

Version



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
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Media Studies

MEST1

(Specification 2570)

Unit 1: Investigating Media

Report on the Examination

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General

This was the fifth examination on Unit 1 Investigating Media (MEST1) for the AQA GCE Media Studies specification which has been running since September 2008. There were 2919 candidates who took the examination this series.

Pleasingly, the vast majority of candidates responded to the examination extremely positively and it was clear that most centres now appreciate fully how to prepare candidates for this unit. Further progress was observed since the last series especially in Section B, The Cross-Media Study.

Section A: Texts, Concepts and Contexts

The Section A moving image product was a viral video released exclusively on YouTube by a German advertising agency to promote the BMW's new Mini Clubman. The product raised a number of interesting conceptual issues which formed the focus of the four questions. Firstly, how adverts (particularly those released virally) use a range of techniques and media forms in combination to engage an audience. Secondly, how an advert is constructed by a media institution to promote a positive brand image. Thirdly, how viral videos and advertising texts use codes and conventions to represent realism. Fourthly, how viral videos contain certain features in order to persuade and encourage the audience to pass on their marketing message to others.

Most candidates seemed to find the unseen product very accessible and were able to produce a series of sustained and enthusiastic responses across the four questions. However, several candidates were confused by the opening YouTube segment of the video (which showed the advert being searched for). They presumed that this opening was also a part of the actual advert and had been constructed on purpose by the advertising agency. This was unfortunate as they failed to pick up from the introductory paragraphs that the video was released exclusively on YouTube and was not part of a television campaign (its content meaning it would have very little chance of meeting ASA guidelines). Although appropriate to question four responses, these candidates sometimes included reference to this part of the clip in their responses to the first three questions. Whilst examiners marked positively and did not penalise candidates for this mistake, it unfortunately sometimes dominated responses at the expense of other more relevant and appropriate ideas.

Question 1: Media Forms

Once again this was by far the most successfully answered question in Section A. Over half of all candidates managed to access level three of the mark scheme showing at least sound knowledge and understanding of a range of media techniques (related to media language, narrative and genre) used in the sequence to engage the audience. Indeed, just over a third of all candidates did very well to achieve eight marks or above. These responses tended to focus on the use of humour (exemplified by the dialogue), narrative techniques such as point of view and elements of mise-en-scene (such as the familiar motorway setting). Narrative

theories were also used with confidence and applied relevantly, particularly Barthes enigma code (linking to the real/fake debate in the advert) and Todorov (referencing the narrative shock/disturbance of the stunts). There was far less evidence of irrelevant theory just being regurgitated in an attempt to impress the examiner.

Media terminology was also generally used well, although there was some confusion over the difference between diegetic and non-diegetic sound. Close textual reference was also a key factor in the success of a response. Many candidates at this stage of the examination are confident with this and were able to draw from detailed notes made during the viewing phase.

Some candidates also need reminding that they need to remember that whilst they are indeed focusing on the specific question set that they are also answering a question tied into a particular key concept and under a specific heading (in this case Media Forms). So for some, audience (and their likely response) was used as a main focus at the expense of media forms and thus such answers failed to exhibit at least sound knowledge and understanding of the relevant key concept.

Question 2: Media Institutions

The institutions question, which has so far proven to be the most challenging for candidates, was again moved this series to nearer the start of the examination to try and reduce the negative impact that a lack of stamina and greater time since the original viewings might have. However, many still struggled with this question with only just over a third of responses achieving level three or above and exhibiting at least sound knowledge and understanding of how the Mini's brand image was promoted.

Most students seemed at least comfortable with the notion of branding and brand image and were able to make links with target audience and lifestyle often citing humour as the main agent of promotion. Thorough responses tended to ground their observations firmly in the product itself and in turn provide close textual references (also enabling them to exhibit a secure grasp of media terminology). More successful responses showed how the brand was promoted as fun and edgy through detailed references to the text and its intertextual relationship with the action genre (especially *James Bond*) and most effectively *The Italian Job*. Pleasingly many saw the positioning of the advert on You Tube and the use of a viral marketing strategy as another technique to establish the brand's unique selling point and coolness.

However, many just considered the brand in a physical sense referencing the eye-catching design of the cars and their speed/handling without considering the wider values which were being promoted. Less successful answers tended to just list and describe the characteristics of the car (often very literally) rather than considering the idea of brand image (essentially rooted in the values and ideology of the institution). They also tended to offer far less textual evidence (and in turn media terminology) to support their arguments and assertions.

Question 3: Media Representations

The representations question was well-handled by most candidates. Just under a half of all responses achieved at least level three and a quarter achieved eight marks or above. The idea of a realistic aesthetic and its construction within the text was handled confidently by many. Terminology was often used proficiently with detailed references to use of camera, sound and mise-en-scene being made. The best answers tackled the contradictions of real/fake in the text in an impressive and sophisticated way, some arguing that the status of the video remained ambiguous. Many were able to skilfully show how the advert established realism then quickly usurped it through the use of elaborate CGI special effects only then to further confuse and cheekily disorientate the viewer through the use of titles such as 'No Fake'. Many though missed the humour and irony of the advert's ending (seeing the 'Professional Driver' warning as seriously and well-meant by the institution) and in some extreme cases the stunts done by the car as real and achievable. Such candidates tended to struggle with the notion of constructed reality.

