

Traditional media and the new media 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. **The trends changing how the media is organised:** cross-media ownership, digitalisation, the growth of media conglomerates, and the rise of social media.
2. **The debates about who controls the media:** owners, corporations, governments, advertisers, journalists or audiences.
3. **How the traditional media differs from the new media:** in how content is made, sent, received, paid for and controlled.
4. **Whether the growth of the new media has undermined the traditional media:** has it weakened newspapers, television and radio, or have they adapted and survived?

Traditional media means newspapers, magazines, books, radio, cinema and broadcast television. **New media** means digital, networked, interactive media: websites, search engines, social media, messaging apps, video sharing, podcasts and streaming. The wider theories of who controls media content (pluralism, the Marxist theories, the propaganda model) are covered in full in *Theories of the media and influences on media content*; what the new media does to power, globalisation and identity is in *The impact of the new media*.

This topic has been asked in **2023 and 2025** only, each time as a 35-mark Paper 4 essay on **who controls the new media**. The other outcomes have not yet been asked directly, but they could be, and they supply the evidence for that essay.

Understand it

How traditional and new media differ

Lister and colleagues (*New Media: A Critical Introduction*, 2003) described new media as **digital**, **interactive**, **hypertextual** (linked, so users jump from item to item), **networked**, **virtual** and **simulated**. In practice, the differences that matter for exams are these:

	Traditional media	New media
Direction	One-to-many: a few producers broadcast to a mass audience	Many-to-many: anyone can post, reply and share

	Traditional media	New media
Who makes content	Paid professionals in newsrooms and studios	Professionals plus ordinary users (user-generated content)
Audience	Mostly receives; feedback slow (letters, ratings)	Comments, shares, remixes; audience becomes producer
Timing	Fixed schedules and print deadlines	On demand, around the clock, updated instantly
Gatekeeping	Editors decide what is published	Few human gatekeepers; algorithms rank and filter
Cost of entry	Very high (presses, transmitters, licences)	Very low (a phone and a connection)
Reach	Mostly national or local	Global from the start
Paid for by	Cover price, licence fee, advertising	Mostly targeted advertising based on users' data; subscriptions
Regulation	National laws, licences and regulators	Hard for one state to regulate; platforms write their own rules

Two terms sum up the shift. **Alvin Toffler** (*The Third Wave*, 1980) coined **prosumer** for someone who both produces and consumes. **Web 2.0**, popularised by **Tim O'Reilly** (2005), describes websites built around users' own contributions rather than pages written by the site owner.

Be careful not to overstate the gap. Most traditional media now also exist online, and the most-followed accounts on social media often belong to old media brands. So the line between the two is blurred, which is itself one of the trends below.

The trends reshaping the media

1. Digitalisation. Text, sound, pictures and video are all turned into the same digital code, so one device can carry them all. This produces **convergence**: **Henry Jenkins** (*Convergence Culture*, 2006) used the term for the merging of once-separate technologies, industries and audiences. A smartphone is a newspaper, radio, television, camera and printing press in one. Digitalisation also makes copying and distribution almost free, which is why so many new producers have appeared and why old business models have struggled.

2. Media conglomerates. A **conglomerate** is a very large corporation that owns many different businesses, often across several countries. Media conglomerates grow by buying rivals:

- **Horizontal integration:** buying firms in the same line of business (one newspaper group buying another).
- **Vertical integration:** owning every stage from making content to delivering it. Disney makes films, owns television channels, and launched its own streaming service, Disney+, in **November 2019**, the same year it bought most of 21st Century Fox's film and television business.
- **Diversification:** spreading into unrelated businesses (theme parks, shopping, cloud computing). Amazon, a shop, bought the MGM film studio in **2022**.

Ben Bagdikian (*The Media Monopoly*, 1983) counted about **50** corporations controlling most US media; in his 2004 edition (*The New Media Monopoly*) he put the number at **five**.

