

# Theories of the media and influences on media content

A2

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## What you need to know

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

1. **Pluralist theories of the media:** power over the media is spread across many groups (owners, journalists, advertisers, audiences, governments, pressure groups), so content reflects the variety of views in society.
2. **Marxist and neo-Marxist theories of the media:** the media is owned by, or works for, the capitalist class and spreads ideas that keep it in power.
3. **The factors that influence which stories become news and how they are presented:** news values, gatekeeping, agenda setting, owners, journalists, sources, advertisers, audiences, time and money.
4. **Mass manipulation and hegemony** as two different Marxist accounts of how media content is produced: deliberate control by owners against a softer, taken-for-granted consensus built up by journalists.
5. **The postmodernist contribution:** a media-saturated world, hyperreality, simulacra, choice and diversity, and identities built from media images.
6. **Censorship as an influence on content:** by the state, by law, by owners and advertisers, by platforms, and by journalists themselves.
7. **How the media may influence the political process**, including **agenda setting**, **opinion polls** and **news reporting**.

Every recent exam question on this topic has been a 35-mark "Evaluate this view" essay on Paper 4, nearly always about **who controls media content** (owners, governments, journalists, audiences, the ruling class, several groups at once) or about **how far the media shapes the way people think**. The rest of the outcomes (news selection, censorship, politics) are the evidence you use in those essays. The new media is covered in more detail in *Traditional media and the new media* and *The impact of the new media*; the effects models are in *Different models of media effects*. You need enough of both here to use them in an argument.

## Understand it

### The big question: who decides what we see?

Every newspaper page, news bulletin, film, search result and social media feed is the result of choices. Somebody decided this story mattered more than that one, chose this headline and this photograph, and left out a thousand other things. **Media content** means everything the media puts out; this topic asks **who makes those choices and in whose interests**.

There are six candidates, and nearly every exam question names one of them:

| Group                       | How it could shape content                                                         | Typical evidence                                   |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| Owners                      | Appoint and sack editors, set the political line, decide budgets, buy more outlets | Murdoch's newspapers; Musk's purchase of Twitter   |
| Editors and journalists     | Choose stories each day, decide angles, interview sources, write the words         | Watergate; the Panama Papers                       |
| Governments                 | Own broadcasters, pass laws, censor, regulate, supply information                  | China's internet controls; the BBC's Royal Charter |
| Advertisers                 | Pay most of the bills, so content must attract the audiences they want             | The closure of the <i>Daily Herald</i> (1964)      |
| Audiences                   | Buy, watch, click, subscribe, complain, boycott and now create content             | The Sun boycott in Liverpool since 1989            |
| The ruling class as a whole | Its ideas become the "common sense" that all the above take for granted            | Glasgow Media Group studies                        |

The theories below are different answers to the question of which group wins.

### Pluralism: many hands on the wheel

**Pluralism** comes from the wider theory of power associated with **Robert Dahl** (*Who Governs?*, 1961): in a democracy, power is spread across many competing groups, and no single one can always get its way. Applied to the media, pluralists argue:

- **The market rules.** A media company is a business. If it ignores what readers and viewers want, they go elsewhere and it fails. So **audiences are sovereign**: the media gives people what they want. **John Whale** (*The Politics of the Media*, 1977) argued that a newspaper's content is shaped far more by its readers' tastes than by its owner's opinions, because a paper that loses readers loses money.
- **There is real variety.** Hundreds of newspapers, channels, magazines, websites and platforms, with different politics and audiences, mean every view finds an outlet. If a gap appears, a new outlet fills it.
- **Professionals have independence.** Journalists follow codes of ethics and value their reputation for accuracy; owners usually leave day-to-day decisions to them.

- **The state acts as a referee.** In democracies, laws and regulators protect variety and fairness. In the UK the **BBC** works under a **Royal Charter** that requires impartial news, and **Ofcom** (set up in 2003) enforces "due impartiality" on all broadcast news.
- **Groups can push back.** Pressure groups, campaigners and individuals can complain, take legal action or organise boycotts.

**What pluralism explains well:** the sheer range of content, the fact that outlets do follow public taste, and the many cases where the media has exposed the powerful.

### Criticisms:

- Owning a media outlet costs huge sums, so the "market of ideas" is open only to the rich. Ownership has become **concentrated**: **Ben Bagdikian** (*The Media Monopoly*, 1983) tracked US media control shrinking from about fifty corporations in 1983 to five by 2004.
- **Whose tastes are they?** What audiences "want" may simply be what the media has offered them for years.
- Variety may be shallow: many outlets carry the same agency copy and the same narrow range of opinion.
- Audiences are not equal: advertisers value rich audiences more than poor ones, so content leans towards them.

## Marxist theories: the media and the ruling class

All Marxists agree that the media helps keep capitalism going by spreading **ruling-class ideology**, ideas that make an unequal society seem natural, fair or unchangeable. In **Althusser's** terms (1971), the media is an **ideological state apparatus**, alongside schools and religion. It encourages **false consciousness**: workers do not see that they are exploited. Marxists divide over **how** this happens.

### Instrumental Marxism: mass manipulation

The **instrumental** or **manipulative** view says owners use the media as a tool (an instrument) to manipulate the masses on purpose.

- **Ralph Miliband** (*The State in Capitalist Society*, 1969) argued that media owners belong to the ruling class and use their outlets to win support for capitalism, which he called the "engineering of consent".
- **Owners intervene directly.** They choose editors who share their views and remove those who do not. **Harold Evans** resigned as editor of *The Times* in 1982, a year after Rupert Murdoch bought it, after clashes over its independence. **Roy Greenslade** (2003) noted that all of the roughly 175 newspapers Murdoch owned worldwide supported the invasion of Iraq in 2003.
- **The Frankfurt School (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1944)** described a **culture industry**: films, music and radio produced like factory goods, keeping the masses passive and content. **Marcuse** (*One-Dimensional Man*, 1964) argued that mass media and consumerism leave people unable to imagine any other kind of society.
- **Entertainment distracts.** Celebrity gossip, sport and reality television keep attention away from inequality and politics.

This is the theory behind the **hypodermic syringe model**: media messages are "injected" into a passive audience.

## The propaganda model

**Herman and Chomsky** (*Manufacturing Consent*, 1988) explained how US news ends up serving elites without anyone giving orders. Every story passes through five **filters**:

1. **Ownership**: large profit-seeking corporations own the main outlets.
2. **Advertising**: the media's real customers are advertisers, who will not fund content that harms business.
3. **Sourcing**: journalists rely on governments, the police and corporations for a steady supply of information, so they avoid upsetting them.
4. **Flak**: powerful groups punish unwelcome stories with complaints, lawsuits and campaigns.
5. **A common enemy**: originally anti-communism; later the "war on terror" served the same purpose, uniting audiences against an outside threat.

