

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 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 some very professional artefacts which demonstrate high levels of skill in the use of media tools. It is also pleasing to see the quality of teaching and learning that has obviously taken place over the year.

On the whole, centres are engaging well with this component and candidates once more produced some excellent work, demonstrating detailed research into existing magazine pages 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 continue to use Submit for Assessment reasonably effectively, but issues still haven't been fully addressed. Moderation continues to be delayed considerably due to missing paperwork, broken urls, and inaccessible/locked work embedded in blogs. When uploading forms, centres should ensure that they use the latest available version, especially the Coursework Assessment Summary Form (CASF) and Individual Candidate Record Cards (ICRC): these are active forms and allow the inclusion of hyperlinks, which greatly help the moderation process. A significant minority of centres are still using old forms or photocopies. Photocopies are particularly problematic, especially when submitted in portrait rather than landscape format. Even when centres use the new active forms they should still link their candidate work to a central blog hub for ease of access. Many centres have now adopted this good practice but a significant number still have not. Centres are reminded that it is their responsibility to ensure that all paperwork and candidate work is available for moderation and easily accessible by the moderator.

The quality of teacher comments on Individual Candidate Record Cards continues to improve, with some centres even using extension sheets to ensure that they have clearly justified their marking. However, there are still a significant number of centres who do not provide clear comments to show how marks have been arrived at for each assessment objective and strand. Providing personalised comments linked to the mark scheme and those reflecting individual contributions to projects is invaluable to moderators when agreeing centre marks.

Comments on specific tasks

Blogs

Many centres are now providing blog hubs (a centre blog or web page with candidates' names and numbers hyperlinked to their work) demonstrating good practice, however, some are still not doing so. 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 hyperlink the URL of the hub on the Individual Candidate Record Cards. All hyperlinks in both the centre's hub and candidate blogs need to be checked carefully by centres to ensure that they are working. Centres not checking links continues to be the primary reason for delays in moderation.

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 fewer than twenty brief posts. The most effective blogs continue to demonstrate 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.

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. However, many centres are still not checking that these documents are available to the moderator, either by making them public (unlocked) or by giving the moderator a password for access. Over the life of the syllabus, much time has been spent contacting centres to make work available for moderation after the submission deadline. Once again, moderators will **not** use their personal Google log-ins 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 of the Creative Critical Reflection (CCR) 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. AO3 strand 4 gives marks for the technical and creative skills used to communicate ideas through the CCR. Therefore, centres should not award high level marks for this strand to candidates who produce CCRs that do not employ creative approaches. Many candidates continue to produce what are essentially oral essays for all four questions: this should be discouraged. A talking head or voice audio is not really a creative approach and certainly should not be used for all four questions. Centres should not reward this type of approach beyond level 3 as candidates are not producing '...more than one creative approach...' Some candidates are still leaving this element to the last minute and not paying it enough attention for the marks on offer.

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 still start with a comprehensive and creative response to **Question 1** and regress to finish with a thin response to **Question 4**.

It was identified that a small number of candidates used AI to produce their responses to the four required questions without giving due credit. This is not permitted and constitutes malpractice. Any assessed evaluative work should be solely the work of an individual candidate. If the centre is in doubt about the use of AI, Cambridge have produced a guidance document (<https://www.cambridgeinternational.org/exam-administration/cambridge-exams-officers-guide/phase-3-coursework-and-moderation/generative-ai-in-coursework/>).

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. 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 continue to present 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. It is becoming clear that some candidates are now using AI to research their productions. At this stage in the process it is acceptable to research in this way as long as the candidate credits the help given by the AI application. If the centre is in doubt, they should once again refer to the Cambridge guidance document.

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, primarily thanks to easy access to good quality video production tools on mobile phones (see below). 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, whilst improving, continue to be an issue with many still 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. Centres should avoid seeing this option as an 'easier' alternative to the Video brief; both briefs have been designed to require equal skills, knowledge, and understanding.

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. Canva is not appropriate for the production of magazine pages at this level.

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. Centres may wish to offer further guidance to candidates, especially given that magazines are not usually within young people's spheres of reference.

Some candidates have started using AI generated text and images for this brief. Centres should discourage this practice. All of the main images should be photographic, with evidence of their originality provided. Copy should be written by the candidate and checked by the centre. In this way, the brief maintains rigour alongside the Video brief.

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. Many smartphone tools, whilst effective for home video, are not of sufficient quality for production of coursework. The centre should only allow candidates to use smartphones if they are of sufficient quality; it is still recommended that centres purchase a least one set of semi-professional equipment.

Whilst steadily improving, centres still need to pay attention to the recording and mixing of sound, which continues to impede many productions. This is especially the case where candidates have used smartphones without external microphones. A significant minority of candidates still need to research the opening titles and credits of feature films. Credits, especially job titles, are particularly problematic. It is fair to say that many professional film openings have adopted unconventional formats but candidates should be encouraged to identify 'traditional' conventions and employ these in their work. If candidates choose to adopt an unconventional approach, this should be well-documented within their blog, showing an awareness of the traditional codes and conventions and why they opted to take a different approach.

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

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 Man Who Fell To Earth*.

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

Candidates tended to perform better on **Section A** than on **Section B**. This seemed to be either because they found **Section A** easier, lacked the case study examples from contemporary media to be able to develop responses beyond *what* to include discussions of *why/how* or alternatively they did not manage their time appropriately and ran out of time to respond adequately to **Section B**. Centres should encourage candidates to practice responding to exam questions within set times and to spend an equal amount of time on responses which carry equal marks and ensure that candidates have a range of contemporary media examples spanning different media to enable candidates to be able to deftly apply their learning to the demands of the questions in **Section B**.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

There was evidence of secure understanding of the technical elements, with most candidates able to identify camera shots, angles, movement, and composition, as well as mise-en-scene, using terminology accurately to explore how meaning was created. Candidates were less successful in identifying how sound and editing helped to create meaning, however. The range of the technical elements covered, as well as their depth, is a direct contributory to the marks which can be achieved for terminology, therefore centres are strongly advised to guide their candidates to ensure that they produced responses which are balanced across all four assessed technical elements of moving image language. Some candidates simply described technical elements featured within the extract and did not develop their answers much further when it came to exploring meaning, making basic statements like 'the close-up shows emotion'. In the preamble above, it is noted that candidates need to be able to move beyond a discussion *what* – in this case what they see/hear and move towards a discussion of what they see/hear integrated with a discussion of *how* they are see/hear – this would enable an easier pivot to a discussion of sound and editing (the latter element is generally not well discussed) and *why* they are seeing/hearing these things – which will enable a fluid discursive move towards a more explicit focus on aspects of representation and shifting beyond discussions which only focus on media language. This limitation in addressing both of the key concepts being assessed in **Section A** is one which has been noted by many Examiners and is evident across the entire cohort sitting the paper. 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. Whilst relevant theory can be useful for giving some academic ballast to the points which candidates make from their interpretations from

the extract, theory detached from context and simply inserted into paragraphs does not work to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of theory in context.

