norms and values outside their family home or local community and understand those of wider society. This can be seen very clearly through children's television, but actually continues throughout people's lives: normal behaviour is modelled, normal opinions and values are communicated: the media is an **agent of socialisation**. It is also able to operate as an **agent of social control** as the media exposes and censures deviant behaviour.

Marxists agree with functionalists that the media performs these roles, but rather than benefiting society as a whole, they see it as benefitting only the ruling class: the bourgeoisie. **Louis Althusser** (1970) referred to the **ideological state apparatus** (ISA) as institutions that use ideas to control people. These institutions are not necessarily part of the state (although in some societies the media is state owned and/or controlled) but they serve the interests of the ruling class and they aim to influence people through subtle methods, rather than force. Althusser also wrote about the **repressive state apparatus** (RSA) by which he meant the systems utilised by formal institutions (e.g. government and the police). The media, for Althusser, clearly fits the description of an ISA.

One of the ways the bourgeoisie uses the media to control the working class, according to Marxists, is to create **false consciousness**. This Marxist term refers to the way in which the ruling class controls and manipulates the proletariat in such a way that it is unable to recognise its own oppression. As the media is owned by the ruling class (see the previous section) they produce messages that persuade workers that they are not oppressed and that the ruling class are not their oppressors. These ideas were further developed by **the Frankfurt school**. This neo-Marxist school recognized that the way in which the mass media presents ideas to audiences is incredibly sophisticated so that less powerful groups are not aware of the way in which the media controls them. People do not revolt or question power because they are persuaded to believe that everything is fair. This relates closely to **Antonio Gramsci's** idea of **hegemony**: the media (and the culture in general) creates a common sense that serves the interests of the ruling class.

Feminists too, see the media as performing a role of maintaining a patriarchal society. Radical feminists in particular see the media as presenting patriarchal domination as normal and challenges to patriarchy as deviant. This is achieved through the objectification of women and the misrepresentation mentioned in a previous section.

Interactionists also see the media as influencing audience members, although not on the macro, structuralist scale that Marxists and feminists suggest. A well-known study that demonstrates this effect is

one we also look at in Crime and Deviance: Stan Cohen's *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*. Cohen developed these two concepts.

**Folk devils** refers to individuals or groups of people who are portrayed in a negative way in the media, usually in relation to some sort of deviant behaviour. The individual/group may be stigmatised and it can lead to a moral panic. Cohen explored the impact of a clash between two youth subcultures in England, 1964 (the "mods and rockers") that was widely reported in the press at the time. He argued that the media amplified the events that occurred, which led to the media demonising the youth subcultures (and in turn creating a moral panic in society).

A **moral panic** is where there is an excessive amount of attention placed on an issue in. A moral panic is a feeling of fear that is associated with a particular issue, usually whipped up by the media. Again these moral panics are often related to deviant acts (such as youth violence or drug culture). Neo-Marxists like Stuart Hall have further developed the idea to suggest that moral panics deliberately divert attention from other, more significant problems.

Cohen argues that the media, through these processes, can cause **deviancy amplification**: this is the idea that the media makes crime or deviance worse through its reporting. For example, the representations of the 2011 riots in the UK helped build and sustain the riots in subsequent hours and days, by publicising and, to an extent, romanticising the actions.

For the most part, postmodernists are more positive about media effects, and see the process as more complex than the wealthy and powerful seeking to dominate the rest. However, some postmodernists, such as Jean Baudrillard, are pessimistic and concerned about the nature of contemporary mass media. Baudrillard writes about the idea of a **simulacrum** where the boundaries between reality and media representations are blurred. He wrote a famous work *The Gulf War Didn't Happen* which explored the idea that all we are aware of are the representations of events, not the events themselves, and these are narratives that are written and administered to create a particular impression and produce particular effects.

There are a number of models that have been developed that seek to show how the media influences its audiences.

## Models of media influence on audiences

**Hypodermic Syringe Model** This is one model that can be used to understand the how the media communicates with people. The hypodermic syringe model assumes that messages presented by the media are received directly and accepted by an audience: the media messages are injected directly into the audience. This model originated in the 1930s to try and explain how propaganda messages were so effective in a context such as Nazi Germany. The hypodermic syringe model assumes a **passive audience**, that is an audience made up of people who do not question the messages presented by the media and accept stories at face value.