3. Cross-media ownership. This means one owner holding several *types* of media at once, so the same company can promote its own products and views across them all (**synergy**: a film advertised in the group's papers, reviewed on its channels and sold on its streaming service). **Rupert Murdoch's** companies are the standard example: newspapers (*The Sun*, *The Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*), television (Fox News) and book publishing (HarperCollins). Many countries once limited cross-media ownership to protect variety of opinion; digitalisation has weakened such limits, because owners argue that the internet already gives people endless choice.

4. Social media and the new giants. Social media grew in a few years: Facebook (2004), YouTube (2005), Twitter (2006), and later TikTok. A new set of technology corporations now own the platforms, and they too grew by buying rivals: Google bought YouTube in **2006**; Facebook bought Instagram in **2012** and WhatsApp in **2014**, and renamed its parent company **Meta** in **2021**. In China, Tencent (owner of WeChat) and Alibaba play a similar role. These firms are not publishers in the old sense: they mostly host what users post, but they decide, through rules and **algorithms**, what gets seen.

How the trends connect. Digitalisation lowers the cost of producing content, so the number of *voices* grows; but the *channels* those voices travel through (platforms, app stores, search engines) are owned by fewer and larger firms. That tension drives the control debate.

Who controls the media? The debate

There are four main answers. You can use them for traditional and new media alike, then show how the new media changes each one.

- **Owners and corporations (Marxist view).** Those who own the media decide what it carries, directly or by hiring like-minded editors. **Ralph Miliband** (*The State in Capitalist Society*, 1969) saw the media as serving the ruling class. **Herman and Chomsky** (*Manufacturing Consent*, 1988) argued that ownership, the need for advertising and reliance on official sources filter the news before it reaches the public.
- **Audiences and the market (pluralist view).** Many firms compete for audiences, so they must give people what they want; owners who ignore their readers lose them. Power is spread across many groups.
- **Media professionals.** Editors and journalists decide day to day what is news (gatekeeping, news values), and have some independence from owners.
- **Governments.** States license broadcasters, pass laws on what can be published and, in authoritarian countries, censor directly.

Who controls the new media?

The case that big corporations and the rich control it (digital pessimists, Marxists):

- **Concentration.** A handful of US and Chinese firms own the platforms, search engines and app stores that almost everyone uses. Founders such as Mark Zuckerberg and Elon Musk keep personal control through their shareholdings.

- **They set the terms.** Platforms decide who may post and what is removed. Twitter suspended US President Donald Trump in **January 2021**; Elon Musk bought Twitter in **October 2022** for about **44 billion US dollars**, let Trump back on in **November 2022**, renamed it **X** in **2023**, and changed its rules on content and verification. No voter chose these rules.
- **Algorithms steer attention.** What each user sees is ranked by software designed to keep people scrolling and clicking adverts. **Eli Pariser** (*The Filter Bubble*, 2011) argued this narrows what people see.
- **Users work for free.** **Christian Fuchs** (*Social Media: A Critical Introduction*, 2014) argued that users' posts and clicks are unpaid **digital labour**: the data they create is sold to advertisers. **Shoshana Zuboff** (*The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, 2019) described firms profiting by predicting and shaping behaviour from personal data. Profit favours shopping and entertainment over anything that threatens the owners.
- **Old owners moved in.** Traditional media firms run the most-visited news sites, and some bought into the new media: Murdoch's News Corporation bought MySpace in **2005** for about **580 million US dollars**. **Curran, Fenton and Freedman** (*Misunderstanding the Internet*, 2012) found that the internet had not broken the hold of large media organisations over news.
- **Online protest often fails.** **Evgeny Morozov** (*The Net Delusion*, 2011) argued that hopes for internet freedom were naive: most of the Arab Spring uprisings (2010–2012) ended in renewed authoritarian rule or civil war.

The case against: others share control.