In the most effective responses, candidates were able to analyse the way that meaning was created within the extract from 'The Man Who Fell To Earth' using a range of appropriate technical terminology and elements. Popular themes were class/socio-economic status (evidence taken from the lecture hall – Faraday's appearance and how and what he speaks about 'I am an immigrant' and a comparison between his origins and his current status as a 'tech bro'), ethnicity and immigration status – pertinent given what the extract hints at Faraday's real origins in comparison to how the audience in the room are presumably perceiving this talk. The most insightful responses were partly characterised by an ability to fully engage with the concept of representation with regards to ethnicity and immigration within the extract – and how that ricochets into real world social and political discourses.

Effective responses made appropriate comments about representation of people (mostly focusing on Faraday), places (mise-en-scene – the lecture hall) and ideas (immigration, the status of males and females). Stronger responses were also able to link media theory (Strauss, Barthes for media language; Alvarado, Gilroy on representations of ethnicity) to their analysis organically, and used technical terms fluently (protagonist, signifies, depth of field, synchronous, voyeurism, etc.). This terminology certainly helps, but it is not a substitute for analysis of the extract – centres and candidates are strongly advised to focus on analysis – who/what is being represented? How? Why? To what effect? Terminology should be a servant to enabling the candidate to fully express their ideas in response to the extract. Theories which were applied successfully were Levi Strauss' theory of binary opposition, Stuart Hall's theory of representation, Gilroy's theory of postcolonialism, Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of semiotics and Roland Barthes theoretical perspectives on semiotics, signs and structuralism.

Less effective responses were characterised by describing/identifying the camera shots (close-up), angles (low angle), movement (track, pan), sound (diegetic) and editing techniques (cut) 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, such as colour. There was also inadequately focused use of terminology (for example using terms such as 'jump cut', J cut, L cut – these are terms relevant to the practice of editing and are terms in wider circulation; however, terms such as jump cut have a different ancestry in the context of understanding the use of jump cuts in French New Wave films. Thus candidates need to be clearer about what they mean when they use such terms with competing definitions). Weaker responses tended to take each technical 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 was superficially applied to many responses (Propp, Todorov), and in some instances not referenced at all. Many candidates would explain terminology, or theories, rather than applying them to an analysis of the extract – this is a poor use of the candidates time; they will achieve more marks from applying theories to the text rather than simply explaining what particular theorists argued.

Section B

Within **Section B**, **Question 2** was more popular than **Question 3**. Film remains the most popular media area on which candidates chose to focus their response, followed by music and video games, with only a handful of responses relating to print or, more fleetingly, radio/podcasts. Responses focused on film, music, or video games tended to be more successful.. This may reflect a candidate's own consumption preferences, or reflect the instruction provided by their centre.

The most effective 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. Most candidates were able to reference at least one case study. 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.

Candidates should be encouraged to apply their case study examples to the question as set, rather than presenting factual information e.g. a potted history of Disney. The use of technical vocabulary was less frequent for **Section B**, in comparison to **Section A**. Centres should support candidates to develop technical vocabulary in relation to industry and audiences, and in response to the question. Examples used successfully included fandom, synergy, convergence, prosumerism, conglomerate, oligopoly, and

hegemony. 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. The application of media theory is preferable to an individual's personal experience, on which weaker candidates rely. Candidates presenting information from only 1 – 2 case studies often limit themselves by not having enough range or depth in their responses. They should be 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), whilst retaining a focus on one media area i.e. video games. Centres should encourage candidates to engage in whatever are the current debates across all aspects of the media. This would better equip them to engage more meaningfully with **Section B**.

Question 2

Explain why synergies between different media products are beneficial to media producers.

The most effective responses were able to develop a critical engagement with how synergies between different media products have benefited media producers – the wording here is crucial to determining how effective or otherwise the candidate's responses were. Where candidates could establish clear links between different media products and how different media producers can benefit was the most straightforward route to success. For example, the many references to 'Barbenheimer' – the social/cultural practice of seeing both Barbie and Oppenheimer on the same day which was fuelled by a social media trend – when all of these elements were fully presented, this example often worked well. Another popular alternative approach to answering this question focused on the music industry and particularly major artists such as Taylor Swift and Billie Eilish. Where candidates were able to construct a line of reasoning which connected revenue generated from music (streaming, downloads, physical sales) and other activities (touring, merchandise) this was another steady route to a highly effective response. As noted in the previous section, most answers focused on the film and music industries. A wider characteristic of the more effective answers moved between major and independent products – both films and music – to demonstrate why synergies are beneficial to media producers within at least one media area. The most effective responses accurately utilised theory – (Jenkins, Hesmondhalgh, Curran and Seaton) to good effect with this question – but as noted elsewhere, this theory is at its most effective when integrated with wider points, thus demonstrating the candidate's ability to apply their learning to the constraints of the question chosen and the available case study material. As has been the case in recent examination series, case study material focusing on Disney, Marvel (MCU)- stretching across both film and games and A24 were popular examples, alongside Black Widow, Deadpool and Wolverine, Everything Everywhere All At Once, Host, The Old Oak and A Minecraft Movie. Additionally, case study material on Billie Eilish and Taylor Swift featured heavily. Terminology was used fluently, demonstrating a good understanding. Some candidates were able to discuss multiple industries in relation to cross-media synergies, and how this might affect the products, and establishment of a new company. When used correctly, key theories strengthened candidates' responses.