The model bridges the two Marxist camps: owners matter, but so do the everyday pressures on every newsroom.

## Hegemonic (neo-Marxist) theory

**Neo-Marxists** take their starting point from **Antonio Gramsci** (writing in prison 1929–1935). **Hegemony** means the ruling class rules mainly by **consent**, not force: its ideas become the common sense that most people accept without thinking. The media spreads hegemony, but **not because owners give orders**.

- Most senior journalists come from **middle-class backgrounds** and share broadly similar views. They do not see their views as political; to them, they are simply "reasonable".
- So the media sets the boundaries of acceptable debate. Views inside the consensus are treated as balanced; views outside (for example, abolishing private property) are treated as extreme or ignored.
- The **Glasgow University Media Group** (*Bad News*, 1976, and later studies) analysed British television news on industrial disputes. Strikes were reported mainly through their disruption to the public; managers were interviewed calmly in offices while strikers were filmed shouting outside the gates; workers' reasons for striking got less airtime. Nobody planned this; it came from journalists' taken-for-granted ideas about what is normal. **Philo and Berry** (*Bad News from Israel*, 2004) found that coverage gave far more time to Israeli official explanations than to Palestinian history, leaving many viewers with little idea of the conflict's causes.
- **Stuart Hall and colleagues** (*Policing the Crisis*, 1978) showed how a media panic about "mugging" in the 1970s focused public fear on young black men at a time of economic crisis, uniting the public behind tougher policing rather than questioning the economic system.
- Hegemony is never complete: it has to be won again and again, which means **resistance is possible**. Hall's **encoding/decoding** idea (1973) says audiences can read media messages in a **dominant** (accepting), **negotiated** (partly accepting) or **oppositional** (rejecting) way.

## Mass manipulation and hegemony compared

|                        | Mass manipulation (instrumental Marxism)                            | Hegemony (neo-Marxism)                                                         |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Who produces the bias? | Owners, deliberately                                                | Journalists, mostly without realising                                          |
| How?                   | Hiring, firing, direct orders, setting the line                     | Shared middle-class assumptions, news values, reliance on official sources     |
| The audience           | Passive, easily manipulated                                         | Usually consents, but can resist (Hall's oppositional readings)                |
| Key thinkers           | Miliband; Frankfurt School; Herman and Chomsky (partly)             | Gramsci; Glasgow Media Group; Hall; Philo and Berry                            |
| Media model            | Hypodermic syringe                                                  | Cultural effects ("drip-drip" over years)                                      |
| Main weakness          | Owners rarely give direct orders; ignores journalists and audiences | Hard to prove what journalists "take for granted"; may underplay owners' power |

### Criticisms of all Marxist views:

- **Deterministic and reductionist:** they reduce every piece of content to the needs of capitalism and leave little room for audiences' own judgement.
- **The media often attacks the powerful:** investigative journalism exposed the US President over **Watergate** (*Washington Post*, 1972–1974); the **Panama Papers** (2016) showed how politicians and the very rich hide money offshore; the phone-hacking scandal exposed Murdoch's own *News of the World*, which closed in **2011**.
- **Content follows profit, not ideology:** owners will sell anything that makes money, including anti-capitalist films and books.
- **Pluralists** reply that audiences, journalists and regulators all limit owners.

## Feminist views

Feminists agree that the media serves a powerful group, but they see that group as **men**. Most owners, senior editors and executives have been men, so content reflects male interests and **patriarchal** values. **Gaye Tuchman** (1978) described the **symbolic annihilation** of women: they are left out of the news, trivialised (judged by looks) or shown only in domestic roles. For control questions this gives a different answer: it is **men in general**, not only owners, who control content. **Post-feminists** reply that women now edit major newspapers and run media companies, and that the new media lets women answer back (for example, the #MeToo campaign spread from 2017).

## Interactionist views

**Interactionists** distrust grand theories of who controls the media. They want **case-by-case observation** of how particular decisions were made, by sitting in newsrooms and following stories from tip-off to publication, before saying who holds power; the answer may differ between outlets, stories and days. They also stress that news is **socially constructed**: it is the product of people's meanings and routines, not a mirror of reality.

## The postmodernist contribution

Postmodernists see the media differently from both Marxists and pluralists. They are less interested in who **controls** the media than in what the media has **done to reality**.

- **A media-saturated society.** We spend more of every day with screens than with almost anything else, carrying the media in our pockets.
- **Hyperreality.** **Jean Baudrillard** (*Simulacra and Simulation*, 1981) argued that media images have become more real to people than the reality they once represented. A **simulacrum** is a copy without an original: a reality show's "real life", a filtered photo, a theme-park "Main Street". Eventually we cannot tell representation from reality. Baudrillard's essays on the Gulf War (1991) argued that, for Western audiences, the war existed only as a televised spectacle.
- **Media-made identities.** People build identities from media images: styles, celebrities, brands and online personas. Identity becomes a choice from a media menu rather than something given by class, ethnicity or gender.
- **No single truth.** The media offers countless competing versions of events, so the old **metanarratives** (big theories such as Marxism) lose their grip. This **challenges Marxism**: if audiences pick and mix, no one ideology can dominate.
- **Choice and diversity.** **Dominic Strinati** (1995) notes that postmodern culture mixes high and low, old and new, and that media images often refer only to other media images.
- **The new media** fits this view: audiences become producers, and anyone can broadcast.

**Support for the postmodern view:** the time people spend online; the size of advertising budgets, which only makes sense if adverts change what people buy; influencers whose followers copy their clothes, diets and opinions; the spread of conspiracy theories and fake news, which suggests that for many people a story online counts as true whatever the evidence; studies of soap opera fans, such as **Dorothy Hobson** (*Crossroads*, 1982), who found viewers using soap storylines to talk about problems in their own lives.

### Criticisms of the postmodern view:

- **It is theory with little evidence.** Baudrillard offers striking ideas but no research on real audiences.
- **People can tell the difference.** Soap viewers know the characters are fictional; **Philo and Miller** (2001) say audiences can check what the media shows against real events and spot the distortions.
- **Audiences are active.** The **uses and gratifications** model (**Blumler and McQuail**, 1968) says people choose media to meet their own needs (information, entertainment, company, identity). **James Lull** (*Inside Family Viewing*, 1990) found families using television for their own purposes, such as avoiding conversation or settling who is in charge.

