

**A LEVEL**

*Examiners' report*

# **MEDIA STUDIES**

**H409**

For first teaching in 2017

## **H409/02 Summer 2019 series**

Version 1

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## Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates. The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report. A full copy of the question paper can be downloaded from OCR.

## Paper 2 series overview

Overall, the paper was accessible to candidates; there were very few candidates who did not manage to answer the full paper. Candidates' responses were clearly differentiated depending on which topic/industry they answered first and their interpretation of the questions. Timing did, however, seem to be an issue when concluding Question 3 and then fitting in Question 4.

Some candidates started with Question 3 which was a successful approach; some even started with Question 4 which allowed them to apply a wider range of theory in Question 3 overall. There was a healthy variety of responses for Question 3 with a good range of approaches which allowed candidates to achieve a range of marks across all levels.

*Stranger Things* and *D83* were the clear favourites of centres and allowed for fluent comparison in most cases; however, there were some notable responses using *Homeland* and *The Killing*.

*Mr Robot* and *House of Cards* were encountered by examiners less frequently, as was *Trapped*; only a handful of centres had studied *Borgen*. That said, all candidates were able to access the question with some really engaging responses.

## Section A overview

This section had questions that focused both on industry, in particular production and/or distribution of films using both versions of *The Jungle Book*, and audiences, using radio - in particular *The BBC Radio One Breakfast Show* (R1BS). Candidates tended to perform equally across both questions though there were some careless errors that prevented a number of detailed responses moving from adequate into Level 3, this was largely due to unsupported statements or generalisations of facts and ideas.

### Question 1

#### Media Industries and Audiences

1 Explain how changes in production **and/or** distribution methods have affected the film industry. Refer to Disney's 1967 **and** 2016 versions of *The Jungle Book* to support your answer.

In your answer you must consider how historical and economic contexts influence the production **and/or** distribution of mainstream films. **[15]**

What was clear from reviewing these responses was that some candidates had only looked at the film texts (micro) rather than understanding the film industry as a whole process (macro). This resulted in responses which simply gave a blow by blow comparison of the similarities and differences between both films with no wider context or knowledge coming in through their explanations. At best these were adequate (Level 2) responses that either went into detail in production, or distribution, or did an adequate job of covering both.

Similarly, some candidates did not focus enough on economic or historical changes, instead discussing issues of representation and social change rather than linking to the question.

The weakest responses were largely descriptive and limited in their use of terminology to explain ideas, e.g. the main difference is that now we have CGI and it's changed everything. Candidate responses require detailed understanding of case study knowledge to be used in a fluent response. Less successful responses also did not use facts accurately, or at all, and employed a lot of guesswork. Whereas the answers that fitted into Level 3 (comprehensive) were fluent in their discussion of production and/or distribution processes and were able to map key changes between the two versions and how Disney, and the text, had influenced film production/distribution across a fifty-year period.

When discussing distribution many candidates were able to contextualise the 2016 version with reference to multiplex cinemas and the immersive experience, however, very few candidates discussed the 1967 context with competition from television and the need for film to break boundaries to draw audiences in by developing new techniques. In terms of distribution, this was again very good for the 2016 version but very few candidates discussed Disney's advantage through synergy with Disney World and their own TV channel. A few candidates referred to the 1967 version as an art house movie.

## Exemplar 1

Animation has become much more advanced and realistic over the years due to research and technological advances within electronic art. In the 1967 version of The Jungle Book, cell animation was used which is a very basic tool to create a basic animated piece and it can be time consuming to create animation like this showing production. Over the 49 years in which the two versions of the Jungle book were created the digital age occurred and we acquired ~~in technology~~ new technologies like the internet, advanced computers and programming, new camera Camera technologies, e.t.c which all helped towards the highly realistic animation of Jungle animals within the Jungle book. The 2016 version used CGI animation which take images and characteristics of real animals to create animations.

This exemplar highlights a basic understanding using limited terminology; this type of response was typical of low Level 2 responses which gave a blow by blow comparison using generalised ideas.