The less effective responses were characterised by general writing about a media area but were slender on details of particular case study examples. This lack of specificity in candidate writing was a limiting factor in determining the overall quality of their work in response to this question. Other notable characteristics of the effective responses to this question were the wholesale importation of facts and figures about their case studies – for example, sales and streaming figures for Taylor Swift, the number of subscribers for Billie Eilish's YouTube channel. Of course, all such material is relevant to understanding the size, scale and reach of such artists, but such facts by themselves do not enable the candidates to develop points which reach higher mark bands. Centres are advised to ensure their candidates avoid simply re-presenting facts and figures about case study examples but use these details to determine a reasoned answer to the question chosen – and analyse that candidates should look carefully at the two questions in **Section B** and consider which one they can most successfully apply their learning to.

Question 3

Analyse the ways in which local and national audiences are targeted differently.

Many candidates found this question problematic – some candidates wanted to swap national for major and local for independent/niche; other candidates wanted to conflate national with international and correspondingly conflate local for national.

Relatively few candidates opted for this question. The most effective responses were able to enter into a critical discussion that was able to offer coherent ways in which national audiences – for film, music, games – are targeted via nationwide campaigns on social media with sponsored advertisements for musical artists or films, for example. Additionally, some useful discussion of print media advertising (in newspapers,

magazines and billboards) was utilised – especially with film promotion, i.e. Deadpool and Wolverine, A Minecraft Movie as these tend to be nationally driven campaigns. Whilst there were few of the following styles of responses – a very effective way of responding to this question was to focus on the news industry and to compare and contrast how national and local/regional newspapers reflect news values in different ways that then corresponds to how audiences are targeted.

The less effective responses tended to be characterised by misunderstanding what is meant by the terms 'national' and 'local'. Where candidates could not distinguish between the two, and relied on presenting details about marketing for media products, this inevitably meant their responses were limited. Similarly where candidates could not re-apply what they had learned to this context, and there was conflation of national for international or major and conflation of local for niche or independent, again, this proved to be a factor which led to consistently limited responses. Centres are advised to ensure their candidates are fully familiar with the full range of vocabulary used within the syllabus and that they cover media areas in such ways to ensure that candidates can be nimble enough to pivot case study materials into a range of different directions as will be required by examination questions. For AS candidates progressing through to A2, this will continue to be a factor with the A2 examination as well.

MEDIA STUDIES

Paper 9607/22
Media Texts and Contexts

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 *Roar*.

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

Candidates tended to perform better on **Section A** than on **Section B**. This seemed to be either because they found **Section A** easier, lacked the case study examples from contemporary media to be able to develop responses beyond *what* to include discussions of *why/how* or alternatively they did not manage their time appropriately and ran out of time to respond adequately to **Section B**. Centres should encourage candidates to practice responding to exam questions within set times and to spend an equal amount of time on responses which carry equal marks and ensure that candidates have a range of contemporary media examples spanning different media to enable candidates to be able to deftly apply their learning to the demands of the questions in **Section B**.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

There was evidence of secure understanding of the technical elements, with most candidates able to identify camera shots, angles, movement, and composition, as well as mise-en-scene, using terminology accurately to explore how meaning was created. Candidates were less successful in identifying how sound and editing helped to create meaning, however. The range of the technical elements covered, as well as their depth, is a direct contributory to the marks which can be achieved for terminology, therefore centres are strongly advised to guide their candidates to ensure that they produced responses which are balanced across all four assessed technical elements of moving image language. Some candidates simply described technical elements featured within the extract and did not develop their answers much further when it came to exploring meaning, making basic statements like 'the close-up shows emotion'. In the preamble above, it is noted that candidates need to be able to move beyond a discussion *what* – in this case what they see/hear and move towards a discussion of what they see/hear integrated with a discussion of *how* they are see/hear – this would enable an easier pivot to a discussion of sound and editing (the latter element is generally not well discussed) and *why* they are seeing/hearing these things – which will enable a fluid discursive move towards a more explicit focus on aspects of representation and shifting beyond discussions which only focus on media language. This limitation in addressing both of the key concepts being assessed in **Section A** is one which has been noted by many Examiners and is evident across the entire cohort sitting the paper. 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. Whilst relevant theory can be useful for giving some academic ballast to the points which candidates make from their interpretations from

the extract, theory detached from context and simply inserted into paragraphs does not work to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of theory in context.

In the most effective responses, candidates were able to analyse the way that meaning was created within the extract from 'Roar' using a range of appropriate technical terminology and elements. Popular themes were class/socio-economic status (evidence taken from Blake's appearance and the type of car being driven), ethnicity/racism and impact on personal identity (Wanda's interaction with the woman in the airport; the discussion on Blake's name in the car). Effective responses made appropriate comments about representation of people (mostly focusing on Wanda and Blake) and places (mise-en-scene – the airport, the car, the house). Stronger responses were also able to link media theory (Strauss, Barthes) to their analysis organically, and used technical terms fluently (protagonist, signifier, depth of field, synchronous, voyeurism, etc.). This terminology certainly helps, but it is not a substitute for analysis of the extract – centres and candidates are strongly advised to focus on analysis – who/what is being represented? How? Why? To what effect? Terminology should be a servant to enabling the candidate to fully express their ideas in response to the extract. Theories which were applied successfully were Levi Strauss' theory of binary opposition. Stuart Hall's theory of representation, Gilroy's theory of postcolonialism, Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of semiotics and Roland Barthes theoretical perspectives on semiotics, signs and structuralism.

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Section B

Within **Section B**, **Question 2** was considerably more popular than **Question 3**. Film remains the most popular media area on which candidates chose to focus their response, followed by music and video games, with only a handful of responses relating to print or, more fleetingly, radio/podcasts. Responses focused on film, music, or video games tended to be more successful. This may reflect a candidate's own consumption preferences, or reflect the instruction provided by their centre.

The most effective 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. Most candidates were able to reference at least one case study. 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.

Candidates should be encouraged to apply their case study examples to the question as set, rather than presenting factual information e.g. a potted history of Disney. The use of technical vocabulary was less frequent for **Section B**, in comparison to **Section A**. Centres should support candidates to develop technical vocabulary in relation to industry and audiences, and in response to the question. Examples used successfully included fandom, synergy, convergence, prosumerism, conglomerate, oligopoly, and hegemony. 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. The application of media theory is preferable to an individual's personal experience, on which weaker candidates rely. Candidates presenting information from only 1 – 2 case studies often limit themselves by not having enough range or depth in their responses. They should be 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), whilst retaining a focus on one media area i.e. video games.

