

Cambridge AS & A Level · Sociology 9699 · Notes

The impact of the new media A2

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Read first: [Theories of the media and influences on media content](#)

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What you need to know

By the end of this topic you should be able to explain and evaluate:

1. **How the new media is helping to drive globalisation:** messages, money, images and culture now cross the world instantly, so distance and borders matter less.
2. **How the new media can challenge the people and institutions that hold power:** governments, big companies, traditional media owners and other elites.
3. **The debate between digital optimists and digital pessimists:** is the new media mostly good for democracy, freedom and equality, or mostly a new tool for the already powerful?
4. **How the new media affects social identities and relationships between people:** how we see ourselves, present ourselves, meet others and keep in touch.

New media here means digital, networked and interactive media: the internet, social media platforms, search engines, messaging apps, video-sharing sites, blogs, podcasts and streaming. What the new media *is*, and how it differs from newspapers and broadcasting, is covered in *Traditional media and the new media*; the theories of who controls media content are in *Theories of the media and influences on media content*.

Almost every exam question on this topic so far has been a 35-mark Paper 4 essay about **power**: does the new media let ordinary people challenge governments and elites, and can governments control it? Globalisation and identity have not yet been asked directly, but they are syllabus outcomes, so a question could appear, and they supply evidence for the power essays too.

Understand it

What makes the new media different

Four features explain nearly everything in this topic. Learn them, because every argument below goes back to one of them.

Feature	What it means	Why it matters for power
Interactive	Users reply, comment, share and create, not just receive	Audiences become producers ("prosumers")
Networked	Everyone can reach everyone, without passing through an editor	Gatekeepers (editors, owners, governments) can be bypassed
Instant and global	A post can cross the world in seconds	Events can't be kept local; borders matter less
Digital and data-based	Everything is recorded, stored, searchable and countable	Users can be tracked, profiled and sold to advertisers

The first three features are the basis of the hopeful view; the fourth is the basis of most of the worried view. Notice that they are all true at once: the same phone that lets you film police violence also logs where you were standing.

The new media and globalisation

Globalisation is the growing interconnection of the world's societies, economies and cultures. The new media speeds it up in four ways.

1. It shrinks time and space. **David Harvey** (*The Condition of Postmodernity*, 1989) called this **time-space compression**: as communication speeds up, the world feels smaller. A family in Manila can video-call a relative working in Dubai every evening for almost nothing. **Marshall McLuhan** predicted in the 1960s that electronic media would turn the world into a **global village**, where people far apart know each other's news as villagers do. **Manuel Castells** (*The Rise of the Network Society*, 1996) argued that power in the information age flows through networks of computers and people rather than through places, and that these networks ignore national borders.

2. It spreads culture across borders, in more than one direction.

- **Cultural imperialism:** **Herbert Schiller** (*Mass Communications and American Empire*, 1969) argued that Western, especially US, corporations flood the world with their media, spreading consumerism and Western values. Today the platforms most of the world uses (YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp) are mostly American-owned.
- **Reverse and multiple flows:** the new media also lets non-Western culture go global. South Korean pop spread worldwide largely through YouTube; "Gangnam Style" became the first YouTube video to pass one billion views, in December **2012**. Nigerian ("Nollywood") films and Indian music reach diasporas and new fans online.
- **Glocalisation:** **Roland Robertson** (1992) used this term for global products adapted to local tastes. Global platforms carry content in hundreds of languages, and users mix global trends with local styles.

3. It creates global audiences, campaigns and communities. A video can be watched in every country at once; a hashtag campaign can start in one country and be copied in dozens. Migrants keep ties with home through messaging groups, creating **transnational** families and identities.

4. It lets global firms work above nations. A handful of companies (Alphabet, Meta, Amazon, Apple, Microsoft, and in China Tencent and Alibaba) run the networks that billions use. They are based in one country, operate in nearly all, and are hard for any single government to regulate.

But globalisation through the new media is uneven. The **global digital divide** is the gap between people who have good internet access and skills and those who do not. By the International Telecommunication Union's estimate, about **2.6 billion people**, roughly a third of humanity, were still offline in **2024**, most of them in low-income countries and rural areas. For them the "global village" does not exist: news still arrives by radio and television, which in many low-income countries the state runs.

Can the new media challenge power?

Power structures are the established positions from which some groups shape society: governments, the police and military, big corporations, media owners, and in a wider sense dominant classes, men, or majority ethnic groups. The new media seems to give ordinary people three new kinds of power.

The power to show: citizen journalism

Citizen journalism means ordinary people recording and publishing news themselves, usually on their phones, without a professional newsroom.