## Exemplar 2

These changes in the film industry have really shaped the production process of Disney who used the British company MPC to create most of the CGI animation used within the film. In terms of distribution, the advance of technology in 2016 compared to 1967 shaped the reach that the film could garner. The use of social media led to *The Jungle Book* 2016 promoting itself through Facebook, Twitter and Instagram videos, even using creating a 'filter' on Snapchat to allow users to interact with their movie in the age of the social.

This is an example of a more comprehensive, fluent response that is confident in its discussion and can link many ideas together to create a coherent and sustained argument, using key examples and accurate references to the set texts.

## Question 2

2 Explain how popular music radio programmes target, reach and maintain a variety of audiences.  
Refer to *The BBC Radio One Breakfast Show* to support your answer. [15]

Candidates often missed opportunities to identify the different types of audiences that are attracted to the R1BS, furthermore they didn't always link the idea of a PSB having a responsibility to follow a specific remit and centres might want to consider emphasising the importance of economic and political contexts of PSB radio. A few candidates stated that the BBC is funded through taxation and that the government controls the BBC.

Answers tended to concentrate on primary audiences and make statements such as "R1BS attracts audiences through inviting artists that would appeal to 16-29 year olds" but then not follow up with an example to illustrate their point.

Candidates were not penalised for stating that Nick Grimshaw is still the presenter since the case study booklet and time of starting the course coincided with this, however centres should make sure their data and facts are accurate; this also includes awareness of social media presence and budget that R1BS receives. The weakest examples were again descriptive and short, with generalisation about radio being government funded or playing 'popular' music to attract 'younger' audiences as the key reason to their success.

More confident responses were able to use specific examples from shows to back up and support many of their points; these responses tended to be more fluent and logical in their structure. There were some candidates who successfully debated the need to justify license fees or made good comparisons to other radio stations to highlight the differences in ways audiences are attracted and maintained.

## Exemplar 3

The Show has a target audience of 15-29 however it can be argued that the programme actually attracts a more niche market when it includes those older than the target audience. This is apparent through the wide range of music played (e.g. 'Waterfalls' by TLC and 'Phases' by Ariana). This gives a wide variety of music within my Evel MacKaign or I could even go to discover new artists. The wide range of genres available to listen to also allows for a wide range of audience variety as Rock (Diva) (Nothing but Thieves) as well as pop (One Direction) are played.

This extract typifies the general type of response that talks about 15-29 audiences and then does little to expand or develop explanation that refers or links to the question, which was about targeting, reaching and maintaining a variety of audiences. Similarly, to Question 1, the points are often not expanded or developed by candidates.

## Exemplar 4

An example of this is the Radio 1 social media and YouTube channel. Through Twitter and Facebook Radio 1 is able to interact with their target audience making them active participants in the content that is being created for them. The Radio 1 YouTube channel is increasingly popular among younger listeners, although they can only publish content every 24 hours, their videos reach on average up to 4 million views. The social media aspect of popular radio shows like the Radio 1 Breakfast show target audiences by getting them involved in the programming.

The Radio 1 Breakfast show is able to reach a variety of audiences through their multi-faceted content. The show offers fun programming such as Greg James' new segment "unpopular opinions" as well as being part of the bigger Radio 1 brand which offers more intellectual content, documentaries and sometimes challenging content.

This is a more confident, fluent extract that demonstrates the candidate's ability to refer to a range of examples to support their explanations and also address different parts of the question using key words extracted from the question.

## Section B overview

The question was a statement centred around audience responses to genre, in particular how codes and conventions of the shows that audiences watch might reflect the audience's ideology (ideas, beliefs and values).

Some candidates showed a good understanding of contexts and the influence this can have in shaping the LFTV drama and how audiences might read/receive the text.

### Question 3

#### Long Form Television Drama

3\* 'The differences in the codes and conventions of long form television dramas reflect the different values, attitudes and beliefs of the audiences that consume them.' How far do you agree with this statement?

