4 The MEDIA

**4.1 The New Media**

P.262 GETTING YOU THINKING

**Suggested answers**

**1.** There has been a significant increase in the average number of hours spent online per week by people, from 9.9 hours in 2005 to 20.5 hours in 2014, more than double as much.

**2.** No set answers.

**3.** Item B supports the idea that smartphones have impacted negatively on community and created social anxiety because it suggests that we give our smartphones more attention than the people we are with and get anxious if we are unable to communicate electronically instantly with family and friends. However, note that some writers have argued that the new media are associated with the formation of new types of ‘virtual communities’ – on-line communities – such as via Facebook and Twitter.

**4.** Item C suggests that national security agencies in the USA and the UK have been spying on people via their smartphones.

P.268 Focus on SKILLS: THE POWER OF TWITTER

**Suggested answers**

**1.** Two examples where Twitter proved to be useful as a news-gathering medium were the Tohuku earthquake in Japan in 2011 and the Arab Spring protests between 2011 and 2012.

**2.** Twitter has the potential to shape people’s social, political and economic lives because it connects an estimated 500 million users worldwide (as of 2015) who are able to exchange information, news and views.

**3.** Twitter (along with Facebook) allegedly played a significant part in Mubarak’s downfall by helping to mobilise street protests and by bringing international attention to what was going on by acting as a news source for journalists.

**4.** Some media sociologists have suggested that the internet can revitalise democracy because it gives a voice to those who would otherwise go unheard and allows like-minded people to join together and take action that may lead to social change, as in the case of Mubarak.

However, the Egyptian protesters' hoped-for transition to democracy proved elusive as post-revolutionary politics became polarised between the newly ascendant Islamists on the one hand and the military, as well as liberal and secular forces, on the other. Mohammed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood was elected President after Mubarak, but he was ousted by the military in 2013 and in 2014 the former head of the Egyptian Armed Forces, Abdel Fattah al Sisi, was elected President. By 2015 many former Muslim Brotherhood leaders and members had been jailed, sentenced and completely banned from political participation. Moreover, journalists have been persecuted on a large scale and media freedom has been restricted.

Hader (2011) is dismissive of the idea that the new media will transform politics, seeing Twitter as the home of pseudo- (i.e. pretend) revolutionaries. Similarly, Cornford and Robins (1999) are sceptical of the view that new media will lead to a more democratic communications structure that will bring about a new political and social order. They note that through a series of assertive tactics – alliances, mergers, takeovers, licensing deals, patents and copyright restrictions – media corporations seek to monopolise key strategic links within the new media. Jenkins (2008), too, notes that not all the participants in the new media are created equal. Corporations – and even individuals within corporate media – still exert greater power than any individual consumer or even aggregates of consumers. Political elite power-holders too, such as government departments and agencies, political parties, and the security services, have not been slow to see the power of new media delivery systems and have constructed sophisticated and elaborate websites to make sure their view of the world dominates the internet.

p.271 CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

**Suggested answers**

**1.** ‘Interactivity’ in relation to new media refers to the fact that communication is much more of a two-way process than it is with the old media, e.g. in terms of user-generated content.

**2.** Helpser (2011) claims that a digital underclass – characterised by unemployment, lower education levels and low digital skills – exists in the UK. The evidence suggests that this group has increased its use of the internet at a much slower rate than other social groups and those members of this group that do have internet access rate their skills as poorer than other more educated groups.

**3.** Supporters of the new media see it as able to harness the knowledge and skills of large numbers of people – their ‘collective intelligence’ - to produce content that is often critical of information produced top-down by traditional forms of media. Wikipedia could be seen as a good example of such content.

**4.** E-commerce (electronic commerce or EC) is the buying and selling of goods and services, or the transmitting of funds or data, over an electronic network, primarily the Internet. These business transactions occur either business-to-business, business-to-consumer, consumer-to-consumer or consumer-to-business. ([www.searchcio.techtarget.com](http://www.searchcio.techtarget.com))

**5.** New media may be used to reinforce elite power rather than undermine it. One way in which this may be done is by the production of web sites that provide information to the public, but whose content is controlled by the powers that be e.g. the UK government site [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) . Another is by using the new media to keep tabs on what people are doing through electronic surveillance.

**6.** The idea behind the concept of a ‘candy-floss culture’ is that, like candyfloss, the new media culture is superficially attractive, but ultimately lacks real nourishment. For example, there are now hundreds of channels available through digital TV, but if what they offer is much the same, then the extent to which viewers have any real choice is debatable.

**7.** New media may play an active role in democratic societies by, for example, enabling citizens to monitor the illegal or immoral activities of big businesses or other powerful organisations and by enabling the coordination of protesters and activists, ranging from hunt saboteurs and anti-vivisectionists to anti-austerity protesters and those disrupting G8 meetings.

**8.** Li and Kirkup (2007) found significant gender differences between men and women in the UK in their use of new media technology. Men were more likely than women to use email or chat rooms, and men played more computer games on consoles such as the Xbox than women did.

**9.** To the extent that the internet is unregulated and uncoordinated, it could be seen in Keen’s term as ‘chaotic’. However, the idea that it provides ‘useless’ information is clearly wide of the mark. What is ‘useful’ and what is ‘useless’ is a matter of opinion, but the internet has both made it easier to find information and democratised the information available. Of course, because anyone can post more or less whatever they want online, not all this information is either reliable or valid, but the same is true of information provided by the old media.

**10.** The ‘neophiliac’ view of new media emphasises what it sees as the positive consequences of the enormous growth in digital technology in recent decades, particularly in terms of increasing opportunities for consumer choice, interactivity, political participation and the formation of virtual social networks.

Critics, by contrast, tend to emphasise either the limitations of these features or the negative consequences of new media. For example:

* the negative impact of on-line retail giants like Amazon on high street shops,
* the problem of cyber bullying, harassment and trolling,
* increased opportunities for state surveillance,
* the alleged decline in the quality of popular culture (see answer to q6 above),
* the growth of internet crime (e.g. identity theft).

**4.2 OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL OF THE MEDIA**

P.280 Focus on skills: MEDIA SILENCE ON GEORGE OSBORNE’S NUCLEAR DEAL WITH CHINA

**1.** The British government is keen to promote more trade between China and the UK (since China represents an enormous potential market) and is especially keen to gain access to China for UK financial services.

**2.** Henderson believes the media should take a more critical stance in relation to this deal because the Chinese have a poor health and safety record with regard to building nuclear power stations; the deal will result in the British taxpayer subsidising the Chinese Communist Party and because the deal raises issues of national security.

**3.** Pluralists might argue that there is nothing wrong with the lack of critical media reporting of this deal since it merely reflects the audience’s lack of interest in economic news and because Osborne could be seen as pursuing Britain’s economic interests.

