

MEDIA STUDIES

Paper 9607/01
Foundation Portfolio

Key messages

In order to successfully complete this coursework component, candidates should:

- Keep a detailed blog showing the development of the project, their final artefact meeting the requirements of their chosen brief, and a creative critical reflection upon their work.
- Aim to complete these elements to a high standard, demonstrating knowledge and understanding of the key concepts, research and planning, and appropriate skilled use of media tools.
- Ensure the blog remains online and easily accessible throughout the examination series.

General comments

Centres and their cohorts are recovering from the restrictions of previous years and are building upon their strengths to support a range of high-quality work. Candidates continue to build upon their developing knowledge and understanding to produce some exceptionally creative products and reflect upon the process. It is pleasing to see that with the re-opening of societies around the world candidates have once more ventured beyond the confines of their classrooms to produce some very professional artefacts.

On the whole centres continue to engage well with this component and candidates produced some excellent work, demonstrating detailed research into existing magazines and film openings, which fed into the planning and construction of their own media products. Many candidates demonstrated high levels of skill in the use of media tools, in both the products and in the creative critical reflections. In the best work, knowledge and understanding of conventions of all aspects of the media products was coupled with comprehensive evidence of the process.

Administration

Centres have taken well to the Submit for Assessment process but there are still a few issues that need to be addressed. When uploading forms, centres should ensure that they are clearly legible, that all necessary paperwork is uploaded, especially the Coursework Assessment Summary Form (CASF) and Individual candidate record cards (ICRC), and that if their entries are over ten, they select and upload the ICRCs of an appropriate sample as set out by Cambridge. It would also aid moderation if centres hyper-linked all of their candidates to a centre web page or blog, the URL address of which should be clearly stated on the ICRCs of each candidate. Moderation continues to be delayed considerably due to illegible or broken URLs.

Individual candidate record cards must be completed with clear comments to show how marks have been arrived at for each assessment objective and strand. If candidates have worked in groups comments must reflect individual contributions to projects.

Some centres submitted work late or did not make all work available for the entirety of the series. This delayed moderation and took time to contact centres to rectify the issue. It is important that centres are punctual and that they take responsibility for ensuring that all candidate work is fully available throughout the moderation period.

Comments on specific tasks

Blogs

Some centres continue to produce blog hubs (a centre blog or web page with candidates' names and numbers hyperlinked to their work) demonstrating good practice, however, the number who did not, once again, seems to have increased. Even if there are only two entries the use of a hub helps teachers monitor candidates' work and aids the moderation process. All centres should follow this good practice and clearly transcribe the URL of the hub on the Individual candidate record cards. All hyper-links in both the centre's hub and candidate blogs need to be checked carefully by centres to ensure that they are working.

Blogs should be clearly organised so that they read in a chronological order using date stamps if possible. The finished product (film opening or magazine pages) should be the first thing seen as the blog is opened so that it is clear to Moderators which is the final version. All elements should be clearly labelled, and the use of menus and tags is to be encouraged. The best online content is comprehensive, with candidates posting meaningful posts on a regular basis. Some candidates continue to produce upwards of fifty meaningful posts whilst others seem content to settle for less than twenty. The most effective blogs demonstrated the whole process of the project from initial idea, through research into similar products, planning, production and creative critical reflection. The least effective were those presented on poorly organised blogs with often descriptive posts lacking in reflection and evaluation of the process of production. These were often scrolling web pages with final products and Creative Critical Reflections buried part way through a scroll.

All elements of the portfolio must be online, either on or linked to the blog for the moderation period. Google applications continue to be popular for presenting work. This is acceptable as long as all documents are either unlocked or the Moderator is provided with a password for access. Much time was once again spent contacting centres to make work available for moderation after the submission deadline. Moderators will not use their personal Google logins to access work. Candidates should be made aware that even though they think materials are visible they may be set to private or for access with a Google account. All embedded documents, no matter what platform or app, should be available to the Moderator without them having to log-in, unless with a single username and password provided by the centre.

Creative Critical Reflections

Candidates need to fully address the four set questions using a range of digital applications to demonstrate their skill, knowledge and understanding. Assessment Objective (AO) 2 calls upon candidates to analyse and evaluate their own work. Marks for this are given across both the CCR and the blog but the criteria explicitly refers to engaging with the set questions. If candidates do not engage with all of the questions it is difficult to move beyond Level 2. Assessment Objective (AO) 3 strand 4 gives marks purely for the technical and creative skills used to communicate ideas through the CCR. Therefore, centres should not be giving high level marks for this strand to candidates who produce CCRs that do not employ creative approaches. Many centres have moved away from text-based approaches to this element, which is to be applauded, however, far too many have replaced the written approach with an oral treatment. A talking head or voice audio is not a creative approach if used for all four questions. A significant number of candidates are still leaving this element to the last minute and not paying it enough attention for the sometimes-high marks given. There is still a minority of candidates who are only providing text responses to the four questions. This approach does not allow them to access any level for AO3 iv.

There continues to be some excellent use of multi-media applications making use of a range of sources taken from the production process to fully explore the four set questions. The most successful candidates have allocated adequate time to the CCR and considered it an integral part of their portfolio; the least successful have rushed it and/or considered it a necessary chore following their production. Centres should encourage candidates to give equal value to each of the four questions. Some candidates start with a comprehensive and creative response to **Question 1** and regress to finish with a thin response to **Question 4**.

Research and Planning

The third strand of AO3 relates directly to the candidate's research and planning, and how this has led to the construction of the final product. Therefore, all research and planning materials should be posted to candidate blogs and made accessible to the Moderator.

The most effective research is that completed independently by the candidate/group. It is clearly relevant to the final product and the candidate is able to articulate how their research models have informed their production. The least effective is class work, where the whole class has analysed the same text which bears little or no relevance to the final product. Some candidates presented research into magazines when following the video brief and vice versa. This is relevant if presented as demonstrating the candidate's choice of brief but not as preparation for construction of the opposite brief.

There is no prescribed list of planning materials, but candidates should clearly demonstrate the process of production via their blog. The process should reflect professional practice where possible so should include those documents associated with magazine or film production. The most successful candidates present a wide range of materials which clearly show the development of the project. The least successful tend towards generalised descriptive comments about what they did, often in a diary-like format.

Products

Products are primarily assessed across the first two strands of AO3. Marks should be given for the application of technical skills and how these are used to communicate meaning. Products should demonstrate clear knowledge and understanding of media language and key concepts.

Magazines

The print brief continues to decline in popularity. Candidates who attempted this brief generally fulfilled the requirements, with understanding of features of design, layout, font choice and size in evidence. Some candidates completed well organised and considered photo shoots resulting in some excellent original images. Overall, centres still need to encourage candidates to produce a wider range of appropriate images. Some candidates are still presenting the minimum number of images required rather than considering what their magazine actually needed. Contents pages continue to be an issue with many needing to reflect the full content of the proposed magazine not just a few pages. It is recommended that candidates compare their products to real magazine pages. Double page spreads require candidates to have had some training in journalistic technique. Copy was often poorly proofread and, in some instances, meaning was not clearly communicated.

