



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
January 2012**

Media Studies

MEST3

(Specification 2570)

Unit 3: Media: Critical Perspectives

Report on the Examination

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General

Although many candidates produced good responses and re-sit candidates could improve their marks, for a significant minority of centres January was too early to enter their candidates for MEST3. Candidates were able to answer one section well, but then produced a very weak second section, with either an incomplete case study or limited understanding of the pre set topic in Section B or a limited understanding of media issues, debates and theories and wider contexts in Section A.

SECTION A

The media products for Section A of the exam were adverts for DJ Hero 2 and the Xbox 360 Kinect.

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.

Focus of the three Section A questions:

Question 1 Media concepts

Use the unseen products to answer a question on concepts - forms, representations, institutions, audiences or values.

This year's question was on forms, in particular media language, focusing on mise-en-scène.

Candidates are rewarded for:

- analysis of both media products, preferably detailed analysis with detailed reference to the products
- understanding of concepts, in particular in this question media language.

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 will get more marks if they do, but they can still get a pass level in question 2 if they don't.

Candidates are rewarded for:

- evaluation using media issues/debates/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 a wide range of sources, for example their individual case studies, their MEST4 coursework, AS work, other AS and A-level class work and from their own media use.

Candidates should read the introductions to the two media products carefully to provide useful background that can help answer the questions. 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, in this case focusing on *mise-en-scène*.

Candidates are rewarded if they make a number 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 question 2 and 3, which they supported with media debates, issues and theories and examples from other media products. Often higher level answers also show discussion and debate of both sides of an argument or advantages and disadvantages. For example in question 2 some higher level candidates discussed possible negative representations in the two adverts and in question 3 the disadvantages of using new technology.

There were lots of good answers in Section A.

1. Evaluate how the two media products use *mise-en-scène* to sell a lifestyle.

Good answers included, for example that;

- in the Kinect advert the variety of settings and the characters within them appealed to a wide target audience, often of people not traditionally targeted by many games. The fairly wide range of ethnicities, ages and both genders gave the brand an inclusive image and sold the game as accessible to ‘everyone’. Although, some candidates used understanding from their own case studies to point out that some groups were absent, such as people with disabilities.
- the characters were shown in two or more shots and a wide range of relationships were established by the setting and costumes, for example parent and child, siblings, friends, work colleagues to show the wide appeal of the Kinect and sell it as a social game.
- the often open, spacious spaces and framing sold it as an active game and tighter more intimate framing promised close relationships.
- the modern, middle class homes also enhanced the brand image as new and aspirational. The sofa became an iconic sign of family life.
- the everyday settings and costumes also gave it a safe and familiar feel, unthreatening to an audience new to gaming. This was reinforced by the high key naturalistic lighting and the voiceover.
- in DJ Hero 2 the low key lighting and mix of colours added to the house party setting.
- the sexualised clothing of the older teenagers promised a younger audience a party that they might like to go to but in reality probably couldn’t. This was also seen in the ‘magical’ mixes of freckles and braces, making the impossible possible. It also emphasised the main ‘mix together’ social selling point and new multiplayer features of DJ Hero 2 compared to the first DJ Hero.

- the mixing theme was also seen when the arms of the 'DJs' were swapped, some candidates suggested this promised the 'geeky white lad' the chance to be the 'cool black lad'.
- the games turntable controller was placed in a 'real' party setting to promise a real party when the audience played the game.
- the costumes sexualised the young women and noted that the turntable was only used by the young men, suggesting a young male target audience.

**2. Gaming culture is often represented negatively. How is this being challenged?
You may also refer to other media products to support your answer.**

This question was answered really well by almost all candidates.

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 examples or theories that were only superficially applied to the question. Theory should be used to support points made.

