General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2011

Media Studies   MEST3

(Specification 2570)

Unit 3: Media: Critical Perspectives

Report on the Examination

General

This was the third MEST3 Critical Perspectives examination.
In Section A candidates answer three compulsory questions based on unseen media products.
In Section B they answer one essay question on a pre set topic.

Centres and candidates showed improved understanding of the demands of the exam, with more focus on the questions and mostly good individual case studies.

Section A
The media products for Section A of this year's exam were two adverts, the Adidas House Party advert and the NHS and Home Office 'You wouldn't start a night like this' advert.
The questions encouraged candidates to critically analyse the texts and in questions 2 and 3 to address the more complex ideas of media, issues, debates, theories and wider contexts.

The focus of the three questions is:

Question 1   Media concepts

Use the unseen products to answer a question on concepts - forms, representations, institutions, audiences or values.
This year's and the previous two exams have focused on representation as an introduction to the new paper, but Question 1 can be on any of the concepts.

Candidates are rewarded for:
*   analysis of both media products, preferably detailed
*   understanding of concepts, in particular in this question representation.

Question 2   Media issues and debates

Use the unseen products to answer a question on media issues and debates.
Candidates may refer to other media products to support their answer.
The 'may' is intended to encourage candidates to move beyond the two unseen exam products and include examples of and from media products other than the two exam products.

Candidates are rewarded for:
*   evaluation using media issues, debates and theories
*   preferably supported with examples from other relevant media products.

Question 3   Wider contexts

Use the unseen products to answer a question on wider contexts.
Candidates should refer to other media products to support their answer.
The 'should' is intended to tell candidates they will be expected to move beyond the two unseen products and include other examples.

Candidates are rewarded for:
*   evaluation using wider contexts
*   supported by examples from other relevant media products.

For questions 2 and 3 candidates can include examples from either of their individual case studies, their MEST4 coursework, AS work, other AS and A Level class work and from their own media use.

Candidates should be reminded to use the marks awarded to questions as a guide to how long to spend on each answer – Question 1 (8 marks), Question 2 (12 marks) and Question 3 (12 marks).

They should read the introductions to the two media products carefully to provide useful background that can help answer the questions. For example the information about Adidas' use of Xbox Live could help with Question 3. However candidates must use the information to answer the question, not just repeat it in their answer.

Candidates should also be reminded to answer the particular question that has been asked, not just include a general analysis of the products. Question 1 answers must answer the question, not just for example, complete a media language analysis or a description of the target audience. They should also read the question carefully, for example some weaker answers for Question 2 just described a range of shock tactics that have been used, rather than answer the question why are shock tactics so often used.

Candidates are rewarded if they make a number of different points and for higher levels a range of different points in each question. They will not achieve as high a level if they only include one point in an answer, even if that one point is answered well.

Higher level answers included candidates own opinions, especially for questions 2 and 3, which they supported with media debates, issues and theories and examples from other media products.

There were lots of good answers in Section A.

Question 1   Evaluate how each advert represents young people?

Good answers showed understanding of the concept of representation, by evaluating dominant and alternative, positive and negative and stereotypical representations and for higher level answers how the producer and audience and the function of the products influence the representation.
Weaker answers lost focus on the question and included over long analysis or description of audience, for example.

Good answers included, for example that both adverts:

- represented young people as hedonistic, living for the moment and enjoying a party lifestyle.
- sexualised the representation of youth. Higher level answers evaluated how this represented young women in particular in a negative and stereotypical way, for example the voyeuristic shots of women in the Adidas ad. Sophisticated answers also identified exceptions to this, for example Missy Elliot whose media image is at least partly based on her talent and confident attitude.
- represented young people using their physical appearance, suggesting they are judged and judge others and themselves on a very narrow definition of attractiveness. Although there was a mix of appearances, genders, ages and ethnicities to some extent in the Adidas advert, the young woman in the second advert conformed to the stereotype of white, very thin and made up and her 'punishment' was to lose this idea of beauty.

- represented young people as rebellious, showing them breaking rules. Higher level answers discussed how this was seen as a harmless, fun rebellion in the Adidas advert, but as negative and deviant in the Home Office ad. Sophisticated answers discussed how this was a dominant and stereotypical representation of youth, often represented as deviant and a threat to society.
- explored the similarity between the two representations of youth, both using the stereotype of youth, but one presented it as positive and one negative.
- explored the different readings audiences could have of the representations of youth in the adverts, based for example on age or gender.
- discussed the reason behind these representations, explaining the different institutions and aims/functions of the two ads. The Adidas ad was a consumer ad, marketing a product and brand, so used an idealistic and glamourised representation of youth and the other was a public information ad to educate and raise awareness.