Whilst some centres continue to invest in appropriate technical tools for construction of media products, some candidates still need more support in building their skills with dedicated DTP software such as InDesign, Quark Xpress, Affinity Publisher etc.

Opportunities for interim feedback need to be built into the task so that candidates can benefit from the critical eye of peers and teachers, particularly in relation to how far they have carried through their research into codes and conventions into their own products. Weaker productions often appear to be based on little or inappropriate research into existing products, sometimes taken from genres other than those of the proposed product.

Film openings

The video brief continues to be the most popular, with the most effective products being carefully researched and planned. For the best film openings candidates had researched professional work relevant to their own genre choice and had developed a systematic understanding of the institutional conventions of opening titles.

It is pleasing to see centres giving their candidates more opportunities to use appropriate technology. Many are showing the development of skills by producing and presenting well-constructed preliminary exercises which not only focus on camerawork but also some lighting and sound recording techniques. Centres should note that whilst smartphone cameras are appropriate tools for this brief, it should not be assumed that candidates 'just know' how to use them effectively. Appropriate training should be provided in all necessary media tools to facilitate candidates to demonstrate application of their knowledge and understanding. Centres would do well to pay some attention to recording and mixing sound, which continues to impede many productions.

When candidates work in groups, as permitted by the syllabus, it is important that all members' roles are clearly identifiable and that the centre has allocated marks appropriate to those roles. Comments on Individual candidate record cards should clearly identify how marks have been allocated according to candidate roles.

MEDIA STUDIES

Paper 9607/21
Media Texts and Contexts 21

Key messages

Section A is a compulsory question, in which candidates must analyse an extract from a TV drama and consider how meaning is constructed, as well as the specific representations of individuals, groups, events, or places through the technical codes of camerawork, editing, mise-en-scene and sound. An understanding of technical codes in moving image media is essential for candidates to answer the question, which was based on an extract from *What/If*.

Section B requires candidates to answer one of two optional questions on one media industry they have studied, adapting, and applying their knowledge. Candidates should support their responses using examples taken from contemporary media.

General comments

Centres should encourage candidates to practice responding to exam questions within set times and encourage them to spend an equal amount of time on responses which carry equal marks.

Please ensure that atypical responses which have been word processed are double spaced. This will support the marking process.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Overall, candidates found it very marginally easier to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of media concepts, contexts, and critical debates, using terminology appropriately (AO1), than to analyse media products by applying knowledge and understanding of theoretical and creative approaches to explain how meaning is created, supported with relevant textual evidence (AO2).

There was evidence of sound understanding of some technical elements, with most candidates able to identify camera shots, angles, movement, and composition, as well as mise-en-scene. Candidates were less successful in identifying sound, and editing. Some candidates simply described technical elements featured within the extract and did not develop their answers much further when it came to exploring meaning. There was also more focus on narrative devices, such as enigma codes, foreshadowing, and suspense/tension. This limited opportunities from exploring representations. Alternatively, some candidates could identify meaning, but lacked the accurate use of technical language, and ability to use examples from the extract to underpin their analysis. Often, and particularly towards the end of their response/the second half of the extract, candidates merely narrated what is seen on screen. This led to more limited responses. Centres should focus on the demands of the mark scheme, ensuring that candidates are aware of how to analyse all the ways in which meaning is constructed through technical elements within texts. This analysis should be underpinned with appropriate media terminology, and an appropriate level of knowledge and understanding of contexts and critical debates, including key theories.

In good answers, candidates were able to analyse the way that meaning was created within the extract from *What/If* using a range of appropriate technical terminology and elements. Popular themes were class/wealth, gender, family/relationships, power, and social morals. Stronger candidates made appropriate comments about representation of people (gender/class stereotypes/dynamics), and places (city/capitalism). They were able to link media theory (binary opposition) to their analysis organically, and used terms, such as connotation/denotation fluently. There were some effective discussions of the power dynamic, and conflict

between the two female leads and gender stereotypes. Relationships and moral values, capitalistic success and socio-economic power, and representations of gender were the key themes of this extract. Examples of theories which were applied successfully are Laura Mulvey's male gaze theory (and the female gaze), Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, and Levi Strauss' theory of binary opposition. Stuart Hall's theory of representation, Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of semiotics and Roland Bathes theoretical perspectives on semiotics, signs and structuralism are important theories (although not essential) for candidates to understand and be able to utilise as tools to support their analytical skills. These theories were sometimes referenced, although more successful candidates applied them within points of analysis.

Weaker candidates simply described/identified the camera shots, angles, movement, composition, sound and editing techniques used within the extract, often following the chronological order of the extract.

Candidates who did this generally failed to explain how shot types created meaning, and so they were weaker. Points were repeated throughout, or analysis reduced to simple points. There was also inaccurate use of terminology (for example using the term 'jump cut' instead of 'cut' or misspelling diegetic). Weaker responses tended to take each micro element and address it separately, whereas more sophisticated responses usually employed a more synthesized and holistic approach to the analysis of individuals/groups, themes, or meanings. Theory, and in particular Laura Mulvey's male gaze theory was superficially applied to many responses. Most candidates missed the opportunity to appropriately expand on the historical male gaze theory by utilising the female gaze and considering how appropriately the theory can be applied to modern texts. Many candidates would explain terminology, or theories, rather than applying them to an analysis of the extract.

Section B

Within **Section B, Question 2** was more popular than **Question 3**.

Film was far and away the most popular media area on which candidates chose to focus their response followed by video games, and music with only a handful of responses relating to print or radio and podcasts. This may reflect candidate's own consumption preferences, or reflect the instruction provided by their centre. The most successful responses were able to respond to the question by relating their discussions on media institutions, the nature of audience consumption and the relationships between audiences and institutions with reference to more than one media area and multiple examples.

There were some weak responses without any case study material at all, evidencing little more than a layman's understanding of the key concepts of audiences and institutions. These responses did not successfully address the question, providing a generalised overview and superfluous facts rather than demonstrating their knowledge and understanding of the key concepts, contexts and critical debates relating to audience and industry. The use of technical vocabulary was less frequent for **Section B**, in comparison to **Section A**, and often entirely missing from responses. Centres should support candidates to develop technical vocabulary in relation to industry and audiences; successfully used examples are conglomerate, oligopoly, cross-platform marketing, demographic, diversification, genre, hegemony, intellectual property, platform, and franchise. Centres should also support candidates to engage more critically with a variety of media theories to ensure that they are understood and can be successfully applied, where appropriate.

Another observation with **Section B** was the pattern of presenting an independent (international and domestic, or acclaimed and successful/limited success) and a blockbuster/tent pole/franchise product as case studies (such as Disney/Marvel's franchises, A24's films or Shudder's film Host). Candidates who presented information from only 2 – 3 case limited the depth of their response. Candidates who perform well are often given more freedom to research each media area outlined in the specification and encouraged to build their own resources and case studies from each area (and perhaps even across various industries), allowing them to be better equipped to meaningfully engage with the questions in **Section B**.