While some argue that adults are a passive audience, and some Marxist ideas of the media acting as **ideological state apparatus** suggest something along these lines, most suggest that it is children and adolescents who are most likely to be influenced by the media in this very direct way. They argue that depictions of violence in the media, as well as various forms of anti-social behaviour, are copied by young audience members, leading to arguments in favour of censorship, and particularly of age certificates for films and games and a "watershed" on the television before which scenes are suitable for young viewers.

Those who argue that the media does directly cause violence in this way point to a number of pieces of research and real-life examples. These include:

- **Bandura's Bobo doll experiment.** Psychology students among you will be aware of this study, conducted in 1961 (with subsequent follow-up experiments) where Bandura gathered kindergarten children to watch an adult being violent with a "bobo doll" toy. He found that those children who saw the adult behaving in such a way went on to imitate the behaviour when they played with the toy. This is "observational learning": they learnt to behave this way because they watched it. A 1963 variant on the study involved the children watching a film of a man attacking the toy. The children who watched the film also learned the behaviour, in the same way as those who watched it in person. Subsequent studies have supported Bandura's findings that children who watch violence and aggression in the media are likely to imitate it and behave aggressively themselves.
- **The murder of Jamie Bulger.** A young child called Jamie Bulger was murdered by two other children in 1993. The two-year-old boy was tortured and murdered by two 10-year-old boys who had watched one of the Child's Play horror movies before abducting and killing Jamie. They did directly copy some of what they had seen in the movie. Those who argue that the media does have this direct effect on its audience point to several other cases where it appears that violent media played a part in inspiring or influencing real-life violence, including some high-profile American school shootings.

The idea that the media might have a direct influence on the audience in this way, specifically in relation to causing violence, focuses on the processes of:

- **Imitation** (as described above) – the idea of people doing **copycat** actions based on things they have seen.
- **Desensitisation** The idea that people cease to find violence shocking and wrong because they have been exposed to so much of it, through the media.

#### Evaluating the hypodermic syringe model

- The theory is considered to be outdated
- There are several methodological criticisms of Bandura's study. First, as argued by **Gauntlett (2008)** observing children's behaviour in a laboratory experiment does not provide a **valid** picture of how they behave in real life. Second, how children play with a doll does not reflect how they would behave with humans or in a situation that is not play. Some suggest that the experiment simply showed some children how to play with the toy (it is a toy that you knock over and it rights itself). The issue of validity also applies to more recent studies, even where they used real media violence rather than playing with a doll: it is still not a realistic scenario.
- Although it is clear that the murderers of Jamie Bulger were influenced by what they had watched, the film did not cause the violence. Many young people see violent images and do not commit violent acts. While the media images might play some role, clearly other factors must influence such actions too. Other cases sometimes referred to, such as the Columbine High School massacre, where the killers had been listening to Marilyn Manson records, there is no real evidence of the media even influencing the subsequent behaviour.
- Most sociologists today would argue that audiences have at least some **agency**: they are not entirely passive. We can choose what we watch, when we watch it and – to a greater or lesser extent – what we take away from what we watch.
- Some have pointed out that watching media violence might have the opposite effect from that described above. Instead of leading to copycat violence, it might lead to **catharsis**. People can release aggression and anger through violent media (e.g. a violent video game) rather than being aggressive and violent in real life.

- Furthermore, violence in the media can lead to **sensitisation** rather than desensitisation. The media can reveal the effects of violence and therefore people are less likely to be violent. The media raises people's awareness of the impact of violence.
- This last point does depend on the representation of violence in the media. For example, violence in the news or in a serious drama might show its real impact, but much media violence is cartoonish and has no obvious consequences.
- However others, such as **Morrison**, have pointed out that children can generally differentiate between cartoon violence and "real" violence: they understand the different contexts in which violence occurs. This also serves as a criticism of Bandura's study, as children can also differentiate between playing roughly with a doll and real violence.