- In **2009**, during protests after Iran's disputed election, a mobile-phone video of a young woman, **Neda Agha-Soltan**, being shot was seen around the world within days, although foreign reporters had been restricted.
- In **May 2020** a teenager, **Darnella Frazier**, filmed George Floyd's death under a Minneapolis police officer's knee. Her video undercut the police's first account and sparked Black Lives Matter protests across the world. She received a special Pulitzer Prize citation in **2021**.

The point for power: governments and police lose their monopoly over the official version of events. What used to depend on a journalist being present, and an editor deciding to run it, now depends only on someone with a phone.

The power to know: leaks and hacktivism

- **Whistleblowers** can leak huge amounts of information digitally. **WikiLeaks** published secret US military logs and diplomatic cables in **2010**. **Edward Snowden** revealed in **2013** that US and UK intelligence agencies were collecting data on millions of ordinary people's phone calls and internet use.
- **Hacktivism** means hacking for political ends: breaking into or disabling the websites of governments or companies to protest or to expose wrongdoing. The loose network known as **Anonymous** attacked the Tunisian government's websites in **2011** in support of protesters.

These show the new media working as a **watchdog** over the powerful, often more fearlessly than traditional media, which depends on government sources and advertisers.

The power to gather: digital activism

Digital activism is using the internet and social media to organise political action. **Clay Shirky** (*Here Comes Everybody*, 2008) argued that the internet makes "organising without organisations" possible: a group can form, coordinate and act without leaders, offices, money or membership lists. Things that once needed a party or union can now be done by a hashtag.

- **The Arab Spring (2010–2012).** In **December 2010** a Tunisian street vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, set himself on fire after officials confiscated his goods. Videos of the protests that followed spread on Facebook and were picked up by satellite channels. Tunisia's president fled in **January 2011**; Egypt's president, Hosni Mubarak, resigned in **February 2011** after mass protests that young activists had helped organise online. Protests spread to Libya, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain and beyond. **Castells** (*Networks of Outrage and Hope*, 2012) saw these as a new kind of movement: born on the internet, spreading by contagion, with no leaders to arrest.
- **#MeToo (from October 2017):** millions of women shared experiences of sexual harassment and assault, leading to the fall of powerful men in film, media and politics in several countries. It challenged **patriarchal** power, not just state power.
- **Hong Kong (2019):** protesters used encrypted messaging apps and online forums to coordinate fast-moving protests with no visible leaders, describing their tactic as "be water".

What the new media adds to protest can be summed up in three words: **speed** (news and plans spread in minutes), **scale** (a message can reach millions, not hundreds) and **cost** (a post is free; printing leaflets and hiring halls is not).

Which theories does this support?

- **Pluralism:** power is spread among many groups, and the new media spreads it further, giving more groups a voice.
- **Postmodernism:** there is no longer one dominant story; anyone can broadcast, and audiences become producers.
- **Neo-Marxist ideas of counter-hegemony:** subordinate groups can now create and spread their own ideas, contesting the dominant ones.

How the powerful strike back

Now look at the same events from the other side. There are five reasons to doubt that the new media has shifted power downwards.

1. Protest that trends is not the same as protest that wins.

- Look at what happened after the Arab Spring. Egypt's elected president was removed by the army in **July 2013**, and military rule returned. Syria, Libya and Yemen fell into civil wars. Only **Tunisia** became a constitutional democracy, and even there President Kais Saied suspended parliament in **July 2021** and took wider powers. Getting crowds onto the streets proved far easier than building something lasting afterwards.

- **Malcolm Gladwell** ("Small Change", *The New Yorker*, 2010) argued that social media is built on **weak ties**: loose links with many people who will click and share but take no risks. Real change has come from movements built on **strong ties** (close friends, committed members) and **hierarchy** (leaders who can plan and negotiate). Leaderless movements also have no one to make deals or hold gains.
- **Slacktivism** (a word **Evgeny Morozov** helped popularise) is low-effort online "activism" (liking, sharing, changing a profile picture) that makes people feel involved while changing nothing. The **Kony 2012** video about a Ugandan warlord was watched about **100 million** times within a week in **March 2012**, yet the street poster campaign it called for that April drew small crowds, and its target was never caught.

2. States use the new media too. **Morozov** (*The Net Delusion*, 2011) argued that optimists forget that authoritarian governments learn quickly. They fight back in three ways:

- **Open censorship and shutdowns**: China's "Great Firewall" blocks Facebook, Google and X; Egypt cut almost all internet access for about five days in **January 2011**; Russia blocked Facebook and Instagram in **March 2022**; Nigeria suspended Twitter from **June 2021** to **January 2022** after it deleted a post by the president. India has ordered more regional shutdowns than any other country in several recent years.
- **Hidden control**: instead of banning, governments can flood the internet with their own message disguised as ordinary posts. **King, Pan and Roberts** (2017) estimated that the Chinese government produces about **448 million** fake social media posts a year, mostly cheerleading and distraction rather than argument. Russia's Internet Research Agency ran thousands of fake accounts during the 2016 US election.
- **Capturing the technology**: surveillance turns the tools of protest into tools of control. Posts, contacts and locations can be used to identify and arrest activists. Some states require platforms to store data locally or register users by real name, and they build their own national platforms (China's WeChat and Weibo) that obey them.