Question 2

Explain the importance of cross-media synergies in the media area you have studied.

This was the more popular question of the two.

Stronger candidates were able to develop a critical engagement and discussion of cross-media synergies within at least one media area. The most common responses discussed how cross-media synergies benefitted industry through increased audience awareness (cross-media marketing) leading to increased consumption and higher profits/increased revenue or access to expensive/advanced (cross-media/converged) technologies leading to higher quality production and more popular products, or increased audience awareness/consumption. They supported their discussion with points of evidence from their case studies, often forming counter points/arguments most successfully through their understanding of the independent sector (companies and products). Disney, Marvel and A24 were successfully utilised examples for film. Terminology was used fluently, demonstrating a good understanding. Some candidates were able to discuss multiple industries in relation to cross-media synergies. When used correctly, key theories (Curran and Seaton, Hesmondhalgh) strengthened candidates' responses.

Weaker candidates referenced case studies that were not recent or relevant, and their knowledge and understanding of media concepts were limited. Terminology was not used fluently. They focused on facts, without providing any analysis, often providing a historical overview limited to facts such as costs and box office revenue. They evidenced no (or a weak) understanding of wider contexts or critical debates. There was a lack of focus on responding to the question. They did not engage with any theories, or superficially referenced older and less relevant theories, such as the Hypodermic Model.

Question 3

'New technologies have made media audiences more complicated and unpredictable.' How far do you agree with this statement?

Candidates who chose this question were often able to craft strong responses.

Stronger candidates were able to discuss new technologies in relation to technological convergence, and how this has affected audience viewing patterns and audience responses. Popular discussions related to consumer choice and control, audience demand and power to influence industry in relation to social media feedback, an increase in detailed audience data collection and the use of AI technology, such as algorithms. Disney/Marvel's Black Widow (2021), Sonic the Hedgehog (2020) and Everything Everywhere All at Once (2022) films were popular and successfully utilised examples. Successful candidates supported their discussion with points of evidence from their case studies, often forming counter points/arguments most successfully through their understanding of audience reception theory (Hall), mass behaviour and individualism (Shirkey), prosumerism (Shirkey) and fandoms (Jenkins).

Weaker candidates focused on facts in relation to their case studies, or media area without providing any analysis, or demonstration of an understanding of wider context. They did not engage with any theories, or their engagement in theories was not accurate. There was a tendency for candidates to misunderstand the concept of 'active' audiences (presuming that this is a more recent development, and only related to current technologies, such as online streaming). There was a lack of focus on responding to the question. They may have evidenced a weak understanding of terms and concepts, such as audience response theories, technological convergence and the independent sector and their products (media as a creative, rather than commercial endeavour).

MEDIA STUDIES

Paper 9607/22
Media Texts and Contexts 22

Key messages

Section A is a compulsory question, in which candidates must analyse an extract from a TV drama and consider how meaning is constructed, as well as the specific representations of individuals, groups, events, or places through the technical codes of camerawork, editing, mise-en-scene and sound. An understanding of technical codes in moving image media is essential for candidates to answer the question, which was based on an extract from *The One*.

Section B requires candidates to answer one of two optional questions on one media industry they have studied, adapting, and applying their knowledge. Candidates should support their responses using examples taken from contemporary media.

General comments

Centres should encourage candidates to practice responding to exam questions within set times and encourage them to spend an equal amount of time on responses which carry equal marks.

Please ensure that atypical responses which have been word processed are double spaced. This will support the marking process.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Overall, candidates found it very marginally easier to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of media concepts, contexts, and critical debates, using terminology appropriately (AO1), than to analyse media products by applying knowledge and understanding of theoretical and creative approaches to explain how meaning is created, supported with relevant textual evidence (AO2).

There was evidence of sound understanding of some technical elements, with most candidates able to identify camera shots, angles, movement, and composition, as well as mise-en-scene. Candidates were less successful in identifying sound, and editing. Some candidates simply described technical elements featured within the extract and did not develop their answers much further when it came to exploring meaning. There was also more focus on narrative devices, such as enigma codes, foreshadowing, and suspense/tension. This limited opportunities from exploring representations. Alternatively, some candidates could identify meaning, but lacked the accurate use of technical language, and ability to use examples from the extract to underpin their analysis. Often, and particularly towards the end of their response/the second half of the extract, candidates merely narrated what is seen on screen. This led to more limited responses. Centres should focus on the demands of the mark scheme, ensuring that candidates are aware of how to analyse all the ways in which meaning is constructed through technical elements within texts. This analysis should be underpinned with appropriate media terminology, and an appropriate level of knowledge and understanding of contexts and critical debates, including key theories.

In good answers, candidates were able to analyse the way that meaning was created within the extract from *The One* using a range of appropriate technical terminology and elements. Popular themes were class, gender, relationships, ethnicity, and genre. Stronger candidates made appropriate comments about representation of people (gender/class/ethnicity stereotypes; dynamics and relationships), and places (dystopian). They were able to link media theory (binary opposition) to their analysis organically, and used terms, such as connotation/denotation fluently. There were some effective discussions of the oppositional

representations of the two female leads in relation to their respective ethnicity, class, wealth, and relationships as well as gender stereotypes. Power (control/manipulation and truth/appearances), class, gender and genre were the main points of discussion for this extract. Theories which were applied successfully are Laura Mulvey's male gaze theory (and the female gaze), Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, and Levi Strauss' theory of binary opposition. Stuart Hall's theory of representation, Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of semiotics and Roland Bathes theoretical perspectives on semiotics, signs and structuralism are important theories (although not essential) for candidates to understand and be able to utilise as tools to support their analytical skills. These theories were sometimes referenced although more successful candidates applied them within points of analysis.

Weaker candidates simply described/identified the camera shots, angles, movement, composition, sound and editing techniques used within the extract, often following the chronological order of the extract. Candidates who did this generally failed to explain how shot types created meaning, and so they were weaker. Points were repeated throughout, or analysis reduced to simple points. There was also inaccurate use of terminology (for example using the term 'jump cut' instead of 'cut' or misspelling diegetic). Weaker responses tended to take each micro element and address it separately, whereas more sophisticated responses usually employed a more synthesized and holistic approach to the analysis of individuals/groups, themes, or meanings. Theory, and in particular Laura Mulvey's male gaze theory was superficially applied to many responses. Most candidates missed the opportunity to appropriately expand on the historical male gaze theory by utilising the female gaze and considering how appropriately the theory can be applied to modern texts. There were also missed opportunities to identify how the parallel narratives utilized binary opposition to generate meaning. Many candidates would explain terminology, or theories, rather than applying them to an analysis of the extract.

Section B

Within **Section B**, **Question 3** was more popular than **Question 2**.

