



Questions matter



A-level

Media Studies

7572/2 Media Two

Report on the Examination

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Overview

Once again students responded very positively to Paper 2, taking advantage of the opportunity to develop analysis and argument across the extended response questions. It is really positive to see so much engagement with – often complex - media theories and concepts. It was noticeable that across the paper, students were usually question focused, addressing the particular assessment objectives, demonstrating the ability to evaluate theory and to draw judgments and conclusions. At the top levels there was a lot of evidence of students testing ideas in a sophisticated way and there was very little evidence of rote responses at any level. This was indicative of the way students addressed the question set rather than repeating facts about the CSPs. Many students produced responses which really demonstrated the importance of Media Studies as a subject which can critically engage with contemporary, significant issues.

As noted in previous reports, the theoretical frameworks (media language, representation, industry, audience) are the central focus of the specification with the study of the CSPs there to help explore and ‘test’ the approaches. It is important that students can develop arguments, evaluate, and make judgements about theoretical approaches and concepts, in order to achieve the higher levels. The improvement in the balanced and meaningful use of the set products (CSPs) noted in last year’s report continued in this session. Theories and approaches are also being intelligently embedded in the responses to develop arguments, rather than as an add on. It was also encouraging to see how well students were responding to the new products which were assessed for the first time on this paper.

Students should be reassured that the space provided in the answer booklet should be sufficient to produce a very successful response. Students should make sure their work is focused on the question and that it is analytical rather than descriptive.

The following provides information on the responses to each question. Please note that there is also detailed indicative content for each question included in the mark scheme, available on the secure area of the AQA website: Centre Services.

Q1

Analyse Figure 1 using the following structuralist ideas:

- **deconstruction**
- **cultural codes.**

This question assessed AO2 1, which meant students had to:

Apply knowledge and understanding of the theoretical framework of media studies to analyse media products through the use of academic theories.

(9 marks).

Question 1 is the only short answer question on the paper and will always test knowledge and understanding of the media language area of the theoretical framework. The contextual information is deliberately kept to a minimum and no prior knowledge of the product is required (though it will always relate to one of the forms assessed on this paper).

Students were required to use the structuralist approaches of deconstruction and cultural codes to analyse the magazine cover. Many students were clearly comfortable with these ideas, using the binary references to gender (the feminine skirt, the masculine torso) to question the conventional hierarchies and binary representations found in media products. This led to thoughtful analysis which focused on the way the *Man About Town* cover reflected a questioning and uncertainty around masculine and feminine codes. Other contrasts, such as the bold forceful title which seemed to connote a traditional male dominance, was compared to the look of uncertainty or pleading on Manu Rios's face. Students were also able to draw on their understanding of magazine cover conventions to discuss the way it deconstructed the form, analysing the lack of cover lines and the mise en scene which foregrounded the set as another construction. This analysis led very easily into a discussion of cultural codes around expectations about gender, sexuality, and beauty. There was no requirement for students to deal with the bullet point areas separately (though it was fine if they did) as there was a degree of overlap between the two. Although this is a media language question, the focus on cultural codes did lead several students to introduce theorists such as Butler in their consideration of gender as performance. Students were not penalised for this in itself but they did need to make sure that they didn't then move towards writing an answer simply on the representation of gender.

As a question which assesses media language it was good that so many students rooted their analysis in the specialist terminology of image construction such as types of framing, lighting, and mode of address.

Q2

Theories of the regulation and control of media industries suggest that there is a conflict between protecting the public interest and the needs of media companies.

How valid do you find this argument in explaining the regulation of the media?

You should refer to both of your television Close Study Products in your answer:

Capital **and** *Deutschland 83*

OR

The Responder **and** *Lupin*

OR

No Offence **and** *The Killing*

This question assessed AO1 1b, AO2 2 and AO2 3 which meant students had to:

Demonstrate understanding of the theoretical framework of media (10 marks).
Apply knowledge and understanding of the theoretical framework of media to:
evaluate academic theories (10 marks)
make judgements and draw conclusions (5 marks).

In this question students were assessed on their knowledge and understanding of the industry framework with a focus on theories of regulation and control. Although no specific theorists were identified in the question, many students confidently linked this to the work of Livingstone and Lunt (and Curran and Seaton) in order to address the relevant issues. An effective way into the question was to consider the regulation of public service broadcasting as opposed to commercial companies, as well as identifying the way regulation is affected by new technology and the dominance of global industries. It was notable that students did struggle with defining the concept of the public interest with some valiantly attempting to define it as things that are of interest to the public, such as crime dramas.