- **Other agencies still matter.** Class, ethnicity, religion, family, school and friends still shape lives and identities; the media is one influence among many.
- **It ignores power.** Marxists reply that saying "everything is choice" hides who owns the platforms and profits from the "choice".

## How strong is media influence? The effects models in brief

Several essay questions ask how far the media shapes thinking. Line up the models from strongest to weakest effect:

| Model                   | Claim                                                                            | Evidence and criticism                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Hypodermic syringe      | Messages are injected into a passive mass audience                               | <i>War of the Worlds</i> radio drama (1938) said to cause panic; <b>Bandura's</b> Bobo doll experiments (1961) on copied aggression. Criticised: the panic was exaggerated; lab studies are artificial |
| Cultural effects        | Repeated messages, "drip-drip" over years, slowly shape how people see the world | Glasgow Media Group; Philo and Berry. Fits hegemonic Marxism                                                                                                                                           |
| Two-step flow           | Messages reach most people through <b>opinion leaders</b> , who filter them      | <b>Katz and Lazarsfeld</b> ( <i>Personal Influence</i> , 1955)                                                                                                                                         |
| Reception analysis      | People decode messages in different ways depending on their social position      | <b>David Morley</b> ( <i>The Nationwide Audience</i> , 1980): trade union officials, managers and students read the same programme differently                                                         |
| Uses and gratifications | People use the media to meet needs they already have                             | Blumler and McQuail (1968); Lull (1990)                                                                                                                                                                |

The further down the table, the weaker the media's power and the stronger the case against mass manipulation and postmodernism.

## What becomes news? Selection and presentation

News is not everything that happened; it is a small, selected and shaped part of it. Sociologists say news is **socially constructed**, or in **Cohen and Young's** phrase (*The Manufacture of News*, 1973), "manufactured". The influences fall into four layers, from outside the newsroom to inside the journalist's head.

### 1. Economic pressures

- **Owners** set the political line and choose editors (see above).
- **Advertisers** need audiences. Content that scares advertisers away gets dropped. **James Curran** showed that the left-wing *Daily Herald* closed in **1964** despite a large readership, because its working-class readers did not attract enough advertising.

- **Competition for audiences** pushes outlets towards **sensationalism**, celebrity, crime and conflict, and towards **infotainment**.
- **Budgets**: cost-cutting means fewer reporters, so more stories come straight from press releases and agency copy. **Nick Davies** (*Flat Earth News*, 2008) called this **churnalism**.

## 2. Organisational routines

- **Gatekeeping**: editors decide which stories pass the "gate". **David Manning White** (1950) studied a newspaper wire editor ("Mr Gates") who rejected most incoming stories, often for personal reasons.
- **Deadlines and time**: 24-hour news and online publishing need constant content, favouring events that are quick to report over slow processes such as poverty.
- **Access to sources**: journalists rely on the police, government departments and companies. **Howard Becker** (1967) described a **hierarchy of credibility**: those at the top of society are treated as the most believable sources.
- **The space available**: a bulletin has a fixed length, so stories compete.

## 3. News values

**Galtung and Ruge** (1965) identified the qualities that make an event "newsworthy". Learn a handful:

- **Negativity**: bad news is more newsworthy than good.
- **Unexpectedness**: the unusual beats the routine.
- **Reference to elite persons and elite nations**: the powerful and famous get coverage.
- **Personalisation**: issues are told through individual stories.
- **Threshold**: the bigger the event, the more coverage.
- **Proximity or meaningfulness**: events close to the audience, culturally or physically.
- **Continuity**: once a story is running, it keeps being covered.

## 4. How news is presented

- **Agenda setting**: by choosing what to cover, the media decides what the public thinks about.
- **Framing**: the angle, words and images chosen tell audiences how to see a story ("migrant crisis" versus "refugees fleeing war").
- **Stereotyping and moral panics**: some groups are repeatedly linked with trouble.
- **Placement**: the front page or the lead item signals importance.

**Who gets to shape all this?** Each layer gives a different answer: economic pressures favour **owners and advertisers** (Marxist), routines and news values come from **journalists** (hegemonic, interactionist), and competition for audiences favours **audiences** (pluralist).

## Censorship

**Censorship** means preventing or removing content. It can be open or hidden, and comes from several directions.

## State censorship.

- **Authoritarian states** control the media directly. China's "Great Firewall" has blocked Facebook since 2009 and most Google services since 2010, and state media follows the Communist Party's line. In March 2022 Russia blocked Facebook and Instagram after invading Ukraine. Egypt's government cut almost all internet access in January 2011 during the Arab Spring protests.
- **Democracies** use law rather than direct orders: official secrets laws, libel and privacy law, contempt of court rules, and laws against hate speech and terrorism. In the UK the **DSMA-notice** system lets officials ask editors, voluntarily, not to publish material that could harm national security. In 2013, after the *Guardian* reported Edward Snowden's leaks about mass surveillance, government officials watched as its staff destroyed computer hard drives holding the files.
- **Laws on platforms:** Germany's NetzDG law (2017) requires large platforms to remove clearly illegal content quickly or face heavy fines; the EU's **Digital Services Act** (2022) sets rules for how platforms handle illegal content.
- Reporters Without Borders' annual **World Press Freedom Index** ranks countries by how free their media is, which shows how widely state control varies.

**Regulation.** Broadcasters in many countries need licences and must meet content rules (in the UK, Ofcom's broadcasting code: impartial news, protecting children before the 9 pm "watershed").

**Commercial censorship.** Owners refuse stories that harm their business interests; advertisers withdraw from content they dislike. In 2017 major brands pulled adverts from YouTube when they appeared beside extremist videos, and YouTube tightened its rules on which videos could earn money.

**Platform moderation.** Tech companies decide what stays online. Twitter permanently suspended Donald Trump's account in January 2021. Their rules are written by private firms, not elected governments.

**Self-censorship.** Journalists avoid stories they expect to cause trouble with owners, advertisers, sources or the state. This is the hardest censorship to see, and the propaganda model's "flak" filter explains it.

**Evaluating censorship as an influence:** it is the main influence in authoritarian states but usually a background one in democracies, where commercial pressures and news values shape more content day to day. The new media makes censorship harder (VPNs, encrypted apps) but not impossible (China shows a determined state can still control most of what people see).

## The media and the political process

**Agenda setting. McCombs and Shaw** (1972) studied voters in Chapel Hill, North Carolina during the 1968 US presidential election and found that the issues voters said were most important closely matched the issues the media covered most. The media may not tell people **what to think**, but it tells them **what to think about**.