3. Corporations own the town square. Digital pessimists in the Marxist tradition stress that the new media is owned:

- **Christian Fuchs** (*Social Media: A Critical Introduction*, 2014) argues that users do unpaid **digital labour**: every post and click produces data that platforms sell to advertisers. The people are the product.
- **Shoshana Zuboff** (*The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, 2019) describes firms that make money by predicting and shaping behaviour from personal data.
- **Curran, Fenton and Freedman** (*Misunderstanding the Internet*, 2012) found that the internet had not broken the power of big media firms: the most-visited news sites are mostly those of old media giants, and the platforms themselves have become giants.
- **Platforms decide who may speak**. Facebook and other platforms remove accounts and posts under their own rules; Twitter permanently suspended US President Donald Trump in **January 2021**; **Elon Musk** bought Twitter in **October 2022** for about 44 billion US dollars and changed its rules. Whether this protects users or hands private firms a censor's power is itself argued over: no voter or court chose those rules.
- **Algorithms** decide what each user sees. **Eli Pariser** (*The Filter Bubble*, 2011) argued that they show people more of what they already agree with, which divides publics rather than uniting them against power.

4. The powerful are better at it. Political parties, governments and corporations have money for targeted advertising, data analysts and influencers. **Cambridge Analytica** obtained data on up to **87 million** Facebook users (revealed in **2018**) to target political adverts. Populist leaders use social media to speak directly to supporters, bypassing journalists who might question them.

5. Many people are not online at all. The digital divide means the people with least power (the poor, the old, rural people, many women in low-income countries) are the least likely to use the new media, and they depend on traditional media that governments often control.

Digital optimism versus digital pessimism

All of the above is one debate, with two camps.

	Digital optimists	Digital pessimists
Core claim	The new media spreads power, knowledge and freedom	The new media mostly serves those already powerful
Democracy	More voices, more participation, watchdog on power	Surveillance, propaganda, fake news, filter bubbles
Ownership	Users create the content	A few corporations own the platforms and profit from users' data
Protest	Fast, cheap, leaderless mobilisation (Arab Spring, #MeToo)	Slacktivism, weak ties, protests crushed or fizzle out
Knowledge	Free information for all; collective intelligence	Amateur content and misinformation; expert knowledge undermined
Relationships	New communities and ties across distance	Shallower ties, isolation, cyberbullying
Key thinkers	Rheingold (1993), Jenkins (2006), Shirky (2008), Castells (2012)	Keen (2007), Morozov (2011), Turkle (2011), Curran et al. (2012), Fuchs (2014), Zuboff (2019)
Fits	Pluralism, postmodernism	Marxism, neo-Marxism, many feminists

The optimists in more detail.

- **Howard Rheingold** (*The Virtual Community*, 1993) described early online groups as real communities, offering support and belonging regardless of where people lived.
- **Henry Jenkins** (*Convergence Culture*, 2006) described a **participatory culture**: fans, gamers and citizens remix, comment on and produce media, so audiences share power with producers.
- **Shirky** and **Castells** (above): collective action without organisations; networked social movements.
- **Wikipedia** is a common example: a free encyclopedia written by volunteers.

The pessimists in more detail.

- **Andrew Keen** (*The Cult of the Amateur*, 2007) argued that when everyone publishes, expert journalism and quality culture are drowned in amateur noise and misinformation.
- **Morozov, Fuchs, Zuboff and Curran, Fenton and Freedman** (above): state control, corporate ownership, surveillance.
- **Sherry Turkle** (*Alone Together*, 2011): constant connection leaves people lonelier (see below).
- **Feminists** point to online misogyny, harassment and threats aimed at women who speak out, which can push women out of online public debate.

Evaluating the debate. Both camps are partly right because both describe real cases. The most useful line in an essay is often that **the outcome depends on context**:

- **Type of state:** in democracies with free courts, the new media adds real voice; in authoritarian states, it can be turned into a surveillance tool.
- **Type of goal:** the new media is good at raising awareness and starting protests, worse at winning lasting change.
- **Over time:** early optimism (around 2010–2011) gave way to pessimism after Snowden, Cambridge Analytica and the failure of most Arab Spring revolutions; some writers now argue for a **realist** middle view.