Good answers included, reference to:

- debates about violence in gaming and the possible effects on audiences. Higher level answers debated the possible weaknesses in effects arguments. This was in contrast to the emphasis in the Kinect advert on the gamer controlling the game, not the other way round.
- a new trend for social games, in the actual game and in increasing multiplayer features and online gaming. This challenged concerns about games damaging social skills and leading to social isolation. Higher level answers debated whether online play encouraged only virtual not real relationships.
- a new trend for active games, with sports and fitness themes, challenging the representation of games as being unhealthy and contributing to obesity.
- changes in the audience targeted and playing games, with increasing numbers of women, older audiences, families and younger children.
- the increase of the casual gamer and the games and marketing targeted at them, rather than the image of games that encouraged players to play for too long and become addicted.
- trends for educational games and the focus on games being 'useful' in marketing.
- developments away from console gaming, with people playing games on their mobile phones and on social networking sites.
- Higher level answers discussed the issue of the rise in active and social games with wider audiences, but the continuing popularity and profitability of violent games and their successful franchises aimed at the stereotypical male teenage gamer.

There was a really wider range of examples used to support points made. Good answers used their examples to explain and support points, weaker answers just described the example.

Examples included:

- Fitness games such as Wii Fit, Zumba Fitness or games with sports themes such as FIFA
- Educational games such as Brain Trainer
- Social games such as Guitar Hero and Just Dance
- Games with non violent themes such as Nintendogs and the successful Sims franchise
- Violent games that have attracted controversy, such as the Grand Theft Auto and Call of Duty franchises
- Games that are popular online, such as World of Warcraft.

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, Baudrillard Hyperreality.

**3. Why do media institutions celebrate new technology to market their products?
You should refer to other media products to support your answer.**

Some candidates found this question hard and tended just to list marketing that used new technology, although this was improved by having some evaluation. 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 reference to the following points:

- Celebrating new technology was used to stay ahead of the competition between companies and platforms.
- Creating a brand image of being the best and most up to date company.
- The promise of the 'new' a continuing trend in marketing not confined to new technology.
- New technology could improve products and the experience of audiences and wasn't always just marketing spin.
- New technology used to encourage audiences to buy again a 'new' or 'better' version of an existing product, with sometimes only minor changes to increase profits. This could also be used to re sell old products again such as 3D versions of old films.
- Technology as a reaction to the decline on traditional media, with falling sales and audiences in for example, newspapers, some TV channels.
- Marketing that used new technology could often be shared easily, quickly and widely with friends in a similar target audience
- Marketing that used new technology could add value by, for example using interactive marketing techniques or could be more personalised

- Convergence has allowed different new 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.
- Marketing that used new technology could often reach a global market.

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 YouTube, a particular video on YouTube. Successful examples included the Apple brand and their products, competition between Nintendo, Sony and Microsoft in the games market, TV catch up services, 3D TV and film and the ongoing competition between TV and cinema, newspapers and magazines move online and to smartphone apps.

Theories that were successfully used to support points included Anderson Long Tail, McLuhan, Marxism and Pluralism debates, O'Reilly, Haraway.

SECTION B

Candidates are rewarded for:

- an individual case study with a range of examples
- understanding of representation or the impact of new and digital media
- application of relevant media issues/debates/theories/wider contexts
- focus on the question.

There was a continuing improvement in Section B by most centres and candidates, with better individual case studies and more focus on the question.

It is useful for case studies to choose at least some less obvious media products to focus on, especially for the popular case studies. For example in the common representation of youth candidates case studies should not just rely on examples such as Kidulthood and Skins and for new and digital media case studies of Facebook and Twitter, not just on events in Egypt or the Ryan Giggs super injunction. Including less obvious examples allowed candidates to show their own understanding and evidence of independent study and often to make more complex and original points.

For Representation case studies, the most popular group was still young people/teenagers. Other popular social groups were women, people with disabilities, the working class, Muslims and gay men. Places were often the place a candidate was from and in the best answers candidates to included issues such as representation of class, ethnicity etc.

For The Impact of New and Digital Media case studies the most popular were Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. However this sometimes led to very general case studies with a lack of detailed examples or detailed analysis. A sharper focus and a selection of a small number of actual media products with detailed analysis would help.

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.

The best case studies often followed candidates own interests and passions as long as they kept a critical distance. This helped them really engage with the question and have a wide range of examples to draw on. The best case studies were produced by candidates that had worked hard throughout their course and thought for themselves and it was good to be able to reward this.

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 with detailed analysis
- evidence of research into media debates and issues and relevant wider contexts
- theory applied to media products 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. There is still a minority of centres doing centre led case studies with only centre led examples.
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 is continuing to improve. Stronger answers identified and addressed the key words from the question in their answer and answered the question directly in their conclusion.