- **Users (digital optimists).** Jenkins describes a **participatory culture** in which ordinary people create, remix and spread content. **Citizen journalists** report events themselves: in **May 2020** a bystander, **Darnella Frazier**, filmed George Floyd's death, and her video contradicted the first police account. Leaderless online campaigns can spread fast and cheaply, and **hacktivists** (such as the loose network **Anonymous**) and leakers break into or expose powerful organisations. Online campaigns helped bring down Tunisia's and Egypt's presidents in **2011**.
- **Governments.** States can override corporations. China blocks Facebook and Google behind its "Great Firewall"; Egypt switched off almost all internet access for about five days in **January 2011**; Russia blocked Facebook and Instagram in **March 2022**. Chinese regulators halted the share sale of Alibaba's sister company **Ant Group** in **November 2020**, showing that even the largest Chinese tech firms answer to the state. Democracies regulate rather than censor: the European Union's **Digital Services Act (2022)** makes the largest platforms remove illegal content and explain how their algorithms work, under threat of large fines.
- **Advertisers.** Because the platforms live on advertising, brands that pull their adverts can force rule changes.
- **The type of state matters.** In democracies, control is split between platforms, regulators and users; in authoritarian states, governments hold most of it, often working through platforms that obey them.

The digital divide cuts across the whole debate. The International Telecommunication Union estimated that about **2.6 billion** people were still offline in **2024**, mostly in low-income countries. For them, the traditional media, often state-run, still matters most, so "who controls the new media" is less relevant than who controls radio and television.

Has the new media undermined the traditional media?

Yes, in several ways:

- **Lost readers and advertisers.** Print sales of newspapers have fallen for years as readers moved online, and classified and display advertising moved to Google, Meta and online marketplaces. Many local papers closed. *The Independent* in the UK printed its last paper edition in **March 2016** and became online only.
- **Lost audiences.** Young people especially watch streaming and short videos rather than scheduled television. Netflix, which began as a DVD-by-post firm, launched streaming in **2007** and now makes its own programmes. In **2024**, Ofcom found that, for the first time, slightly more UK adults used online sources for news than television.
- **Lost authority.** When anyone can publish, the traditional media no longer decides alone what the public knows; scandals and events now often break on social media first.

No, or not entirely:

- **They adapted.** Newspapers and broadcasters went online, put content behind paywalls, built apps and podcasts, and run some of the most-visited news websites (Curran, Fenton and Freedman).
- **They are still the main source of original reporting.** Much of what circulates on social media is traditional journalism shared, quoted or argued about. Citizen footage usually reaches a mass audience only once established outlets verify and broadcast it.
- **Trust.** Amid misinformation, many people still turn to established brands for checked news, especially during crises.
- **The digital divide.** Billions still rely on radio, television and print.
- **Convergence, not replacement.** The old and new media are merging: broadcasters stream, and streaming services make television. The traditional *form* (print, scheduled broadcasts) has declined more than the traditional *organisations*.
- **The old failed, too.** MySpace shows the risk running the other way: News Corporation sold it in **2011** for about **35 million US dollars**, a tiny fraction of the price it paid, after users moved to Facebook.

Key facts and formulas

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

Key term	Status
Traditional media (newspapers, magazines, radio, cinema, broadcast television: one-to-many, professional, gatekept, scheduled, costly to enter) against new media (digital, interactive, networked, on demand, many-to-many, cheap to enter, global; Lister et al. 2003)	Learn it
Prosumer (Toffler 1980); Web 2.0 (O'Reilly 2005); user-generated content; algorithms as gatekeepers	Learn it