The Adidas advert:
- represented young people as valuing celebrity, the advert promises them access to an exclusive and exciting world of celebrity for the price of the product and for buying into the Adidas brand. Although some of the celebrities, such as Run DMC are much older and maybe offer a nostalgic appeal, part of the Adidas Originals brand image.
- higher level answers discussed the contradiction between the slogan of representing young people as wanting to aspire to originality and selling a mass market product with Adidas' profits dependent on mass sales.
- showed a positive representation of young people as talented, creative and artistic, seen in the choice of celebrities and in the shots of graffiti and dancing.

The NHS and Home Office advert:
- represented young people as out of control, part of a moral panic in the media and society.
- used the common stereotype of anti social behaviour, in this case binge drinking. Some candidates argued that problems with alcohol are not confined to young people in the UK, so although the advert was addressing a real problem it did negatively represent young people and stereotype a whole group.
- represented young women particularly negatively and the character was 'punished' for acting against social norms of femininity.

Question 2   Why are shock tactics, such as those in product two so often used? You may also refer to other media products to support your answer.

Good answers focused sharply on a range of media debates, issues and theories, with lots of examples from other media products to support their points. A few weaker answers were only lists of theories that were only superficially applied to the question. Theory should be used to support points made.

Good answers included, for example the use of shock tactics:
- to get an audience's attention, the most common point made. Most candidates also developed this straightforward point to evaluate how it also kept their interest and then made the advert and its message memorable.
- to get an emotional response from audiences. Higher level answers discussed the tactics that are often used to create this response, such as the frequent use of children, emotive language and shocking statistics or facts.
- to change behaviour or values, with examples of other campaigns. Higher level answers debated the success of these attempts, for example in anti smoking campaigns.

- being widespread in advertising and in general in the media. Higher level answers argued this could lead to desensitisation, with audiences unaffected by explicit images. Higher level answers developed this point further and debated whether this could lead to advertisers and the media in general producing even more shocking content each time to get attention and still shock.
- as a common technique in charity and public information campaigns. Higher level answers suggested this may be to get a big impact on a smaller budget. The NHS couldn't compete with the budget of the big drinks companies, so used shock tactics to reach their audience.
- to show realism, a defence of shock tactics could be that they are only showing reality.
- to create controversy, which could get audiences talking about a marketing campaign, film etc. This could create word of mouth marketing and result in media coverage that was 'free' marketing, to spread the message or publicise the product.
- assumes a passive audience that will be directly affected. Candidates used a range of audience theories to support and explain their points.

There were lots of up to date examples to support points made, for example:
- public information campaigns to reduce drivers' speed, stop drink driving
- charity and government campaigns on health, for example the British Heart Foundation, FRANK, anti smoking
- charity campaigns by children's charities, for example Barnardos, NSPCC
- television programmes, in particular aimed at young audiences, for example Skins, Misfits
- film campaigns, in particular horror.

Good answers used their examples to explain and support points, weaker answers just described the example.

Theories that were successfully used to support points included a range of audience theories such as Uses and Gratifications, Gerbner Cultivation theory, Morley reception analysis, Hall encoding and decoding, plus Cohen Moral Panic, Marxist and pluralist debates.

**Question 3   Consider the value of using online marketing to target a youth
                 audience?
                 You should refer to other media products to support your answer**.

Good answers focused sharply on a range of wider contexts, with lots of examples from other media products to support their points.

Good answers included, for example:
- Youth audience being frequent and regular users of the internet as the most common point made. This was developed by good answers to argue that young people's use of traditional media, including television and magazines has declined. Higher level answers developed this straightforward point by, for example explaining how different websites or types of sites could be used to target different audiences.
- Online marketing could be shared easily, quickly and widely with friends in a similar target audience, which could create 'free' marketing to a wide but particular target audience. Sophisticated answers discussed how receiving this information from friends could make it seem more trustworthy and less commercialised, an effective covert marketing technique. Some answers explored the particular appeals of social networking sites to target youth audiences,with a wide range of examples from their own media use.

- Online marketing could add value by, for example using interactive marketing techniques.
- Online marketing could be personalised, for example based on a person's previous internet use and search history.
- Convergence has allowed different digital technologies to be combined into one device, making it easier to reach audiences. Developments in technology with laptops, tablets and smartphones has improved and extended access, allowing audiences to be reached at any time and anywhere.
- Online marketing often has easy to use links to buying products, for example music website links to iTunes, Ticketmaster.
- Online marketing could reach a global market. Some higher level answers debated the digital divide in the UK and between developed and developing nations and markets.
- Debates about utopian and dystopian views of the internet, whether it had lost its original democratic principals and was now just there to be exploited for commercial gain by big companies.
- Global brands can create cross platform campaigns and link up with other brands, for example Adidas and X Box as described in the introduction to Section A.