Centres should encourage candidates to engage in whatever are the current debates across all aspects of the media. This would better equip them to engage more meaningfully with **Section B**.

Question 2

Assess the significance of technological convergence on the ways in which audiences consume media products.

The most effective responses were able to develop a critical engagement of the impact technological convergence has made for the consumption of media products – with a focus within the best answers for the impacts for institutions (the type of products they produce/distribute – whether those products are films or musical artists) and for audiences (how people now consumer media products- with an obvious, appropriate focus on the centrality of smartphones and other mobile devices). As noted in the previous section, most answers focused on the film and music industries. The more effective answers moved between major and independent products – both films and music – to demonstrate the significance of technological convergence for all kinds of creators and all kinds of media products within at least one media area. The most effective responses accurately utilised theory – (Jenkins, Blumer and Katz) to good effect with this question – but as noted elsewhere, this theory is at its most effective when integrated with wider points, thus demonstrating the candidate's ability to apply their learning to the constraints of the question chosen and the available case study material. As has been the case in recent examination series, case study material focusing on Disney, Marvel (MCU) - stretching across both film and games and A24 were popular examples, alongside Black Widow, Deadpool and Wolverine, Everything Everywhere All At Once and A Minecraft Movie. Additionally, case study material on Billie Eilish and Taylor Swift featured heavily. Terminology was used fluently, demonstrating a good understanding. Some candidates were able to discuss multiple industries in relation to cross-media synergies, and how this might affect the products, and establishment of a new company. When used correctly, key theories strengthened candidates' responses.

The less effective responses were characterised by general writing about a media area but were slender on details of particular case study examples. This lack of specificity in candidate writing was a limiting factor in determining the overall quality of their work in response to this question. Other notable characteristics of the effective responses to this question were the wholesale importation of facts and figures about their case studies – for example, sales and streaming figures for Taylor Swift, the number of subscribers for Billie Eilish's YouTube channel. Of course, all such material is relevant to understanding the size, scale and reach of such artists, but such facts by themselves do not enable the candidates to develop points which reach higher mark bands.

Question 3

'The days of the all-powerful media owner dictating content are over; media organisations and their messages are much more complex these days.' To what extent do you agree with this statement?

Relatively few candidates opted for this question. The most effective responses were able to enter into a critical discussion which addressed the notion that media owners are as all-powerful as the claim in the question contends. Critical engagement with the degree of this power was fundamental to being able to develop an effective response to this question. The most effective responses were characterised by a consideration of the nature of power held by media owners to influence audiences. Owing to the nature of the case study material which candidates had access to, these answers very much focused on film and music, though there was some good utilisation of insights into the news industry with this question. Another feature of the most effective answers was to integrate audience theories to consider the ability of audiences as well as institutions to determine the range of media production. Theories which used and worked well to support points were Hesmondhalgh, Shirky, Jenkins and Blumer & Katz.

The less effective responses tended to be ones-sided in their approach, where the candidates did not recognise the need to demonstrate academic skills in constructing and presenting competing views or arguments and/or asserted a simplistic position that the audiences were in charge now. Many of these responses called Shirky and Jenkins to aid this but these answers did not conceptualise the role of media owners in being able to shape audience tastes. A number of such responses were largely driven by anecdotal, personalised responses. Whilst there is of course truth and merit in the lived experience of candidates adopting this strategy, it is a matter of academic skill to be able to present and interrogate opposing arguments. Both in terms of academic skill and wider pedagogy, centres are advised to be mindful to ensure their candidates are able to understand, present and dissect arguments which are counter to their experience or simply outside of the frame of reference shaped by their lifespans.

MEDIA STUDIES

Paper 9607/23
Media Texts and Contexts

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 Rig*.

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

Candidates tended to perform better on **Section A** than on **Section B**. This seemed to be either because they found **Section A** easier, lacked the case study examples from contemporary media to be able to develop responses beyond *what* to include discussions of *why/how* or alternatively they did not manage their time appropriately and ran out of time to respond adequately to **Section B**. Centres should encourage candidates to practice responding to exam questions within set times and to spend an equal amount of time on responses which carry equal marks and ensure that candidates have a range of contemporary media examples spanning different media to enable candidates to be able to deftly apply their learning to the demands of the questions in **Section B**.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

There was evidence of secure understanding of the technical elements, with most candidates able to identify camera shots, angles, movement, and composition, as well as mise-en-scene, using terminology accurately to explore how meaning was created. Candidates were less successful in identifying how sound and editing helped to create meaning, however. The range of the technical elements covered, as well as their depth, is a direct contributory to the marks which can be achieved for terminology, therefore centres are strongly advised to guide their candidates to ensure that they produced responses which are balanced across all four assessed technical elements of moving image language. Some candidates simply described technical elements featured within the extract and did not develop their answers much further when it came to exploring meaning, making basic statements like 'the close-up shows emotion'. In the preamble above, it is noted that candidates need to be able to move beyond a discussion *what* – in this case what they see/hear and move towards a discussion of what they see/hear integrated with a discussion of *how* they are see/hear – this would enable an easier pivot to a discussion of sound and editing (the latter element is generally not well discussed) and *why* they are seeing/hearing these things – which will enable a fluid discursive move towards a more explicit focus on aspects of representation and shifting beyond discussions which only focus on media language. This limitation in addressing both of the key concepts being assessed in **Section A** is one which has been noted by many Examiners and is evident across the entire cohort sitting the paper. 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. Whilst relevant theory can be useful for giving some academic ballast to the points which candidates make from their interpretations from

the extract, theory detached from context and simply inserted into paragraphs does not work to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of theory in context.

