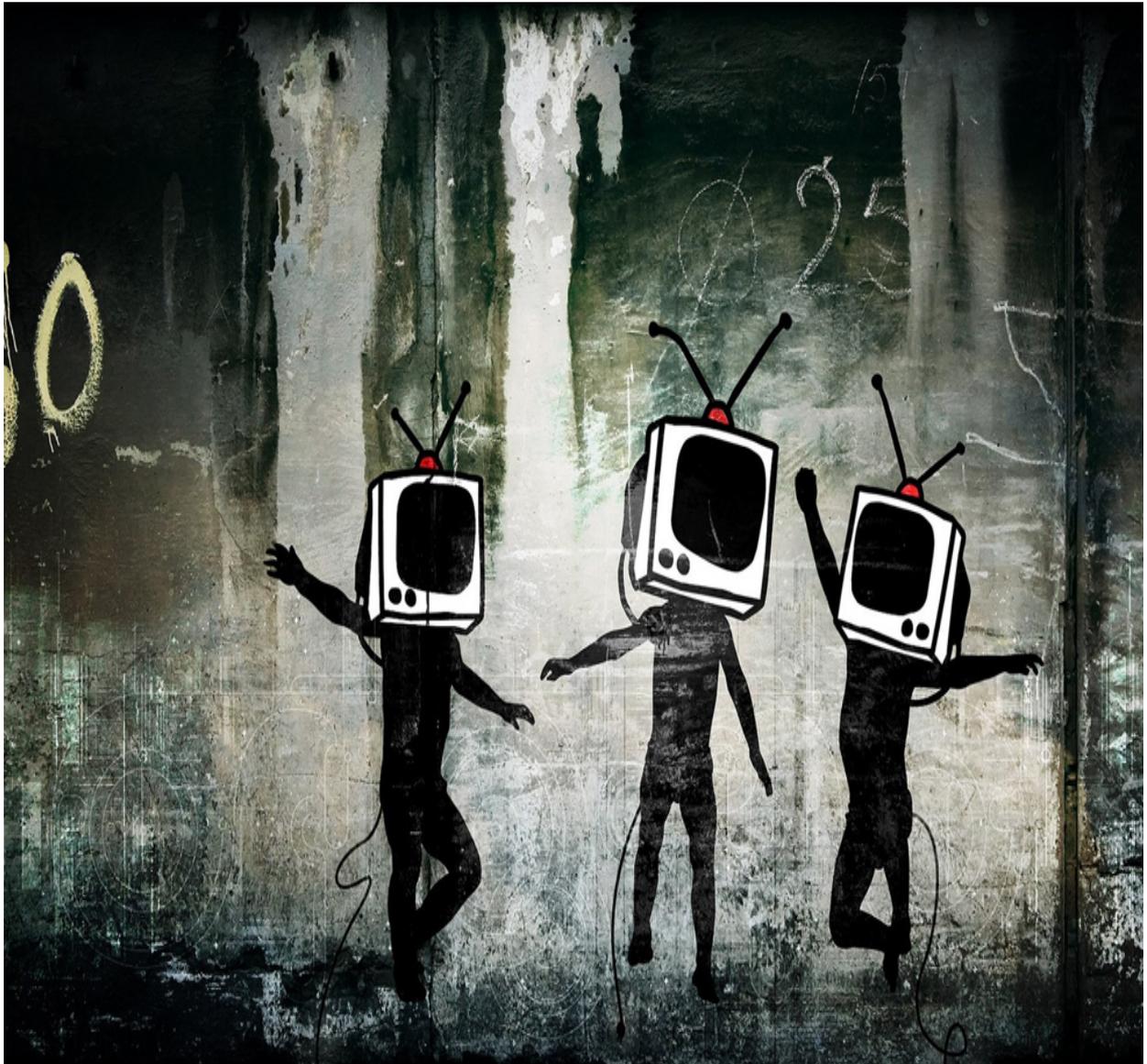


Media Influence

SAC & EXAM

Examples



This question asked students to expand on the communication theory or model identified in Question 1a. by discussing supportive arguments and evidence. Most students only expanded on their response to Question 1a. by providing a definition of the theory or model without reference to any arguments or evidence. Arguments and evidence discussed ranged from anecdotal and personal examples to empirically supported evidence. Some students expanded on the theory identified in Question 1a. and therefore were unsure about what to write for this question.