**4.** For Marxists, the lack of critical coverage could be seen as a consequence of a right wing bias in the news media causing it to underplay the potentially negative aspects of the deal since it is likely to benefit British exporters.

P.282 CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

**1.** The term ‘concentration of ownership’ refers to the fact that ownership of the commercial media in the UK is concentrated in the hands of a relatively small number of companies themselves controlled by a relatively small number of very rich individuals. For example, the ownership of national newspapers remains concentrated in just a few large companies: 70% of the UK national market is controlled by just three companies (News UK, Daily Mail and General Trust, and Trinity Mirror), with Rupert Murdoch’s News UK holding a third of the entire market share.

**2.** Jones (2014) defines the ‘Establishment’ as an alliance of unaccountable powerful groups “bound together by common economic interests and a shared set of mentalities”. These groups aim to protect their dominant position in society by managing democracy to make sure that it does not threaten their interests.

**3.** According to Cambridge Dictionaries Online, ‘synergy’ refers to “the ​combined ​power of a ​group of things when they are ​working together that is ​greater than the ​total ​power ​achieved by each ​working ​separately”. It is used here to refer to the increasing tendency of media conglomerates to use one branch of their businesses to promote another branch e.g. using a newspaper to promote a series shown on a satellite TV channel produced by a branch of the same conglomerate that owns the newspaper.

**4.** ‘Polysemic’ literally translates as many meanings. It is used to refer to the fact that the same media message can be interpreted in different ways by different members of the audience.

**5.** Horizontal and vertical integration are concepts from economics referring to two different ways in which companies can expand. Horizontal integration involves companies *broadening* the range of their outlets. For example, News Corp, which owns newspapers in Britain and Australia, also owns the publisher HarperCollins as well as interests in the USA, including the New York Post, Fox TV and 20th Century Fox film studios. It also owns a big chunk of Sky and the biggest Asian satellite channel, Star TV.

By contrast, vertical integration involves companies *deepening* their commercial interests by moving backwards or forwards in the production process. For example, Time Warner makes its own films and distributes them to its own cinema complexes while News Corp owns television and film studios as well as the satellite television channels that show them. Vertical integration therefore gives media multinationals greater economic control over their operating environment.

Both represent ways in which media ownership has become increasingly concentrated.

**6.** Pluralists believe that media content is shaped by the market on the basis that, in order to survive, commercial media must make a profit and unless they provide audiences with what they want, they won’t do so.

**7.** According to the Media Reform Coalition (2014), “concentration (of ownership) within some news and information markets has reached endemic levels and is undermining the quality and diversity of output on which citizens rely.

Just three companies (News UK, DMGT and Trinity Mirror) control nearly 70% of national newspaper circulation.

Just five companies control some 70% of regional daily newspaper circulation.

Out of 406 Local Government Areas, 100 (25%) have no daily local newspaper at all while in 143 LGAs (35% of the total) a single title has a 100% monopoly.

Online news sources are overwhelmingly accounted for by traditional news providers, while online news consumption is also dominated either by established news providers or digital intermediaries who rely predominantly on traditional news providers for their content.

A single news provider, Sky, provides news bulletins for virtually all of national and regional commercial radio.

While the BBC accounts for a majority of television news consumption, a single company, ITV, accounts for a majority of non-BBC TV news consumption”.

**8.** Public service broadcasting (in the UK, the BBC and Channel 4) is seen by pluralists as playing a crucial part in maintaining media diversity and, because it is free from direct commercial pressures, as able to provide coverage of views that may be critical of vested commercial interests.

**9.** In principle, editors and journalists are independent of owners. However, Curran argues that there is plenty of evidence that media owners have undermined newspaper independence and balance in subtle ways by choosing the editors that they want and getting rid of editors and journalists that ‘fail’ to toe their owner’s line. Moreover, he observes that journalists deliberately self-censor their reports to omit controversial issues that might draw the owner’s attention to them. Conforming to the owner’s requirements brings rewards in terms of interesting assignments and promotion, whilst dissident journalists are often sacked.

The Media Reform Coalition (2014) reports that: “in 2008, the House of Lords Select Committee on Communications heard evidence from former editors of a number of national newspapers. Together, they told a colourful tale of editorial influence: how Robert Maxwell, Conrad Black, the Barclay Brothers, and Rupert Murdoch openly meddled with the titles under their control. Roy Greenslade, editor of the Daily Mirror between 1990 and 1991, said the late Robert Maxwell had been “an overt interferer...he liked to appear in the newspaper as often as he possibly could and he liked to have an involvement in virtually every story.” Dominic Lawson, editor of the Sunday Telegraph from 1995 to 2005, said Aidan Barclay had asked him to pull a negative story about David Blunkett because he did not want to cross a “powerful man”. Rupert Murdoch admitted that he had “editorial control on major issues”, while Andrew Neil, who edited the Sunday Times, said he was “never left in any doubt what Murdoch wanted”.

**10.** For Marxists the mass media, as part of the superstructure of capitalist societies, inevitably reflect the interests of the dominant class and therefore help to legitimate and reproduce the class structure. For instrumental Marxists this is because the wealthy directly control the mass media and intentionally use it in this way. For hegemonic Marxists it happens simply because of the way in which the media is organised and staffed.

The strongest evidence supporting this claim in the UK relates to the press, which is overwhelmingly right wing in its orientation and much of which is owned and controlled by extremely wealthy individuals. However, even here there are national newspapers such as the Guardian, the Observer and the Morning Star (not to be confused with the Daily Star) which are left wing in orientation.

Commercial broadcasting and film also tend to be right wing in orientation though the legal requirement placed on news broadcasters to show ‘due impartiality’ in their coverage of news and current affairs prevents them from being simple voice pieces for right wing views (cf. Fox News in the USA). Whether Public Service Broadcasting is also predominantly right wing is a matter of debate. The GUMG argues that the BBC operates within a ‘consensus band’ that leaves extreme views – whether left or right – largely untransmitted. On the other hand, the fact that the BBC historically has been attacked as biased by successive governments of different political complexions suggests that it can’t be accused of peddling a consistent party political line, at the very least.

With the arrival of new – digital – media, the Marxist argument as it applies to the UK becomes even more problematic. On-line news sources cover every conceivable political position, satellite TV gives access to critical sources like Russia Today and Al Jazeera and platforms like Reddit enable users to set the ‘trending’ news agenda. Hence, despite the increasing concentration of ownership of the mainstream media, the new media provide evidence of real diversity.

**4.3 The MEDIA, GLOBALISATION AND POPULAR CULTURE**

P290 Focus on skills: SOME COUNTRIES REMAIN RESISTANT TO AMERICAN CULTURAL EXPORTS

**1.** Cowen believes that American popular culture is unlikely to dominate countries such as India and Iran because a) American popular culture is mainly secular, but religion (Hinduism and Islam) remains a strong cultural influence in these societies, b) loyalty to local popular culture is important in terms of connecting to others like themselves, constructing their identity and signalling their place in local hierarchies, c) these countries produce a great deal of their own popular cultural products.