Social identities and interpersonal relationships

Social identity is how we see ourselves and are seen by others as members of groups (gender, ethnicity, class, age, nationality, sexuality, religion, fan groups). **Interpersonal relationships** are our ties with family, friends, partners and acquaintances.

Identity

- **Presenting the self.** **Erving Goffman** (*The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 1959) said we manage the impressions others form of us, like actors on a stage. Social media makes this constant and deliberate: people choose photos, filters and posts to build a "front stage" self. This can be creative, but it can also feed anxiety about looks and status, since people compare their ordinary lives with others' edited highlights.
- **Identity as choice and play.** Postmodernists argue that identity is now something people construct from a menu of options. Online, people can try out identities, join fan communities and follow subcultures from anywhere. Turkle's early work (*Life on the Screen*, 1995) saw online spaces as places to experiment with who you are.
- **Support for marginalised identities.** Young people questioning their sexuality, disabled people, and members of small minorities can find others like them online when there are none nearby, which can strengthen an identity that local life ignores or stigmatises.
- **Hybrid and diaspora identities.** Migrants and their children follow home-country news, music and family life online while living elsewhere, combining identities (see *Globalisation and identity*).
- **Collective identities through campaigns.** Hashtag movements (#MeToo, #BlackLivesMatter) gave many people a shared political identity.

- **But old identities remain.** Class, gender, ethnicity and religion still shape who goes online, what they see and how they are treated there. Online spaces can also **harden** identities: filter bubbles and extremist forums can draw people into narrow, hostile group identities, and online hate targets women and minorities.

Relationships

- **Optimistic views.**
 - **Networked individualism:** **Lee Rainie and Barry Wellman** (*Networked*, 2012) argue that people now live in wide, flexible personal networks rather than tight local groups, and that the internet adds contacts rather than replacing face-to-face ones.
 - **Keeping in touch across distance:** video calls, family chat groups and photo sharing keep migrants, students and grandparents close.
 - **Meeting partners:** **Rosenfeld, Thomas and Hausen** (2019) found that among US heterosexual couples who met in **2017**, about **39%** met online, more than through friends; online dating widens the pool beyond one's own neighbourhood or class.
 - **Teenagers' social lives:** **danah boyd** (*It's Complicated*, 2014) found that young Americans use social media mainly to hang out with friends they already know, because adults limit where they can meet in person. On this view, online life continues offline friendship rather than replacing it.
 - **Daniel Miller** (*Tales from Facebook*, 2011), studying Trinidad, found that people use social media in ways shaped by their own culture, and that it helps maintain wide family and community ties.
- **Pessimistic views.**
 - **Turkle** (*Alone Together*, 2011): people are always connected yet more alone; they prefer texting to conversation because it can be controlled, and real attention to the person in the room declines.
 - **Robert Putnam** (*Bowling Alone*, 2000) traced a decline of community life and **social capital** in the USA; critics apply his argument to screens, which draw time away from local groups.
 - **Cyberbullying, trolling and harassment** follow victims home and onto every device.
 - **Surveillance in relationships:** partners and parents can track and monitor, which can become controlling.
- **Evaluation.** Most research finds the new media **reshapes** relationships rather than simply improving or damaging them, and effects differ by age, class and culture (Miller's studies show the same platform used very differently in different societies).

Key facts and formulas

There is no formula list in Sociology. "Learn it" means you must remember it.

Key term	Status
New media: digital, networked, interactive media (internet, social media, apps, streaming); four features: interactive, networked, instant and global, data-based	Learn it

Key term	Status
Globalisation and the new media: time-space compression (Harvey 1989); global village (McLuhan, 1960s); network society (Castells 1996); cultural imperialism (Schiller 1969); glocalisation (Robertson 1992); reverse flows ("Gangnam Style", 2012); global digital divide (about 2.6 billion offline in 2024)	Learn it
Challenges to power: citizen journalism (Neda Agha-Soltan 2009; Darnella Frazier 2020); leaks (WikiLeaks 2010; Snowden 2013); hacktivism (Anonymous, Tunisia 2011); digital activism (Shirky 2008; Castells 2012); Arab Spring 2010–2012; #MeToo 2017; Hong Kong 2019; speed, scale, cost	Learn it
Limits of digital protest: weak ties (Gladwell 2010); slacktivism (Morozov; Kony 2012); Arab Spring outcomes (Egypt coup 2013, civil wars, Tunisia's reversal 2021)	Learn it
State responses: censorship and shutdowns (Egypt January 2011; Nigeria's Twitter ban 2021–2022; Russia March 2022); hidden control (King, Pan and Roberts 2017: about 448 million fake posts a year); capturing the technology (surveillance, national platforms)	Learn it
Corporate control: digital labour (Fuchs 2014); surveillance capitalism (Zuboff 2019); Curran, Fenton and Freedman (2012); platform moderation (Trump suspended January 2021; Musk bought Twitter October 2022); filter bubbles (Pariser 2011); Cambridge Analytica (87 million users, 2018)	Learn it
Digital optimists: Rheingold (1993), Jenkins (2006), Shirky (2008), Castells (2012) against digital pessimists: Keen (2007), Morozov (2011), Turkle (2011), Curran et al. (2012), Fuchs (2014), Zuboff (2019)	Learn it
Identity and relationships: impression management (Goffman 1959); identity play (Turtle 1995); networked individualism (Rainie and Wellman 2012); couples meeting online (Rosenfeld, Thomas and Hausen 2019: about 39% in 2017); boyd (2014); Miller (2011); Alone Together (Turtle 2011); social capital (Putnam 2000)	Learn it
Paper 4: two essays from different sections, each 35 marks: AO1 9, AO2 11, AO3 15, so $9 + 11 + 15 = 35$	Learn it