Film was far and away the most popular media area on which candidates chose to focus their response followed by video games, and music with only a handful of responses relating to print or radio and podcasts. This may reflect candidate's own consumption preferences, or reflect the instruction provided by their centre. The most successful responses were able to respond to the question by relating their discussions on media institutions, the nature of audience consumption and the relationships between audiences and institutions with reference to more than one media area and multiple examples.

There were some weak responses without any case study material at all, evidencing little more than a layman's understanding of the key concepts of audiences and institutions. These responses did not successfully address the question, providing a generalised overview and superfluous facts rather than demonstrating their knowledge and understanding of the key concepts, contexts and critical debates relating to audience and industry. The use of technical vocabulary was less frequent for **Section B**, in comparison to **Section A**, and often entirely missing from responses. Centres should support candidates to develop technical vocabulary in relation to industry and audiences; successfully used examples are conglomerate, oligopoly, cross-platform marketing, demographic, diversification, genre, hegemony, intellectual property, platform, and franchise. Centres should also support candidates to engage more critically with a variety of media theories to ensure that they are understood and can be successfully applied, where appropriate.

Another observation with **Section B** was the pattern of presenting an independent (international and domestic, or acclaimed and successful/limited success) and a blockbuster/tent pole/franchise product as case studies (such as Disney/Marvel's franchises). Candidates who presented information from only 2 – 3 case studies limited themselves with the depth of their response. Candidates who perform well are often given more freedom to research each media area outlined in the specification and encouraged to build their own resources and case studies from each area (and perhaps even across various industries), allowing them to be better equipped to meaningfully engage with the questions in **Section B**.

Question 2

Explain the significance of an example of convergence in the media area you have studied.

Stronger candidates were able to develop a critical engagement and discussion of convergence within at least one media area. The most common responses discussed how convergence benefitted industry through access to expensive/advanced (converged) technologies, or a more cost-effective use of technology leading to higher quality production and more popular products, and increased audience awareness/consumption and higher profits/increased revenue. Appropriate references were also made to cross-media convergence. Candidates supported their discussion with points of evidence from their case studies, often forming counter points/arguments most successfully through their understanding of how convergence is utilised by large conglomerates, such as Disney/Marvel (Black Panther: Wakanda Forever). Avatar: Way of the Water provided a successfully utilised example for film as did Spotify for music, radio and podcasts. Terminology was used fluently by stronger candidates, demonstrating a good understanding. Some candidates were able to discuss multiple industries in relation to convergence, which was a very appropriate response to this question. When used correctly, key theories (Curran and Seaton, Hesmondhalgh) strengthened candidates' responses.

Weaker candidates referenced case studies that were not recent or relevant, and their knowledge and understanding of media concepts were limited. Terminology was not used fluently. They focused on facts, without providing any analysis, often providing a historical overview limited to facts such as costs and box office revenue. They evidenced no (or a weak) understanding of wider contexts or critical debates. There was a lack of focus on responding to the question. They did not engage with any theories, or superficially referenced older and less relevant theories, such as the Hypodermic Model.

Question 3

‘Media consumption is an old-fashioned idea, audiences do not simply ‘consume’ media anymore.’ How far do you agree with this statement?

More candidates opted to respond to this question.

Stronger candidates were able to discuss media consumption in relation to audience concepts through theory and discussion of examples within industry. Popular discussions related to different patterns of consumption and how this has changed (individualism, niche interests, prosumerism) in relation to the development of industry (streaming, convergent online devices, global audiences) within a specific media area. Disney/Marvel's Black Widow (2021), Everything Everywhere All at Once (2022), Parasite (2019), Squid Game (2021) and a range of YouTube/TikTok influencers were popular and successfully utilised examples. Successful candidates supported their discussion with points of evidence from their case studies, often forming counter points/arguments most successfully through their understanding of prosumerism and niche interest (Shirkey), fandoms (Jenkins), uses and gratifications (Blumer and Katz), audience reception theory (Hall).

Weaker candidates focused on facts in relation to their case studies or media area without providing any analysis, or demonstration of an understanding of wider context. They did not engage with any theories, or their engagement in theories was not accurate. There was a tendency for candidates to misunderstand the concept of ‘active’ audiences (presuming that this is a much more recent development, and only related to current technologies such as online streaming). There was a lack of focus on responding to the question. They may have evidenced a weak understanding of terms and concepts, such as audience response theories and the independent sector and their products (media as a creative, rather than commercial endeavour).

MEDIA STUDIES

Paper 9607/23
Media Texts and Contexts 23

Key messages

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Section B requires candidates to answer one of two optional questions on one media industry they have studied, adapting, and applying their knowledge. Candidates should support their responses using examples taken from contemporary media.

General comments

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Comments on specific questions

Section A

Overall, candidates found it very marginally easier to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of media concepts, contexts, and critical debates, using terminology appropriately (AO1), than to analyse media products by applying knowledge and understanding of theoretical and creative approaches to explain how meaning is created, supported with relevant textual evidence (AO2).

There was evidence of sound understanding of some technical elements, with most candidates able to identify camera shots, angles, movement, and composition, as well as mise-en-scene. Candidates were less successful in identifying sound, and editing. Some candidates simply described technical elements featured within the extract and did not develop their answers much further when it came to exploring meaning. There was also more focus on narrative devices, such as enigma codes, foreshadowing, and suspense/tension. This limited opportunities from exploring representations. Alternatively, some candidates could identify meaning, but lacked the accurate use of technical language, and ability to use examples from the extract to underpin their analysis. Often, and particularly towards the end of their response/the second half of the extract, candidates merely narrated what is seen on screen. This led to more limited responses. Centres should focus on the demands of the mark scheme, ensuring that candidates are aware of how to analyse all the ways in which meaning is constructed through technical elements within texts. This analysis should be underpinned with appropriate media terminology, and an appropriate level of knowledge and understanding of contexts and critical debates, including key theories.

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representations of the two female leads in relation to their respective ethnicity, class, wealth, and relationships as well as gender stereotypes. Power (control/manipulation and truth/appearances), class, gender and genre were the main points of discussion for this extract. Theories which were applied successfully are Laura Mulvey's male gaze theory (and the female gaze), Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, and Levi Strauss' theory of binary opposition. Stuart Hall's theory of representation, Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of semiotics and Roland Bathes theoretical perspectives on semiotics, signs and structuralism are important theories (although not essential) for candidates to understand and be able to utilise as tools to support their analytical skills. These theories were sometimes referenced although more successful candidates applied them within points of analysis.

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Section B

Within **Section B**, **Question 3** was more popular than **Question 2**.

Film was far and away the most popular media area on which candidates chose to focus their response followed by video games, and music with only a handful of responses relating to print or radio and podcasts. This may reflect candidate's own consumption preferences, or reflect the instruction provided by their centre. The most successful responses were able to respond to the question by relating their discussions on media institutions, the nature of audience consumption and the relationships between audiences and institutions with reference to more than one media area and multiple examples.