**2.** Cowen believes that it is Europe that is more likely to be affected by American cultural exports. For example, Cowen suggests Hollywood movies are popular in Europe in part because of the successes of European welfare states and of European economic integration. The adoption of welfare states has resulted in fewer differences between citizens and less need to reinforce these by using cultural products. Western Europe has also moved away from an aristocratic class society, and high culture now has much the same status as popular culture. Europe also has strong global connections. All those factors favour an interest in American popular culture.

**3.** Europe has been more receptive to American popular culture because of the cultural and historical links between the two. Both reflect the historical influence of Christianity and both are increasingly secular. Also, many Americans have ancestral links with European countries and so American culture has developed reflecting these European roots. Finally, they are at similar levels of economic development.

**4.** Imperialism refers to a policy of extending a country's power and influence through colonization, use of military force, or other means. The view that the export of American popular culture is a type of ‘cultural imperialism’ implies that American popular culture is being forced on unwilling recipients against their will. Given that people in other countries choose to watch American films or TV series, listen to American bands or singers and eat American food, the term can be seen as hyperbolic. However, given the wealth and power of the TNCs that produce these goods and their resultant ability to promote these products and given the fact that the USA has been the economically, politically and militarily dominant country since the middle of the last century, a milder version of this thesis is plausible.

P.292 CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

**1.** Globalisation involves all parts of the world becoming increasingly interconnected, so that national boundaries – in some respects, at least – become less important. It is associated with increasing global flows of information, ideas, goods and people.

**2.** The concept of a ‘media-saturated society’ implies that the mass media have become so ubiquitous that it is impossible to escape their influence.

**3.** ‘Civic disengagement’ implies that people are abandoning the roles and responsibilities associated with being a citizen of a country, such as participating in elections, becoming school governors, taking an interest in local politics and so on.

**4.** Imperialism refers to a policy of extending a country's power and influence through colonization, use of military force, or other means. Cultural imperialism therefore refers to the extension of a country’s power and influence through cultural means.

**5.** Two examples of the globalisation of American popular culture are the global ubiquity of baseball caps and American fast food outlets, such as McDonalds and KFC.

**6.** Marxists are critical of the globalisation of popular culture because they argue that it is an ideological product aimed at distracting poorer groups from the exploitation and inequality which is a feature of their everyday lives. Marxists claim that it encourages conformity and a lack of critical thinking, especially about the organisation of capitalism. For example, Marcuse (1964) claimed that this conformity is the product of media audiences being encouraged by media companies to subscribe to three ways of thinking and behaviour: *commodity fetishism* – the idea that the products of popular culture have special powers that somehow enhance the life of the user; *the creation of false needs* – that if one doesn’t have a particular consumer product life will barely be worth living; and *conspicuous consumption* – the need to be seen as owning certain products in order to attract praise and status from others for one’s affluence and taste.

Hence, Marxists argue that the role of the global mass media is to indoctrinate global consumers into capitalist ideology and to produce a homogenised culture that mainly promotes capitalist values such as materialism and consumerism.

**7.** The rapid spread of media and popular culture globally in the last 30 years reflects developments in communications technology, the growth of TNCs, the search for new markets and the embrace of new media by the general public.

**8.** Two ways in which global media may produce a participatory culture are through enabling people to communicate with each other more easily (e.g. through Twitter) and enabling them to take part in political activities more easily (e.g. through signing on-line petitions).

**9.** Postmodernist sociologists have argued that the rapid expansion in media technologies between 2005 and 2015 has led to postmodern societies becoming ‘media-saturated’. As a result, they claim that the media – and the popular culture that they generate – are now more influential in the shaping of personal identity and lifestyle than traditional influences such as family, community, social class, gender, nation or ethnicity.

They also argue that the new media have enabled the creation of a much more participatory global culture, which Fuchs (2014) defines as “the involvement of users, audiences, consumers and fans in the creation of culture and content”. This might include contributing to a Wikipedia page, uploading videos to YouTube, writing a blog or the creation of short messages on Twitter.

Finally, postmodernists argue that global media sites such as Twitter and Facebook can help increase political awareness of issues such as human rights abuses, repression and protest, and consequently help coordinate a mass political response to these issues.

Postmodernists have been criticised for exaggerating the degree of the social changes that they associate with global media and popular culture. Evidence from attitude surveys indicates that many people still see social class, ethnicity, family, nation and religion as having more influence over their lives and identities than global media or culture. Media influence is undoubtedly important, but it is not the determining factor in most people’s lifestyle choices.

There is also a rather naïve and unrealistic element to postmodernist analyses, in that they tend to ignore the fact that a substantial number of people are unable to make consumption choices because of inequalities brought about by traditional influences such as unemployment, poverty, racial discrimination and patriarchy. A ‘digital divide’ exists between those who are ‘wired’ and those who aren’t.

**10.** Those who argue that the globalisation of the media and popular culture has been a positive process talk about the way in which it has opened up the flow of information between ordinary people, extended consumer choice and made it more difficult for despotic rulers to hide behind national walls of privacy.

Critics argue that it has done little to alter existing power relationships and that it has involved the increasing penetration of American popular culture into foreign countries – dubbed ‘cultural imperialism’ – and has encouraged the growth of civic disengagement as people spend increasing amounts of time on the internet exchanging inconsequential information about their personal lives via Facebook and Twitter and on smart phones taking selfies!

**4.4 THE SELECTION AND PRESENTATION OF THE NEWS**

p.297 Focus on SKILLS: CITIZEN JOURNALISM

**1.** Keen claims that citizen journalism offers up ‘opinion as fact’ (i.e. subjective views as objective truths), ‘rumour as reportage’ (i.e. hearsay as if it were a first-hand account) and ‘innuendo as information’ (i.e. negative inferences as matters of fact).

**2.** Gillmor argues that citizen journalists do not represent a cross-section of society, because such journalism requires education, technical skills, money and time, which only the more privileged possess.

**3.** There are a number of arguments for citizen journalism:

* it allows ordinary people to get their voice heard,
* it increases the range of voices represented in the media, particularly in those countries where the state directly controls media content,
* it can provide access to what is happening in areas from which professional journalists have been excluded or banned,
* it can help fill in gaps resulting from the reduction in the size of newsrooms e.g. because of falling sales of print journalism.

**4.** In one sense, the view that news values are the main influence on the news-gathering process is self-evidently true, given that they determine what is regarded as ‘newsworthy’. However, when one looks at the content of news media it is clear that there is more going on than meets the eye. For example, in relation to newspapers, the news presented varies with the characteristics of the presumed audience – compare the news contained in tabloid newspapers with that in the broadsheets, for example. It also varies according to the political affiliations of newspapers – compare the front page of the Daily Star with the Morning Star, for example. This is why some sociologists argue that equally important are organisational or bureaucratic constraints/routines and ownership of media news organisations.

