

**AS LEVEL**

**Examiners' report**

# **MEDIA STUDIES**

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**H009**

For first teaching in 2017

**H009/01 Summer 2023 series**

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## Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. A selection of candidate answers is also provided. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

A full copy of the question paper and the mark scheme can be downloaded from OCR.

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## Paper 1 series overview

This paper is designed to test candidates' knowledge and understanding of the media as well as their ability to analyse a range of media products, both seen and unseen. To succeed in this paper, candidates must apply their broader knowledge of the media and analyse a range of media forms. Each question offers slightly different challenges, and each requires a slightly different approach to meeting the Assessment Objectives. This was the second paper since the disruption to formal exams caused by the Covid 19 pandemic. The students sitting this paper had, in the main, already experienced external examinations and it appeared that this had had a positive effect as the general quality of responses was marginally better than in 2022. Answers were seen which covered the entire range of marks for each question, with more fitting the criteria for Level 2 and Level 3 than last year.

Overall, the paper was accessible to candidates, with a broad spread of responses demonstrating a range of different strategies for sitting the exam. It was evident that some candidates had been well briefed as to the individual requirements of each question, while others demonstrated strengths and weaknesses across the paper which led to some quite uneven overall outcomes. This was particularly clear in relation to the length of some responses compared to the available marks (some substantial Question 1 responses were seen, while some responses to Question 5 were barely half a page long). On occasion, candidates appeared to have run out of time or rushed through Questions 4 to 6. Some candidates started with Question 4, with no real impact on marks. A few left Question 4 until the end (far fewer than 2022); this tended to lead to shorter responses which did not advantage candidates.

Successful responses tended to balance the broader focus of the questions with specific examples from the media products required. They used those examples to demonstrate either knowledge and understanding, or their ability to analyse, depending on the nature of the question.

Less successful responses tended to give quite broad responses which demonstrated a general knowledge and understanding of the focus of the question (for example, ownership and control in radio) without giving specific examples (for example, discussing the BBC in general rather than providing evidence from *The Radio One Breakfast Show*). Less successful responses to AO2 questions tended to present general analysis without exemplification, rather than using specific examples to support arguments (for example referring to *The Big Issue* in broader terms rather than the specific front cover published in the paper).

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>used bullet points to guide responses where these were provided</li> <li>matched the amount written with the marks available</li> <li>understood the difference between 'explain' and 'analyse' as command words</li> <li>customised responses and application of theory to the focus of the question</li> <li>used relevant examples from appropriate products</li> <li>wrote legibly.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>did not address key bullet points (for example, the requirement for theory in Question 4 or Question 5)</li> <li>did not balance the requirement to cover both AO1 and AO2 in Question 4</li> <li>wrote general analyses rather than considering the specifics of the questions (for example, a basic analysis of Homeland rather than a specific discussion with the focus on active audiences)</li> <li>wrote responses which described media products such as R1BS or the cover of The Big Issue without analysing or explaining the relevance of these descriptions</li> <li>did not attempt to answer some of the questions or did not balance the amount written with marks available.</li> </ul>

## Section A overview

This section on The Media Theoretical Framework was addressed well by many candidates. Most referred to the media products specified in the questions and used the theoretical framework to structure their responses. Key media ideas were addressed effectively. In general it seemed that candidates had studied the required forms and products in reasonable depth, although analysis was sometimes stronger than explanation. This was often just presented as a list of examples with little attempt to contextualise or discuss: knowledge without understanding. This was particularly the case with Question 3, where some candidates simply listed the regulations and expectations of PSBs as represented by the BBC rather than digging down into how issues of control and ownership influenced content in practice.

### Question 1

- 1 Explain how economic contexts can influence the film industry.  
Use Disney's *The Jungle Book* (2016) to support your answer.

[5]

More successful responses balanced an understanding of economic contexts with knowledge of how films are made and marketed with specific reference to *The Jungle Book* (2016). Answers demonstrated a logical link between the budget available to a conglomerate such as Disney (and the broader Hollywood film industry) and choices made by producers (e.g. use of costly CGI, star/director power or global distribution). In general, these ideas were linked to the notion of generating profit while minimising risk. Some of the most successful responses went on to explain how this profit was then fed into the production of future films. Some also made comparisons with independent films, which is a valid point in relation to the question where this was compared with *The Jungle Book*'s blockbuster status. Although not a requirement of the question, some candidates applied Hesmondhalgh's ideas relating to cultural industries.