In your answer you must:

- consider the contexts in which long form television dramas are produced and consumed
- explain how media contexts may have influenced the codes and conventions in the set episodes of the two long form television dramas you have studied
- refer to relevant academic ideas and arguments
- make judgements and reach conclusions about the reasons for the differences in the codes and conventions between the two episodes.

[30]

Comprehensive answers made good reference to all of the contexts which allowed for a wider range of comparison and analysis using media language.

Some candidates were stronger on others, e.g. understanding the differences in budgets of streaming services versus PSBs; less successful responses tended to make lots of generalisations about budgets and viewing figures, not citing their sources. Similarly, social contexts tended to be explored implicitly when discussing differences in gender which most candidates did as a strength, but few considered political and cultural contexts in more detail. Overwhelmingly, candidates discussed the stereotyping of the mother as stay at home housewife as if this was how women were in 1983. Centres need to emphasise that the positioning of women was very much to do with an industry dominated by men in the 80s and hence the stereotypes. Historical contexts were prevalent across most responses but only at a general level.

**AO2** is about application of knowledge and understanding. There were some very clear ideas presented in candidate arguments about why audiences might interpret LFTV drama differently, however there were very few clear examples using/demonstrating their understanding of media language and application of relevant academic ideas and arguments, which is required for candidates to access the top of Level 3 for comprehensive comparison and analysis of products.

Overall, weaker responses were very short. Centres should encourage students to practice writing in more depth under timed conditions, and perhaps answer Q4 first to 'warm up' candidates and their use of theoretical knowledge. The majority of responses were adequate, giving a blow by blow account (sometimes using the bullet points as a guide) to explore both texts with appropriate use of theory and media language. At times, it was felt that the knowledge of US LFTV dramas were stronger than foreign language dramas. Some candidates led with the foreign LFTV dramas first which was also useful.

Candidates often struggled to use media theory in an applied, balanced way in their answers, sometimes going for a 'scattergun' approach, throwing in every named theorist without due application to the texts and in other cases writing in a very broad and general, untheoretical manner about codes and conventions. The stronger answers offered a tightly focused set of contextual points (e.g. Netflix industry

practices, cold war history) and a similar, more selective and tailored set of theoretical references (e.g. negotiated readings, intertextuality, genre hybridity, gender representation, postcolonial analysis).

A significant number of candidates mentioned a theory without discussion of what the theory is and how the application of the example illustrates the theoretical concept and its relevance to answering the question. Candidates need to learn how to qualify statements, for example “Netflix has a much younger audience that could have much more flexible values, attitudes and beliefs whereas C4s older audience may have stricter ones”. At A Level such a statement needs following up with evidence to justify such an assertion.

## Exemplar 5

This shows that conventions of particular roles in society can be reflected in a similar way of its attitudes and beliefs of a profession in Stranger Things and Trapped.

Stranger Things also uses the American convention of having a Spielbergian family and small town America. These are conventions of long form TV drama in the 80s which conveys an attitude of small town America against the Federal government. Mike's mum is dominant within the family shown by dad's lack of interest towards Mike and a low camera angle shot showing her as bigger and stronger than Mike. This is a convention of the Spielbergian family, this reflects a belief that in America the mums are in charge of the house and look after the kids. This is a different belief shown to Trapped where the father is shown as the mothering figure as the kids stay with their father Andri. This differing view on family life is due to the different times they were set and differing locations. A reason why Stranger Things has to have more conventions known world wide such as intertextual references of ET and The Goonies and the Spielbergian family is due to <sup>the</sup> distribution of Stranger Things worldwide by Netflix.

This extract confidently discusses both LFTV drama texts with a fluent argument used to support the points made; the use of media language and key vocabulary is also embedded into the candidate's writing to show a greater understanding and coherence in their argument.