Key term	Status
Trends: digitalisation and convergence (Jenkins 2006); conglomerates with horizontal and vertical integration and diversification (Disney+ 2019; Amazon bought MGM 2022); about 50 firms in 1983 down to five in 2004 (Bagdikian); cross-media ownership and synergy (Murdoch); social media giants (Google bought YouTube 2006; Facebook bought Instagram 2012 and WhatsApp 2014; Meta 2021)	Learn it
Who controls: owners (Miliband 1969; Herman and Chomsky 1988), audiences (pluralism), journalists and editors, governments	Learn it
New media controlled by corporations: platform rules (Trump suspended January 2021; Musk bought Twitter October 2022, about 44 billion US dollars; X 2023); filter bubbles (Pariser 2011); digital labour (Fuchs 2014); surveillance capitalism (Zuboff 2019); Curran, Fenton and Freedman 2012; Morozov 2011; MySpace bought 2005	Learn it
Others share control: participatory culture (Jenkins); citizen journalism (Darnella Frazier 2020); hacktivism (Anonymous); Arab Spring 2010–2012; states (Egypt January 2011; Russia March 2022; Ant Group November 2020; Digital Services Act 2022); advertisers; digital divide (about 2.6 billion offline in 2024)	Learn it
Traditional media undermined: falling print sales and advertising (<i>The Independent</i> print ended March 2016; Netflix streaming 2007; Ofcom 2024 online news overtook TV) against adaptation, original reporting, trust, convergence (MySpace sold 2011)	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 3 questions for this topic (2023 and 2025), 2 different (the November 2023 question was set on two papers). All are 35-mark "Evaluate this view" essays from Paper 4.

Question type	Questions
Evaluate who controls the new media	3

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

1. 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. Introduction** (3–4 sentences): define the new media and contrast it briefly with the traditional media; say who the quotation names (rich individuals, or large corporations); and say this is the debate between digital pessimists (and Marxists) and digital optimists (and pluralists).

2. **Case for the view**, each point with an example or a study:

- A few firms own the platforms (Alphabet, Meta, Microsoft, Amazon, Netflix, Disney; Tencent and Alibaba in China), built by buying rivals (YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp).
- Owners set and change the rules on who may post and what is removed (Trump's suspension; Musk's changes at X).
- Algorithms, advertising and data make the platforms profitable for owners, not users (Pariser; Fuchs; Zuboff).
- Traditional owners have moved into the new media, and old brands still lead online news (MySpace; Curran, Fenton and Freedman).
- Online protest rarely changes who holds power (Morozov; the Arab Spring's outcomes).
- Apply **Marxism**: like the old media, ownership brings control.

3. **Case against**: show who else has control.

- **Users**: participatory culture (Jenkins), citizen journalism (Darnella Frazier), leaderless campaigns, hacktivists and leakers.
- **Governments**: authoritarian states block, monitor and run their own platforms (China, Russia, Egypt 2011), and can even rein in giant firms (Ant Group); democracies regulate (the Digital Services Act).
- **Advertisers**: platforms depend on them and change rules to keep them.
- Apply **pluralism**: control is spread among owners, states, advertisers and users.

4. **Use the distinctions examiners reward: democratic against authoritarian states** (who holds control differs), and **traditional against new media** (owners can control a newspaper's every page, but cannot write billions of users' posts; they control the channels, not the content).

5. **Conclusion**: answer the exact words. For example: large corporations own the infrastructure and decide what is seen, so the view is largely true about *channels*; but users create most of the *content*, and governments, especially authoritarian ones, can overrule corporations, so control is shared, and shared differently in different countries.

Variants.

- **"The rich and powerful"** is wider than corporations: include billionaire owners, and governments and political elites (who are powerful but not corporations), then ask whether ordinary users have any real share.
- **"Large media corporations"**: test whether *governments* rather than corporations hold the real power, and whether advertisers steer the corporations.
- **Untested outcomes**. A question could ask whether the traditional media has been undermined by the new media, or how the two differ. Use the "Has the new media undermined the traditional media?" section: losses (readers, advertisers, audiences, authority) against adaptation, original reporting, trust, the digital divide and convergence. A question on the trends would use digitalisation, conglomerates, cross-media ownership and social media, asking whether they have made ownership more concentrated or opened the media to more voices.