**Cultural effects model** While most sociologists now would argue that the audience is not as passive as the hypodermic syringe model suggests, the media does, nevertheless, have an impact on the audience. The cultural effects model is a neo-Marxist approach that explores how the powerful groups in society (the bourgeoisie) are able to transmit their values through the media and ultimately turn their message into the **dominant ideology** or **hegemony** in society. Coming from a conflict perspective, this model recognises that people do not all share the same beliefs and values and that people's background and upbringing will influence how they interpret media messages and whether they internalise them or reject them. However, the model then has to explain why those who do not share the interests of the dominant and powerful groups in society find themselves still being influenced by the media messages they put out, and adopting bourgeois values as their own (which is part of a **false class consciousness**). When the media – dominated by the bourgeoisie – transmit their media messages, they have a **preferred reading** (or a dominant reading) in mind: how they expect people to respond to and understand what they have put out. That preferred reading is (for the most part) the one that reflects the values of the ruling class. The combination of the framing of media messages (how the stories are told) and their repetition means that, gradually over time, people come to take on those ruling-class values of their own. Essentially, these neo-Marxists are arguing that the media does play a role in imparting the dominant ideology, but not in the direct way presented in the hypodermic syringe model. Audiences are diverse and can be active; there are different voices in the media that can sometimes be heard; but ruling-class media messages are dominant, powerful, relentless and effective.

**Stuart Hall (1980)** argues that audience members are often able to "decode" the ideological messages that are contained in the media. That does not automatically mean that they will reject them: recognising that there is an ideological message in the media is not the same as rejecting it or being immune to its effects. People's experiences, cultural context, education level, etc. will all influence the extent to which people recognise coded messages, are able to decode them and then whether they choose to agree or oppose them.

The idea of messages building up over time can be closely linked with the section on representations of groups in the media. We have seen how certain groups can be misrepresented in the media, but regular repetition of those stereotypes and misrepresentations create and reinforce norms. People seeing women presented in a stereotypical way over time come to consider those representations as normal, which can have a great many negative effects (such as negative body image, objectification, etc.) Similarly, misrepresentations or stereotypes of minority-ethnic groups can lead to widespread discrimination and racism in society (for example, some link a rise in Islamophobia to the representation of Muslims in the media).

### Evaluating the cultural effects model

- This is certainly a more nuanced argument than the hypodermic syringe model. It argues that the relationship between the media and the audience is a rather complex one. People do interpret media messages based on their social and cultural context: it is not just the audience is not entirely passive, but it is not homogenous either. The audience is made up of diverse people with different attitudes, experiences, backgrounds and values.
- However, this is an approach to media influence that is almost impossible to measure. While experiments, like the Bobo doll, can seek to test the immediate impact of the media, testing the cumulative effect, and the diverse effect between cultures and contexts is extremely difficult. How could researchers determine the cause and effect? Yes, there will be different attitudes between people from different social backgrounds, or at different times or in different countries. Yes, people may hold attitudes that are present and have been regularly repeated in media messages. But the role of the media in those differences and in shaping those attitudes would be very hard to prove. An interesting take on this is John Norberg's work on how most people think things in the world are worse than they are. He argues that we see bad news from all around the world in a way that people one or two generations did not, and we therefore think things have got worse and yet, by a whole range of measures, the world is in a better way today than it was 20, 30, 200, 500 years ago, etc. However, Norberg himself suggests that there are other explanations for a rise in pessimism, not just media messages (for example, nostalgia in aging population). How could sociologists prove that the media had these effects?
- Some pluralists would argue that this still suggests that the audience is effectively passive. It might be that some audience members are more passive than others, and it might take a bit longer for them to stop having agency, but effectively these ideas still suggest that the media manipulates the audience.
- However, people spend billions on advertising, precisely because they believe the media can influence the behaviour of audiences (in this case their behaviour as consumers) and political parties spend huge sums on managing media messages, so it seems counter-intuitive to suggest that audience members are all active and able to reject all media messages. Every day people buy things that they do not actually need, because media messages have successfully created a "false need".