In the most effective responses, candidates were able to analyse the way that meaning was created within the extract from 'The Rig' using a range of appropriate technical terminology and elements. Popular themes were class/socio-economic status (office managers versus the workers in the recreation room), binary oppositions, narrative enigma (suspense) and the foreshadowing of something 'dark' in the earlier part of the extract interspersed with the warnings of danger signified by the unavailability of the helicopter. Effective responses made appropriate comments about representation of people (the senior female workers as signified by her more formal dress v more casually dressed off-shift rig workers) and places (mise-en-scene – the recreation room, the office). Stronger responses were also able to link media theory (Strauss, Barthes) to their analysis organically, and used technical terms fluently (protagonist, signifies, depth of field, synchronous, voyeurism, etc.). This terminology certainly helps, but it is not a substitute for analysis of the extract – centres and candidates are strongly advised to focus on analysis – who/what is being represented? How? Why? To what effect? Terminology should be a servant to enabling the candidate to fully express their ideas in response to the extract. Theories which were applied successfully were Levi Strauss' theory of binary opposition. Stuart Hall's theory of representation, Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of semiotics and Roland Barthes theoretical perspectives on semiotics, signs and structuralism.

Less effective responses were characterised by describing/identifying the camera shots (close-up), angles (low angle), movement (track, pan), sound (diegetic) and editing techniques (cut) 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, such as colour. There was also inadequately focused use of terminology (for example using terms such as 'jump cut', J cut, L cut – these are terms relevant to the practice of editing and are terms in wider circulation; however, terms such as jump cut have a different ancestry in the context of understanding the use of jump cuts in French New Wave films. Thus candidates need to be clearer about what they mean when they use such terms with competing definitions). Weaker responses tended to take each technical 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 was superficially applied to many responses (Propp, Todorov), and in some instances not referenced at all. Many candidates would explain terminology or theories, rather than applying them to an analysis of the extract – this is a poor use of the candidates time; they will achieve more marks from applying theories to the text rather than simply explaining what particular theorists argued.

Section B

Within **Section B**, **Question 2** was more popular than **Question 3**, and generally better answered than **Question 3**. Film was the most popular media area on which candidates chose to focus their response, followed by music and then video games, with only a handful of responses relating to print. Responses focused on film, music, or video games tended to be more successful. This may reflect a candidate's own consumption preferences, or reflect the instruction provided by their centre.

The most effective 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. Most candidates were able to reference at least one case study. 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.

Candidates should be encouraged to apply their case study examples to the question as set, rather than presenting factual information e.g. a potted history of Disney. The use of technical vocabulary was less frequent for **Section B**, in comparison to **Section A**. Centres should support candidates to develop technical vocabulary in relation to industry and audiences, and in response to the question. Examples used successfully included fandom, synergy, convergence, prosumerism, conglomerate, oligopoly, and hegemony. 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. The application of media theory is preferable to an individual's personal experience, on which weaker candidates rely. Candidates presenting information from only 1 or 2 case studies often limit themselves by not having enough range or depth in their responses. They should be 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), whilst retaining a focus on one media area i.e. video games. Centres should encourage candidates to engage in whatever are the current debates across all aspects of the media. This would better equip them to engage more meaningfully with **Section B**.

Question 2

Explain the significance of specialised audiences, such as fans, in the media area you have studied.

The most effective responses were able to develop a critical engagement and discussion of media ownership and products within at least one media area – in the case of this paper, nearly exclusively film or games. Responses generally focused on the perceived need for media products to have a core specialist audience in order to radiate out positive messages to wider potential audience segments. In doing so, such responses utilised to some effective degree aspects of the theories of Shirky and Jenkins. Answers focused on the pivotal importance of specialised audiences in spreading awareness of a particular product. Disney, Marvel (MCU) - stretching across both film and games and A24 were popular examples, alongside Black Widow and Everything Everywhere All At Once. Terminology was used fluently, demonstrating a good understanding.

Some candidates were able to discuss multiple industries in relation to cross-media synergies, and how this might affect the products, and establishment of a new company. When used correctly, key theories strengthened candidates' responses.

The less effective responses were characterised by general writing about a media area but were slender on details of particular case study examples. This lack of specificity in candidate writing was a limiting factor in determining the overall quality of their work in response to this question.

Question 3

'Now that everyone has access to technologies of production, the traditional media companies are irrelevant.' To what extent do you agree with this statement?

Relatively few candidates opted for this question. The most effective responses were able to enter into a critical discussion which addressed the position that traditional media companies still have relevance as well as the position asserted by the claim in the question. These responses were partly characterised by references to the theories of Hesmondhalgh and Curran and Seaton which were used as levers to assert that traditional media companies still have relevance.

The less effective responses tended to be ones-sided in their approach, largely driven by anecdotal, personalised responses. This was the dominant line of reasoning in the answers to this question. Whilst there is of course truth and merit in the lived experience of candidates adopting this strategy, it is a matter of academic skill to be able to present and interrogate opposing arguments. Both in terms of academic skill and wider pedagogy, centres are advised to be mindful to ensure their candidates are able to understand, present and dissect arguments which are counter to their experience or simply outside of the frame of reference shaped by their lifespans.

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 to the correct folder. It is important that the most up to date forms are used, 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 hyper-linked on the ICRCs of each candidate. Moderation continues to be delayed considerably due to illegible urls, non-hyperlinked urls that need to be transcribed, and/or broken links that point at error pages.

General comments

For this series candidates have continued to demonstrate a wide range of media skills firmly based on their knowledge and understanding of media concepts. It continues to be a privilege to be the audience for a range of very professional productions in video, print and online. 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. 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

Many 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, there are still a significant number who did not. 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 hyperlink the URL of the hub, and individual candidate's blog, on the Individual Candidate Record Cards (ICRC). Please ensure that the most up to date version of the ICRC is used in order to facilitate easy access to candidate work.

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 time chasing centres for access to work. Google documents continue to be of particular concern. Centres, and candidates, need to ensure that privacy options do not prevent candidate work from being accessed. Many candidates embed Google documents and 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. Once again, the principal examiner must point out that 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 continue to use 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. Unfortunately, this type of blog is becoming less common, with websites taking over as the primary vehicle. This is allowed, as long as pages and sections are clearly labelled and tagged. The Wix/Weebly format tends not to be as effective at demonstrating the process of production but the best candidates often make it work. Some candidates, however, are still submitting disorganised websites/blogs with difficult-to-find elements.

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 descriptive 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. It is also recommended that candidates use separate blogs for their AS and A level work as combined blogs often cause confusion, especially if they are not well labelled.