## Exemplar 6

In Some Sense I disagree with this statement as ~~it's~~ ~~to~~ ~~be~~ a Code and Convention of a long form tv drama is to have a villain or enemy ~~which~~ which does wrong or evil. This enemy doesn't not always reflect the audiences idea and belief of an enemy or villain. For example in Deutschland 83 The enemy is west germany and the protagonist Martin Rauch is going into west germany as a spy to defend and protect East Germany. ~~As a watcher~~ ~~the~~ ~~group~~ the preferred (Dominant) reading is that Martin is good man and his mother, Ingrid, and girlfriend, Annette, are also good likeable people therefore we grow fond of them and don't want them to get hurt. Therefore the preferred reading is to see west germany and their forces as a threat and the enemy.

This response highlights ways in which some candidates chose to disagree with the statement to help develop arguments; however, this type of answer can feel descriptive and lacks the use of media language to expand on ideas and arguments stated by the candidate.

## Question 4

4 Evaluate the usefulness of **one** of the following theories in understanding long form television drama:

**EITHER**

- Hesmondhalgh's theories about cultural industries

**OR**

- Butler's theories about gender performativity.

[10]

Very few candidates encountered rubric issues with this question; and both theorists were attempted across the session, with a slight leaning towards Butler over Hesmondhalgh.

Some candidates struggled to go into enough detail to earn higher marks on this paper - many candidates simply stated what the theory was and applied it (or not) in the simplest sense. Adequate responses tended to explore how the theory could be useful in LFTV drama using both set texts they had studied, however only those who clearly evaluated its usefulness (and flaws as a theory for LFTV drama) were able to reach Level 3.

Some candidates tried to compare the theory to other theorists, which was not always successful since they effectively tried to steer the question away to an idea they were more confident with, and hence created rubric issues for markers. Some candidates also did not apply theory to LFTV drama or used shows that were not on the set text list; this also created some problems. Centres might want to consider time management strategies and more practice of Questions 3 and 4 in timed conditions for future sessions.

Many answers showed a misunderstanding of the basic core elements of the theory in question, most notably with Butler. This was the most awkward for candidates when they were trying, in good faith, to evaluate the theories, and often resulted in a clumsy argument that gender performativity is not relevant to one text but is for the other or that some characters do perform gender but others don't.

## Exemplar 7

Hesmondhalgh said companies minimise risk to maximise potential earnings. This can be seen through *Stranger Things* as spending \$60m on a series may seem like a risk to the conglomerate Netflix, it was not. This is due to Netflix being worth over \$40 billion so \$60 million is not much to them as even though if *Stranger Things* flopped it would have most likely made its money back in subscriptions to Netflix from people subscribing to watch *Stranger Things* due to the good advertising campaign. Sci fi long form TV dramas such as *Star Trek* and *Red Dwarf* are very popular so it was not a big risk Netflix creating a sci fi long form TV drama as there is an audience for it. Hesmondhalgh's theory of risk can apply to *Trapped* as RUV studios used an up and coming popular genre in Nordic noir so they knew there was a big audience for this in Europe. But it can also be seen that RUV took a massive risk and economic risk as this was the most expensive long form TV drama produced by an Icelandic company ever.

This extract is an example of a confident response that addresses both LFTV dramas to evaluate the usefulness of Hesmondhalgh's theory, not only supporting their ideas with facts but also expanding on key ideas of the argument in a logical and comprehensive fashion.

## Exemplar 8

Judith Butler's theory on gender performativity suggests genders within the media is based upon how it is argued that men and women are ~~performed by~~ should act. This helps us understand long form television dramas because it highlights where a man or women is acting stereotypically and where they aren't.

In Stranger things, Mrs Wheeler, ~~as~~ Mike Wheeler's mother is looking after baby Holly whilst cooking the dinner. This is a stereotypical representation of a women as ~~it is~~ stereotypically. Women should do the housework, cleaning and cooking whilst the men go to work and earn money. This reflects the context of it being set in 1984 when this stereotype was strong however in current time it is slightly outdated.

This is an example typical of a candidate using Butler, which simply states the basics of the theory and then attempts to apply it (often unsuccessfully) at a descriptive level without really evaluating whether it is useful or not (or relevant) to LFTV drama

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