**The reception analysis model** This model asserts that different audiences will interpret the content presented by the media differently. McQuail, Blumler et al. (1972) argue that the media is consumed by people in four ways: it provides **entertainment**, it gives us an **understanding** of what is happening around the world, it provides us with a **sense of identity** and it provides **social solidarity**.

Morley suggests that there are three ways in which an audience may understand the messages presented in the media:

- Dominant/hegemonic reading: (the preferred reading, as suggested in the cultural effects model)
- Negotiated reading: messages are mostly accepted by the audience, amended in such a way as to make sense from their socio-economic background. It is also worth bearing in mind that people belong to a range of identity groups or subcultures, and therefore it is hard to predict how identity might impact reception to media messages. Will people react as a woman, as a working-class person, or as a black person, or a gay person, etc. or a combination of all of these?
- Oppositional reading: the messages presented by the media are either rejected or are interpreted in a different way from that intended.

The key point here is that the audience is neither passive nor homogenous and that media messages can be **polysemic**, that is that individuals or groups can interpret media messages in a variety of different ways.



### Evaluating the reception analysis model

- Some sociologists, especially pluralists, would question whether media messages really have a dominant or hegemonic preferred reading. They would argue that it is not just the audience that is diverse and heterogeneous but the media is too. There are a range of media messages available and people can choose to consume those they are interested in.
- Marxists and radical feminists would argue that the theory implies that it is easy to negotiate or reject media messages, but this ignores false consciousness or the cumulative effect of media messages across a lifetime.

**The two-step flow model** Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) assert that individuals form their views based on **opinion leaders**, who are influenced by the media. Ideas originate from the media and these are interpreted by opinion leaders, who then pass on their views to the rest of the population.

**Opinion leaders** are people who are generally thought to be knowledgeable about a particular issue and help filter information about media content to other audience members.

Some research in the US found that people, when questioned about the source of the views and ideas about a presidential election, were much more likely to reference informal conversations, friends and associates than direct media messages. However, on most issues, it is clear that those friends and associates must (usually) have received those ideas and views from the media themselves. Essentially, then, media messages were getting through to the public, but not directly. Some people consume more media than others - especially political news and current affairs. Those people might be thought of by friends, family and work colleagues as being authorities on such subjects. When such topics of conversation arise, then, people will defer to the greater knowledge of opinion leaders.

This theory suggests that most people are not especially informed about current affairs, and look up to opinion leaders who are more like them than the voices they hear in the media. This does not just refer to current affairs and politics. Some people read lots of fashion magazines and their friends will often be led by those people's views on coming trends.

### Evaluating the two-step flow model

- Some research has undermined the original Katz and Lazarsfeld study and suggested that most people cite media sources as their source of their information/opinion rather than opinion leaders. This might be a change over time, of course, as receive a lot more media messages today than we did in 1955.
- There is also a suggested that the process is rather more complex than a simple two-step flow. For example, people may generally get their information direct from the media (a one-step flow) but turn to opinion leaders when media messages disturb the balance of their worldview. For instance, if someone had a particular view about a current affairs issue (e.g. Brexit) and then saw a documentary that undermined that view, they might seek out an opinion leader to restore balance. In that sense, the opinion leader is not so much passing on the media message but explaining and contextualising it, and indeed quite possibly arguing against it through using alternative media messages.
- This is an important element of a two-step flow process and links with the cultural effects model: when messages are filtered through an opinion leader, that opinion leader may well significantly change or reinterpret the intended message from the media. Opinion leaders have their own sets of values and beliefs and the next stage of the message flow might well be why a documentary or news item was wrong, rather than simply passing it on.
- Hobson (1990) suggested that there could be several steps. He argued that people in workplaces can feel excluded if they do not conform to dominant views and viewing choices of co-workers. If

everyone is talking about a television programme that they watched the previous evening, it is clear that watching that programme is a way to be included next time.

- The original two-step flow appeared to suggest rather passive opinion leaders who simply pass on media messages, but those who engage with the media a lot and are looked up to by associates as opinion leaders are actually among those audience members who are least likely to be passive. People come to them to hear their opinion because they know they will have an opinion, not simply pass on the opinion of the producer.