### News reporting and bias.

- Newspapers in many countries openly back parties. On the day after the UK's 1992 election the *Sun* claimed "It's The Sun Wot Won It", though research on whether newspapers change votes, or merely follow readers' existing views, is mixed.

- **Spin**: governments employ communications staff ("spin doctors") to manage coverage; **Alastair Campbell** did this for Tony Blair's government from 1997 to 2003.
- **Access journalism**: reporters who need ministers' briefings avoid angering them. In the 2003 Iraq war, **embedded** journalists travelled with military units, getting dramatic access at the price of seeing the war from one side.
- **Broadcasting balance**: in the UK, broadcast news must be impartial, so television tends to report politics more evenly than the press.

### Opinion polls.

- Polls estimate public opinion from a **sample**. They can affect politics as well as measure it:
  - **Bandwagon effect**: voters swing behind whoever seems to be winning.
  - **Boomerang (or underdog) effect**: voters rally to the party that is behind, or the leader's supporters stay home thinking victory is certain.
  - **Tactical voting**: polls tell voters which party can beat the one they dislike.
- Polls also set the media's agenda: "horse-race" coverage of who is ahead can crowd out discussion of policies.
- **Polls can be wrong**. Before the 2015 UK general election most polls predicted that no party would win a majority; the Conservatives won outright. Every poll has a **margin of error**, and non-response and dishonest answers add bias.

### The new media and politics.

- **Optimists**: social media helped protesters organise in the Arab Spring (2010–2012) and let politicians speak directly to voters.
- **Pessimists**: **Cambridge Analytica** obtained data on up to 87 million Facebook users, revealed in 2018, for targeting political adverts; algorithms trap users in **filter bubbles** (**Eli Pariser**, 2011) where they see only views they already hold; fake news and foreign interference spread fast.

### The new media and the control debate

The new media (internet, social media, streaming, smartphones) reopens every control question.

- **Digital optimists** (for example **Henry Jenkins**, *Convergence Culture*, 2006) say it creates a **participatory culture**: anyone can publish, **citizen journalists** film events on their phones, campaigns organise without leaders, hackers and leakers expose secrets (WikiLeaks, 2010). Power shifts from owners and governments to users. This supports pluralism and postmodernism.
- **Digital pessimists** (for example **Evgeny Morozov**, *The Net Delusion*, 2011; **Curran, Fenton and Freedman**, *Misunderstanding the Internet*, 2012) say a few giant firms (Google, Meta, Amazon, Alibaba, Tencent) now own the platforms, set the rules through algorithms, and profit from users' data. Old media owners bought into the new media too (Murdoch bought MySpace in 2005). **Elon Musk** bought Twitter in **2022** for about **44 billion US dollars**, renamed it **X** in 2023 and changed its rules on content and verification. Authoritarian states censor, monitor and run their own platforms, and much of the world still lacks good internet access (the **digital divide**). This supports Marxism.

## Key facts and formulas

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

| Key term                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Status   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| Media content: everything the media produces; the debate is who decides it (owners, journalists, governments, advertisers, audiences, the ruling class)                                                                                     | Learn it |
| Pluralism (Dahl, <i>Who Governs?</i> , 1961; Whale, <i>The Politics of the Media</i> , 1977): power spread over many groups; audiences sovereign; variety; state as referee (BBC Royal Charter, Ofcom 2003)                                 | Learn it |
| Instrumental Marxism, mass manipulation: owners deliberately use the media to spread ruling-class ideology (Miliband 1969; Frankfurt School, Adorno and Horkheimer 1944 culture industry; Marcuse 1964)                                     | Learn it |
| Propaganda model (Herman and Chomsky, <i>Manufacturing Consent</i> , 1988): five filters, ownership, advertising, sourcing, flak, a common enemy                                                                                            | Learn it |
| Hegemony (Gramsci): rule by consent; neo-Marxists say journalists' shared middle-class assumptions produce bias without orders (Glasgow Media Group 1976; Philo and Berry 2004; Hall et al. 1978)                                           | Learn it |
| Ideological state apparatus (Althusser 1971); false consciousness; encoding/decoding (Hall 1973): dominant, negotiated, oppositional readings                                                                                               | Learn it |
| Feminist: men control the media; symbolic annihilation (Tuchman 1978); post-feminist reply                                                                                                                                                  | Learn it |
| Interactionist: news is socially constructed; study real newsroom decisions                                                                                                                                                                 | Learn it |
| Postmodernist: media saturation, hyperreality, simulacra (Baudrillard 1981; Gulf War essays 1991), media-made identities, no metanarratives (Strinati 1995)                                                                                 | Learn it |
| Effects models: hypodermic syringe (Bandura 1961), cultural effects, two-step flow (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955), reception analysis (Morley 1980), uses and gratifications (Blumler and McQuail 1968; Lull 1990)                              | Learn it |
| News selection: gatekeeping (White 1950), news values (Galtung and Ruge 1965), hierarchy of credibility (Becker 1967), manufacture of news (Cohen and Young 1973), churnalism (Davies 2008), advertisers ( <i>Daily Herald</i> closed 1964) | Learn it |
| Censorship: state, legal, regulatory, commercial, platform, self-censorship; DSMA-notices; NetzDG (2017); Digital Services Act (2022); China blocked Facebook (2009); Russia blocked Facebook and Instagram (2022)                          | Learn it |
| Media and politics: agenda setting (McCombs and Shaw 1972); spin; opinion polls (bandwagon, boomerang, tactical voting, margin of error; 2015 UK polls missed the result); Cambridge Analytica (2018); filter bubbles (Pariser 2011)        | Learn it |

| Key term                                                                                                                                                                                  | Status   |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| Owner power cases: Evans left <i>The Times</i> (1982); about 175 Murdoch papers backed the Iraq war (Greenslade 2003); <i>News of the World</i> closed (2011); Musk bought Twitter (2022) | Learn it |
| New media: digital optimists (Jenkins 2006) against digital pessimists (Morozov 2011; Curran, Fenton and Freedman 2012); concentration (Bagdikian 1983)                                   | 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 33 questions for this topic (2021–2026), 29 different (four November questions were each set on two papers). All but one 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 34.

| Question type                                                   | Questions |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Evaluate how far governments control media content              | 7         |
| Evaluate how far the media shapes people's thinking and reality | 5         |
| Evaluate whether media content reflects ruling-class interests  | 4         |
| Evaluate whether media owners control media content             | 4         |
| Evaluate the pluralist claim that control is shared             | 4         |
| Evaluate whether editors and journalists control media content  | 3         |
| Evaluate how much influence audiences have on media content     | 3         |
| Evaluate who controls the new media                             | 3         |
| Explain the Marxist view of ownership and control               | 1         |

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

**The plan for every "who controls" essay.** Six of the nine types name one group and ask if it controls content. They share one shape:

- 1. Introduction** (3–4 sentences): say which group the quotation names, which theory backs it, and pick out the key words ("complete", "no", "main", "little", "shared").
- 2. The case for the view:** the theory that supports it, the means that group has, and named cases.
- 3. The case against:** the **other groups** from the table in "Understand it", each with a theory and a case. Examiners reward weighing the named group against its rivals, not only describing them.
- 4. Two distinctions** that lift any answer: **traditional against new media**, and **democratic against authoritarian states**.