Underlying news values are sets of interests that shape what is selected for coverage, the importance attached to it and how it is interpreted. There are far more *potentially* newsworthy events and incidents occurring than can ever be reported, so other factors must influence what is reported. Ultimately, it needs to be recognised that news is not *discovered*, but *manufactured.*

p.303 CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

**1.** Davies argues that journalists should be renamed ‘churnalists’ because they are largely engaged in uncritically churning out ‘facts’ or stories given to them by government spin doctors, and particularly by public relations companies working for celebrities and corporate interests.

**2.** ‘Citizen journalists’ are members of the public who collect, report, analyse and disseminate news and information, generally on-line.

**3.** ‘Moral panics’ are situations of widespread anxiety or fear amongst the public over people, incidents or events reported by the news media where the level of anxiety is out of proportion to the real threat – if any – posed. It is not used appropriately to refer to situations where the threat is objectively real.

**4.** ‘News values’ are the ideas held by journalists about what is or is not newsworthy. They include such elements as negativity, conflict, scandal, large numbers and so on.

**5.** Television news programmes are seen as most reliable by the public because they recognise that the press is biased and because broadcast news is legally required to display ‘due accuracy’ and ‘due impartiality’ in its coverage.

**6.** The ‘hierarchy of credibility’ refers to the idea that journalists rank potential sources of information in terms of how believable they consider them to be. As a result how events are to be understood is determined by the views of those at the top of this hierarchy.

Hall argues that this ‘hierarchy of credibility’ means that journalists often report what prominent people say about events rather than the events themselves; indeed, what such people say may constitute an event in itself – powerful people ‘make news’.

**7.** Following the exposure in 2011 of the *News of the World*’s involvement in phone-hacking, the Coalition government set up an inquiry, chaired by Lord Justice Leveson, which concluded in 2012 that phone-hacking was common and encouraged by editors, that the culture of the press frequently and unethically demonstrated a blatant disrespect for people’s privacy and dignity, and that news stories frequently relied on misrepresentation and embellishment. Leveson recommended the setting up of an independent regulatory body that would hear complaints from the victims of unfair press treatment, and would have the power to impose fines on news organisations. Leveson also recommended that this body be underpinned by legislation to make sure it was doing its job properly.

Leveson’s recommendations received overwhelming public support and – in the form of a Royal Charter – were endorsed by every party in Parliament. The owners of the Express, the Mail, the Mirror, the Sun, the Telegraph and the Times refused to do what Leveson suggested. Instead they revamped their discredited self-regulator, the Press Complaints Commission, giving it a new name: the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO).

At the time of writing (April, 2016) little progress has been made in implementing the Leveson recommendations and the Conservative government appears to be backtracking on the commitments David Cameron made at the time.

One of these was that there would be a second stage to the Leveson enquiry. On 29 November 2012, the day the first phase of the inquiry delivered its report, David Cameron repeated to Parliament that there would be a second part to the inquiry: ‘When I set up the inquiry I also said that there would be a second part to investigate wrongdoing in the press and the police, including the conduct of the first police investigation. That second stage cannot go ahead until the current criminal proceedings have concluded**, but we remain committed to the inquiry as it was first established.’** *Hacked Off* has recently reported (11/04/2016) that reports in the Times and the Daily Mail say that ministers have privately decided to shelve Part 2. These reports showed every sign of being the result of government briefing.

Moreover, as *Hacked Off* has also reported, in December, 2015, “David Cameron attended a Christmas party given by Rupert Murdoch at his London home. Also present were George Osborne, John Whittingdale (the Culture Secretary) and other ministers and leading Conservatives. Back in 2011 Cameron said of Murdoch’s UK operations: ‘What has happened at this company is disgraceful. It has got to be addressed at every level.’ And he declared: ’There needs to be root-and-branch change at this entire organisation . . .’ Five years on, though the Murdoch press has refused to participate in effective, independent press self-regulation as Leveson recommended, and though there has been nothing resembling root-and-branch change, Cameron is happy to drink Murdoch’s wine again. Cameron’s personal friend Rebekah Brooks is back running the company that hacked phones and bribed officials and James Murdoch has also returned to his post as boss of Sky. Everything here suggests that Cameron’s words of 2011 were just words, and the risk to the public from this closeness remains”.

**8.** The stages of a moral panic are outlined in Figure 4.4.1. They were first set out by Stan Cohen writing about the moral panic that developed around Mods and Rockers in the 1960s and have been validated by countless further examples since then.

**9.** News values shape what journalists consider newsworthy and therefore play a significant role in the social construction of news. However, sociologists have suggested that news construction is also constrained by various bureaucratic constraints connected with the organisation of newsrooms such as financial costs, the time or space available, deadlines, immediacy and actuality and so on. (See also the answer to q4 in Focus on Skills: Citizen Journalism, above.)

**10.** Cohen and Young (1981) suggest that moral panics originate in the consensual nature of the news media in the UK today. Journalists see ‘problem groups’ as newsworthy because they assume that their audiences share their moral concerns about the direction that society is taking. In this sense, journalists believe that they are giving the public what they want.

Moral panics may also simply be the product of the desire of journalists and editors to sell newspapers – they may be a good example of how audiences are manipulated by the media for commercial purposes. In other words, moral panics sell newspapers.

The neo-Marxist Stuart Hall (1978) studied news coverage of Black muggers in the 1970s and concluded that the moral panic that resulted functioned to serve capitalist interests because news stories labelled young African Caribbeans as criminals and as a potential threat to White people. This served ideologically to divide and rule the working-class by turning White working people against Black working people. It also diverted attention away from the mismanagement of capitalism by the capitalist class (which had resulted in a crisis of legitimacy for the state) and justified heavier policing of Black communities.

All three sociological explanations are plausible. The first two illustrate action perspectives where social behaviour is explained in terms of the intentions of those whose behaviour is being examined. The third represents an example of a structural approach where behaviour is explained in terms of factors that the social actors involved may be unaware of and which are largely outside their control.

**4.5 MEDIA REPRESENTATION OF GENDER, SEXUALITY AND DISABILITY**

P.309 FOCUS ON SKILLS: EVERYDAY SEXISM

**Suggested answers**

**1.** ‘Freak shows’ used to be a popular pastime in Victorian times where people with unusual or abnormal bodies would be shown off and exploited for the benefit of an audience. Susan Boyle was treated like a ’freak’ by some newspapers because she had the temerity to appear on television without make-up and had untidy hair and crooked teeth.