How to do it

We have tagged 10 questions for this topic (2021–2025), 8 different (two November questions were each set on two papers). Nine are 35-mark "Evaluate this view" essays from Paper 4; the other is a two-part question from the old Paper 3 (June 2021), whose parts fit two different types, so the counts add up to 11.

Question type	Questions
Evaluate how far the new media empowers people to challenge power	8
Evaluate how far governments can control the new media	2
Explain the factors influencing how news is reported	1

Paper 4 lasts 1 hour 45 minutes for two essays, so allow about 50 minutes for each, including 5 minutes to plan.

1. Evaluate how far the new media empowers people to challenge power (8 questions)

Asked as: the new media has given people more power, or more opportunities, to challenge existing power structures (4, two questions each set on two papers); the new media is a powerful tool for challenging government authority, or has given citizens more power to influence politics (2); the growth of the new media has weakened the power of governments (1); the new media has transferred power from large organisations to individual citizens (1, the old Paper 3 part worth 16 marks).

1. **Introduction** (3–4 sentences): define the new media by its features (interactive, networked, instant, data-based); say **whose** power the quotation means (governments, elites, large organisations); and say the question is the core of the digital optimism against pessimism debate.
2. **Build the case for the view around the three new powers**, each with a named case and a theorist:
 - **To show**: citizen journalism (Neda Agha-Soltan; Darnella Frazier) breaks the official monopoly on what happened.
 - **To know**: leaks and hacktivism (WikiLeaks; Snowden; Anonymous) make the new media a watchdog that does not need government sources or advertisers.
 - **To gather**: leaderless, fast, mass mobilisation (Shirky; Castells; the Arab Spring; #MeToo; Hong Kong). Stress **speed, scale and cost**: a post that reaches millions overnight costs nothing, where a printed leaflet campaign once took money, volunteers and weeks.
 - Link to **pluralism** (power is spread wider) and **postmodernism** (audiences become producers).
3. **Build the case against around five doubts**, again with cases:
 - **Results**: the Arab Spring mostly failed (only Tunisia became a democracy, and it later slid back); weak ties (Gladwell); slacktivism (Kony 2012).
 - **State fight-back**: open censorship and shutdowns (Egypt 2011; Russia 2022; Nigeria 2021), hidden propaganda posing as ordinary users (King, Pan and Roberts), and capturing the technology for surveillance (Morozov).
 - **Corporate ownership**: platforms profit from users (Fuchs; Zuboff), decide who may post (Trump's suspension; Musk's X), and old media giants still dominate news (Curran, Fenton and Freedman).
 - **The powerful use it better**: Cambridge Analytica; targeted advertising; leaders bypassing journalists.
 - **The digital divide**: the least powerful are the least connected, so the new voice goes mainly to people who already had more of one.
 - Link to **Marxism** (the new media is owned and serves capital) and **digital pessimism**.
4. **Use the two distinctions: democratic against authoritarian states** (where courts protect speech, digital protest can work; where they do not, the state usually wins) and **traditional against new media** (the new media gives far more voice than newspapers did, even if it has limits).
5. **Conclusion**: answer the exact words. For example: the new media has given people new ways to expose and protest, and can take governments by surprise, but it has rarely changed who holds power, because states and corporations have adapted and own or watch the networks. "More opportunities" is true; "more power" is only partly true.

Variants.

- **"Influence politics" or "challenge government authority"**: keep governments at the centre. Add elections (targeted campaigns; leaders speaking directly to voters) and online petitions alongside protest.
- **"Weakened the power of governments"**: the case against is the strongest here; show governments' new powers too (surveillance, data, propaganda), so the new media may have **strengthened** some governments.
- **"Transfer of power from large organisations"**: "large organisations" includes corporations and media conglomerates, so give corporate ownership (Fuchs, Curran) as much space as states, and weigh citizen journalism's strengths against its limits (unverified, easily ignored, often picked up only when traditional media repeat it).
- **Stay on the new media**. Examiners criticise answers that discuss the media in general; every paragraph should be about digital, interactive media.