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 present 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

Assessment Objective (AO) 2 draws 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. Some candidates are still not following the requirement to produce an essay and are answering each question individually, sometimes with the question as a title or header. However, fewer candidates produced AS level type creative critical reflections. It is still worrying that some did take this approach as the syllabus is very clear.

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. Some candidates are ignoring the later questions despite giving a detailed response to the first.

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 'around 1000 words' of continuous prose. Centres should advise candidates that this word count should be seen as an advisory minimum. Candidates who write fewer than 1000 words candidates are liable to self-penalise through a 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.

It was identified that a few candidates used AI to produce their essays without giving due credit. This is not allowed and constitutes malpractice. Any assessed evaluative work should be solely the work of an individual candidate. If the centre is in doubt about the use of AI, Cambridge have produced a guidance document (<https://www.cambridgeinternational.org/exam-administration/cambridge-exams-officers-guide/phase-3-coursework-and-moderation/generative-ai-in-coursework/>)

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.

It is becoming clear that some candidates are now using AI to research their productions. At this stage in the process it is acceptable to research in this way as long as the candidate credits the help given by the AI application. If the centre is in doubt, they should once again refer to the Cambridge guidance document.

There was a range of excellent planning and development presented by many candidates, especially where they had recorded evidence that enabled them to reflect and make informed choices about the way forward for their productions. Most centres 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 a 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. Unfortunately, the lack of research and planning for the minor tasks very often resulted in an adjustment of marks for AO3 (iii) (the third strand of AO3).

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 are still focusing much of their effort on the main product and neglecting the minor ones.

The most successful production work built on previous skills, knowledge and understanding, much of it gained from the AS level. Links were clear, but also newly acquired and developed skills were demonstrated, especially in the field of social media production. 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 Film Promotion Package. The Short Film Package once again provided some of the best work, with some complete short films worthy of submission to short film festivals.

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 continue to be 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. Lip synching, if employed, should be practiced before production in order to achieve the desired professional results. Editing to the beat should also be practised and encouraged.

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 continue to be on the short side. Codes and conventions were often researched and applied, although some teaser trailers continue to simply be 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 continue to be 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 although this could often be stronger in many cases. 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. Many candidates would benefit from researching the art of the interview, many were over-long and lacked interest.

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 for whom 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, once again, some effective subtitling this series, especially of the short films. However, some centres chose not to use subtitles which makes the products difficult to follow for non-speakers of the language used. It is advisable to check subtitles before submission as some AI based subtitle generators can produce 'interesting' outcomes.

Minor print products

Whilst there were some excellent minor print products conforming to appropriate conventions and continuing the branding of the major product, many still 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. The choice of fonts was often ill-considered and sized inappropriately.

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. Centres could remind candidates that they should not use AI to generate text for their articles but should produce original copy.

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.

Some centres seem to be encouraging candidates to produce a range of print materials as part of their promotional packages. Whilst this is acceptable as part of a programme of study, the extra materials should be disregarded when centres mark the packages. Only the materials stated in the briefs should be assessed.

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 by far for this series was once again Instagram. Only a few candidates chose to use other generic templates based on the Facebook 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 reels 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. It is a concern that many candidates are neglecting this element of the promotional package thinking that they can achieve good marks by simply dropping four or six images into the Instagram format. Centres could encourage candidates to research social media forms and usage in depth and to apply their learning to their own promotional package.

MEDIA STUDIES

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| <p>Paper 9607/41 Critical Perspectives</p> |
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Key messages

The most successful candidates are ones who:

- manage their time effectively, with equal time being spent on **Section A** and **Section B**
- address the specifics of each set question
- use a variety of case study content for each question rather than repeating the same case study material throughout the exam
- apply theory successfully rather than just referring in passing to names of practitioners.

General comments

The most popular choice of **Section A** optional questions was Regulation with almost equal numbers attempting Power and the Media and/or Postmodernism (the most relatively successful option).

This paper asks students to choose two questions from a choice of three in **Section A**; each question is marked out of 15. **Section B** is a compulsory question on Media Ecology which is worth up to 30 marks. 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, in this case 2020.

There remain problems with Time Management – some students submitted very lengthy **Section A** answers sometimes followed by really short Media Ecology responses despite this compulsory question being worth double the marks. Regular timed Exam practice is highly recommended as one method of addressing this; many students attempted Ecology first which also works. While there is no direct correlation between volume and outcome one would expect a longer response for Media Ecology given the potential marks available are double the other questions.

A significant number of candidates clearly had learnt a great deal but did not address the set question which made it difficult for them to access the higher levels. In general there was too much listing of irrelevant data about box office receipts or technical aspects of production possibly as a hangover from paper 2 case studies, too little analysis and too much unquestioning acceptance of what we might call the company line e.g., X is free speech. There were some excellent responses from candidates who achieved very high marks by addressing the set question. These offered detailed case studies which exemplified the relevant features of their chosen topic area.

Candidates should avoid using the same content for every answer including repeating the same sentences. While there are connections between topics, to see BLM included in each individual question might suggest the candidate has not embraced the breadth of learning one would hope to see at this level. For guidance, the case study should be a collection of associated texts, linked thematically or in another way, which the candidate clearly knows well – including the processes through which the texts were made, how they were intended to be distributed and consumed, and their intended audience.

When citing Media theorists there is a marked tendency for candidates from some centres to refer to them by first name only (e.g., George for Gerbner) which confuses rather than clarifies. The ability to apply the critical approach is the key to achieving credit; the name is far less important.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

'Without media regulation there would be chaos'. To what extent do you agree with this statement?

This topic is informed by a legacy of study around audience reception of texts and ensuing debates. Broadly, the early development of this field made many simplistic assumptions which most media specialists would now regard as problematic given the complexity of the inter relationship between reader and text. There was an understandably frequent reference to the UK's Online Safety Act which is now being fully implemented. However, the majority of candidates did not offer significant detail hence no real analysis of the lengthy debates and controversy around this major piece of legislation which is an active case study of the Livingstone and Lunt theory around the tension between citizens and consumers.

A working definition of regulation offered was the application of agreed standards and rules on our behalf whereas censorship was generally done without our consent. One case study was Netflix's *Cuties* which was regarded as offending public decency as it was accused of hyper-sexualisation of its youthful cast. A recurring motif was the assertion that social media companies have introduced regulations followed by a list of some of them then simply moving on without questioning whether they had the desired impact (if any).