**The selective filter model** Klapper (1960) agrees with Katz and Lazarsfeld that audiences have a degree of choice about how the media they consume affects them: it is a model that sees the audience as being more active rather than passive. He suggests that the media passes through three filters before it affects the audience:

1. **Selective exposure:** The audience chooses whether or not to consume the media in the first place. Someone who chooses to read the Guardian instead of the Daily Mail cannot be influenced by media messages in the Mail. Similarly, we are not effected by messages we do not see, hear or read, because we are not interested or because work or home-life commitments mean we do not happen to consume that particular media. (For example, some might argue that the representation of the Royal Wedding in 2018 in the media was partly designed to make people feel more patriotic and deflect from difficulties elsewhere in society, but I was at a children's party so missed it all!)
2. **Selective perception:** The audience may choose to reject the messages presented in the media. Just because we see, read or hear something does not mean that we accept it, agree with it or internalise it. It is also perfectly possible for people to see something and take a different meaning away from it from the one which the writer or producer intended (this, of course, ties in with the cultural effects model).
3. **Selective retention:** It is also quite likely that the audience may not find the messages memorable and subsequently forget them. Klapper found that people are more likely to remember those messages which they broadly agree with and forget those that are more challenging.

#### Evaluating the selective filter model

- This does seem quite a convincing argument: clearly people are not always influenced by media messages and audiences are able to avoid influence, consciously or otherwise, in these ways.
- However, the principle of marketing and advertising is really to get past these filters. Its whole purpose is to influence the audience to buy something they might otherwise not have done. Media saturation can get past selective exposure (for example, some messages are repeated across many medial platforms and at many times to ensure as many people as possible consume them). As we saw with the cultural effects model, repetition and encoding can mean people are influenced by messages that they might consider themselves immune to.
- Finally, advertisers use various methods to make their messages memorable (such as humour, catchphrases and various other hooks). Other media producers are also able to use such techniques, as nobody wants to produce forgettable media products!
- As such, while media influence might be limited by these filters, media producers have techniques and skills to get through these filters and influence audiences.

**The uses and gratification model** This model suggests that the media performs a vital function in meeting the needs of the audience. Audiences select what media they consume depending on their interests and desires. **Blumler and McQuail** suggested that there are four main functions that the media performs for individual audience members:

1. **Diversions.** The media entertains people and offers them an escape from real life. In this way it provides an emotional release for people.

2. **Personal relationships.** Conversations and discussion often involve shared media experiences, and so the media provides ammunition for this, and with topics of conversation. It can also act as a substitute for real companionship for some.
3. **Personal identity.** The media is able to reinforce people's values and helps people to explore themselves and their ideas.
4. **Surveillance.** It also allows people to know about others. One reason we use the media is to find out information that either affects us personally, or that have an interest in.

Other thinkers have considered other uses or variations on this, but the general point is that the main relationship between the audience and the media is that the media meets the audience's needs. Earlier versions were more traditionally functionalist, with one functions of the media being value transmission (secondary socialisation) but clearly that is more of a function for society rather than for audience members.

#### Evaluating the uses and gratification model

- While it is clear that the audience does use the media for various purposes and the media meets this in its variety, this does not mean that the media does not also perform other functions.
- For example, while the media does reinforce people's values, it also plays a part in shaping and creating those values in the first place.
- Media often performs more than one role at the same time, and sometimes something that is intended for one purpose performs another one. For example, some argue that the news is often presented in a frivolous and entertaining way, really diverting the audience rather than informing it.
- Similarly, entertainment programmes are also often intended to influence values and opinions.

#### KEY STUDY: Glasgow University Media Group

The Glasgow University Media Group (GUMG) has conducted research into media content over many years. It has also looked at the influence of media messages on audiences by interviewing audience members.

For example, led by Greg Philo, they looked at how the audience had responded to reporting of violent clashes during the miners' strike of 1984/85. Most of their sample believed that most picket lines during the strike had been violent, despite eye-witnesses saying that violent clashes were a rare feature.