Successful answers were based on factual knowledge about who the regulatory bodies in broadcasting are (eg, Ofcom) and how the BBC, Channel Four and DR (if appropriate) meet their remits as public sector broadcasters. All of the CSPs allowed students to consider the structure, aims and regulations of the commercial or public companies which produced and distributed their chosen products. All the examples also included linear broadcasting and streaming (quite often examples where series have moved from one platform to another) which could be used to discuss problems of regulation in the age of mass streaming. Another valuable approach was to structure the response around the concept of the consumer versus the citizen, which was a very useful way to explore ideas, often showing a sophisticated understanding of the relevant arguments.

Many students clearly wanted to analyse their programmes in terms of representation, and this was a valid response to discussing the concept of the public interest in terms of innovation, diversity, challenging dominant ideologies etc, but they did need to be careful to keep question focused. While the dominant argument did seem to be that public service broadcasting was a way of both protecting the public interest and the needs of industry through public funding, some responses did usefully argue that public service broadcasting limited creativity and diversity through a lack of competition.

Other approaches to the question included a more literal definition of protecting the public through age restriction certificates and the watershed, which was linked to subject matter which might be difficult or upsetting. There seemed to be a consensus that commercial companies wouldn't behave against the public interest because that would mean less profit – a conclusion which really needed greater examination.

This was the first year of assessment of the new CSPs – *The Responder* and *Lupin* – and these seemed to have worked very well. The regulation of Netflix in the UK is currently in transition, so it was fine for students to make reference to uncertainty around this and to point out that it currently isn't regulated by a UK body. This – as with the other non-UK produced examples – provided a useful area to discuss the limitations of regulation and control in the contemporary media landscape.

Students do tend to seem less enthusiastic about studying and analysing media in the context of the industry area of the theoretical framework, which is a shame as the debates are central to the present and future of media production and consumption. It was notable that students did struggle at times to provide factual information about regulatory bodies. There was also confusion about the status of Channel Four as a public service broadcaster which could be usefully addressed. Students who were confident about the nature of the regulation of their products were able to access the question in a quite straightforward way as they understood how and why media industries are regulated. A further problem was where students misread the focus of the question and reinterpreted it as a question based on Hesmondhalgh's theory of the way industries minimise risk to maximise profit. Although aspects of this approach could be relevant it wasn't the main focus of the question.

Q3

Media products represent social and cultural contexts to convey values and beliefs.

To what extent does an analysis of the video game Close Study Products *The Sims FreePlay* and *Horizon Forbidden West* support this view?

This question assessed AO2 1 and AO2 3, which meant students had to:

Apply knowledge and understanding of the theoretical framework of media to analyse media products, including in relation to their contexts (15 marks).

Apply knowledge and understanding of the theoretical framework of media to make judgements and draw conclusions (10 marks).

This is always the ‘contexts’ question and this time students needed to draw on their knowledge of the relationships between the representations in media products and the social and cultural contexts in which they’re produced. Students really seemed to relish writing on these texts with the new CSP, *Horizon Forbidden West*, along with *The Sims Freeplay* providing a range of opportunities for discussion and evaluation. Given the enthusiasm for the topic it’s worth reminding students that they need to remain question focused and precise – they can’t include everything they know about the games!

The majority of students were able to identify how the games represented aspects of the society and culture which produced them, focusing on representations of gender, the family, ethnicity, and religion. While some responses remained at this straightforward level, it was important to focus on the second part of the question which asked students to consider how – or whether – the representations conveyed values and beliefs. Many students were keen to question the nature of the relationship identified and to explicitly evaluate the extent to which the representations were a product of an industry’s ideological position. For both examples, students questioned the extent to which representations were progressive or reinforced dominant ideology, leading to judgements and conclusions about which approach was more reflective of society.

Many successful responses used theoretical approaches as examples of how the games reflected social and cultural contexts, with students applying Gauntlett, Butler and Gilroy to argue that audiences were constructing identities through gameplay, in a way which was specific to the time in which the games were produced. Beyond issues of identity there were several interesting responses which interpreted the post-apocalyptic setting of *Horizon Forbidden West* as a reference to concerns about climate change, while the threat of the robot/monster creatures related to fears about rapid changes in technology and particularly AI. With *The Sims Freeplay* students usefully analysed the game as a reinforcement of consumerist, capitalist values.

A further differentiation was evident in those responses which questioned the implicit assumption of the question, arguing that there isn’t a direct relationship between representation and context. The relationship, they argued, was complicated by the nature of audience response; they might reject the values and beliefs contained in the representations or might not notice them at all. Some students suggested that rather than representations being shaped for ideological reasons it was a product of a much more commercial concern, reinforcing the progressive values held by the target audience.