2. Evaluate how far governments can control the new media (2 questions)

Asked as: governments have no control over the new media (1); national governments are powerless to control the new media (1).

The quotation says governments are weak, so arguments about **why the new media escapes control** support it, and **the means governments use** challenge it.

1. **Introduction**: define the new media; note that governments differ: **authoritarian** states aim to control directly; **democracies** mainly regulate.
2. **Why the new media is hard to control (for the view)**:
 - **No borders**: the platforms and servers are often in another country, and global firms can resist (Facebook blocked news in Australia in **February 2021** in a dispute over a law making it pay publishers; Apple refused the FBI's demand to unlock a terrorist's iPhone in **2016**).
 - **Too much, too fast**: billions of users post constantly, so no state can check everything; and the technology changes faster than laws can be passed.
 - **Ways around**: VPNs, encrypted messaging, the Tor network and the dark web, and cryptocurrencies for funding, let users dodge blocks and surveillance.
 - **Democratic limits**: courts and constitutions protect free speech (the US First Amendment; Section 230 of the US Communications Decency Act, 1996, which protects platforms from liability for users' posts); voters punish governments that censor; and in a democracy ministers have no seat in the newsroom or on a platform's moderation team.
 - **Governments may not want full control**: a mostly open internet makes a government look legitimate, and it can still lean on platforms over the few issues it cares about most.
3. **What governments can do (against the view)**, five levers:
 - **Block**: censorship, website bans and shutdowns (China; Egypt 2011; Russia 2022; Nigeria 2021–2022; India).
 - **Watch**: surveillance, real-name rules, data laws (Snowden showed even democracies watch at scale).
 - **Legislate and fine**: Germany's NetzDG (2017); the EU's Digital Services Act (2022); the UK's Online Safety Act (2023); fines, licences and decisions on state funding and advertising; platforms now **regulate themselves**, taking material down unasked, partly to head off new laws.

- **Own or capture:** national platforms (WeChat, Weibo); pressure on companies that also own traditional media, where governments already have levers such as licences.
 - **Persuade:** governments are a main source of news and post their own; covert propaganda floods platforms (King, Pan and Roberts).
4. **Bring in other actors:** owners (Musk), advertisers, users and campaigners also shape the new media, so governments share control.
5. **Conclusion:** for example: "no control" is clearly false; authoritarian states control much of what their citizens see, and democracies increasingly regulate platforms; but no government controls the new media as fully as it once controlled broadcasting, and determined users can get round it.

Variant. "Powerless" and "no control" are absolute: one strong case of control (China) disproves them, so spend the essay judging **how much** control different governments have and **whether it is growing**. Examiners marked down answers that simply agreed governments are powerless, and answers about the media in general rather than the new media.

3. Explain the factors influencing how news is reported (1 question)

Asked as: explain the factors influencing how news is reported (1, the 9-mark first part of the old Paper 3 question).

1. **Explain only; no evaluation needed.**
2. **Give two or three developed factors**, each with a concept and a study. Good choices (all covered in *Theories of the media and influences on media content*): news values (Galtung and Ruge), owners and their politics, advertisers, gatekeeping and agenda setting, reliance on official sources, and sensationalism under competition.
3. **Add the new media** as a factor, since this question sat with this topic: 24-hour online news and the race to be first; clicks and shares rewarding sensational headlines; algorithms deciding which stories reach people; citizen footage and social media posts as sources that journalists must verify.
4. **Avoid personal opinion** about bias; examiners noted that low answers relied on it instead of concepts.

Worked examples

The first example is a short "explain" answer; the others are new 35-mark essays. The essay marks are given the way the levels mark scheme works: by assessment objective and level, not by points. In the exam, write each bullet as a full paragraph.

Example 1

Explain how the new media has changed interpersonal relationships. [9]

Point 1: relationships across distance. Video calls, family chat groups and photo sharing let migrants and students stay part of daily family life far from home. Rainie and Wellman call the result **networked individualism**: people keep wide, flexible networks that are not tied to one place.

Point 2: how partners meet. Online dating has widened the pool of possible partners beyond neighbourhood, school and friends' circles; Rosenfeld, Thomas and Hausen found about 39% of US heterosexual couples who met in 2017 met online.

Point 3: the quality of contact. Turkle argues that constant messaging replaces conversation, leaving people "alone together"; cyberbullying and monitoring of partners can follow people everywhere.

How it would be marked. Three developed points, each with a concept and a study: the top band. A list of apps, or personal opinion about phones, stays in the lower band. Note that "explain" does not ask for evaluation, although Point 3 shows the change can be negative.