**2.** An alien using the media as their primary source of information about men and women would end up with a distorted view because not all men and women are represented in the media and those that are represented are not a representative cross-section. For example, the vast majority of television presenters are physically attractive, not overweight, able-bodied and young or middle-aged (unless they are male, in which case they may be allowed to continue in the job a little longer).

**3.** One The ‘Just the Women’ report (2012), based on a fortnight’s analysis of 11 national newspapers in September 2012, concluded that just over 1300 news reports portrayed women in limited roles. The report found that the tabloid press in particular often focused on women’s appearance and reduced them to sexual commodities to be consumed by what Mulvey (1975) calls the *male* *gaze.* According to Kilbourne (1995), the media often present women as mannequins: tall and thin, often size zero, with very long legs, perfect teeth and hair, and perfect skin. Kilbourne notes that this mannequin image is used to advertise cosmetics, health products and anything that works to improve the appearance of the body for the benefit of the male gaze (rather than for female self-esteem). Wolf (1990) argued that the dominant media message aimed at women is that their bodies are a project in constant need of improvement.

The media’s obsession with the female figure is likely to be a product of a number of factors. Historically, Western culture has valued women in terms of their appearance and men for their achievements. Whilst feminists have justifiably condemned this as sexist, such a view is a long way from being obsolete. It is also the case that ‘sex sells’. Pictures of attractive women, particularly if they are also scantily clad, attract the ‘male gaze’ and help to focus their attention on the accompanying article or product. Finally, it is unlikely to be irrelevant that the people producing media messages are more likely to be male than female.

**4.** To some extent, media representations of masculinity and femininity will inevitably ‘reflect the reality of life in the UK for women and men’ because these media representations *help to constitute that reality.* Thus, if Susan Boyle is pilloried for not looking young, svelte and glamorous then the message that is transmitted is that you shouldn’t appear on TV – or, at least, on talent shows – unless you can conform to these strictures. Similarly, if you are a young woman watching rock videos, you will quickly gain the message that if you want to be attractive to men you’ll need to look a certain way.

**5.** Gender representations tend to reflect dominant discourses. Thus one can identify the versions of masculinity and femininity that are hegemonic via the media. It is these representations that are most frequently conveyed by the media and, like it or not, it is these versions that people are expected to emulate or aspire to. Nevertheless, the media are incredibly diverse, in some respects at least, and subordinate versions of femininity and masculinity are also conveyed. As postmodernists claim, today people have a much greater freedom to choose how they will be a man or woman. However, those choosing to renounce hegemonic versions would be wise to be aware of the powerful social expectations that continue to surround gender identity.

(Students are recommended to view a recent podcast on novaramedia.com by Shon Faye entitled *Is it time to abolish masculinity?* for some provocative insights into the issues explored in this Focus on Skills exercise.)

P.314 CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

**Suggested answers**

**1.** ‘Disablism’ is the name given to a set of beliefs or ideology that regards disabled people as different from and inferior to able-bodied people. It also describes the social barriers that arise when an able-bodied person views someone with an impairment with prejudice and treats them in a discriminatory way. (In the USA, the equivalent term – confusingly – is ‘ableism’).

**2.** ‘Symbolic annihilation’ is a term used by Tuchman et al. (1978) to describe the way in which women are represented by the media. They argue that women’s achievements are often not reported, or are condemned or trivialised by the mass media. The term was coined by George Gerbner: “Representation in the fictional world signifies social existence; absence means symbolic annihilation.” (Gerbner & Gross, 1976, p. 182)

**3.** ‘The male gaze’ refers to the way the camera looks at a woman in the same way as a man does and consequently portrays women as sexual beings or as decorative. It is assumed by a male-dominated media that this is what the male audience wants.

**4.** ‘Demonisation’ refers to the process by which certain individuals or groups are represented as devils through media representations.

**5.** Two of the ways in which women are stereotyped by the media are: a) female prostitutes are stereotyped as either sad, heroin-addicted waifs or as glamorous, high-flying escorts; b) women who advertise perfumes who are invariably young, glamorous and thin.

**6.** Research suggests that disabled people are often portrayed in stereotypical ways by both television and newspapers. Barnes (1992) identified a number of stereotypes in the media generally: a) pitiable and pathetic, b) sinister and evil, c) atmospheric or curio, d) super-cripples, e) sexually abnormal, f) incapable of participating fully in community life. More recent research looking at newspaper coverage has revealed a growing trend for disabled people to be portrayed as ‘scroungers’ or ‘benefit cheats’.

Even more striking, however, is the relative invisibility of disabled people in TV. Indeed, Gerbner’s term of ‘symbolic annihilation’ by the media is much more appropriately applied to disabled people than to women today. Channel 4’s *The Last Leg,* which features two presenters with physical impairments alongside a third who is not disabled, is an exception to this rule and the comedian Francesca Martinez, who has cerebral palsy, appears fairly regularly on TV. But people with visible disabilities are mainly notable by their absence.

**7.** In 1999, the research group Children Now asked boys between the ages of 10 and 17 about their perceptions of the male characters they saw on television, in music videos and in movies (Children Now, 1999). Their results indicate that media representations of men do not reflect the changing work and family experiences of most men today.

The study found the following representations of masculinity were dominant: › males are violent › men are generally leaders and problem-solvers › males are funny, confident, successful and athletic › men and boys rarely cry or show vulnerability › male characters are mostly shown in the workplace, and only rarely at home. More than a third of the boys had never seen a man doing domestic chores on TV. These images support the idea that traditional images of masculinity generally continue to dominate mass-media coverage of boys and men.

McNamara (2006) analysed a wide variety of media – newspapers, magazines and television – and claimed that media representations of men and boys generally failed to portray the reality of masculine life. McNamara found that:

* 80 per cent of media representations of men were negative. Men and boys were routinely shown as “violent and aggressive thieves, thugs, murderers, wife and girlfriend bashers, sexual abusers, molesters, perverts, irresponsible deadbeat dads and philanderers, even though, in reality, only a small proportion of men act out these roles and behaviours.”
* Men and boys were also shown as irresponsible risk-takers and, in particular, incapable of communicating their feelings or controlling anger. In contrast, McNamara did find that 20 per cent of media representations of masculinity focused on men and boys who were in touch with their feminine side and expressed this through their appearance – the *metrosexual* male – and, through fatherhood especially, the need to connect emotionally to their children. However, on the whole, McNamara concludes that men are demonised by media representations of masculinity.

**8.** (Some) disabled sociologists are critical of telethons that seek to raise money for disability charities because they believe that disabled people’s needs should be met by the state, as of right, rather than through charity – hence the slogan ‘rights, not charity’ – and because such programmes act to keep the audience in the position of givers and disabled people in their place as grateful and dependent recipients of charity.