Responses were very interesting about the nature of the game play and how that affected the extent to which representations conveyed values and beliefs – pointing out that in *The Sims Freeplay* audiences had the ability to subvert intended messages.

Both games allowed students to refer to specific real-world examples of the relationship between the game and its contexts – particularly looking at how Gamergate influenced gender representations in *Horizon Forbidden West* and the banning of *The Sims Freeplay* in certain countries due to its representation of gender, family, and sexuality. A particularly sophisticated approach questioned the notion that audiences understood games as reflecting reality at all, using the concept of simulacra to explore the way players experienced games and arguing that one of the pleasures of gameplay is to remove the player from reality.

Q4

If magazines are to survive, producers must target specialised audiences.

To what extent do you agree with this statement?

Refer to the Close Study Products *GQ* and *The Gentlewoman* to support your answer.

This question assessed AO1 1a, AO1 1b and AO2 3, students needed to:

Demonstrate knowledge of the theoretical framework of media (5 marks).

Demonstrate understanding of the theoretical framework of media (10 marks).

Apply knowledge and understanding of the theoretical framework of media to make judgements and draw conclusions (10 marks).

Q4 is the synoptic question (and is identified as such on the cover of the exam booklet) where students are expected to draw on their knowledge across the media frameworks. They aren't expected to address these equally (or even all four) but it is a chance to explore the CSPs across a range of concepts and issues, selecting the aspects which are of most relevance and/or interest to the student.

In this question students were clearly confident about defining what was meant by a specialised audience (it was fine to use the term niche instead of specialised in this context, but on the whole students should be very wary of changing the question terms) with reference to demographics and psychographics. Categorising the audiences as either male or female was too broad – there needed to be consideration of other segments.

While there clearly wasn't one correct answer to the question of the survival of print magazines, most responses did seem to agree that specific targeting – rather than mass appeal – was a sensible strategy. They gave evidence for this in very interesting ways by looking at the wider media landscape, including considering how print magazines were trying to recreate the way online media targeted specialised audiences. This was an interesting approach, leading students to draw on and evaluate the validity of end of audience theories in this context – suggesting perhaps the demise had been overstated. They also considered the specific form of a print magazine, arguing that *The Gentlewoman* in particular could be considered as an artifact, a 'coffee table' magazine to be displayed as part of a statement about the owner's identity.

Students had studied the wealth of information about audience profiles provided by the publishing companies and the stronger answers used this very effectively to define ‘specialised’ and to illustrate how the content of the magazine targeted the intended audience.

In the case of *GQ*, students argued that there had been a deliberate shift from addressing a fairly mainstream audience to a specialised one and that this had been relatively successful in sustaining their circulation figures (even at a much lower level than historically). Evidence for the specialised audience was provided in the overall mode of address of *GQ* which was characterised as artistic, diverse and progressive, so that even conventional aspects such as the use of a film star on the front cover was understood as an alternative aesthetic. Many answers also referenced the representations of gender which were seen to subvert traditional masculinity, reinforced through the visual style. The audience was also defined as specialised in terms of the average income of the readers, with many responses referring with some disbelief to the £850 belt worn by Jonathan Bailey! Students thoughtfully used this change in strategy by *GQ* to question Hesmondhalgh’s theory that media industries succeed by minimising risk, arguing that the alternative and queer representations were challenging and ‘risky’.

Students were confident and knowledgeable in their evaluation of *The Gentlewoman*, considering it to represent a new model of production and distribution. The minimalistic aesthetic and takes on female empowerment, high end fashion and the environment was clearly new and engaging to the students. Strong responses rooted their analysis of the mode of address in a discussion of the independent institution which produced it and the way in which it created a feeling of exclusivity through its members club. Several students argued that it was the exclusivity itself – rather than attempting to appeal to a mass audience – which made the brand successful. It was pleasing that students referred to the material form of the magazine, noting how the expensive paper and art style photography made it a desirable object to place on show in the home.

While the majority of responses agreed with the premise of the statement, there were valid, thoughtful answers which challenged the idea that the print magazine industry would survive in any meaningful way. These were particularly focused on the position of *GQ* as part of a conglomerate which survived through synergy and the exploitation of new online platforms, where the sales of the print magazine were insignificant to its overall profit. This argument included the nuanced observation that the print magazine was used as a ‘loss leader’ for the brand, functioning as a shop window in which to advertise the expensive fashion brands which appreciated the status and connotations of the magazine. This, it was also pointed out, was a strategy only available to an institution like Conde Nast, not the independent publishers of *The Gentlewoman*. This type of evaluative argument, rooted in an understanding of the audience and industry frameworks in order to respond directly to the question focus, shows students working at a very high level and makes for an interesting, stimulating read – a significant achievement within an exam framework.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.