Example 2

'The new media has turned the world into a global village.' Evaluate this view. [35]

Introduction. McLuhan's global village is a world where distance no longer separates people's knowledge and culture. The view claims the new media has made this real.

For the view (AO1/AO2).

- **Time-space compression** (Harvey): instant, almost free contact; families and businesses work across continents in real time.
- **Network society** (Castells): information and power flow through global networks, not places.
- **Global audiences and campaigns:** one video or hashtag reaches every country at once (#MeToo spread across dozens of countries).
- **Two-way cultural flows:** K-pop and "Gangnam Style" (2012) show culture moving from non-Western countries too; diasporas maintain transnational identities.

Against the view (AO3).

- **Not everyone is in the village:** about 2.6 billion people were offline in 2024, mostly in poorer countries; the divide within countries follows class, age and gender.
- **Not an equal village:** Schiller's cultural imperialism; the main platforms are mostly US-owned, so the "village" runs on American companies' rules and profits.
- **Walls are being built:** China's Great Firewall, Russia's blocks and national platforms split the internet into national zones.
- **Villages of the like-minded:** filter bubbles (Pariser) mean people meet mainly those who agree with them; glocalisation (Robertson) shows local cultures adapting, not disappearing.

Conclusion. The new media has made a global village possible for the connected, but it is divided by access, ownership and state borders; "the world" overstates it.

How it would be marked. Accurate knowledge of globalisation concepts and named cases (AO1 7–9), every point tied to "global village" (AO2 10–11), and sustained evaluation using the digital divide, ownership and national control to reach a judgement on the wording (AO3 12–15).

Example 3

'The new media has mainly had a negative effect on social identities and relationships.' Evaluate this view. [35]

Introduction. Define social identity and interpersonal relationships, and note that this is the digital pessimism debate applied to private life.

For the view (AO1/AO2).

- **Shallow ties:** Turkle's *Alone Together*; time on screens draws people away from community life (Putnam's argument about social capital, applied to screens).
- **Pressure on identity:** Goffman's impression management becomes constant; comparing oneself with others' edited lives feeds anxiety.
- **Hostility:** cyberbullying, trolling and misogynist harassment; filter bubbles and extremist forums harden narrow group identities.
- **Control:** partners and parents can monitor each other.

Against the view (AO3).

- **Networked individualism** (Rainie and Wellman): more contacts, added to face-to-face ties, not replacing them.
- **Continuity, not loss:** boyd found teenagers using social media mainly to stay with existing friends; Miller found people adapt platforms to their own culture.
- **Support and belonging:** marginalised groups find others like them; diasporas keep identities alive; online dating widens choice (about 39% of couples in 2017 met online).
- **Identity as choice:** postmodernists see more freedom to build and try out identities (Turkle's earlier view).
- **Structure still matters:** class, gender and ethnicity shape effects, so "mainly negative" depends on who you are.

Conclusion. The new media has reshaped identities and relationships, with real harms and real gains; the evidence does not show the effect is mainly negative, though some groups (targets of harassment, isolated heavy users) bear most of the harm.

How it would be marked. A range of studies on both identity and relationships (AO1 7–9), applied to "mainly negative" throughout (AO2 10–11), and evaluation that weighs optimistic and pessimistic evidence and distinguishes between groups (AO3 12–15).

Example 4

'The new media has strengthened the power of elites rather than weakened it.' Evaluate this view. [35]

This is the hardest kind: "rather than" asks you to weigh the two outcomes against each other, not just list both.

Introduction. Elites are the small groups at the top of politics, business and the media. The view is the digital pessimists' case.

For the view (AO1/AO2).

- **States watch and steer:** surveillance (Snowden); hidden propaganda (King, Pan and Roberts); shutdowns (Egypt 2011; Russia 2022) (Morozov's *Net Delusion*).
- **Corporations profit:** digital labour (Fuchs); surveillance capitalism (Zuboff); a few firms own the platforms; billionaire owners set the rules (Musk).
- **Old elites adapt:** big media firms still dominate news online (Curran, Fenton and Freedman); parties buy data-driven targeting (Cambridge Analytica).
- **Protest fizzles:** the Arab Spring's outcomes; weak ties (Gladwell); slacktivism.

Against the view (AO3).

- **Exposure:** leaks (WikiLeaks; Snowden himself) and citizen journalism (Darnella Frazier) have embarrassed and held to account the powerful.
- **Real defeats for elites:** Tunisia's and Egypt's presidents fell in 2011; #MeToo ended the careers of powerful men.
- **Pluralism:** new voices, parties and movements reach audiences without owners' permission (Shirky; Jenkins; Castells).
- **Context:** in democracies with free courts, the balance favours citizens more than in authoritarian states.