Worked examples

All three are new 35-mark essays. The 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

'The new media is fundamentally different from the traditional media.' Evaluate this view. [35]

Introduction. Define both kinds of media; the view is that the new media works in a completely new way.

For the view (AO1/AO2).

- **Many-to-many, not one-to-many:** anyone can publish and reply; audiences become prosumers (Toffler; Jenkins).
- **No editor at the gate:** content goes out without professional checks; algorithms rank it instead.
- **Instant, global and cheap:** no schedules or print deadlines; a phone replaces a printing press.
- **Funded differently:** targeted advertising using personal data (Zuboff), not cover prices or licence fees.

Against the view (AO3).

- **Same pattern of ownership:** a few giant firms own the platforms, as a few owned the presses (Bagdikian; Curran, Fenton and Freedman), so control looks familiar.
- **Same content:** much of what is shared is traditional journalism; old brands lead online news.
- **Convergence:** broadcasters stream and streamers make television, so the two are merging.
- **Not universal:** about 2.6 billion people were offline in 2024 and rely on the traditional media.

Conclusion. The *technology* and the role of the audience are very different; the *ownership* and much of the *content* are not. "Fundamentally" overstates it.

How it would be marked. Accurate, detailed knowledge of the differences, with studies (AO1 7–9); every point tied to "fundamentally different" (AO2 10–11); sustained evaluation that sets the changes against what has stayed the same and reaches a judgement (AO3 12–15).

Example 2

'The traditional media has been seriously weakened by the growth of the new media.' Evaluate this view. [35]

Introduction. Define traditional and new media. "Weakened" can mean audiences, income or influence; deal with all three.

For the view (AO1/AO2).

- **Income:** advertising moved to Google and Meta; print sales fell; local papers closed; *The Independent* stopped printing in 2016.

- **Audiences:** young people stream on demand; Ofcom found in 2024 that online news had overtaken television in the UK.
- **Influence:** news breaks first on social media; citizen journalists (Darnella Frazier) reach millions without a newsroom.

Against the view (AO3).

- **Adaptation:** paywalls, apps and podcasts; old brands remain the most-visited news sites (Curran, Fenton and Freedman).
- **Still the source:** social media mostly shares and argues about professional journalism; citizen footage usually needs established outlets to verify and spread it.
- **Convergence:** conglomerates such as Disney now own both, so "traditional against new" is a false contest.
- **The digital divide:** for billions, radio and television remain the main media.
- **The new can fail too:** MySpace lost almost all its value within six years.

Conclusion. Print and scheduled broadcasting have been weakened; traditional media *organisations* have survived by becoming new media themselves. "Seriously" fits print far better than television news or the big conglomerates.

How it would be marked. Accurate knowledge of the changes with real cases (AO1 7–9), applied to "seriously weakened" in each paragraph (AO2 10–11), and evaluation that separates forms from organisations and countries with good and poor internet access (AO3 12–15).

Example 3

'Digitalisation has made media ownership more concentrated, not less.' Evaluate this view. [35]

This is the hardest kind: "not less" asks you to weigh two opposite trends against each other.

Introduction. Define digitalisation and concentration of ownership (fewer owners controlling more of the media).

For the view (AO1/AO2).

- **Conglomerates:** Bagdikian's count fell from about 50 firms (1983) to five (2004); mergers continued (Disney and Fox 2019; Amazon and MGM 2022).
- **Platform giants:** a few firms own the channels almost everyone uses, and buy their rivals (YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp).
- **Cross-media ownership and synergy:** digital convergence makes owning every type of media more profitable.
- **Marxist reading:** Fuchs and Zuboff; ownership brings control of data and attention.

Against the view (AO3).

- **More producers than ever:** low costs let millions publish (Jenkins; prosumers); bloggers, podcasters and creators compete with old media.
- **Ownership is not control:** platforms host content they did not make; users decide much of what spreads.
- **Giants fall:** MySpace was overtaken within a few years; TikTok rose against established platforms.
- **States step in:** regulators (Digital Services Act) and authoritarian governments (Ant Group, China's firewall) limit corporate power.