There were lots of good up to date and topical examples to support points, although some candidates only included very general examples. More detailed examples were awarded higher marks, for example rather than just referring to Facebook, use an example of an actual Facebook group or official page and rather than YouTube a particular video on YouTube. Successful examples included campaigns by Nike, Skins, FRANK, Eastenders, UK Uncut, particular game launches and particular film marketing. Candidates should look for their examples from a wide range of sources, including from their own media use, not just products they have studied in class.

Theories that were successfully used to support points included: Baudrillard Hyperreality, Anderson Long Tail, De Sola Pool, Habermas, McLuhan, Marxism and Pluralism debates, O'Reilly, Giddens, Haraway and Furedi.

SECTION B

Candidates were asked to choose one out of four possible questions, two from each of the two pre set topics - Representation and the Impact of new and digital media. They were reminded that they would be rewarded for references from their own individual case study.

There was an improvement in Section B from June 2010 by most centres and candidates, with better individual case studies and more focus on the question.

There was a huge range of case studies.

For Representation, the most popular group was young people/teenagers. Other popular social groups were women, people with disabilities, working class and gay men and lesbians. Other successful groups were for example students, young men, British Muslims, working women. Some candidates chose wider issue based case studies, for example teenage pregnancy and included within this the representation of women, class etc. Places was less common, but examples included London and New York or a candidates local town or city. It is useful for representation case studies to choose at least some less obvious media products to focus on. For example in the common representation of youth case studies not to just rely on, for example Kidulthoood, The Inbetweeners and Skins.

For The Impact of New and Digital Media case studies included particular institutions, the BBC and Sky were the most popular, social networking sites with Facebook and YouTube still the most popular choices, news in general with a good focus on controversial stories and political events such as the events in Egypt and the student protests, the game or film industry with a particular focus on one successful franchise.

Some candidates had very wide ranging case studies and although they were still rewarded for the wide range of examples they used, this made it difficult for some candidates to write a focused or coherent answer, with the weakest ones ending up as lists of examples with limited evaluation.

There were lots of good case studies, it was good to see candidates following their interests and using case studies they really cared about. This helped them really engage with the question and have a wide range of examples to draw on. It was also good to be able to reward candidates in the exam for the hard work they had done during the year.

The best case studies included:
- a range of different media products from the three platforms, with different representation/values/genres/producers.
- detailed examples from particular media products
- evidence of research into media debates and issues and relevant wider contexts
- theory used to explain and support
- a genuine interest in the case study they had chosen to do, seen by engagement with the issues and their own opinions.

The main ways candidates achieved higher level marks was by:

Having their own individual case study to answer the question.
Candidates from one centre shouldn't all have the same case study. This doesn't allow candidates to show evidence of independent study, which excludes them from the higher levels. For example a centre all writing answers on the representation of youth, with the same or very similar media products is disadvantaging their candidates. In addition candidates who had their own case study were more engaged and more willing to focus on the question, rather than repeat a pre learned answer of descriptive points. All or at least the vast majority of the media products candidates use to support their answer should also be individual.

Centres can start the pre set topics with a class overview on Representation and The impact of new and digital media to introduce the topic and may want to do a mini class case study as an example, but then candidates should do their own individual case study, with their own choice of media products.

Answering the particular question, not writing 'everything I know about my case study'. This was a real improvement from June 2010. Stronger answers identified and addressed the key words from the question in their answer and answered the question directly in their conclusion.

Including detailed references to particular media products, rather than just general examples. For example not just 'Misfits' but an example of a particular scene, shot, mise en scene from a particular episode, not just a film's website but a reference to a particular heading or image on the website. Quite a number of candidates based their case study on a media institution, for example the BBC, Sky, Facebook, these made potentially very good case studies but they should include detailed examples of, for example actual TV programmes and examples within the programmes.

Showing range in their answers. For example referring to a wide range of platforms, preferably all three, using products from different genres/institutions/representations/values. Candidates were also rewarded for referring to a range of media products to support their answer, answers couldn't achieve the higher levels if they only used one or two.

Having a clear focus. Very wide ranging topics covering different social groups and places or lots of new and digital media areas in one answer meant their answers lacked focus and tended to become a list of descriptive points. Candidates produced better answers when they had a clear and specific focus. For example for Representation one social group or one place with detailed examples from particular media products and for New and Digital media one industry and one institution, again with detailed examples from particular media products. Candidates can then bring in a wide range of examples as well that support this focused topic, but would refer to them more briefly.