There were some weak responses without any case study material at all, evidencing little more than a layman's understanding of the key concepts of audiences and institutions. These responses did not successfully address the question, providing a generalised overview and superfluous facts rather than demonstrating their knowledge and understanding of the key concepts, contexts and critical debates relating to audience and industry. The use of technical vocabulary was less frequent for **Section B**, in comparison to **Section A**, and often entirely missing from responses. Centres should support candidates to develop technical vocabulary in relation to industry and audiences; successfully used examples are conglomerate, oligopoly, cross-platform marketing, demographic, diversification, genre, hegemony, intellectual property, platform, and franchise. Centres should also support candidates to engage more critically with a variety of media theories to ensure that they are understood and can be successfully applied, where appropriate.

Another observation with **Section B** was the pattern of presenting an independent (international and domestic, or acclaimed and successful/limited success) and a blockbuster/tent pole/franchise product as case studies (such as Disney/Marvel's franchises). Candidates who presented information from only 2 – 3 case studies limited themselves with the depth of their response. Candidates who perform well are often given more freedom to research each media area outlined in the specification and encouraged to build their own resources and case studies from each area (and perhaps even across various industries), allowing them to be better equipped to meaningfully engage with the questions in **Section B**.

Question 2

Explain the significance of an example of convergence in the media area you have studied.

Stronger candidates were able to develop a critical engagement and discussion of convergence within at least one media area. The most common responses discussed how convergence benefitted industry through access to expensive/advanced (converged) technologies, or a more cost-effective use of technology leading to higher quality production and more popular products, and increased audience awareness/consumption and higher profits/increased revenue. Appropriate references were also made to cross-media convergence. Candidates supported their discussion with points of evidence from their case studies, often forming counter points/arguments most successfully through their understanding of how convergence is utilised by large conglomerates, such as Disney/Marvel (Black Panther: Wakanda Forever). Avatar: Way of the Water provided a successfully utilised example for film as did Spotify for music, radio and podcasts. Terminology was used fluently by stronger candidates, demonstrating a good understanding. Some candidates were able to discuss multiple industries in relation to convergence, which was a very appropriate response to this question. When used correctly, key theories (Curran and Seaton, Hesmondhalgh) strengthened candidates' responses.

Weaker candidates referenced case studies that were not recent or relevant, and their knowledge and understanding of media concepts were limited. Terminology was not used fluently. They focused on facts, without providing any analysis, often providing a historical overview limited to facts such as costs and box office revenue. They evidenced no (or a weak) understanding of wider contexts or critical debates. There was a lack of focus on responding to the question. They did not engage with any theories, or superficially referenced older and less relevant theories, such as the Hypodermic Model.

Question 3

'Media consumption is an old-fashioned idea, audiences do not simply 'consume' media anymore.' How far do you agree with this statement?

More candidates opted to respond to this question.

Stronger candidates were able to discuss media consumption in relation to audience concepts through theory and discussion of examples within industry. Popular discussions related to different patterns of consumption and how this has changed (individualism, niche interests, prosumerism) in relation to the development of industry (streaming, convergent online devices, global audiences) within a specific media area. Disney/Marvel's Black Widow (2021), Everything Everywhere All at Once (2022), Parasite (2019), Squid Game (2021) and a range of YouTube/TikTok influencers were popular and successfully utilised examples. Successful candidates supported their discussion with points of evidence from their case studies, often forming counter points/arguments most successfully through their understanding of prosumerism and niche interest (Shirkey), fandoms (Jenkins), uses and gratifications (Blumer and Katz), audience reception theory (Hall).

Weaker candidates focused on facts in relation to their case studies or media area without providing any analysis, or demonstration of an understanding of wider context. They did not engage with any theories, or their engagement in theories was not accurate. There was a tendency for candidates to misunderstand the concept of 'active' audiences (presuming that this is a much more recent development, and only related to current technologies such as online streaming). There was a lack of focus on responding to the question. They may have evidenced a weak understanding of terms and concepts, such as audience response theories and the independent sector and their products (media as a creative, rather than commercial endeavour).

MEDIA STUDIES

Paper 9607/03
Advanced Portfolio

Key messages

In order to successfully complete this coursework component, candidates should:

- Complete one of the four set briefs.
- Keep a detailed blog showing the development of the project, their final three artefacts meeting the requirements of their chosen brief, and a critical reflection upon their work in essay format.
- Aim to complete these elements to a high standard, demonstrating knowledge and understanding of the key concepts and applying them through skilled use of media tools.
- Reflect upon their work both in blog posts and the critical reflection essay.
- Ensure the blog remains online and easily accessible throughout the examination series.

Individual candidate record cards must be completed with clear comments to show how marks have been arrived at for each assessment objective and strand. If candidates have worked in groups comments must reflect individual contributions to projects.

When using Submit for Assessment, centres should ensure that all of the required forms (Coursework Assessment Summary Form (CASF) and Individual candidate record cards (ICRC)), are uploaded correctly, that they are clearly legible, that all necessary paperwork is uploaded, and that if their entries are over ten, they select and upload the ICRCs of an appropriate sample as set out by Cambridge. It would also aid moderation if centres hyper-linked all of their candidates to a centre web page or blog, the URL address of which should be clearly stated on the ICRCs of each candidate. Moderation continues to be delayed considerably due to illegible URLs.

General comments

As we come out of the pandemic, centres and their cohorts appear to be returning to 'normality'. The freeing from major restrictions seems to have inspired many candidates to explore locations beyond their classrooms to produce materials for their media texts. This has resulted in the creation of a wide range of very professional productions for this component. Many candidates continue to present detailed and focused research into appropriate existing media, using skills, knowledge and understanding gained over the whole course to effectively plan and construct their own products. Most demonstrated good levels of skill in the use of media tools in video, print and online production. Critical reflections demonstrated knowledge and understanding of the subject, and the most effective were able to clearly reflect upon their own work. The quality of centre assessment has also, once again, seen an improvement over the last series and centres are to be congratulated on their professionalism.

Comments on specific tasks

Blogs

Some centres produced blog hubs (a centre blog or web page with candidates' names and numbers hyperlinked to their work) demonstrating good practice, however, the number who did not seems to continue to increase. This is a mystery to Moderators, who make this simple request year upon year. Even if there are only two entries the use of a hub helps teachers, as well as Moderators, monitor candidates' work. All centres should follow this good practice and clearly transcribe the URL of the hub on the Individual candidate record cards.

It is important that centres check that within candidate blogs, and the blog hub, all links are working and that the Moderator is given access to all documents throughout the moderation period. Once again, Moderators have spent too much time chasing centres for access to work. This series Google documents have been of particular concern. More and more centres are buying into the powerful tools that Google offer but centres need to ensure that built in privacy options do not prevent candidate work from being accessed. Candidates are rightly enthused by the possibility of embedded apps in their blogs but are often unaware that they have them set to private or available only to those with a Google account. It is the responsibility of the centre to ensure that candidates are aware of this and that they make their work available to all who have access to their blog. Moderators will not use personal accounts to sign in to Google, or any other platform. If data protection is an issue, then it is recommended that centres password protect their blog hub and make candidate blogs only available via the link from the hub. Passwords should always be made available to the Moderator.

The most effective blogs used a linear format, organising the blog so that the earliest post is last and the most recent post is first. The package of products and the critical reflection should be the first thing seen when opening up the blog. All elements should be clearly labelled whether through the use of menus, tags, or headers. The most successful blogs use a simple template with all posts visible to read without having to click through 'read more' links.

Candidates who documented the whole process of production in detail tended to be most successful. They showed clear evidence of research in all aspects of the production, clearly documenting and justifying the choices and decisions they made – including the ideas at each stage that they rejected. The least successful were simply diaries of what the candidate had done, with little or no reflection on process or outcome. Some centres continue to encourage candidates to post all their class or examination related work to their blog as well as their Portfolio work. This is to be discouraged, as work for other components cannot be assessed as part of the Advanced Portfolio.

At this level a substantial amount of evidence, in a variety of forms (photos, video, articles, audio, presentation, surveys, comparisons, annotations, text, mock ups, tests, drafts and roughs), is needed to illustrate an effective understanding of the core concepts. Some candidates are presenting in excess of fifty meaningful blog posts. At A level a small number of 'thin' posts is insufficient to earn the marks that some centres continue to give candidates.

Critical reflections

In the mark scheme Assessment Objective (AO) 2 draws heavily upon evidence presented in the Critical Reflection. Therefore, candidates need to fully address the four set questions. These should not be dealt with separately but integrated into a fluent essay style response. Too many candidates are still ignoring the requirement to produce an essay and are answering each question individually, sometimes with the question as a title or header.

The mark scheme clearly states across all levels that there should be a degree of engagement with **all** questions. If candidates do not engage with **all** of the questions they self-penalise, and this should be reflected in the centre's marking.

The syllabus requires that candidates produce an 'evaluative essay' therefore centres should prepare candidates for this and discourage simple responses to the four questions set out as four paragraphs under the question heading. Some candidates continue to struggle with producing 'around 1000 words' of continuous prose. Centres should advise candidates that this word count should be seen as an advisory minimum. Candidates who use fewer than 1000 words are liable to self-penalise through lack of depth of reflection. Candidates should focus on presenting a well structured and argued reflective and analytical essay rather than worrying about the word count.

Some candidates developed their critical thinking through application of their media skills, making effective use of captioned images from their productions to support the content of their essays. This is good practice and to be encouraged.

The strongest critical reflections tended to be from candidates who had kept the most reflective records of their research, planning and production. Successful candidates thus answered the questions using clear examples from all stages of their production.

Research and planning

The third strand of AO3 relates directly to the candidate's research and planning, and how this has led to the construction of the final products. Therefore, all research and planning materials should be posted to candidate blogs and made accessible to the Moderator.

Candidate blogs should include a range of research and planning materials posted over the duration of the project which illustrate the process of production from research and initial ideas to the final production packages and critical reflection. The best research materials demonstrated a range of textual analysis with focused and annotated examples. It is important that candidates include the exploration of similar products aimed at similar audiences to those chosen for their production tasks. In the strongest work the research was revisited at stages throughout the production and reflection process, for the purpose of comparison and to demonstrate how conventions were used or deliberately broken. Audience research was strongest when learners went beyond quantitative based questionnaires, which are rarely as useful as qualitative, and analysed how target audiences actually engage with products. Candidates were rewarded when they explored multiple ideas for their product and then documented the progression and development of those into pre-production documents.

There was a range of excellent planning and development presented, especially where candidates had recorded evidence that enabled them to reflect and make informed choices about the way forward for their productions. Centres could continue to encourage learners to include evidence such as: script readings, screen tests for actors, location pre shoots, practice shots or lighting tests, costume fittings and ideas, behind the scenes videos or photos, production vlogs (video logs), and 'making-of' video(s). Candidates could also be encouraged to make photos or video on the set and annotate them with reflection of their own roles. Work was almost always improved when candidates gained feedback on rough cuts and in many strong portfolios this was done on a number of occasions for each of the major and minor tasks.

Centres are reminded that research and planning should not just reflect the process of production of the major task. The briefs are to produce a package of work; therefore, candidates should research and plan the major task, the two minor tasks, and branding across the products.

Production

Products are primarily assessed across the first two strands of AO3. Marks should be awarded for the application of technical skills and how these are used to communicate meaning. Products should demonstrate clear knowledge and understanding of media language and key concepts. All three products should be assessed together as a package. This should be clearly communicated to candidates as many focus all their efforts on the main product and neglect the minor ones.

The most successful production work built on previous skills, knowledge and understanding. Candidates produced packages of products demonstrating consistency in style, purpose and quality between the major and the minor tasks. Strong examples paid close attention to simulating form, style and generic conventions across video, print, and online work as well as identifying a clear branding strategy.

Of the four briefs (Music Promotion Package, Film Promotion Package, Documentary Package, and Short Film Package) the Music Promotion Package continues to be the most popular. The least popular for this series was the Documentary package. The Short Film Package seems to be declining in popularity despite some of the best work being produced for this brief. The Film Promotion Package continues to gain in popularity, but the quality of work produced continues to be weaker than for the other briefs.

Major video products

All briefs contain a major video product. These are a music video, two film trailers, an extract from an original TV documentary, or a complete short film

There were some creative approaches to music videos and many were of a professional standard. These employed a range of forms with the most popular, and effective, being a mixture of narrative and performance. Weaker productions tended to be simple narratives accompanied by music. The most successful had the star persona/s to the fore and were able to carry this 'branding' across to their minor products.

For the film trailer products most candidates continue to choose to produce a teaser trailer plus a theatre trailer. This is an effective approach, although some theatre trailers were on the short side. Codes and

conventions were often researched and applied, although some teaser trailers were simply short versions of the theatre trailer. Distinct material should be produced for the purpose of each type of trailer. Candidates working on this brief often presented too much of the narrative of the film they were promoting, failing to select and film appropriate extracts. Weaker productions tended to present over long extracts from one part of the film.

TV Documentary extracts were of mixed quality. The most successful were conscious of the fact that they were extracts and candidates often contextualised these in their blogs. Codes and conventions were adhered to, and it was often clear that research into theories of documentary production had been explored and applied. Weaker examples tended to attempt too much and started to resemble full short documentaries. They were often poorly researched and edited with long shots of rambling and/or repetitive information.

There were some powerful short films with thoughtful narratives, conscious choices of mise-en-scene, and well-considered casting. Weaker products tended to try to produce a short feature film rather than treating the product as a distinct genre in its own right.

Centres are reminded of the importance of producing risk assessments for all video products. It remains a concern that many products contain scenes with weapons, some of which are clearly either real or very good replicas. Products often contain vehicles driven at speed and sometimes dangerous stunts which centres should discourage. Centres should also consider the wellbeing of their candidates and discourage scenes depicting drug use or suicide.

Some centres where English is not the first language are choosing to present products in their first language. This is acceptable for video products as long as English subtitles are used and the rest of the portfolio is completed in English. There was some effective subtitling this series, especially of the short films.