Conclusion. The new media has given elites powerful new tools and given citizens new weapons; in authoritarian states and in the economy, elites have mostly gained, but in exposing wrongdoing and starting protests, citizens have gained. "Rather than" is too one-sided.

How it would be marked. Detailed knowledge of both camps with named cases (AO1 7–9), applied to elites throughout (AO2 10–11), and evaluation that weighs gains and losses by context and reaches a reasoned verdict (AO3 12–15).

Common mistakes

- **Writing about the media in general.** Examiners repeatedly criticise answers that discuss media power without focusing on the **new** media. Make every paragraph about digital, interactive media, and contrast it with traditional media only to show what is new.
- **Accepting the view uncritically.** Weak answers agree that the new media has empowered people, or that governments are powerless, and never test it. AO3 is worth 15 of the 35 marks: evaluate throughout.
- **No examples.** Low-scoring answers make general claims ("people can protest online") without cases. Name real events (the Arab Spring, #MeToo, Snowden, China's firewall) and real sociologists.
- **Losing the link to power.** Some answers describe what people do online (shopping, gaming, chatting) without connecting it to challenging, or being controlled by, power structures.
- **Treating all governments as the same.** Good answers separate authoritarian states, which control directly, from democracies, which regulate indirectly; this distinction is one of the quickest ways to show evaluation.

- **Personal opinion instead of sociology.** In "explain" parts especially, low answers gave personal views about media bias; use concepts and studies.

How to get the marks

- **"Evaluate this view" (35 marks):** one long essay, marked by levels for each assessment objective.
- **AO1 knowledge and understanding (9):** the top level (7–9) needs a wide range of accurate, detailed points using concepts, theory and research. Use terms such as digital optimism, digital pessimism, citizen journalism, hacktivism, digital activism, slacktivism, weak ties, surveillance, digital labour, filter bubble, digital divide, time-space compression and networked individualism, and name sociologists.
- **AO2 interpretation and application (11):** the top level (10–11) needs material that is accurate and **consistently applied to the question**. Keep using the question's own words ("power structures", "government authority", "no control") and apply named cases.
- **AO3 analysis and evaluation (15):** the top level (12–15) needs evaluation that is **explicit, detailed and sustained**, with contrasting views. A brief outline of the other side stays in the 4–7 band; explicit evaluation that is not kept up reaches 8–11.
- **Use the debate as your structure:** digital optimists against digital pessimists, linked to pluralism and postmodernism against Marxism.
- **Evaluate the wording:** "no control" and "powerless" fall to one strong exception; "more opportunities" is easier to accept than "more power"; "weakened" invites the counter-claim that governments have gained.
- **Reach a judgement** that says where (which countries, which goals, which groups) the view holds best and worst.
- **"Explain" parts** need two or three developed points with concepts and studies, and no evaluation.
- **Answer two questions from different sections** (Globalisation, Media, Religion); the paper is out of $2 \times 35 = 70$.

Quick check

1. Give the four features of the new media and say which one digital pessimists rely on most.
2. What is the difference between citizen journalism and hacktivism? Give an example of each.
3. An online event page for a protest has 40,000 people marked "going", but 1,200 people turn up. What percentage of those marked "going" attended, and which concept does this illustrate?
4. Give one reason Gladwell gives for doubting that social media can produce lasting political change.
5. Give one way the new media can strengthen social identities and one way it can damage relationships, each with a sociologist.

Answers

1. Interactive, networked, instant and global, digital and data-based. Pessimists rely most on the last: because everything is recorded, users can be tracked by states and sold to advertisers.
2. Citizen journalism is ordinary people recording and publishing news (Darnella Frazier's video of George Floyd in 2020). Hacktivism is hacking for political ends, breaking into or disabling websites to protest or expose wrongdoing (Anonymous attacking Tunisian government sites in 2011).
3. $\frac{1200}{40000} \times 100 = 3\%$, so only 3% of those who said they were going actually went. This illustrates **slacktivism**: online support that costs nothing does not turn into action.
4. Social media is built on weak ties: people will click and share for causes but not take risks, whereas successful movements have relied on strong ties and leadership.
5. Strengthen: marginalised groups and diasporas find others like them online (postmodernists; Rainie and Wellman's wide networks). Damage: Turkle argues constant connection leaves people "alone together", replacing conversation with controllable messaging.

Past questions to try

- **9699/42/F/M/21 Q4**: essay on whether national governments are powerless to control the new media.
- **9699/43/O/N/21 Q4**: essay on whether access to the new media has given people more power to challenge existing power structures.
- **9699/34/M/J/21 Q6**: explain the factors influencing how news is reported, then assess whether the new media has moved power from large organisations to individual citizens.