**9.** Attitudes towards people who are gay, lesbian or bisexual have undergone profound changes in Western societies since the 1960s and the start of the gay liberation movement, as notions of sexual deviance have slowly but surely given way to notions of sexual diversity. These attitudinal changes have both influenced, and been influenced by, legal changes such as the outlawing of discrimination on the basis of someone’s sexuality and, most recently, the granting of the right to marry to lesbians and gay men in England, Wales and Scotland.

These societal changes have been reflected in changes in media representations. In the sixties it was rare to see gay men or lesbians portrayed at all in the media and if they were, they were portrayed as deviant (note: homosexual activity by men was illegal in England and Wales until 1968). Representations of alternative sexualities started to become slightly more common in the seventies and eighties, but it was rare to see gay men who weren’t camp or lesbians who weren’t butch. For example, in 1975, the ground-breaking film portraying the flamboyantly camp, gay-icon Quentin Crisp's life, *The Naked Civil Servant* (based on the 1968 autobiography and starring John Hurt) was transmitted by Thames Television for ITV.

Since then increasing numbers of people in the public eye have ‘come out’ as lesbian or gay and homophobia is widely condemned (although the views associated with organised religions such as Christianity and Islam have been more equivocal at best, and remain homophobic at worst). Consequently, sympathetic portraits of gay and lesbian sexuality have become commonplace in movies (*Philadelphia, Brokeback Mountain, Pride, Carol*) and on TV (*Queer as Folk, EastEnders, Coronation Street, Will and Grace)*.

Nevertheless, the LGBT-rights organisation, Stonewall, argued in 2010 that most LGBT characters portrayed on TV are promiscuous, predatory or figures of fun. Moreover, in research which looked specifically at television aimed at younger viewers, out of a total of 126 hours of such programming, only 5 hours 43 minutes were focused on LGBT-related characters or issues, and only 46 minutes of this coverage portrayed them realistically and positively in Stonewall’s view.

Similarly, in the right-wing press, homosexuality is consistently presented as wicked, sinful and unnatural. Editorials have often strongly opposed legislation aimed at bringing about social and political equality for gay people, such as gay marriage and space is often given to commentators critical of gay lifestyles.

Bisexuality is rarely explicitly recognised by the media.

Strictly speaking, ‘transgender’ does not refer to an alternative sexuality but to a self-identity in which a person’s gender identity does not conform with the sex they were assigned at birth. People who are transgender can be heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual or asexual.

**10** Evaluating sociological explanations of mass media representations of femininity is complicated by the fact that sociologists disagree about just how much such representations have changed. Traditionally, 3 stereotypes dominated: women as mothers, women as housewives and women as objects of (male) desire.

For radical feminists, women continue to be over-represented in the domestic sphere and their bodies sexualised to titillate men. For radical feminists like Germaine Greer, these representations are not only sexist, but also – in her view – misogynistic (i.e. woman-hating). They explain this as a product of patriarchy. Socialist feminists see it as a product of patriarchy and capitalist pursuit of profits.

Radical feminists are particularly critical of what they see as the sexual objectification of women in the media – from the Sun’s P3 pin-ups (until they were discontinued), through men’s glamour magazines, to pornography. However, their stance has been criticised by ‘sex-positivist feminists’ who see the views of radical feminism as too close to those of political conservatives and religious fundamentalists: it often appears that the radical feminist position is not so much concerned to promote gender equality (there were no calls by radical feminists to institute P3 male pin-ups alongside female ones) as to condemn open expressions of sexuality. Sex-positive feminists argue that patriarchy limits sexual expression and are in favour of giving people of all genders more sexual opportunities, rather than restricting pornography (Queen, 1996).

McRobbie (1999) argues that much of the media projected towards young women today constitute a form of ‘popular feminism’ expressed through magazines that promote the concept of ‘girl power’. This is a theme picked up by postmodernists such as Gauntlett. He argues that: “the traditional view of a woman as a housewife or low-status worker has been kick-boxed out of the picture by feisty, successful ‘girl power’ icons.” Indeed, Gauntlett argues that, in contrast with the past, men and women no longer get singular and straightforward media messages that suggest that there is only one ideal type of masculinity or femininity. He argues that the mass media today actually challenge traditional definitions of gender and are in fact a force for change because they encourage a diversity of masculine and feminine identities.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to argue with the evidence that many women today are overwhelmingly dissatisfied with and continuously anxious about how they look. New findings from the 2014 British Social Attitudes survey reveal that only 63% of women aged 18-34 and 57% of women aged 35-49 are satisfied with their appearance. And a recent report by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Body Image found that girls as young as five are worrying about their size and appearance, and that one in four seven-year-old girls have tried to lose weight at least once. Feminists such as Wolf and Orbach see media representations of women, particularly the routine use of air-brushing techniques, as playing a crucial part in this.

**4.6 MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF ETHNICITY, SOCIAL CLASS AND AGE**

P.319 FOCUS ON SKILLS: GANGSTA RAP

**Suggested answers**

**1.** Two reasons why moral panics around gangsta rap occurred in 2003 and 2006 were that it was seen as contributing to an increase in gun crime and promoting homophobia and misogyny.

**2.** Rap music can be seen as a potent symbol of (black) cultural identity because a) it displays orally talented young black singers, b) conveys feelings of anger, frustration and alienation and c) appears authentic.**3.** The researchers argue that the idea that ‘benefit ghettos’ exist is a myth and that the problem of high levels of unemployment in areas which have been de-industrialised is a consequence of structural unemployment: the lack of jobs in these areas.

**3.** Rap music has been associated with the glorification of guns and knives, violence towards women and homophobic lyrics. The effects are a matter of conjecture (see Chapter 4.7 on media effects theories).

One possible limitation, common to all interview research, is that interviewees may not be completely honest. Another is that the researchers can’t be sure that different findings may have been gathered had they chosen other communities to investigate.

**3.** It is implausible to argue that BME/BAME groups are ‘symbolically annihilated’ by the mass media given their visibility in TV, film, music videos, newspapers and magazines. Certainly, compared with 50 years ago, BAME groups are far more visible, partly because of an increase in the size of the BAME community in Britain and partly because of conscious policies to increase the ethnic diversity of people working in the media e.g. think of the carefully selected range of ethnicities represented on *Gogglebox*.

Nevertheless, the actor and comedian Lenny Henry has called for new legislation to reverse a recent decline in the percentage of black and Asian people in the creative industries. In a speech delivered in 2014, Henry said the situation has "deteriorated badly" with the number of black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) people working in the UK television industry falling by 30.9% between 2006 and 2012. They now make up just 5.4% of the broadcasting workforce, which Henry described as an "appalling percentage".

p.327 CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

**Suggested answers**

**1.** ‘Islamaphobia’ refers to prejudice and discrimination practised against Muslims.

**2.** ‘Folk devils’ are individuals and groups who have been demonised by the mass media and attract public opprobrium.

**3.** ‘Ageism’ refers to beliefs and social practices that identify the members of a particular age category – such as old people – as socially inferior.