Minor print products

Whilst there were some excellent minor print products conforming to appropriate conventions and continuing the branding of the major product, many seemed to be an after-thought. Candidates should view the minor products as an integral part of the brief and centres should give marks based on the whole package not just the major task. Candidates should be encouraged to produce original imagery for their print minor product and not use screen grabs from their video product.

The most effective digi-packs (Music Promotion) had clearly been well researched and employed an appropriate number of panels. Images had been produced specifically for the product and usually promoted the star persona/s of the major task. Weaker products often resembled vinyl LP covers with just two panels and limited imagery, often lifted directly from the major product.

Film posters (Film Promotion) were the most effective of the minor tasks with candidates demonstrating a clear understanding of their role in the promotion of the film. The main weakness with some posters was the production of original photographs with some candidates relying on screen grabs from their major products for this purpose.

Magazine articles (Documentary) were often well written and clearly a product of effective research. However, if centres choose to offer this brief, they should offer candidates some instruction in journalistic technique in preparation. Copy should be carefully proofed and formatted appropriately. The most effective products were presented as articles from existing professional magazines or online journals. Articles should contain some original photography as well as clear copy and effective design.

The short film festival postcards (Short Film) tended not to reflect the quality of the films they were promoting. Often candidates would lift an image from their film and place text over it along with the film festival logo. Postcards were presented as single sided and often lacked in detail. Some candidates confused postcards with posters and ended up producing a mixed brief which is not allowed by the syllabus. The most successful products again demonstrated a clear link to detailed research, employed some original imagery, and considered both sides of the card.

Social Media pages

All briefs require the production of a social media page as part of the promotional package. The page should reflect the overall branding of the main product and be used to demonstrate an understanding of how products target their audiences. Unfortunately, this element continues to be the weakest part of many

packages. A strong major product and minor print product were often let down by a poor social media product. Centres should continue to focus on this element as an area for development.

Social media pages may be 'live' online or produced within templates and embedded in candidate blogs. Centres should ensure the safety of their candidates when using live social media pages and adhere to any local guidelines.

The most popular format for this series was once again Instagram but some candidates used generic templates based on the Facebook or Twitter format. Weaker Instagram constructions consisted of a few images from the main product whilst the most effective Instagram products used original images creatively and made effective use of the comments function. Some candidates created a range of characters to comment on their social media page, this is good practice and demonstrates a good understanding of audience. The most effective products were clearly promotional and reflected the branding of the main product, the weaker products simply posted a few images from the main product with little or no sense of purpose.

MEDIA STUDIES

Paper 9607/41
Critical Perspectives 41

Key messages

In order to do well on this paper, candidates should:

- manage their time effectively – many candidates submitted lengthy **Section A** answers followed by very short responses to **Section B** despite both being worth the same number of marks.
- avoid using case studies that focus on primary texts older than 5 years from the examination date.
- address the set question; a significant number of candidates had clearly learnt a great deal but did not frame their answer to respond to the question which made it difficult for them to access the higher levels.
- have enough case studies to provide a variety of examples rather than relying on one case study. Those who used the same content for every answer struggled to demonstrate enough breadth of understanding.

General comments

The most popular choice of **Section A** optional questions were Regulation and Power; Postmodernism was the highest score on average.

Clearly there is some excellent teaching going on in this subject. It is genuinely pleasing to see responses with a real emphasis on up-to-date media issues from perceptive, engaged and informed candidates. Centres should be congratulated for this. Some centres have adjusted their approach to reflect feedback from previous sessions resulting in far fewer lengthy historical accounts which has been a concern particularly in Regulation and Ecology. The syllabus states that case studies should feature a majority of contemporary texts, although any text may be used to give historical context. The term contemporary is used to mean a text which was first published no more than approximately five years before the examination year, which for this series meant primary texts should have been released no earlier than 2018.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

Evaluate the benefits of media regulation.

Candidates demonstrated a reasonably good level of knowledge of regulatory structures but there was a general lack of critical edge and a tendency for candidates to simply express corporate lines about the effectiveness/efficacy of regulatory institutions. There were some good discussions about different countries and the pressures exerted by dictatorships on media freedoms. In general, candidates need to be critically sharper and less trusting especially of the social media self-regulation regimes. In terms of theory rather surprisingly the psychologist Bandura 'Bobo Doll' remains ubiquitous. There is a substantial body of subject-specific, accessible, specialist academic work in the field of Media Effects including (but not limited to) the work of Barker, Livingstone, Petley, Gauntlett, Kermode, and Byron. Weaker candidates often made simplistic assertions that in the past audiences were more easily influenced than contemporary ones were frequent, possibly a misreading of active/passive audience. For a nominal 30 mins response there is often too much emphasis on history (see above) which might be a consequence of a focus on the role of BBFC/IPSO.

Question 2

‘There is no difference between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture in postmodern media.’ To what extent do you agree with this statement?

Candidates often used terminology clearly and accurately, and most were able to cite this learning in response to this question. However, the demonstration of understanding was less successful. Refreshingly there was a real engagement with contemporary examples, including *Everything Everywhere All At Once*, *Tenet* and *Bridgerton*, the latter forming the basis of many excellent responses with insightful, informed and detailed analysis of its postmodern approach to soundtrack in key scenes. This was frequently paired with critiques of the *Black Mirror* episode *Rachel, Jack and Ashley Too* enabling stronger candidates to fulfil the criteria for the highest marks. Weaker candidates still relied on old examples (*Pulp Fiction*, *Inglourious Basterds* or *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*); centres are reminded that the syllabus does not allow for these to be used as the primary examples.

Question 3

‘Now that everyone has a voice in the media, everyone has equal power to influence.’ How far do you agree with this statement?

The ‘Power and the media’ question demands a critical edge and critique of power structures present in both the media and wider society. The theories of Althusser and Gramsci around hegemony were explored in better answers. Less successful responses relied upon a conviction that social media platforms have allowed everyone to become an influencer relegating ‘Big Tech’ to merely neutral facilitators for uncensored free speech. Many cited Kelly, Jenkins, Shirky’s work on prosumers. Morozov/Buckingham’s critique of such utopian/technological determinist views serves as very useful counter arguments to such ideas. For both this question and the Media regulation question some candidates had good examples but struggled to connect these to media debates. Weaker candidates were those who abounded in personal opinions with little more than a layman’s understanding, and they often struggled to use relevant examples. Clearer delineation of which debates and studies to mobilise when they make their arguments would be useful.

Section B

Question 4

Explain what you think is the most significant change in the media in recent years.

As mentioned above, a significant minority of candidates did not manage their time effectively, producing very limited responses to this question despite responding well to those in **Section A**. Pleasingly, there were fewer lengthy histories of Media Ecology (centred on the work of Marshall McLuhan/Neil Postman) which leave little time to address the contemporary issues or the focus of the question.