Where candidates did not address the influence of economic contexts on the film industry, responses were less successful. Such responses tended to describe the content of the film without really reflecting on the economic contexts which had led to their inclusion. For example, several candidates referenced use of CGI without explaining what this had to do with economics. It is important that candidates demonstrate understanding as well as knowledge, which means spelling out what might seem obvious (in this case that CGI is expensive to render but acts as a box office draw leading to higher profit and that Disney, as a significant conglomerate, has the resources to create high-quality CGI renders with limited risk). Many candidates simply described Disney's conglomerate structure and considered the process of making and releasing films in general terms without referring to *The Jungle Book*. Several candidates mentioned *The Jungle Book* without clarifying the point they were making; centres should make sure that candidates are coached on how to explicitly link their knowledge of media to relevant examples from specific products so that they might demonstrate understanding.

Centres should be aware that this is the last year of *The Jungle Book* being used as the focus for film (and advertising and marketing) questions. For students sitting the AS exam in 2024 and beyond, the set product is *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings* (2021). Further information about the changes to set products can be found on the OCR [website](#). Support materials are available on [Teach Cambridge](#).

## Exemplar 1

1 The economic contexts can affect the film industry, for example in the Disney's *The Jungle Book*. As ~~the~~ Disney is an ~~multimillion~~ International conglomerate, which is currently one of the largest companies in the world, it allowed the *Jungle Book* to have a budget of £177 million. This allowed the John Fawcett to cast famous actors like Scarlett Johansson and Idris Elba which helped create a better cultural currency, and meant there was more appeal for older audiences. The fact that they had such a big budget meant that they could use the latest CGI, and employed over 700 MPC graphic designers to make everything, from the animals to the trees in the background. As Disney is an ~~an~~ International company it meant that the expectation for the film was already high, meaning more people would want to watch it. The huge size of the company also meant the ~~ad~~advertisement campaigns were bigger and could reach larger audiences, for example the Snapchat Interactive Snapchat filters.

Exemplar 1 shows a Level 3 response which covers all the requirements of Question 1. Several economic contexts are evident here: budget, affording star names and the economic power of Disney. The points made are directly related to the production of *The Jungle Book* (2016).

## Question 2

- 2 Analyse how the front cover of *The Big Issue* (**Source A**) uses media language to appeal to audiences.

[10]

Some excellent responses were seen for this question, with many candidates achieving marks in Levels 2 or 3. Clear links were made between media language and audience appeal. Some particularly good ideas of how Russell Brand had been positioned through the use of verbal and non-verbal codes were offered, with both the image and coverline being analysed in detail. More successful responses identified how each of the elements on the cover were likely to appeal to specific audiences while, as a package, the whole cover was designed to attract *The Big Issue*'s slightly niche, socially conscious readership. Many candidates referred to *The Big Issue*'s (then comparatively recent) rebrand which, when it was clearly linked to audience appeal, was a relevant point.

Less successful responses tended not to focus on the question asked, instead they often concentrated on image analysis without considering the verbal codes (an essential element of audience appeal when discussing magazines). Several candidates solely focused on the Russell Brand photograph without mentioning any other element of the cover. As has often been the case, some candidates presented an overview of everything they knew about *The Big Issue* with little reference to the unseen cover or with examples taken from other editions they had studied. This might have possibly been appropriate for an AO1-based question, but not for AO2, which requires analysis of a specific product (in this case the unseen cover). Some candidates were able to apply their knowledge of *The Big Issue*'s redesign, but without context or link to the unseen cover, which made such points irrelevant. A few candidates appeared to have written a 'generic' response they had learned, which (since it precluded reference to the unseen cover) offered little which could be given marks for.

When analysing magazine covers, candidates should always be advised to consider both the verbal and non-verbal codes as well as the layout as these can provide a clear structure for a response, particularly for a media language question. They should also be encouraged to move beyond the main image and consider other elements such as the coverlines, the masthead and any puffs or plugs. They should, though, make sure their points link to the question (rather than just analysing the media language out of context).

It was notable that some candidates seemed to have an inaccurate understanding of *The Big Issue*'s target audience, describing them as C2DE and using this as the foundation for their response. Several candidates did this, suggesting it is quite a widespread idea. To the extent that evidence is available, *The Big Issue* appears to appeal mostly to an ABC1 audience; the magazine's advertising page describes the readership as 'affluent and environmentally, socially and ethically aware'.