**4.** ‘Tokenism’ refers to the practice of making only a perfunctory or symbolic effort to do a particular thing. With regard to television drama, it means recruiting a small number of actors from minority ethnic groups in order to give the appearance of racial equality.

**5.** One way in which youth are portrayed by the media is as a threat to society. Research by Wayne et al. looked at 2,130 news items across all the main television channels during May 2006 and found 286 stories that focused specifically on young people. Of these, 28 per cent focused on celebrities, but 82 per cent of the remainder focused on young people as either the victims of or, more commonly, the perpetrators of violent crime. In other words, young people were mainly represented as a threat to society. Another way is as members of youth cultures or subcultures such as Goths.

**6.** Whitaker (2002) found that Muslims are stereotypically presented by the media as “intolerant, misogynistic, violent or cruel, and finally, strange or different”. Moore et al. (2008) analysed the content of the British media between 2000 and 2008.(They avoided 2001 and 2005, in the aftermath of 9/11 and 7/7 respectively because they wanted to focus on the everyday coverage of British Muslims.) The research found that, between 2000 and 2008, over a third of stories focused on terrorism, while a third of stories focused on differences between the Muslim community and British society by highlighting forced marriages and the wearing of the hijab and the veil. In contrast, stories about attacks on Muslims and islamophobia were fairly rare.

**7.** Research suggests that media representations, both fictional and non-fictional, of the working class and the poor are predominantly negative. For example, Lawler (2005) argues that the media use the term ‘chav’ to vilify and socially stigmatise what they depict as a peasant underclass or ‘White trash’, symbolised by stereotypical forms of appearance, such as the wearing of tracksuits, idleness, fraudulent benefit claims, anti-social behaviour, drug use and criminality. For example, *Benefits Street,* first broadcast in 2014, has given rise to a whole new genre of ‘reality TV’ programmes about people living on benefits, that has been dubbed by critics as ‘poverty porn’. These media representations neutralise any public concern or sympathy for their social and economic plight.

**8.** The charity Age Concern (2000) argues that the elderly are underrepresented in general across a variety of mass media and that media portrayals are generally ageist in that the old tend to be portrayed in stereotypically negative ways:

* Grumpy – This stereotype paints elderly women as shrews or busybodies and males as curmudgeons who spend their time waxing lyrical about the past, bemoaning the behaviour of young people and complaining about the modern world. These characters tend to be portrayed as conservative, stubborn and resistant to social change.
* Mentally challenged – This stereotype ranges from those elderly who are forgetful or befuddled to those who are suffering from senility, so that they are feeble-minded or severely confused. This stereotype suggests that growing old involves the loss, or at least the decline, of people’s mental functions.
* A burden – The elderly are portrayed as an economic burden on society (in terms of the costs to the younger generation of pensions and health care) and/or as a physical and social burden on younger members of their families (who have to worry about or care for them).

However, recent research suggests that media producers may be gradually reinventing how they deal with the elderly, especially as they realise that this group may have more disposable income – the grey pound – to spend on consumer goods. Lee et al. (2007) note that representation of the elderly in advertisements is still fairly low – 15 per cent – but the majority of these advertisements (91 per cent) portray the elderly as ‘golden agers’, who are active, alert, healthy, successful and content.

**9.** Mass media representations of the monarchy and wealthy tend to be positive and, in the case of the royal family, both deferential and sycophantic. Newspapers like the *Express* and *Daily Mail* provide extensive coverage of the royal family and rarely contain any coverage that is critical.

However, after an extended period of austerity politics and growing economic inequality there are some signs of change in relation to the wealthy (though not the royal family). For example, the BBC has transmitted a number of documentaries by Jacques Peretti that explore the growing wealth divide, such as *The Super Rich and Us* in 2015 and *Britain’s Trillion Pound Island-Inside Cayman* in 2016. Also, a report by the High Pay Centre showing average FTSE 100 CEO pay jumped to £5 million in 2014, “achieved the rare feat of uniting both the Guardian and the Daily Mail, both of which featured editorials condemning the scale of executive pay awards and warning that public faith in business will be completely undermined if the proceeds of success accrue so overwhelmingly to those at the top” (HPC, 20/08/2015).

**10.** Media representations of minority ethnic groups have been extensively researched. Back in 1991, Van Dijk conducted a content analysis of tens of thousands of news items across the world over several decades. He noted that news representations of Black people could be categorised into three stereotypically negative types of news: ethnic-minority people as criminals; ethnic-minority people as a threat and ethnic-minority people as unimportant.

There are signs that the media are growing more diverse in terms of positive representations of ethnic minority culture, especially as more ethnic minority professionals take up media careers and develop media institutions and agencies that specifically target the interests and concerns of ethnic-minority audiences (though note the Lenny Henry speech referred to above). A survey by BBC News Online in 2002 suggested that 78% of people overall thought that ethnic minorities were better represented on television then compared to 10 years ago. The proportion among BME groups was lower, but not drastically so: 73% of black people and 67% of Asians also said things had improved.

One would have expected further significant change to have taken place since then, yet research conducted in 2008/9 by Cushion et al who monitored a range of daily and Sunday newspapers, nightly television news and radio news programmes for a period of 16 weeks found that Black young men and boys are regularly associated with negative news values. Close to 7 in 10 stories of Black young men and boys were related in some form to crime, especially violent crime involving knives and/or gangs. Moreover, Cushion et al. point out that the news media often represent Black crime as irrational and senseless or as motivated by gang rivalries.

**4.7 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE MEDIA AND THEIR CONTENT, PRESENTATION AND AUDIENCES**

P.335 FOCUS ON SKILLS: USING THE MEDIA

**Suggested answers**

**1.** Watson believes that the increased use of new media by teenagers may lead to a decline in face to face interaction with family members and those beyond the family.

**2.** According to Lull, people use the media:

1. as a conversational topic
2. as a means of bonding
3. as a means of avoiding others
4. as a source of guidance and information
5. to gain intellectual validation or status.

**3.** Social networking sites appear to satisfy various social needs:

1. keeping in touch with friends and family
2. meeting new people
3. entertainment and information
4. career development
5. self-presentation (impression management).

**4.** The view that media effects are both direct and powerful is associated with the, so-called, ‘hypodermic syringe model’ of media effects.

Uses and gratifications theories of the media assume that people actively make use of the media to satisfy (‘gratify’) various needs and wants. Such approaches do not necessarily exclude the possibility that the media may have direct effects on audiences that they do not necessarily recognise – or, indeed, choose – but they do alert us to the fact that audiences are not passive beings.