5. **Conclusion:** answer the exact words of the quotation. A strong verdict usually says control is shared but unequal, and names who has most power **where**.

## 1. Evaluate how far governments control media content (7 questions)

Asked as: governments have no control over, or lack the power to control, media content (4, including one question set on two papers); governments control the media, or are the main or primary influence on content (3).

The wording flips, so decide first which side the quotation is on: "no control" puts government weakness on the "for" side; "main influence" puts government strength there.

1. **Define the means.** Sort what a government can do into five levers, and give each a case:
  - **Own:** state broadcasters (the BBC; China's CCTV; Russia's state channels).
  - **Pay:** licence fees, subsidies, state advertising, decisions on funding.
  - **Make law:** secrets, libel, privacy, hate speech, platform laws (NetzDG, the Digital Services Act), and outright censorship.
  - **Watch:** regulators (Ofcom), licences, fines, public inquiries. The **Leveson Inquiry** (report 2012) followed phone hacking and led to new press regulation debates.
  - **Feed:** governments are the biggest news source; spin doctors, briefings and embedded reporting keep journalists dependent (Becker's hierarchy of credibility; the propaganda model's sourcing filter). Even the threat of punishment makes outlets cautious (self-censorship).
2. **Split by regime.** Authoritarian states use all five levers openly (China's Great Firewall; Russia's 2022 blocks). Democracies mostly rely on law, regulation and the information supply, so their control is real but indirect.
3. **Then the limits,** grouped as four leaks:
  - **Reach:** global conglomerates and platforms are based abroad and can push back. When Australia's News Media Bargaining Code was introduced in 2021, Facebook briefly blocked all news for Australian users.
  - **Routes around control:** VPNs, encrypted apps and the dark web dodge blocks; citizen journalists film what state media hides (the Arab Spring). Technology also changes faster than laws can be written, so regulators are always catching up.
  - **Voters and courts:** in a democracy, heavy-handed censorship costs votes, and constitutions and courts protect press freedom.
  - **Restraint by choice:** a press that looks free is more believable, so many democratic governments prefer quiet pressure on chosen stories to open control.
4. **Weigh other groups:** owners (Murdoch), journalists (Watergate, the Snowden reporting), advertisers and audiences may matter more in democracies.
5. **Judge.** For example: governments control content almost completely in authoritarian states, and have strong indirect levers in democracies, but global platforms and the new media have made total control harder everywhere.

### Variants.

- **"No" or "lack the power"**: avoid simply agreeing. Examiners criticise answers that accept the claim without discussing the levers governments do have.
- **"Main influence"**: compare government with the other groups; owners and audiences are the strongest rivals in democracies.
- **The new media**: show why it is harder to control (borderless, user-made, fast-changing) and how states respond (blocking, platform laws, their own social media).

## 2. Evaluate how far the media shapes people's thinking and reality (5 questions)

Asked as: postmodernists are right that the media shapes social reality or plays a central role in people's lives (2); postmodernists have exaggerated the media's influence (1); the media successfully controls how people think and behave (1); the media controls how audiences receive and interpret information (1, the old Paper 3 part worth 16 marks).

1. **State the claim's theory.** For postmodern wordings, explain saturation, hyperreality, simulacra, media-made identity (Baudrillard; Strinati). For "controls thinking" wordings, explain mass manipulation and the hypodermic syringe model.
2. **Support it from several directions:** the hours spent with media; advertisers' spending; celebrities and influencers as role models; conspiracy theories and fake news; the Frankfurt School's culture industry; cultural effects studies (Glasgow Media Group; Philo and Berry); Hobson's soap viewers. For "behaviour", Bandura's experiments.
3. **Challenge it with the active audience.** Work down the effects table: two-step flow, reception analysis (Morley), uses and gratifications (Lull). Add Hall's oppositional readings: audiences can reject the message.
4. **Challenge the evidence:** postmodern claims rest on theory; lab experiments like Bandura's are artificial; Philo and Miller show that people can check images against reality; soap fans know fiction from fact.
5. **Bring in social structure:** class, ethnicity, gender, age, family and religion still shape identities and how people read the media.
6. **Judge.** For example: the media shapes what people think about and supplies the images they use, which supports a weaker version of the claim; but audiences interpret and resist, so "control" and "hyperreality" overstate it.

### Variants.

- **"Exaggerated"**: the sides swap. Criticisms of postmodernism are the "for"; postmodern arguments and their support are the "against".
- **"Controls how information is received and interpreted"**: this is about the audience's reading of messages, so set direct models (hypodermic) against indirect ones (two-step flow, uses and gratifications, reception analysis), and contrast traditional media with the new media, where users choose and comment.
- **Keep it on the claim.** Examiners mark down answers that describe the effects models one by one without linking them to the view.

### 3. Evaluate whether media content reflects ruling-class interests (4 questions)

Asked as: the media is an instrument or agent of ideological control (2); media content is shaped by, or reflects, the interests of the ruling class or the rich and powerful (2).

1. **Explain ideology and the two Marxist routes:** ruling-class ideology, false consciousness, the ideological state apparatus; then mass manipulation (Miliband, the Frankfurt School, Greenslade's Iraq evidence) and hegemony (Gramsci, Glasgow Media Group, Hall's mugging study). Showing that Marxists disagree about **how** earns marks in itself.
2. **Use content evidence:** strike coverage; Philo and Berry; negative coverage of non-capitalist states such as North Korea; Curtis's critique of British media and foreign policy (*Web of Deceit*, 2003); McChesney (*Rich Media, Poor Democracy*, 1999). Add the propaganda model's filters.
3. **Add allies:** feminists (patriarchal ideology, Tuchman); digital pessimists (the same rich firms own the new media); and states that use the media for **propaganda**, from wartime broadcasting to the state channels of authoritarian regimes, which shows ideological control by governments as well as owners.
4. **Evaluate:**
  - **Pluralism:** audiences, advertisers, journalists and regulators all pull content in other directions.
  - **The media bites the powerful:** Watergate, the Panama Papers, the phone-hacking exposure.
  - **Determinism:** audiences decode, and can resist (Hall, Morley).
  - **Profit beats ideology:** anti-capitalist content sells too.
  - **The new media** gives the less powerful a voice (digital optimists, citizen journalism, hacktivists).
  - **Interactionists:** before deciding whom a story benefits, look at how that particular story was put together, case by case.
5. **Judge.** For example: much mainstream content does reflect elite assumptions, more through hegemony than conspiracy; but the media also exposes the powerful, and audiences are not passive, so "instrument" is too strong.