Including **detailed analysis of and references to particular media products**, rather than just general examples. For example not just YouTube but a particular scene, shot, mise-en-scène etc from a particular video or not just Eastenders, but a particular scene, costume, storyline or piece of dialogue.

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. The very wide ranging topics sometimes happened when candidates ran out of things to say, showing they hadn't done enough work on their own individual case study.

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. Lengthy descriptions of the history of the representation of a group didn't answer the questions asked.

REPRESENTATION

Candidates mostly showed a better understanding of the topic of representation. 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 examples from media products.

A few weaker answers wrote a very general essay about the representation of their group or place, rather than focusing on the question, but this continues to improve, with almost all candidates answering the question.

4. How are stereotypes used by media producers? Why are they popular?

This was a popular question and was mostly answered well.

- Stronger answers analysed and evaluated a range of stereotypes of their group or place, weaker answers repeated the same stereotype, which although valid could only show more limited understanding. Choosing a variety of media products when planning their case study would help this.
- The higher level challenge in this question was the word 'why'. Lower level answers only addressed the 'how'.

The why covered media issues, debates and wider contexts, for example values, ideologies and hegemony, the role and motivations of media producers in general and differences between different media producers, the role of audiences.

- Higher level answers debated the concept of stereotypes, for example whether there are still a narrow range of stereotypes, using pluralist/Marxist debates to support their debates or whether stereotypes can be positive.
- Some higher level answers included examples of self-representation and discussed whether these were less stereotypical or not.

5. Audiences are now too sophisticated to be taken in by negative and stereotypical representations? Do you agree?

- Almost all answers evaluated how their group or place was represented in a negative and stereotypical way.
- Higher level answers discussed the range of representations of their group or place. A good way for candidates who may find Section B a challenge to improve their answers is to study a wide range of examples that represent their group or place in different ways.
- The higher level challenge in this question was the audience and stronger answers really focused on this.

Higher level answers debated issues of active and passive audiences and the relationship between audiences and producers. Many sophisticated answers didn't necessarily come to a clear conclusion.

- Some higher level answers included the changing role of audiences with examples of self representation. They discussed whether these were more positive or alternative of just conformed to dominant representations and how audiences responded to them

THE IMPACT OF NEW AND DIGITAL MEDIA

Almost all candidates showed good understanding of the impact of new and digital media. A minority of weaker candidates got bogged down in only knowledge of new and digital media and their answers tended to be descriptive lists.

Most candidates also showed a good understanding of media issues and debates, including a real sense of debate and discussion in their answers. Many higher level answers included candidates own opinions at the end of a debate, with a range of opinions from really positive and optimistic views to more negative and pessimistic views on the future of new and digital media. It was good to see candidates engaged in the issues with their own opinions.

There was a wide range of theory applied to support points and it was good to see references to up to date opinions on new and digital media not only 'media theory'.

6. Although new and digital media may promise audiences more freedom, it doesn't necessarily give them more power. Discuss.

This was a popular question and was almost always answered well, with most candidates including debate in their answer.

- Lower and middle level answers tended to see freedom as just the freedom to have more choice of media products or to access them in a more convenient way.
- Higher level answers addressed power and freedom in a deeper way, including for example how much audiences can influence media products, user generated content, the changing role of audiences, globalisation, the ways in which media institutions maintained their power.
- Stronger answers included a range of different freedoms and powers in their answers.
- Stronger answers tended to be more critical, debating whether the freedom or power offered was only superficial or not. Sophisticated answers debated the possible limits of this freedom and power.
- Sophisticated answers debated why media producers might want the audience to feel they have freedom and power.

7. New and digital media is creating one global culture. Do you think this is true?

Although this was a less popular question, it was mostly answered well.

- Answers discussed the range of ways that one global culture had been created, including for example convergence, user generated content, the rise of citizen journalism, freedom of speech, the speed and ease of access, the changing role of producers and audiences, difficulties of censorship, the role of mobile technology and video streaming services.
- Higher level answers discussed the disadvantages of globalisation, for example cultural imperialism, virtual versions of cultures rather than real experience, digital inequalities, the influence of power in society and the media, one homogenised culture.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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