The best responses showed how the representation of reality (on several levels) was constructed and conveyed through media language and in turn used close textual reference and media terminology. Such level four responses also often used Stuart Hall to discuss meaning construction and encoding/decoding of the text.

Question 4: Media Audiences

Unfortunately this was the least well-answered of all the Section A questions. Under a third of candidates achieved level three and on average only some knowledge and understanding was shown. Perhaps this is once again an issue of stamina and candidates need to make sure that they have enough planning and viewing notes to rely on by the time they reach question four and are over forty-five minutes away from the last time they saw the clip. They would also do well to use the full fifteen minutes time provided and ensure they stay focused on the question.

Most candidates, however, were very comfortable with new technology and could easily communicate how the video could be passed on (the initial YouTube segment of the clip being very useful and relevant here). Several went into detail discussing how the clip could be embedded and shared through social networking sites and how the rating and comment facility of YouTube also lead to further audience involvement and engagement.

Less considered though was why the video would be passed on and specifically what features it had that would make it popular as a viral. Several responses though were able to consider here its short length and humorous nature, use of special effects and most importantly for many level four responses the real/fake debate it encouraged.

Many candidates also used audience theory well, particularly Uses and Gratifications to suggest and explain the pleasures gained (social identity, diversion etc.) from passing the viral on. There was far less evidence of candidates merely regurgitating media theory and making it fit the question regardless.

Section B: The Cross-Media Study

There was clear evidence once again this series that the majority of centres have got to grips with the Cross-Media Study. Practically all candidates were able to tackle the questions set and to draw on examples from across the three media platforms. Indeed overall performance was greatly improved with over half of all Section B responses achieving level three or above and in turn exhibiting at least sound application of knowledge and understanding of the question focus. Pleasingly less than six per cent of candidates' responses dropped into level one. Candidates also seem to be better at selecting material from their pre-prepared cross-media study to exemplify their arguments and assertions rather than feeling the need to use everything. This led to more focused and tighter responses and less long, indiscriminate answers.

Many responses are now organised around the three platforms (rather than the core products) which tends to work well and helps to avoid repetition. There was also far less evidence of candidates merely describing their cross-media studies. However, some still wasted time regurgitating factual information on budgets, credits and plot outlines (most often for Film case studies). There was also some very minor evidence of candidates with no prepared cross-media study or who tried to use their MEST2 production work as a case study or indeed the unseen product from Section A, but this was far less common than in previous series.

Pleasingly, the majority of cross-media studies tend to take a contemporary focus. However, some centres will want to refresh the core products that they model initially to students (for example, *Cloverfield* and *The Dark Knight* although excellent examples of cross-media distribution and consumption, are now becoming dated). New products will of course allow for more enlightened responses that have a secure feel for the contemporary media landscape and relevant media issues/debates.

Some centres and their candidates need also to be once again reminded that the study of a single core product with one or two links in other platforms does not constitute a cross-media study. Those candidates that draw from a breadth of core products inevitably exhibit a greater knowledge and understanding of the topic area related to their cross-media study and in turn are able to achieve a more sustained and engaged response.

Question 5

This was the most popular Section B question with two thirds of candidates opting for it. The vast majority agreed that audience experience had been improved by improvements in technology, although again candidates should be reminded that it is fine to disagree with the question's premise, which in some cases led to very interesting and engaged responses.

E-media examples were unsurprisingly used most as a way of justifying arguments in support of the question. Sometimes candidates need to be careful not to be too generalised here and provide relevant and detailed examples selected from their cross-media study. Print was again the poor relation and surprisingly (especially in the context of the iPad) many

found it difficult to show how print media was in fact using new technology (all be it within another platform).

Fundamentally some candidates needed to be more careful not to just provide a list of all the differing ways new technology works for the audience in each platform. This led to a lack of real focus and engagement with the question which essentially required an evaluation of such developments rather than just a description. It was those candidates who really tackled how far new technologies had actually improved audience interaction and enjoyment who really developed engaged and confident responses.

Question 6

A third of candidates opted for Question 6. The key discriminator was whether or not candidates could engage with why institutions (and their media products) have a presence on some platforms more than others. Many could provide a descriptive overview of platform coverage but more successful (level three) answers suggested reasons for this often linking to audience needs and targeting, institutional aims and strategies (marketing, budgets, positioning etc.) and the need to stay in touch with and take advantage of wider technological developments.

Again those who were able to use thinking time appropriately and plan a response drawing effectively from their cross-media study fared far better than those who jumped in head first and felt the need to merely provide a descriptive overview of each product's presence on each platform.

Some unfortunately took a very literal view of media institutions and their presence choosing to describe the positioning of logos on products such as posters and therefore remaining at a limited level of knowledge and understanding.

It was pleasing to note though that candidates' performance on this question was equal to that of question five (over ten percent achieving level four and over half level three or above). In view of this question having the more traditionally difficult concept of media institutions at its core, this was a very positive sign that centres and their candidates are now adjusting very well to the demands and challenges of this still relatively new AS specification and in turn building an even stronger foundation for their A2 studies.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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