**Variant.** For "agent of ideological control" questions, make the word "ideological" visible: examiners noted that some answers wrote about the media in general and never mentioned ideology.

### 4. Evaluate whether media owners control media content (4 questions)

Asked as: owners control the content of the media, sometimes "completely" (3); owners have little control over content (1).

1. **Show the routes of owner control**, each with a case:
  - **People:** owners hire and fire editors (Evans and *The Times*, 1982).
  - **The line:** owners set political positions (Greenslade's 175 papers on Iraq; the propaganda model's ownership filter).
  - **Money:** owners set budgets, so cost-cutting and churnalism follow (Davies).
  - **Expansion:** concentration and conglomerates (Bagdikian); owners buying into the new media (MySpace; Musk and X).
  - Where the owner is the **state**, the owner and the government are the same.

2. **Name the theory:** instrumental Marxism (Miliband); the propaganda model. Journalists who defy owners risk their jobs.
3. **Evaluate with the checks on owners:**
  - **Scale:** a conglomerate publishing thousands of items a day across many countries cannot be run on one person's opinions; many firms are owned by scattered shareholders such as pension funds that care about profit, not content.
  - **People inside:** journalists' expertise, ethics and solidarity (hegemonic theory says bias comes from them, not owners).
  - **The market outside:** audiences and advertisers. After Musk's takeover many major advertisers stopped buying space on X, showing that owner choices carry commercial costs.
  - **The state:** regulators and inquiries (Leveson; Ofcom's impartiality rules).
  - **The new media:** user-made content and citizen journalism mean much of what people read never passes through an owner's hands; but algorithms written by platform owners also shape what users see.
  - **Feminists:** it is men, not only owners, who hold power.
4. **Judge.** For example: owners set the limits within which journalists work and can intervene when they wish, but they cannot control everything, and audiences and advertisers limit them; "complete" control is rare outside one-owner or state-owned media.

### Variants.

- **"Little control":** the sides swap; arguments for owner power become the challenge.
- **"Complete":** one clear exception (a journalist exposing the owner's own paper, as with phone hacking) disproves it; then judge how far owners still dominate.
- **Keep linking to content.** Examiners mark down answers that describe patterns of ownership without showing how they affect what is published.

## 5. Evaluate the pluralist claim that control is shared (4 questions)

Asked as: no single group controls the media (1); control is shared between different groups (1); different groups influence media content (1); the media serves the interests of a wide range of groups (1).

1. **Explain pluralism properly:** Dahl's spread of power; Whale's readers over owners; market competition, variety, professional independence, the state as referee (the BBC Charter, Ofcom), pressure groups and legal challenges.
2. **Show each group's share,** with a case: audiences (the Liverpool boycott of the *Sun*), advertisers (YouTube 2017), journalists (Watergate), governments (Ofcom), owners (Murdoch). Add that a firm with thousands of staff, outlets and daily decisions has too many centres for any one group to steer.
3. **Use the new media for pluralism:** digital optimists, citizen journalism, user campaigns.
4. **Test the claim against its rivals:**
  - **Marxists:** the groups may all have a say, but only within limits that suit capital; the shares are unequal.
  - **Feminists:** men dominate the key decisions.

- **Digital pessimists:** a few platforms now control which views are seen.
- **Authoritarian states:** one group, the government, clearly controls.
- **Not every voice is equal:** a well-funded lobby with press officers is heard far more than a poor community with no media contacts, and the boardrooms deciding content are not a cross-section of society.
- **Whose tastes?** Audience demand may itself be a product of what the media has always supplied.

5. **Judge.** The highest marks need a reasoned view on whether control is **concentrated** or **contested**, and the answer may differ by country (authoritarian or democratic) and by medium (newspapers or social media).

**Variation.** "Serves the interests of a wide range of groups" asks about **whose interests** content serves, not only who controls it: bring in content evidence (Glasgow Media Group, Tuchman) as well as control.

## 6. Evaluate whether editors and journalists control media content (3 questions)

Asked as: media content is controlled, or influenced mainly, by editors and journalists (3, including one question set on two papers).

1. **Their powers**, walking through a newsroom day:

- **Gatekeeping** (White) and **agenda setting** (McCombs and Shaw): they decide what runs.
- **News values** (Galtung and Ruge) and **framing**: they decide the angle.
- **Expertise:** owners cannot write, film or edit the news themselves; they depend on professionals who know how.
- **Solidarity and ethics:** codes of conduct, unions and newsroom loyalty give journalists a shared line to defend against interference.
- **Investigative journalism** shows independence (Watergate; the Panama Papers).
- Hegemonic Marxists agree that journalists shape content, though through shared assumptions rather than free choice.

2. **Their limits:**

- **Owners** hire and fire (Evans; the propaganda model).
- **Advertisers and audiences** (pluralism): content must sell.
- **Governments and sources:** dependence on official sources, the hierarchy of credibility, censorship.
- **Feminists:** senior journalists and editors are mostly men, so it is male journalists who hold this power.
- **The new media:** citizen journalists and users now produce content outside professional control.

3. **Judge.** For example: editors and journalists make most daily decisions, but within limits set by owners, budgets, sources and audiences; they have operational control, not ultimate control.

**Variation.** Keep the professionals at the centre of every paragraph; examiners noted answers that discussed influences on content with little mention of editors and journalists.

## 7. Evaluate how much influence audiences have on media content (3 questions)

Asked as: audiences are the main influence on content (2, one question set on two papers); audiences have no influence on content (1).

### 1. Three channels of audience power:

- **Money:** sales, ratings, clicks, subscriptions; content that does not attract audiences is cut, and streaming services use viewing data to decide what to make.
- **Voice:** complaints to regulators, boycotts (the *Sun* in Liverpool), campaigns aimed at advertisers (Stop Funding Hate, from 2016).
- **Creation:** user-made content, citizen journalism, instant comments and shares (digital optimists; postmodernists).
- Pluralists and regulators back this up: broadcasters must serve the whole public (the BBC Charter).