Recognition of this fact has led sociologists to challenge the hypodermic syringe model on the basis of what are known as ‘active audience’ models. For example, Klapper (1960) argued that the effects of media messages are modified by three factors:

* selective exposure – people (mainly) choose which media messages to expose themselves to. For example, people with right wing views probably won’t subscribe to the *Morning Star* or watch *Russia Today* on TV (unless they’re monitoring them for research purposes!).
* selective perception – people don’t simply soak up media messages like kitchen paper soaks up a spilt drink, but *interpret* or decode messages in terms of their pre-existing beliefs and attitudes. In other words what they ‘see’, ‘read’ or ‘hear’ is only partly a product of the content of the message; it’s also a product of what’s already in their head. (Imagine 2 viewers watching a party political broadcast by the Conservative Party, one viewer saying to themselves “How true!” the other shouting at the screen “What a load of rubbish!” You can probably guess the respective political sympathies of the 2 viewers.)
* selective recall – people only remember part of what they see, read or hear. Media content has to ‘stick’ in the mind if it is to have an effect, but research indicates that most people have a tendency to remember only the things they broadly agree with.

The idea of selective perception is taken up in the reception analysis model which suggests that different people interpret the same media content in a variety of different ways because of their different social backgrounds. Morley (1980) researched how 29 different groups, made up of people from a range of educational and professional backgrounds, interpreted the content of a TV news and current affairs programme called *Nationwide.* He argued that people generally ‘read’ media messages in one of three ways: a *dominant reading* which reflected the intended meaning encoded in the text; an *oppositional reading* which involved the viewer rejecting the intended message and a *negotiated reading* where the viewer concurs with some of the intended message, but rejects other parts.

However, the idea of an active audience can be overstated. What if the audience member has no direct personal experience with which to compare media messages? Marxists argue that the media plays a powerful ideological role in society transmitting views of reality that reflect the interests of a dominant class. The rise in hate crimes directed against disabled people in recent years is difficult to explain if one does not accept that their vilification in certain media as benefit fraudsters has played a significant part. Moreover, it is implausible to suggest that the billions spent on advertising annually is a waste of money because people are immune to them.

So, whilst the hypodermic syringe model almost certainly oversimplifies the relation between media and audience, the active audience model should not be used to dismiss the idea that the media have effects.

p.338 CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

**Suggested answers**

**1.** ‘Desensitisation’ is the idea that if someone is exposed often enough to something that would normally provoke an emotional reaction, they will eventually stop being emotionally aroused.

**2.** ‘Selective exposure’ is the idea that audience members actively choose which media messages they will watch, read or listen to.

**3.** ‘Catharsis’ refers to the safe release of violent or aggressive impulses by, for example, taking part in sport, playing computer games or watching screen violence. However, the value of the concept has been questioned in recent years.

**4.** ‘Opinion leaders’ are the members of social networks to whom others (allegedly) turn in order to make sense of and evaluate media messages.

**5.** Two ways in which people may use the media to provide gratification is as a source of entertainment or to keep themselves informed about the world beyond their personal experience.

**6.** See the reference to Klapper in the answer to Q4 Focus on skills: using the media, above.

**7.** For postmodernists people today live in a ‘media saturated world’ in which the distinction between image and reality has not simply become blurred, but entirely disappeared. It is a world of ‘hyperreality’ in which people are, allegedly, unable to distinguish between reality and a simulation of reality. At the same time, however – and somewhat confusingly – postmodernists also argue that each individual interprets media messages in their own way, that there can be as many ‘readings’ of media messages as there are audience members. As Philo puts it: “There is no way of saying that reality is distorted by media images since there is no fixed reality or truth to distort. It is all relative to who is looking; ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ are in the eye of the beholder.”

Critical sociologists find this claim unconvincing. Jenny Kitzinger (1999), a member of the GUMG, argues that “Many of the terms widely used in media/cultural studies obscure vital processes in the operation of media power. Concepts such as 'polysemy', 'resistance' and 'the active audience' are often used to by-pass or even negate enquiry into the effects of cinema, press or televisual representations. Our work shows that the complex processes of reception and consumption mediate, but do not necessarily undermine, media power. Acknowledging that audiences can be 'active' does not mean that the media are ineffectual. Recognising the role of interpretation does not invalidate the concept of influence.”

**8.** The ‘reception analysis model’ of the media argues that people interpret media messages in terms of their subcultural attitudes, values and beliefs. (See the reference to Morley in the answer to Q4 Focus on skills: using the media, above.)

**9.** The Marxist ‘cultural effects’ model sees the media as having a very powerful ideological influence that is mainly concerned with transmitting capitalist values and norms. For example, media coverage of unemployment and single-parent families gives the general impression that these situations are often the result of choice and so the claiming of benefits by these groups is probably unjustified. This leads to many people seeing claiming benefits as a form of scrounging.

The cultural effects model suggests that media content helps those who manage (and benefit from) capitalist society to obtain the active consent of the majority (who do not particularly benefit from the organisation of capitalist society). It recognises that audiences interpret media messages in different ways, but argues that they do so within certain confined limits. As Curran (2003) argues, the frequent reading of particular newspapers means the immersion of the reader into a particular ideological way of seeing and interpreting the world. Consequently, it is argued, this view of the world may affect some readers in that they may interpret such ideology as common sense.

Pluralists question the Marxist view that these cultural effects benefit the capitalist elite because pluralists believe that the professionalism and objectivity of modern journalists ensure that media output is constructed for the benefit of the audience. If the media do project a particular point of view at the expense of another, pluralists say, this is because the audience already believe in it and therefore demand it. Moreover Pluralists argue that the sheer diversity of media content means that the Marxist concern that the media is creating an homogeneous worldview underpinned by capitalist ideology is simply untrue.

**10.** The hypodermic syringe model of media effects suggests that mass media representations of violence, particularly in visual media such as TV, film and computer games, causes real-life violence and anti-social behaviour through, for example, imitation, disinhibition and desensitisation.

Critics have challenged this claim on a number of bases. For example, Fesbach and Sanger (1971) claim that media violence has a cathartic effect – watching an exciting film releases aggressive energy into safe outlets as the viewers immerse themselves in the action.

Similarly, Gauntlett has raised numerous criticisms of the research which appears to support the hypodermic syringe view. For example, in an article published in 1998 he wrote about what he called “*Ten things wrong with the media ‘effects’ model*”. Among the criticisms he raised were the use of laboratory studies to generalise about what happens in real-life settings; the failure to operationalise ‘violence’ adequately; the failure to analyse how the audience interprets the meaning of media violence and the failure to distinguish between correlation and causation.

Guy Cumberbatch (2004) looked at over 3,500 research studies into the effects of screen violence, encompassing film, TV, video and, more recently, computer and video games. He concluded: “If one conclusion is possible, it is that the jury is still not out. It’s never been in. Media violence has been subjected to a lynch mob mentality with almost any evidence used to prove guilt.” In other words, there is still no conclusive evidence either way that violence shown in the media influences or changes people’s behaviour.