The most common approach offered was that of Censorship vs Freedom of Speech which led on to a debate around the self-regulation of social media too often referred to in generalised terms rather than specific, detailed examples. There is still a tendency for candidates to simply list texts and explain why they got the rating they did without referring to the question at all. Media effects is one of the most widely studied areas in the subject yet for so many weaker responses the only theorist studied appears to be Bandura – a much-criticised research project from the early 1960s. This has now become something of a default. 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. Among the huge volume of work in this field David Gauntlett's *Ten things wrong with the media 'effects' model* is an excellent resource. Some excellent case studies included GB news/ Ofcom; Musk/ Zuckerberg removal/ downgrading of trust/ safety teams at X; Tik Tok as citizen journalism

Question 2

Explain the relationship between the postmodern media text and other media texts.

Most students were able to refer to key terminology for postmodernism and many took the approach of applying them one by one to texts referring in particular Kristeva's work on intertextuality to stress the relationship. The best responses offered critical reflection clearly informed by study of other key theorists Strinati, Baudrillard and Lyotard which implies that terminology and theory is taught very well. In too many cases there was little understanding that it is how stories are told which is key rather than just the content. More than other questions, this topic is regularly hindered by the use of very old examples, including Pulp Fiction, The Matrix series or Truman Show, which is still more common than one would expect given the clear guidance in the syllabus. Whenever one reads such responses it is disappointing given the obvious critical insight and engagement on display; the Centre must exercise responsibility in ensuring such students are not hampered by this. Successful case studies include Everything Everywhere All At Once; Eminem's Houdini, Barbie, Wuthering Heist, Stranger Things, Wandavision, Bridgerton; various reality TV shows

Question 3

It's not just *what* is said, but *how* it is said that matters.' Analyse the power of rhetoric in the media.

This question demands an informed critique of the power structures present in the Media within the context of wider Society with reference to the style, form and rhetoric of media messages from case studies. These need to be beyond superficial comments around gender, ethnicity, LGBTQ+ etc., The theories of Gramsci and Hegemony were explored in better answers. Candidates who were strong on examples often struggled to connect these to media scholarship and debates, and those who abounded in personal opinions and 'person on the street' viewpoints also struggled with the examples. Clearer delineation of which debates and scholarship to mobilise when they make their arguments would be useful. Some candidates regurgitated previous essays on representations without reference to media control power or ownership. Successful case

studies include Daily Mail/Guardian coverage of rail strikes in the UK; Disney and other conglomerates acquisition of other companies consolidation of power.

Question 4

Explain the most significant contemporary trends in the evolution of the media.

The focus here is on the development of media forms, styles, and modes of audience engagement. The better candidates assessed the significance of particular developments which are likely to indicate possible future trends in the media. Better candidates assessed the current media landscape, with a focus on a few apposite examples, and used this to make an informed judgement about the ways in which change has occurred and determinants on this – e.g., the market, streaming, public service broadcasting, the style and form of media content, mobile technology, social media, the nature of celebrity, the crisis of truth and reality, the influence of AI.

Generally students addressed the question directly which is refreshing. Prosumerism was a popular case study with some insightful comments on aspects of the Digital Divide in terms of access to national digital infrastructure and particularly media literacy/skills which might enable it. All of which point to the advantages the majority of the population of the First World has over the global majority. Content creators/influencers labelled prosumers were used 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 now be considered part of the digital media elite.

There was a recurrent theme that audiences used to be passive but are now active which David Buckingham states cannot be sustained if we examine research on television audiences by Hall, Morley et al. One outstanding response dealt with social media, algorithmic content subscription models, surveillance capitalism (Zuboff) and streaming exemplified through Greta Thunberg's campaigning, coverage of the Israel Gaza conflict on Tiktok and Instagram, 'anti woke' filter bubbles created by GB news etc, concluding that the move to an attention economy is the most significant.

Jenkins work on participatory culture and the creation of fandoms recurred frequently with successful case studies including Swifties and the Tate Brothers. It would be good to have a slightly more balanced debate around the internet as the very best responses considered the recent work around the online world of Jaron Lanier, David Buckingham and Evgeny Morozov's critiques of technological determinism.

MEDIA STUDIES

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| <p>Paper 9607/42 Critical Perspectives</p> |
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Key messages

The most successful candidates are ones who:

- manage their time effectively, with equal time being spent on **Section A** and **Section B**
- address the specifics of each set question
- use a variety of case study content for each question rather than repeating the same case study material throughout the exam
- apply theory successfully rather than just referring in passing to names of practitioners.

General comments

The most popular choice of **Section A** optional questions was Regulation with almost equal numbers attempting Power and the Media and/or Postmodernism (the most relatively successful option).

This paper asks students to choose two questions from a choice of three in **Section A**; each question is marked out of 15. **Section B** is a compulsory question on Media Ecology which is worth up to 30 marks. 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, in this case 2020.

There remain problems with Time Management – some students submitted very lengthy **Section A** answers sometimes followed by really short Media Ecology responses despite this compulsory question being worth double the marks. Regular timed Exam practice is highly recommended as one method of addressing this; many students attempted Ecology first which also works. While there is no direct correlation between volume and outcome one would expect a longer response for Media Ecology given the potential marks available are double the other questions.

A significant number of candidates clearly had learnt a great deal but did not address the set question which made it difficult for them to access the higher levels. In general there was too much listing of irrelevant data about box office receipts or technical aspects of production possibly as a hangover from paper 2 case studies, too little analysis and too much unquestioning acceptance of what we might call the company line e.g., X is free speech. There were some excellent responses from candidates who achieved very high marks by addressing the set question. These offered detailed case studies which exemplified the relevant features of their chosen topic area.

Candidates should avoid using the same content for every answer including repeating the same sentences. While there are connections between topics, to see BLM included in each individual question might suggest the candidate has not embraced the breadth of learning one would hope to see at this level. For guidance, the case study should be a collection of associated texts, linked thematically or in another way, which the candidate clearly knows well – including the processes through which the texts were made, how they were intended to be distributed and consumed, and their intended audience.