While this is used to support the cultural effects model, it is important to note that it supports the complexities and nuance of that model, rather than a more direct hypodermic syringe type of model. 98% of those surveyed said that most picket lines they saw in the media were violent, while "only" 54% said that they believed most picket lines to be violent. Therefore, a significant minority were able to criticise what they saw in the media. Philo found that trade union members were more likely to be sympathetic to the miners and therefore question the coverage, for instance.

## Links to Core Themes

- This links to core themes including socialisation (as socialisation is one of the ways the media influences the audience: to teach it norms and values) and power and stratification, as many sociologists argue that those with power use the media to maintain their power and to control other groups in society.

## Possible Exam Questions

1.

### Item M

Some sociologists question whether the media really has much effect on its audience, as people are not simply passive recipients of media messages. However, the amount of money that is spent on advertising suggests that many believe that the media does affect the audience, even if it is through a more complex process than some sociologists argue.

Applying material from **Item M**, analyse **two** ways in which the media is able to affect its audience. (10 marks)

2.

### Item N

While most sociologists agree that the media is able to influence audiences in some way, they do not agree about how direct this influence is, nor to what extent the audience is able to avoid such influence. Views about ownership and control of the media also inevitably affect what sociologists think about the nature of any influence.

Applying material from **Item N** and your own knowledge, evaluate the view that the mass media has a direct influence on its audiences. (20 marks).

3.

### Item N

Many sociologists argue that the media is controlled by the rich and powerful in society, and particularly by wealthy media moguls who own massive multinational media empires. Some would argue that it is the media who control the audience, in some respects! However, others disagree, and suggest that the media largely provides what the audience wants.

Applying material from **Item N** and your own knowledge, evaluate the view that the mass media is ruled by its audience (20 marks).

## Outline and Explain 10-markers

***These 10-mark questions always combine ideas from two different topic areas. There are almost endless possibilities for these questions, but here are some good practice ones:***

1. Outline and explain two ways in which new media has affected the ownership and control of the media in the UK today. (10 marks)

***Exam hint: With these questions the skill that is being tested is the student's ability to apply knowledge from one area of the topic to knowledge from another. So it is important to try and ensure that the response is balanced: there is a roughly similar amount of content devoted to new media as to ownership and control. Ideally ownership AND control should be addressed (one "way" for each is one possible approach).***

2. Outline and explain **two** ways in which the ownership of the media affects the selection and presentation of news content in the UK today. (10 marks)

*Exam hint: Again, how well can you apply the one aspect of the topic to the other? It's important not to write a piece that is primarily about media ownership with the news element tacked on the end (or vice versa). Actually, ownership is potentially quite an important factor relating to the selection and presentation of news. Do not just think about private ownership.*

3. Outline and explain **two** ways in which globalisation has affected the relationship between media and its audience. (10 marks)

*Exam hint: This is an interesting question and a chance to use the sociological imagination to explore a topic area. There are lots of ways that globalisation might have influenced the relationship between the media and its audience, not least because of the way that globalisation has transformed the potential audience that a media production might reach. While new media and digital technology is clearly part of this, make sure that globalisation itself is explicitly referenced and explored.*

4. Outline and explain **two** ways the audience affects media representations of ethnicity in the UK today. (10 marks)

*Exam hint: Here the student needs to think laterally. They are quite likely to use this knowledge as an evaluative point in a longer essay, when considering why some minority-ethnic groups are negatively stereotyped in the media, for instance. After considering issues like the lack of diversity among owners and editors, the question of whether the editors are giving the audience what they want, in order to sell products, is likely to arise. That isn't a bad starting place for this question. Of course the audience may also have influenced more positive representations of ethnicity too.*

5. Outline and explain **two** ways in which the ownership and control of the media affects representations of social class in the media. (10 marks)

*Exam hint: While this is a typical outline and explain question, applying one area of the topic to another, it is possible that students would feel confident answering this question based just on knowledge from the topic on media representations. However, the answer can be enriched with specific and detailed material relating to ownership and control, and questions about ownership and control can form part of the analysis.*

6. Outline and explain **two** ways in which globalisation has affected the selection and presentation of the news. (10 marks)

*Exam hint: Again, the best answers to this question will go beyond the impact of new media (although the globalisation of communication through technological change can certainly form part of the answer) and think about other aspects of globalisation too.*

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