Conclusion. Ownership of the *channels* is more concentrated than ever, but production of *content* is far more spread out; the view is right about ownership, which is what it claims, but control is less concentrated than ownership.

How it would be marked. Detailed knowledge of the trends and studies (AO1 7–9), consistently applied to concentration (AO2 10–11), and evaluation that weighs ownership against content and corporations against states (AO3 12–15).

Common mistakes

- **Writing about the media in general.** Examiners want the new media discussed specifically, and they reward answers that contrast it with the traditional media. Make the contrast explicit in each section.
- **Accepting the view without testing it.** Weak answers agree that corporations or the rich control everything. AO3 is worth 15 of the 35 marks: bring in users, governments and advertisers.
- **Personal opinion instead of sociology.** Low answers give views about who controls the media with no concepts or studies. Use Marxism and pluralism, digital optimists and pessimists, and named cases.
- **Confusing ownership with control of content.** Owning a platform is not the same as writing what is on it. The strongest answers separate the channel from the content.
- **Treating all countries alike.** In authoritarian states the government, not a corporation, usually holds most control; say so.
- **Out-of-date or vague examples.** "Facebook is big" earns little. Name the firm, the year and what happened (Musk's purchase of Twitter in 2022; the Digital Services Act in 2022).

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 digitalisation, convergence, conglomerate, cross-media ownership, synergy, prosumer, user-generated content, algorithm, citizen journalism, digital labour, digital divide, digital optimism and digital pessimism.
- **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 ("the rich and powerful", "large media corporations") and say how each example supports or challenges them.

- **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.
- **Structure with the debate:** Marxists and digital pessimists against pluralists and digital optimists, then governments as a third answer.
- **Reach a judgement** that says who controls *what* (channels or content) and *where* (democratic or authoritarian states).
- **Answer two questions from different sections** (Globalisation, Media, Religion); the paper is out of $2 \times 35 = 70$.

Quick check

1. Give three differences between the traditional media and the new media.
2. What is the difference between vertical integration and cross-media ownership? Give an example of each.
3. A regional newspaper sold 120,000 print copies a day in 2010 and 30,000 in 2025. By what percentage did its print sales fall?
4. Bagdikian counted about 50 corporations controlling most US media in 1983 and five in 2004. By what percentage did the number fall?
5. Give one argument that large corporations control the new media and one argument that governments do.

Answers

1. Any three, for example: traditional media is one-to-many, new media many-to-many; traditional content is made by professionals and checked by editors, new media includes user-generated content ranked by algorithms; traditional media runs to schedules, new media is on demand; traditional media is costly to enter, new media is cheap.
2. Vertical integration is owning every stage from making content to delivering it (Disney making films and streaming them on Disney+). Cross-media ownership is owning several types of media at once (Murdoch's companies owning newspapers, television and book publishing).
3. $\frac{120000-30000}{120000} \times 100 = 75\%$, a fall of 75%.
4. $\frac{50-5}{50} \times 100 = 90\%$, a fall of 90%.
5. Corporations: a few firms own the platforms and set the rules on who may post (Musk changing X's rules after 2022). Governments: authoritarian states block platforms and control access (Russia blocking Facebook and Instagram in 2022), and even rein in giant firms (China halting Ant Group's share sale in 2020).

Past questions to try

- **9699/41/O/N/23 Q4**: essay on whether the new media is controlled by the rich and powerful.
- **9699/42/M/J/25 Q4**: essay on whether large media corporations control the new media.
- **9699/42/O/N/25 Q4**: essay on whether control of the media is shared between different groups, comparing traditional and new media.
- **9699/42/F/M/26 Q3**: essay on whether owners have complete control over media content, contrasting how far owners can control traditional and new media.