When citing Media theorists there is a marked tendency for candidates from some centres to refer to them by first name only (e.g., George for Gerbner) which confuses rather than clarifies. The ability to apply the critical approach is the key to achieving credit; the name is far less important.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Assess the effectiveness of the sanctions imposed by media regulators.

This topic is informed by a legacy of study around audience reception of texts and ensuing debates. A working definition of regulation offered was the application of agreed standards and rules on our behalf whereas censorship was generally done without our consent. Broadly, the early development of this field made many simplistic assumptions which most media specialists would now regard as problematic given the complexity of the inter relationship between reader and text. There was an understandably frequent reference to the UK's Online Safety Act which is now being fully implemented. However, the majority of candidates did not offer much in the way of significant detail and hence there was little real analysis of the lengthy debates and controversy around this major piece of legislation, which is an active case study of the Livingstone and Lunt theory around the tension between citizens and consumers. Those who looked at the details of the Act highlighted the punitive sanctions proposed in it. The Australian Government's ban on mobile phones and the EU's Digital Services Act were both dealt with in some detail by better candidates. One candidate presented a very good case study on attempts to regulate AI in California.

The most common approach offered was that of Censorship vs Freedom of Speech which led on to a debate around the self-regulation of social media, too often referred to in generalised terms rather than specific, detailed examples. There is still a tendency for candidates to simply list texts and explain why they got the specific rating they did without referring to the question at all. Media effects is one of the most widely studied areas in the subject yet for so many weaker responses the only theorist studied appears to be Bandura – a much-criticised research project from the early 1960s. This has now become something of a default. 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. Among the huge volume of work in this field David Gauntlett's *Ten things wrong with the media 'effects' model* is an excellent resource. Some excellent case studies included GB news/Ofcom; Musk/Zuckerberg removal/ downgrading of trust/safety teams at X; Tik Tok as citizen journalism

Question 2

'Postmodernism in the media is simply parody and pastiche.' To what extent do you agree with this statement?

The most common approach was to disagree with the statement then illustrate further characteristics of postmodernism. Most students were able to refer to key terminology for postmodernism and many took the approach of utilising them to analyse their chosen texts. The best responses offered critical reflection clearly informed by study of key theorists Kristeva, Strinati, Baudrillard and Lyotard which implies that terminology and theory is taught very well. In too many cases, there was little understanding that it is how stories are told which is key rather than just the content. More than other questions, this topic is regularly hindered by the use of very old examples, including Pulp Fiction, The Matrix series or Truman Show, which is still more common than one would expect given the clear guidance in the syllabus. Whenever one reads such responses it is disappointing given the obvious critical insight and engagement on display; the Centre must exercise responsibility in ensuring such students are not hampered by this. Successful case studies include Everything Everywhere All At Once; Eminem's Houdini, Barbie, Wuthering Heist, Stranger Things, Wandavision, Bridgerton; various reality TV shows.

Question 3

Explain the relationship between the media and democracy.

This question demands an informed critique of the power structures present in the Media within the context of wider Society; the political economy of the media. The theories of Chomsky, Gramsci and Hegemony were explored in better answers along with Habermas' concept of the public sphere and how the media might constitute this. It was good to see a candidate using Morozov's critique of social media campaigns ('slacktivism') to analyse movements such as Black Lives Matter, Everyone's Invited. This was enhanced by offering context on conglomerate ownership of the platforms such campaigns rely on which frequently results in shadowbanning of dissenting voices or 'controversial' topics (as defined by the owners) e.g., Gaza. Mis/Disinformation featured in some very successful answers some of which focussed on the January 6th Capitol Riots.

Candidates who were strong on examples often struggled to connect these to media scholarship and debates, and those who abounded in personal opinions and ‘person on the street’ viewpoints also struggled with the examples. Clearer delineation of which debates and scholarship to mobilise when candidates make their arguments would be useful. Some candidates regurgitated previous essays on representations without reference to media control, democracy or ownership. Successful case studies included: how For You Pages set terms of political debate – the Overton window; the role of AI deepfakes in Ukraine/Russia; a comparison of Trump/ Harris campaigns and role of podcasters/cable/network TV; Elon Musk and X.

Question 4

‘The media have transformed us into global citizens.’ To what extent do you agree with this statement?

The best candidates addressed the degree to which the media have eliminated geographical boundaries and created a global citizenship. Candidates should assess the current media landscape, with a focus on a few apposite examples, and use this to make an informed judgement about the nature and extent of this impact. Clearly McLuhan’s Global Village has relevance too and good responses analysed this theory. At the other end of the spectrum many students would provide a quote from Marshall or Postman – one sentence (often ‘the medium is the message’) and then just move on without demonstrating its relevance to the question.

Generally students addressed the question directly which is refreshing. The worldwide success of such shows as Squid Game enabled by the oligopoly of streaming services including Netflix was used to illustrate the spread of globalism in the media. The potential for prosumers to achieve an international following was a recurring theme citing the usual examples Mr Beast and KSI. Better candidates offered insightful comments on prosumerism and aspects of the Digital Divide in terms of access to national digital infrastructure and particularly media literacy/skills which might enable it. All of which point to the advantages the majority of the population of the First World has over the global majority. Content creators/ influencers labelled prosumers were used 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 now be considered part of the digital media elite. There was an outstanding response to technological determinist views accusing them of Western/Eurocentric bias. One excellent example offered was the migration of US Tiktok users to the Little Red Book Chinese app fostering a cultural exchange in reaction to the proposed ban. Such pick and mix consumption of global media was cleverly linked to Gauntlett’s work on identity while also addressing the potential for Surveillance Capitalism (Zuboff) alongside the concentration of power into an ever-smaller group of aggressively acquisitive conglomerates such as Disney and Silicon Valley in general. Curran and Seaton’s theories were often cited along with Hesmondhalgh’s work on media industries and Gilroy’s around cultural imperialism

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MEDIA STUDIES

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| <p>Paper 9607/43 Critical Perspectives</p> |
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Key messages

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- use a variety of case study content for each question rather than repeating the same case study material throughout the exam
- apply theory successfully rather than just referring in passing to names of practitioners.

General comments

The most popular choice of **Section A** optional questions was Regulation with 86 per cent with almost equal numbers attempting Power and the Media and/or Postmodernism (the most relatively successful option). In general Power and the Media scored the lowest.

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