Applying media issues and debates. What does their case study suggest are the current issues in the media? Applying relevant media theories to their case study and media products throughout their answers, using the theory to answer the question and support the point they are making, not just describing a theory. Weaker answers tended to list pre learned centre led theories, that although relevant were not clearly applied to media products or used to answer the question.

Including relevant wider contexts and again applying them to their own case study. Weaker answers tended to include lists of facts and statistics or the history of a particular topic with no evaluation or link to the question.

REPRESENTATION

Question 4

"Constant media stories about gang crime create a depressing and unbalanced picture of black youngsters" (www.guardian.co.uk)

Using the group or place you have studied, consider whether media portrayals are more complex than simple positive or negative representations?

- A few weaker answers wrote a very general essay about the representation of their group or place, rather than focusing on the question, but there was a real improvement from June 2010, with almost all candidates answering the question.
- Good answers didn't lose sight of explaining how their group or place was actually represented in individual texts. They showed understanding of the topic of representation by analysing how their group or palace was represented in their media products. Higher level answers did this in detail, with detailed references.
- The higher level challenge in this question was the word 'complex'. Weaker answers described examples of positive and examples of negative representations of their group or place. Higher level answers really focused on the complexities and contradictions in each product and the overall representation.
- However, some candidates decided that almost all the representations of their group or place were negative, as long as they explained this and justified it with reference to a range of media products it was a valid response.
- Higher level answers debated the reasons behind the complex representations, for example issues of ownership and control, different audience readings, power in society and the media.

- Remind candidates the quotation is a starting point for the essay, designed to get them thinking about issues and debates, but they should focus mainly on the question in their answer.

Question 5

"While considerable progress has been made with respect to the depiction of gays and lesbians in television and movies, critics argue that news media still systematically ignore and distort the lives and experiences of gays and lesbians". (Media Awareness Network)

How does the representation of the group or place you have studied differ across different media platforms or genres? Why do you think this is the case?

- The higher level challenge in this question was the 'why'. Higher level answers used a range of media debates and wider contexts to explain why the representations differed or were similar. For example issues of ownership and control, different audiences and audience readings, power in society and the media.
- Some candidates decided that the representations of their group or place were very similar across genres or platforms. Similarly to question 4, as long as they explained this and justified it with reference to a range of media products it was a valid response.
- This question rewarded candidates who had studied a wide range of media products.
- Weaker answers lost focus on the comparison across genres or platforms, stronger answers had a sharp focus on similarities and/or differences.
- Good answers didn't lose sight of explaining how their group or place was actually represented in individual texts. Higher level answers did this in detail, with detailed references.

NEW/DIGITAL MEDIA

Question 6

The world first heard about the death of Michael Jackson from the online gossip website TMZ.

How has new/digital media changed the ways in which information reaches audiences and what are the implications?

- The higher level challenge in this question was the 'implications' of the changes. Weaker answers listed the changes, but most answers used wider media issues and debates or wider contexts to suggest what the implications were.
- There was a very wide range of points on the ways in which NDM has changed the way information reaches audiences, including the speed, convenience, reach and variety and interaction. Most answers also discussed the increasing role of the audience in producing the information, but did need to stay focused on this question rather than one on the changing role of audiences.
- Higher level answers discussed positive and negative changes and implications. Sophisticated answers debated this, by for example discussing the tension between free speech and the risks of loss of privacy and misleading information or the positive and negative implications of lack of regulation.

- Quite a number of good answers argued that although developments gave audiences new power, media institutions were still powerful. Sophisticated answers debated whether the choice, convenience etc was just an illusion of audience power or not.
- Candidates were rewarded for using detailed examples from a range of media products to illustrate the points they made. Weaker answers only included limited and very general examples, such as Facebook or Twitter, rather than a detailed example of a particular story, group etc.

Question 7

New and digital media erodes the dividing line between reporters and reported, between active producers and passive audiences: people are enabled to speak for themselves. (www.indymedia.co.uk)

Have such developments made the media more democratic, with more equal participation by more people?

- The higher level challenge in this question was the idea of 'democracy' Solid answers focused on the changing power relationship between audiences and producers and increased audience participation. Higher level answers discussed the concept of democracy.
- Sophisticated answers debated the arguments and examples for and against increasing democracy as a result of NDM.
- Globalisation was a popular point. Satisfactory answers said NDM had contributed to globalisation. Higher level answers debated the advantages of globalisation, for example the rise of citizen journalism, freedom of speech and disadvantages, for example the digital divide, censorship.
- Lots of answers used really up to date and topical examples, showing their knowledge of and interest in the media and society. They can obviously include these if they fit in to their own case study, but they can also use them to supplement their own case study, supporting points they have already made from their own case study products.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results statistics page of the AQA Website.

UMS conversion calculator www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion