



General Certificate of Education

Media Studies

MEST3 Media: Critical Perspectives

Report on the Examination

2010 examination - June series

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General

This was the first examination of MEST 3 Critical Perspectives.

Section A

The unseen media products were the game play trailer for *Call of Duty World at War* and the cinema trailer for *Battle for Haditha*. Candidates were asked to answer 3 compulsory questions.

Part of the description for the *Call of Duty* extract was incorrect. It described another similar game in the series. Examiners were instructed at the Standardisation meeting to mark openly and not to penalise candidates in any way, so for example in Question 1, candidates would be rewarded for references to *any war* if they made a reference to a specific war.

Section B

4 questions on the two pre set topics – Representations in the Media and The Impact of New and Digital Media. Candidates were asked to answer one question using their individual case study.

Section A

The focus of the 3 questions are:

1 Media concepts

Use the unseen products to answer a question on forms, representations, institutions, audiences or values. This paper and the sample papers have been on representation as a gentle introduction to the new paper, but Question 1 can be on any of the concepts.

2 Media issues and debates

Use the unseen products to answer a question on media issues and debates. You may refer to other media products to support your answer.

The 'may' is intended to encourage candidates to move beyond the two unseen exam products, they will get more marks if they do, but they can still get a pass level if they don't.

3 Wider contexts

Use the unseen products to answer a question on wider contexts.

You should move beyond the texts, referring to other media products to support your answer.

The 'should' is intended to tell candidates they will be expected to move beyond the two unseen products and include other examples.

For Questions 2 and 3, candidates can include examples from either of their individual case studies, class work they have done and from their own media use.

There were lots of good answers in Section A. 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. As a result of the products being controversial, this encouraged candidates to be engaged and have their own ideas and opinions.

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 also be reminded to **answer the particular question set**. For example, some candidates lost marks for detailed media language analysis of the texts that did not answer the

questions. Candidates also need to make sure they make different points in each of the three questions.

Candidates should make detailed references to the two media products, especially in Question 1 to illustrate the points they make.

Higher level answers included a range of points, not just repeated explanation of one or two points.

Higher level answers included candidates own opinions explained and justified, especially for Questions 2 and 3. They took a standpoint and backed it up with contextual evidence and examples from other media products. Higher level answers in Question 2 and particularly in Question 3 discussed different sides of the argument and showed a sense of debate.

Question 1

How do the two media products represent war?

Good answers included, for example:

- That war was represented as being very violent, with an emphasis on blood and gore in the game. Did this seem more violent because the game was a first person shooter game, which positioned the audience to feel as if they were there doing the killing?
- The contrast between the violence and killing being rewarded in *Call of Duty* as having no consequences and the focus on the devastating and emotional consequences for everyone involved in *Battle for Haditha*. Higher level answers discussed that in the game the player was rewarded points for killing, but in the film everyone was a loser.
- War is shown only from the soldier's point of view and from one side in *Call of Duty*, compared to the different points of view in the film, where war was represented as involving civilians and that the local people that planted the bomb. The film explored the political reasons behind war. Higher level answers discussed how the game placed different values on different soldiers' lives.
- How both products used media language and narrative techniques to make war dramatic and in the game, exciting.
- In *Battle for Haditha* war appeared more realistic, using media language and documentary conventions to give a sense of realism. Higher level answers discussed how both products were constructed, they were both representations of war and the function of both was to attract the target audience to watch or play.
- A discussion of the dominant representation of war as a man's activity, with men represented as heroic and violent and women only represented in *Battle for Haditha* as victims and emotional.

Question 2

What is the appeal to audiences of such shocking war films and war games?

You may also refer to other media texts to support your answer.

Good answers included, for example:

- Escapism from an ordinary life.

- To feel like you are experiencing war, an experience most of the audience will never have.
- Information about war and the feeling that you were better informed. Higher level answers argued that the film offered an alternative point of view of the war in Iraq compared to the mainstream news. In addition, the pleasures a UK audience could comfortably have from a war film that was very critical of the US.
- The film promised realism, similar to other films based on true stories. Higher level answers suggested this promised audiences a transparent product rather than a constructed one. Higher level answers questioned this promise of realism and 'truth'.
- The film offered emotional involvement with the characters. Higher level answers contrasted this with the lack of emotional involvement offered by the game.
- The film also offered the pleasures of a complex plot. The game offered the pleasures of a more straight forward narrative with clear heroes and villains.
- The game offered the opportunity to be in control and to have power, to be a hero. Higher level answers discussed however that this was without the dangers or consequences of real war. Some higher level answers also suggested women could have a chance to play the role of the hero, not offered in other platforms.
- Excitement and fun in the game. Higher level answers argued that players could distinguish the war in the game from real life.
- Addiction to the excitement and drama of the game, with narrative techniques that encourage players to continue playing.
- Competition with yourself, friends and online players in the game. Higher level answers argued this was the opposite of the anti social, negative effects games are usually accused of having.
- Social interaction, in the game from the online multi play or talk about the latest games or in the film in talking about the political and moral issues, encouraged by the different points of view.
- A traditional masculinity that offered a safe male identity in the game. Higher level answers arguing that this would appeal especially to the young male audience of the game and at a time when masculinity is changing.
- The appeal of the next instalment of a successful and popular franchise.
- The comfort of clear heroes and villains in games and some films in post 9/11 representations of war and terrorism.

Good answers included a range of media debates and issues, for example:

- Active and passive audiences
 - Addiction to video games
 - The positive aspects of video games
 - Audience enjoyment of realism
 - Channel 4 and its promise of alternative values
 - Moral panics about violence in the media
 - Marketing of controversial games and the success of the big franchises
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- Whether audiences now want more e.g. more realism with improved graphics, more violence, or to be closer to the action
- Post 9/11 representations of war and terrorism.

Question 3

Some media research has raised concerns about the unrestricted access that audiences have to violent images. Do you think control is necessary?

You should refer to other media texts to support your answer.

Good answers included, for example:

- The restrictions that already did exist, for example age certification by the BBFC for films, by PEGI for games and the watershed on TV.
- However age restrictions could be easily bypassed by, for example downloads, DVDs.
- The unrestricted nature of the internet, for example restrictions like pop up age confirmation boxes didn't work, easy access by for example, YouTube or file sharing. Higher level answers discussed whether it was possible or desirable to try to control internet content.
- Higher level answers debated the disadvantages of control and issues of freedom of expression.
- The history of moral panics about the media and violence, with examples from games and films to illustrate e.g. Grand Theft Auto, Manhunt, Saw franchise.
- The debate about media effects, with references to famous examples like the murder of Jamie Bulger, Manhunt, Columbine shootings. Higher level answers debated whether a direct affect had been proven, that the cases involved were rare examples and suggested other influences.
- Different responses by different audiences, for example whether children were more vulnerable. Higher level candidates discussed debates about active and passive audiences.
- Higher level answers discussed the values of the texts and whether that was as important as the concerns over violence, whether these were dominant or alternative.
- Whether war films should be banned or not, if they show the negative reality of war, especially at a time when the UK is involved in a controversial war.

Theories that were used to support and explain points in Question 2 and 3 included: Uses and Gratifications, Hypodermic needle and it's weaknesses, Dyer's Utopian Pleasures, Cultivation theory, Cohen's Moral Panic, Baudrillard Hyperreality, Desensitisation, Chomsky's manufacture of consent.

Examples of other media products included to support Questions 2 and 3 included:

- Other war games
 - Other violent games or films
 - Other controversial games, films, TV programmes, websites etc
 - Films and games that have been banned
 - Examples of censorship
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- Other films, especially war films that promise the audience realism or films that are based on real events
- Websites that offer easy access to violent images.

Section B

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

There was a huge range of case studies.

For Representation, there were the popular social groups such as women, men and youth and places such as London and Liverpool, to the topical representation of gender and sexuality in the vampire genre and young Muslims, to very individual groups such as people with a visual impairment, women in sport, protestors and transgendered people.

For The Impact of New and Digital, media case studies included TV institutions like the BBC and Channel 4, social networking sites (with Facebook the most popular choice), news in general with a focus on for example US or UK elections, the film industry with a focus on Hollywood studios or the music industry with a focus on a record company or artist.

There were many good case studies, with candidates being rewarded 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
- 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 real interest in the case study they had chosen to do , evidenced by engagement with the products and issues and their own opinions.

Candidates achieved higher level marks 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, theory, contexts and media debates 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. Pre learned answers will only be awarded lower level marks. The majority of the media products candidates use to support and illustrate their answer should also be individual. Centres may want to start the pre set topics with a class overview that introduces the topic, 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 shame for candidates that had obviously worked hard to produce a good case study, but then just described it with little or no focus on the question.

Including **detailed references to particular media products**, rather than just general examples. For example a point explaining that the BBC has adapted to the changes in new and digital media could be illustrated with them reaching a niche audience with BBC3 and some examples of

BBC3 programmes and examples from those programmes. A point explaining how social networking was used to reach audiences in the last election could be illustrated by a particular party or single issue website, with examples from the content of the website.

Showing **range** in their answers. For example, referring to a wide range of platforms, preferably all three, but at least two. This can seem more straight forward for some case studies, but even for example in a case study on the vampire genre products could be obviously films and TV programmes, but also teenage girls magazines and fan and official websites. Candidates were also rewarded for referring to a range of different media products to support their answer, not for example just one or two films. Higher level answers discussed examples of self representation and whether these showed alternative representations or not.

Having a **clear focus**. Some candidates answered Representation questions using several different case studies – a place, an age group, a gender group or a very wide ranging new/digital media topic that including the music industry, TV industry and film industry. This 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.

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, 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 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.

Question 4 (a)

“1Xtra, MTV Base and Zee TV are all hugely popular. But whenever I watch these channels, all I see is a ghetto ... Nobody wants to be in the ghetto, OK? We all want to live in the mainstream,” (Lenny Henry in a speech to the *Royal Television Society, Guardian News and Media Ltd, 2008*).

Why would the group or place you have studied want to be represented in the mainstream media?

This was the less popular of the two representation questions, but when it was answered candidates did focus on the question. Higher level answers included the ‘whys’, for example social and economic wider contexts, media issues of ownership and control. Higher level answers debated the advantages and disadvantages and also discussed examples of self representation in new media.

Question 4 (b)

A dominant representation is one that is repeated across the media over time and so are the values that it carries. Discuss.

This was a popular question. However some candidates lost marks for writing ‘everything I know about my group or place’ rather than using their case study to answer this particular question. Candidates should also avoid lengthy descriptions of the history of the representation of a group, that may show sound knowledge, but only demonstrates limited understanding and poor focus on all of the question. Higher level answers focused on the key words in the question, ‘repeated’,

'over time' and 'values'. Higher level answers also produced a more complex answer than a simple yes or no and discussed ways in which the representation had changed and ways it hadn't or ways it was repeated and often more positive exceptions.

Question 4 (c)

Developments in new/digital media mean that audiences now have access to a greater variety of views and values. To what extent are audiences empowered by this development?

This was a popular question that was answered well. Almost all candidates focused on the question. They used their case study to discuss media debates and issues about new and digital media and audiences. Higher level answers had a clear focus. Candidates with a very wide ranging case study tended to just include descriptive lists of developments in new and digital media, rather than focusing on the question. Higher level answers evaluated the extent of empowerment and also discussed some of the downsides for audiences and the ways in which audiences had not been empowered. For example, whether some of the initial democratic and open spirit of the internet is now dead, with the large companies finally catching up and exploiting the internet for profit. Also debates about a digital underclass of people excluded from the developments in new and digital media.

Question 4 (d)

Why and with what success are traditional media institutions adapting to the challenge posed by new/digital media?

This was also a popular question that was answered well by most candidates. Good answers had a clear focus, for example one industry and institution. As with 4(c), candidates with very general case studies were tempted to just produce a list of developments in new and digital media, with little exploration or evaluation of media debates or issues. Stronger answers evaluated the success of attempts to adapt, often emphasising positive attempts to adapt, some discussion of drawbacks or failures and an uncertain future. Higher level answers explained the 'why', with good social, economic and historical wider contexts reasons. Weaker answers had a pre learned teacher taught list of media issues and debates to open their essay, leaving them a limited amount of time for their own case study and they struggled to put the two together or focus on the question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.