The most common approach was to identify technology as the significant change. However, some sophisticated responses addressed the many ongoing, varied forces of change acting simultaneously upon the media ecosystem. Often examiners see data used without comment, whereas one excellent response pointed out the top-rated BBC programme counts viewers in their tens of millions compared to YouTube’s billions of monthly users. This formed part of a very eloquent observation on prosumers – a term used throughout the paper by most candidates to illustrate how diverse, minority/niche voices are empowered by social media. It would be interesting to explore whether such creators as Mr Beast might be considered part of the mainstream. Debates and critiques around technological determinism as offered by Morozov were mentioned by a small sample of candidates, and these proved to be a very rewarding starting point for this area. Some weaker responses merely use terminology without demonstrating their understanding through exemplification, particularly such key terms as Vertical/Horizontal integration and Technological Convergence. Sophisticated understanding and analysis of theory and examples were rewarded with the highest marks.

MEDIA STUDIES

Paper 9607/42
Critical Perspectives 42

Key messages

In order to do well on this paper, candidates should:

- manage their time effectively – many candidates submitted lengthy **Section A** answers followed by very short responses to **Section B** despite both being worth the same number of marks.
- avoid using case studies that focus on primary texts older than 5 years from the examination date.
- address the set question; a significant number of candidates had clearly learnt a great deal but did not frame their answer to respond to the question which made it difficult for them to access the higher levels.
- have enough case studies to provide a variety of examples rather than relying on one case study. Those who used the same content for every answer struggled to demonstrate enough breadth of understanding.

General comments

In **Section A**, the most popular optional questions were Regulation and Power; Postmodernism was the highest score on average.

Clearly there is some excellent teaching going on in this subject. It is genuinely pleasing to see much improved responses this year – with a real emphasis on up to date media issues from perceptive, engaged and informed candidates. Centres should be congratulated for this. Some centres have adjusted their approach to reflect feedback from previous sessions resulting in far fewer lengthy historical accounts which has been a concern particularly in Regulation and Ecology. The syllabus states that case studies should feature a majority of contemporary texts, although any text may be used to give historical context. The term contemporary is used to mean a text which was first published no more than approximately five years before the examination year, which for this series meant primary texts should have been released no earlier than 2018.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

Assess the idea that media regulation is always designed to prevent harm.

The knowledge of regulatory structures was once again shown to be generally good, but too many candidates were simply repeating corporate lines about the effectiveness/efficacy of regulatory institutions without digging into their effectiveness. A sharper critical approach to thoroughly examine the stance of regulatory bodies using well-sourced examples would help candidates to access the upper ranges of the mark schemes. That said, there were some good discussions about the relative levels of freedom in which the media can operate in different countries and the pressures exerted by dictatorships. Candidates would be well served by being critically sharper and less trusting, especially of the self-regulation approach adopted by social media regimes.

Rather surprisingly the psychologist Bandura 'Bobo Doll' experiment was frequently referred to, often to little success. There is a substantial body of subject specific, accessible, specialist academic work in the field of Media Effects including (but not limited to) the work of Barker, Livingstone, Petley, Gauntlett, Kermode, Byron. Weaker candidates often made simplistic assertions that in the past audiences were more easily

influenced than contemporary ones were frequent, possibly a misreading of active/passive audience. For a nominal 30 mins response there is often too much emphasis on history (see above) which might be a consequence of a focus on the role of BBFC/IPSO.

Question 2

‘The key characteristic of postmodern media is complexity.’ To what extent do you agree with this statement?

Candidates generally engaged with the question well, using appropriate terminology effectively. Weaker candidates still relied on old examples for primary texts such as *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, *Pulp Fiction* or *Inglourious Basterds* despite the fact that these texts clearly do not meet the requirements of the syllabus to be released no more than 5 years before the examination year. Thankfully, many candidates used a range of texts when exploring this question, such as *Everything Everywhere All At Once*, *Tenet* and *Bridgerton*, the latter forming the basis of many excellent responses with insightful, informed and detailed analysis of its postmodern approach to soundtracks in key scenes. The series *Black Mirror* again proved to be a useful source of evidence, with the episode *Rachel, Jack and Ashley Too* being used to good effect by stronger candidates. When candidates showed a good understanding of relevant theorists, used media terminology confidently, exemplified their response with contemporary examples and engaged thoroughly with the question, the higher ranges of the mark scheme were often awarded.

Question 3

‘Only a few people get to decide what is ‘true’ in the media.’ How far do you agree with this statement?

Successful candidates approached this question with a clear understanding and critique of the power structures present in both the media and wider society, exploring their examples critically to fully develop a response. The theories of Althusser and Gramsci around hegemony were often presented within stronger responses. Conversely, candidates that relied upon the notion that social media platforms have liberated the truth while relegating Big Tech to merely neutral facilitators for uncensored free speech tended to not appreciate the complexity of the current debates, and often struggled to reach the upper ranges of the mark scheme.

Many responses cited Kelly, Jenkins, Shirky’s work on prosumers, some with more success than others. Morozov/Buckingham’s critique of such utopian/technological determinist views serves as a very useful counter arguments to such ideas. For both this question and the Media regulation question some candidates had good examples but struggled to connect these to media debates. Weaker candidates were those who abounded in personal opinions with little more than a layman’s understanding, and they often struggled to use relevant examples. Clearer delineation of which debates and studies to mobilise when they make their arguments would be useful.

Section B

Question 4

Explain why people’s personal data is so valuable to media companies.

As mentioned above, a significant minority of candidates did not manage their time effectively, producing very limited responses to this question despite responding well to those in **Section A**. Pleasingly, there were fewer lengthy histories of Media Ecology (centred on the work of Marshall McLuhan/Neil Postman) which leave little time to address the contemporary issues or the focus of the question.

There was a recognition that data was highly valuable and frequent reference to the idea that ‘if the service is free you are the product’. Candidates used this question as an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge of a variety of media and communication theorists and practitioners but often failed to connect this scholarship with the actual point they were making. This was perhaps most evident where a clear question has been asked about personal data and the challenges of the ‘datafication’ in society. Some candidates were able to show that they understood the topic and had learned about it, but missed the opportunity to reflect about the consequences of the collection of personal data.

Most candidates explored the idea of large companies offering personalised recommendations (e.g. Twitter for you etc.) in order to enhance the user experience almost as if this were a gift from a benevolent company. Surveillance Capitalism (Zuboff) was cited in some excellent responses which examined the darker side of

the inter relationship between audience and industry. The use of data in micro targeted advertising with particular reference to political campaigning and mis/dis-information was successful where candidates avoided simplistic assertions e.g. Cambridge Analytica delivered Brexit/Trump. On the other hand, political polarisation and Filter bubbles (Pariser) were handled with greater subtlety as were the concerns around Dobbs decision and its implications for women using medical apps in some US states. Successful use of theorists included a sensitive exploration of Lanier's 10 reasons to delete your social media; Gerbner's cultivation and Two Step Flow using YouTube algorithmic targeting as a result of user supplied data to radicalise or send audiences down a rabbit hole. Sophisticated understanding and analysis of theory and examples were rewarded with the highest marks.