### 2. Limits:

- **Marxists:** audiences choose only from what owners offer; content serves capital first.
- **Global firms** can lose one country's viewers and barely notice.
- **Unequal access:** richer, educated groups have more influence, and advertisers value them more.
- **Professionals'** expertise lets them decide what audiences "want".
- **Feminists:** male decision-makers.
- **Manufactured demand:** audiences may have learned to like what they were offered.

3. **Distinguish media types:** a newspaper reader can only buy or not buy, but a social media user can post, reply and go viral, so audience power is greater online.

4. **Judge.** For example: audiences have real but indirect influence, mainly through the market; their direct power has grown with the new media, but owners and platforms still set the terms.

## 8. Evaluate who controls the new media (3 questions)

Asked as: the new media is controlled by the rich and powerful (2, one question set on two papers); the new media is controlled by large media corporations (1).

### 1. The case for (digital pessimists, Marxists):

- A handful of firms own the main platforms, search engines and app stores, and decide what users may post and see through terms of use and algorithms.
- Owners use their power: Musk's changes at X; platforms banning users (Trump's suspension in 2021).
- Old media owners have bought into the new media.
- Data and advertising make the rich richer; political protest online has often failed (Morozov).
- Some platforms work closely with governments (Chinese platforms and the state).
- The digital divide leaves many people offline.

### 2. The case against:

- **Digital optimists** (Jenkins): users create most content; citizen journalism; leaderless protest (the Arab Spring); hacktivists and leakers expose the powerful.

- **Governments** regulate and fine platforms (the Digital Services Act) and, in authoritarian states, control the internet themselves, which means states rather than corporations are in charge.
  - **Advertisers** can force platforms to change rules (YouTube 2017).
3. **Judge.** For example: large corporations own the infrastructure and shape what is seen, but users produce the content and governments increasingly set the rules, so control is shared between corporations and states more than with ordinary users.

## 9. Explain the Marxist view of ownership and control (1 question)

Asked as: explain the Marxist view of the relationship between ownership and control of the media (1, the 9-mark first part of the old Paper 3 question).

1. **Explain only; no evaluation needed.** Examiners noted that some candidates wasted time evaluating in "explain" parts.
2. **Cover the link:** owners belong to the ruling class; they control content directly (hiring editors, setting the line) or indirectly (journalists' shared assumptions, advertisers' pressure).
3. **Use concepts:** ideology, false consciousness, gatekeeping, agenda setting, conglomerates, concentration, interlocking elites (owners sit on other company boards and mix with politicians).
4. **Name thinkers and studies:** Miliband; Herman and Chomsky; Gramsci and the Glasgow Media Group as the neo-Marxist version.
5. **Give two or three developed points** rather than a long list.

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## 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 the difference between the mass manipulation and hegemonic views of how media content is produced. [9]

**Point 1: who produces the bias.** In the mass manipulation view, owners deliberately use their outlets to spread ruling-class ideology; Miliband saw owners as part of the ruling class engineering consent. In the hegemonic view, bias comes mainly from journalists, whose shared middle-class assumptions decide what counts as "balanced", without orders from above.

**Point 2: how it works.** Manipulation works through direct intervention, such as appointing editors who share the owner's line (Greenslade found Murdoch's papers worldwide backing the Iraq war in 2003). Hegemony works through routine news values and reliance on official sources, as in the Glasgow Media Group's finding that strike coverage presented managers as calm and workers as disruptive.

**Point 3: the audience.** Manipulation assumes a passive audience (the hypodermic syringe model).

Hegemony, following Gramsci, sees consent as something that must keep being won, so audiences can make oppositional readings (Hall).

**How it would be marked.** Three developed points, each with a concept and a study, and a clear contrast in every point: the top band. A description of only one view, or a list without studies, stays in a lower band.

## Example 2

'News is a social construction rather than a reflection of reality.' Evaluate this view. [35]

**Introduction.** A social construction is something made by people's choices and routines. The view says news tells us more about how newsrooms work than about the world.

**For the view (AO1/AO2).**

- **Selection:** White's gatekeeper rejected most incoming stories; Galtung and Ruge's news values (negativity, elite persons, personalisation) favour some events over others.
- **Economics:** advertisers and competition push towards sensation and celebrity; cuts produce churnalism (Davies).
- **Sources:** Becker's hierarchy of credibility gives officials the first word; the propaganda model's sourcing filter.
- **Presentation:** framing and agenda setting turn events into stories (Cohen and Young's "manufacture" of news; Hall's mugging panic).

**Against the view (AO3).**

- **Events do force their way in:** a war, an earthquake or an election will be reported whatever journalists prefer.
- **Professional standards:** accuracy, fact-checking and impartiality rules (Ofcom) limit invention.
- **Reality can be checked:** Philo and Miller argue that media images can be compared with evidence.
- **Postmodernists** go further than the view: if all news is representation, the contrast between construction and reality disappears (Baudrillard); critics reply that this is unproven.

**Conclusion.** News is constructed in **what** is chosen and **how** it is told, but it is anchored to real events; "rather than" overstates the split.

**How it would be marked.** A wide range of news-selection concepts and studies (AO1 7–9), every point tied to construction against reflection (AO2 10–11), and evaluation that weighs both and judges the wording "rather than" (AO3 12–15).

## Example 3

'The media has little influence on the political process.' Evaluate this view. [35]

**Introduction.** The political process includes what issues are debated, how parties are seen and how people vote.

#### For the view (AO1/AO2).

- **Active audiences:** voters read papers that already match their views (uses and gratifications), and talk politics with opinion leaders (Katz and Lazarsfeld's two-step flow).
- **Polls can mislead:** the 2015 UK polls missed the result, so they cannot have decided it.
- **Claims of influence are exaggerated:** "It's The Sun Wot Won It" was a boast; papers often switch to the side already winning.
- **Broadcast rules:** Ofcom's impartiality limits television bias.

#### Against the view (AO3).

- **Agenda setting:** McCombs and Shaw found voters ranked issues as the media did.
- **Polls shape behaviour:** bandwagon, boomerang and tactical voting effects, and "horse-race" coverage.
- **Spin and access:** governments manage the news (Campbell; embedded reporting), so politics is shaped around the media.
- **The new media:** targeted adverts (Cambridge Analytica), filter bubbles (Pariser) and the Arab Spring.
- **Marxists:** the media keeps radical options off the agenda (hegemony), which is influence even when no vote changes.

**Conclusion.** The media's power to change votes directly is limited, but its power to set the agenda and frame choices is large, so "little influence" is too weak a claim.