### Question 3

- 3 Explain how issues of control and ownership can influence the content of public service broadcast (PSB) radio. Use *The Radio One Breakfast Show (R1BS)* to support your answer. [10]

This was one of the less well-answered questions. Although many candidates had a good knowledge of how control and ownership affected the BBC, few responses were seen which demonstrated confident application of this knowledge to the content of *The Radio One Breakfast Show (R1BS)*. Some candidates were able to refer to specific elements which showed how *R1BS* demonstrated the specific requirements of the BBC's Charter (for example, Newsbeat, providing information or the selection of artists and features offering a balanced entertainment package). Radio One's music policy was sometimes discussed, but only a small number of responses used identifiable examples. More successful responses were able to articulate how actual features of shows they had listened to illustrated exactly how the BBC was meeting its unique responsibilities (and in some cases demonstrated an appreciation of the BBC's neutral stance by clarifying how this also influenced content).

Less successful responses did not refer to *R1BS* directly while a significant number seemed to believe that the UK government 'owned' the BBC (it does not). Some candidates simply described features of *R1BS* without relating it to the question; this demonstrates knowledge but not understanding. Some candidates demonstrated a knowledge of *R1BS* but did not link this to the broader knowledge of PSB radio required by the question. A few candidates described how the BBC is organised without mentioning Radio One or *R1BS* at all. There was a tendency for candidates to refer to industry theorists such as Curran and Seaton without applying or explaining why a particular theory was relevant (this happened in quite a few questions but was notable here). It is important that candidates demonstrate that they have listened to *R1BS*. More successful responses were able to reference specific shows (guests, features, reports etc.) to illustrate their knowledge and show understanding.

#### Knowledge and Understanding

AO1 questions (usually beginning with 'Explain') require candidates to demonstrate both knowledge and understanding. Information (such as that the BBC is funded by the licence fee) demonstrates knowledge but, to show understanding, candidates must be able to explain how the licence fee is used and how this affects *R1BS*. In the context of this question, responses needed to be framed according to an awareness of the BBC's public service remit and how this specifically influenced the content of *R1BS* (for example, discussion of the host's salary or reasons for his employment in relation to the target audience).



## Section B overview

This section on Long Form Television Drama was often addressed well by candidates, with many achieving marks in Level 2 and Level 3. Candidates managed to balance both Assessment Objectives, with many demonstrating a good level of knowledge of the theoretical framework which allowed them to analyse the chosen episodes in some depth (only *Homeland* and *Stranger Things* were used by candidates). Less successful responses lacked discussion of active audiences, with many candidates confusing this for audience appeal (they are not the same).

Centres should be aware that this is the last year that *House of Cards* and *Homeland* are available as set products for television. For students sitting the AS exam in 2024 and beyond, these have been replaced with *Killing Eve* (2018), season 1, episode 1, and *Atypical* (2017), season 1, episode 1. Further information about the changes to set products can be found on the OCR [website](#).

### Question 4\*

- 4\* 'The codes and conventions of long form television dramas are influenced by the need to appeal to an active audience.'

Discuss how far you agree with this statement in relation to the set episode of the long form television drama you have studied.

In your answer you must:

- explain the relationship between active audiences and long form television drama
- analyse how the need to appeal to different types of audience has influenced the key codes and conventions in the set episode you have studied
- use relevant academic ideas and arguments in your analysis
- make judgements and reach conclusions about how far you agree with the statement.

[20]

This question required candidates to draw on their knowledge and understanding from the full course of study to analyse the set episode of their chosen LFTVD. The most successful candidates were able to apply a range of theories and ideas to support their responses. They addressed both Assessment Objectives with excellent knowledge and understanding in relation to the focus of the question being used to support a detailed, well-exemplified analysis of the specific LFTVD episode they had studied. The more successful candidate responses demonstrated knowledge and understanding of LFTVD, with a clear appreciation of the codes and conventions of TV dramas. Better responses demonstrated an excellent knowledge and understanding of how media language elements such as enigmas and genre function in relation to active audiences by creating points of entry for viewers to engage with the LFTVDs in a range of ways. Such responses also demonstrated a detailed analysis of their chosen LFTVD episodes with precise references to how active audiences might be served, supported by relevant theory. Jenkins and Gauntlett were mentioned in successful responses, with many also referring to Uses and Gratifications theory and Hall's reception theory. Personal judgement clearly informed the argument in a logical and well-articulated manner. Logical links were made between specific content and audience involvement (for example, fandom or social media).