**How it would be marked.** Accurate knowledge of agenda setting, polls and reporting with named cases (AO1 7–9), applied to the political process throughout (AO2 10–11), and evaluation that separates direct and indirect influence and reaches a verdict (AO3 12–15).

### Example 4

'Censorship is the main influence on media content today.' Evaluate this view. [35]

This is the hardest kind: "main" demands a comparison with every rival influence, and "today" demands the new media.

**Introduction.** Censorship means preventing or removing content: by the state, by law, by owners and advertisers, by platforms, or by journalists themselves.

#### For the view (AO1/AO2).

- **Authoritarian states:** China's Great Firewall and state media; Russia's 2022 blocks.
- **Democracies' laws:** secrets, libel, platform laws (NetzDG; the Digital Services Act); the *Guardian's* hard drives destroyed under official supervision in 2013.
- **Hidden censorship:** self-censorship and the propaganda model's flak; advertisers pulling out (YouTube 2017).

- **Platform moderation** now decides what billions see (Trump's suspension).

### Against the view (AO3).

- **Selection, not suppression:** most content is shaped by news values and gatekeeping, which decide what is covered long before anyone censors anything.
- **Market pressures:** audiences and advertisers (pluralism) shape far more content than bans do.
- **Owners and ideology:** Marxists see the main influence as ownership and hegemony; censorship is just one tool.
- **The new media evades it:** VPNs, encryption and citizen journalism.
- **Free-press democracies:** courts and voters protect freedom of expression; the World Press Freedom Index shows wide variation.

**Conclusion.** Censorship is the main influence in authoritarian states, but in democracies commercial pressures, news values and ownership shape more content; online, private platforms' moderation is a growing form of censorship that governments increasingly regulate.

**How it would be marked.** Detailed knowledge of types of censorship and rival influences (AO1 7–9), applied to "main" and "today" throughout (AO2 10–11), and a sustained comparison across regimes and media types leading to a verdict (AO3 12–15).

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## Common mistakes

- **Accepting the view uncritically.** The most repeated comment in examiner reports on these essays: weak answers agree that governments, owners or the media control everything and never consider the other side. AO3 is worth 15 of the 35 marks: evaluate throughout.
- **Opinion instead of sociology.** Low-scoring answers say who they personally think controls the media. Name theories (pluralist, Marxist, neo-Marxist, feminist, postmodernist) and studies in every paragraph.
- **Describing without linking.** Listing patterns of ownership, or describing every effects model in turn, earns little unless each point is tied to the question (who controls **content**, or how far the media **shapes thinking**).
- **Drifting to effects in a control question.** In owner or government questions, some candidates write about the media's impact on audiences instead of who controls the content. Keep effects for the "shapes thinking" questions.
- **Muddling which theory supports which view.** Mass manipulation is a Marxist idea; examiners noted candidates trying to support it with effects models alone instead of Marxist theory.
- **Ignoring the named group.** In "editors and journalists" or "audiences" questions, some answers discuss influences on content in general. Keep the named group at the centre.
- **Missing the two distinctions.** Good answers separate traditional and new media, and democratic and authoritarian states; these are among the quickest ways to show evaluation.
- **Uncritical "no control" answers about governments.** Candidates who agree that governments cannot control the media often forget the indirect levers democracies have (law, regulation, funding, being the main news source).

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## 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 pluralism, ideology, hegemony, mass manipulation, false consciousness, gatekeeping, agenda setting, news values, hierarchy of credibility, hyperreality, simulacra, censorship and digital optimists and pessimists, 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 its words and apply real cases: Murdoch, Musk and X, Watergate, the Panama Papers, the Glasgow Media Group, China's internet controls.
- **AO3 analysis and evaluation (15)**: the top level (12–15) needs evaluation that is **explicit, detailed and sustained**, with contrasting views that show how complex the issue is. A brief outline of the other side stays in the 4–7 band; explicit evaluation that is not kept up reaches 8–11.
- **Evaluate the wording**: "complete" and "no" are disproved by one strong exception, so then weigh how far the view still holds; "main" needs a comparison with the rivals; "little" and "lack" swap the sides.
- **Evaluate with theories against each other**: pluralist against Marxist is the core debate; feminist, interactionist and postmodernist views add depth.
- **Reach a judgement** that says where (which country, which medium) the view holds best and worst.
- **"Explain" parts** need developed points with concepts and studies, and no evaluation.
- **Answer two questions from different sections** (Globalisation, Media, Religion); the paper is out of  $2 \times 35 = 70$ .

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## Quick check

1. What is the difference between the hegemonic and the instrumental Marxist views of who produces media bias?
2. Name three of Galtung and Ruge's news values and explain how one of them shapes what becomes news.
3. A poll of 1,000 voters puts Party A on 52% and Party B on 48%, with a margin of error of  $\pm 3$  percentage points for each share. Can the poll say which party is ahead? Show the ranges.
4. Give one argument a pluralist would use, and one a Marxist would use, about audiences' influence on media content.
5. What did Baudrillard mean by hyperreality, and give one criticism of the idea.

## Answers

1. Instrumental Marxists say owners deliberately use the media to spread ruling-class ideology (Miliband). Hegemonic Marxists say bias comes mainly from journalists' shared middle-class assumptions, which make ruling-class ideas seem like common sense, without any orders (Gramsci; the Glasgow Media Group).
2. Any three of negativity, unexpectedness, elite persons, elite nations, personalisation, threshold, proximity or meaningfulness, continuity. Example: personalisation means issues are told through individuals, so a story about one family's eviction is more likely to run than a report on housing policy.
3. Party A could be anywhere from  $52 - 3 = 49$  to  $52 + 3 = 55$ , and Party B from  $48 - 3 = 45$  to  $48 + 3 = 51$ . The ranges overlap (49 to 51), so the poll cannot say for certain who is ahead.
4. Pluralist: media firms must give audiences what they want or lose sales and advertising, so audiences hold the real power (Whale). Marxist: audiences only choose among products owners decide to offer, and tastes are shaped by what the media has supplied, so owners keep control.
5. Hyperreality is a state where media images seem more real than reality, so people cannot separate representations from the world they represent. Criticism: it lacks evidence from real audiences, and studies suggest people can tell fiction from fact (Philo and Miller; soap viewers know characters are fictional).

## Past questions to try

- **9699/42/M/J/24 Q3**: essay on whether postmodernists have exaggerated the media's influence.
- **9699/43/M/J/24 Q3**: essay on whether editors and journalists control media content.
- **9699/43/O/N/22 Q3**: essay on whether audiences are the main influence on media content.
- **9699/34/M/J/21 Q5**: explain the Marxist view of ownership and control, then assess how far the media controls how audiences interpret information.