Less successful responses tended to address one but not both AOs. Mostly, this was to the detriment of the discussion of active audiences. Such candidates were often able to analyse episodes in relation to narrative and genre but without really touching on the key point of active audiences. Sometimes the audience was only mentioned in passing, or the response discussed audiences in general rather than in relation to active audiences. In some responses, candidates confused the idea of active audiences (those who get involved with the media product) with audience appeal (which can relate to passive audiences). Some candidates wrote exceptionally detailed analyses of their chosen episode which did not really fit the question and appeared to be quite generic responses. Such responses tended to focus on theories which were not strictly relevant to active audiences (for example, Todorov and Neale). These could have been applied if they were discussed in relation to active audiences but were sometimes used as general frameworks for analysis. Centres might advise candidates that although it is necessary to refer to theorists in this question, the choice of theorist must be relevant to the question, or the relevance must be made clear to the examiner. Crucially, the analysis must be framed to the question. Some candidates simply described episodes in detail without including any analysis or judgement.

The most popular LFTVD covered was *Stranger Things*. A smaller number of responses discussed *Homeland* (centres who use this are asked to note that *Homeland* has now been retired as a set product). No responses were seen which discussed either *House of Cards* or *Mr Robot*. Several candidates seemed to think *Stranger Things* was set in the 1970s and some that it was set in the 1940s.

### Choosing theories

Candidates have covered a wide range of theories during the AS. Questions 4, 5 and 6 ask students to apply these, although they can be used in any question to support responses. It is important that where theories are used, they are relevant to the question and used to illustrate the point. As a general rule, candidates might be advised to use theorists who fit the part of the theoretical framework being explored in a question (so if the focus is on audiences, Bandura, Gerbner and Hall would be the most appropriate, although it was clear from this exam that some candidates had covered A Level theorists such as Jenkins, Hesmondhalgh and Shirky). It adds little to a response if a candidate mentions a theory without explaining its relevance (for example, several responses to Question 3 mentioned Curran and Seaton without linking their ideas to the BBC).

## Section C overview

The section on News and Online Media once again demonstrated that candidates often had an excellent knowledge of a range of newspapers, but in some instances lacked the ability to apply this knowledge to the specific requirements of the questions. This was particularly true for Question 6. In Question 5 a significant number of candidates did not apply academic arguments and ideas in their analysis or did not compare the two front pages beyond a perfunctory level. Students may benefit from more coaching on the specific requirements of the questions.

It is worth noting here that some responses in this section (as elsewhere in the paper) were difficult (and in some cases impossible) to decipher. It is not possible to give marks for work which is illegible. Centres are advised to provide coaching for candidates whose handwriting is deemed to be hard to read.

### Question 5\*

5\* To what extent do **Source B** and **Source C** construct identities?

In your answer you must:

- analyse and compare the ways in which identities are constructed in **Source B** and **Source C**
- use relevant contexts and academic ideas and arguments in your analysis
- draw judgements and conclusions in relation to the question.

[15]

Most candidates were able to discuss the media language of the two front covers and were able to identify elements of identity, mainly relating to how the two newspapers constructed slightly different versions of Prince Philip and Queen Elizabeth II. More successful responses were able to appreciate the similarities and differences between the two papers. Some element of comparison was required and candidates who were able to do this tended to produce responses of some depth and insight. The best responses wove the analyses of the two front pages together, comparing the ways that construction of identities had clear similarities and differences. The most effective responses tied this into a broader consideration of how both the *Mail* and the *Mirror* constructed their own identities in relation to newspaper genres and in relation to their respective socio-political audiences. Some fascinating arguments were made suggesting very different readings of the covers, which demonstrated quite sophisticated engagement from some candidates. Hall's reception theory was often used here, as were Gauntlett's ideas about identity, as might be expected from the question.

Less successful responses tended to either describe the two front pages in isolation with no comparison or analysis, or focused on specific elements such as the representation of the prince or the photo of Helen McCrory without really considering how identity was being constructed. As with last year, few responses applied theory in any way, even implicitly. Centres should advise candidates that use of theory to support responses is essential for the 15 mark question in Section C, otherwise responses are capped at 10 marks (some potential 15 mark responses were seen which fell into this category). It was also noticed that many responses were quite short. Bearing in mind the higher tariff of the question, a response of reasonable length might be expected. In a few responses, theorists (or theories) were named without any context or explanation. Quite a few responses were unbalanced and wrote a great deal about one source and very little about the other. Some responses wrote in quite general terms about the two sources and some did not reference them at all.

## Exemplar 2

5	<p>Source B and source B both construct identities through the combination of media language codes such as language as well as pictures.</p> <p>In source B, the main headline refers to the Queen's 'farewell' to 'her Prince' and the lexical choices of 'farewell' and adjective 'poignant' connote formality and sadnessness/severity of the situation of the prince's death and funeral. This constructs the Queen as an important and formal figure <del>who is</del> who is at a fully grieving state. The absence of a photo of the Queen nor Prince indicates the extreme sadness and of the private matter for the elite family of the Royals. The respect in handling the news of the death of the prince indicates and reinforces the right-wing values that the Tabloid holds, as it presents the Queen and the Royal Family as important and respectable figures in society. This reflects Curran and Seaton's industry theory that few companies dominate the Press to put out a narrow range of ideas and perspectives, such as the Royals as significant social figures which is often seen through right-wing news papers. Additionally, the 'cancer death of Helen McCrory' headline also constructs the actor as an important figure in culture, as a well-known actor from Harry Potter series. This indicates the Mail as also</p>
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Exemplar 2 shows the first half of a low Level 3 response which covers all the requirements of Question 5. This demonstrates a detailed analysis of Source B with some consideration of identity in relation to the overall front page and an attempt to apply theory. The response clearly references the source and aims to draw conclusions from specific examples. The candidate discusses the second source and includes a clear comparison later in the response (as well as applying another theory).

### Bullets

Candidates should be coached to use the bullet points provided with some questions to support their responses. The bullets emphasise Assessment Objectives which are referenced in the mark scheme and candidates who do not meet all the requirements outlined are unlikely to achieve marks beyond Level 2. It was clear from the lack of theory that few candidates had done this since the requirement is clearly laid out in the second bullet point.

## Question 6

- 6 Explain how political and economic contexts can influence the distribution and circulation of newspapers in a global context. Use *Telegraph Online* to support your answer.

In your answer you must:

- consider relevant political and economic contexts that can influence the global distribution of newspapers
- use your knowledge and understanding of relevant academic ideas and arguments
- use *Telegraph Online* as an example of how newspapers are distributed and circulated in a global context.

[10]

This question was answered very well by some candidates, with other candidates being less successful. This was mainly due to candidates missing one of the elements of the question, often one of the two contexts or the link between the contexts and distribution. The most successful responses demonstrated an understanding of how *Telegraph Online* has met the challenges of a declining print industry by creating a unique identity as a quality right-wing news source which derives income from its paywall (as well as advertising) and has used its online platform to develop a global reach. Candidates were also able to explore the implications of *Telegraph Online*'s right-wing stance with its audience, discussing how in some cases this was mitigated to make sure audiences were not alienated. They were also able to discuss how it might attract certain audiences, for example right-wing American readers who might sympathise with the political stance.

Less successful responses either did not mention political contexts at all, mistook *The Telegraph* for a left-wing or tabloid newspaper, or did not consider in any way how the political context might affect how *Telegraph Online* might be circulated globally. Economic contexts were usually referenced, but sometimes not explained (for example, candidates mentioned that *Telegraph Online* allowed the Barclay Brothers to increase their income but did not explain how). As noted with Question 3 above, where a question is testing AO1, knowledge is not sufficient: understanding needs to be demonstrated through unambiguous explanation and clear exemplification.

It was clear from some responses that some candidates had not studied *Telegraph Online* at all, which was concerning. Centres must make sure they cover all the set products.



## Exemplar 3

6	<p>Political and economic contexts can largely influence distribution and circulation of newspapers in a global context through the different platforms that the news is released and distributed on. For example, as a result of loss in consumers of the Daily Telegraph broadsheet due to audience preference of online and like, up-to-date updates and news on politics and issues, more than 50% of consumers of the Telegraph have moved to consume news on Telegraph Online, as it is more convenient.</p>
	<p>Additionally, the Telegraph online is a part of the Daily Telegraph owned by Barclay Brothers, who are known to be wealthy individuals holding far-right conservative viewpoints often conveyed through the news and stand on issues on the newspaper. For example, on 7 March 2023, there was an article on the Telegraph website as well as across social media accounts regarding Gary Lineker's boycott of match of the Day, which described BBC as facing a 'revolt' over Gary Lineker, which connotes Lineker to be an inconvenience and nuisance to a government-run broadcasting company. This highlights the newspaper's pro-government as well as right wing values. As a wealthy company, Telegraph</p>

Exemplar 3 shows the beginning of a low Level 3 response which demonstrates an adequate and in places comprehensive response to Question 6. This includes a reasonable knowledge of the economic contexts which might influence the distribution and circulation of *Telegraph Online* with some attempt to apply understanding. There is also a consideration of the political dimension, with a reasonable attempt made to provide a relevant (and up to date) example. The response goes on to expand on both points. The response would have been improved by more precise use of terminology and a consideration of the newspaper's global reach.

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