The following is an excerpt from a high-scoring response.

1a. The Uses and Gratification Theory

1b. ...Various arguments are used to support this model. Studies of post-election campaigns, including the 1974 American election, suggested voters only took on what they needed to based on pre-conceived ideas. Yet many argued against this research saying the sample of 2000 voters didn't incorporate a large enough cross section of the community and was influenced by external factors. More recently a Kent State study in 2012 surveyed the general American election, noting all the various forms of media people used and compared it to the changes in their voting preferences. They concluded that 96% didn't change their votes from media and thus reinforced the ideas presented in this theory.

This question was generally well answered by students who were able to specifically explain a form of media regulation. Most responses referred to government regulators such as the Australian Classification Board or Australian Communications and Media Authority. Fewer students noted industry regulators such as the Australian Press Council, Australian Association of National Advertisers and Free TV Australia. Alternative self-regulation such as parental controls, internet search blocks and online community forums were also discussed with some authority. It is important that students can demonstrate accurate knowledge of media classification and regulation rather than using incorrect terms such as censoring or banning when referencing film classification.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

A form of media regulation is classification. This involves the evaluation of media content such as films, television, video games and print media, and the use of classifications or ratings to determine the age bracket allowed to view the product and the placement of content descriptors for the purpose of self-regulation or the regulation of children by adults. This process is handled by the Classifications Board.

This question required students to discuss two arguments in favour of the regulation specified in Question 2a. Students should have referred to the purpose of the regulation in a relevant and coherent manner. Most students were able to identify two arguments but few discussed these in depth. Often one argument was discussed in greater depth than the other. Many students noted the protection of vulnerable children as an argument but few went on to discuss exactly what these audiences are being protected from and why.

The following is a good response that followed a Question 2a. answer explaining the role of the Advertising Standards Bureau.

One of the key arguments in favour of advertising regulation is to prevent copycat behaviour from occurring. This can be found in the regulation of advertisements that may depict unhealthy lifestyles, such as unhealthy eating, drinking and/or drug consumption. In addition to this, it includes regulation of advertisements that may depict suicide or graphic violence. Another argument in favour of regulating advertising in Australia is that it can help protect children by preventing them from seeing explicit content. This can include bad language such as profanities, sexual content, violence and or potentially scary content from being shown in advertisements, particularly during certain hours of the day where children are watching.

Questions from 2013 exam

This question gave students the opportunity to first explain two communication theories or models, then discuss their similarities and/or differences (stemming from key skill: identify, compare and contrast communication theories and models, p. 29, VCE Media Study Design). Most students performed well in the first part of this question, but few discussed similarities and/or differences well, tending to simply add short statements or dot points at the bottom of responses.

A high response:

The two reception theories Uses and Gratification and reinforcement both are based on the idea that communication is what the audiences do with the media. They both state that audiences are active and that they are able to negotiate their own meaning. While Uses and Gratification states audiences are not influenced very much at all by the media as they choose what to consume, Reinforcement states that they are equally influenced by socialising agents and those around us as the media. Both theories rely on pre-conceived values however, as Reinforcement states that the media is only influential if it introduces a new concept and Uses and Gratification ignores how people will not always pay full attention to what they consume (intermittent consumption)

Question from 2013 exam:

Students managed their responses to this question in a variety of ways. Both positive and negative influences were discussed, along with a variety of media forms such as the internet, newspapers and television. Specific texts such as TAC advertisements, Michael Moore's documentary Fahrenheit 9/11 and 'Saints Row' were also identified. A number of students referred to 'The Kylie Effect' in their response without clearly describing the media text (commercial television news reports) or form (television). The nature of influence was generally soundly outlined by students, with reference to specific examples of attitudes and behaviour. Specific audiences were also generally soundly noted, such as vulnerable and susceptible young children. The following example illustrates a succinct response.

A high response:

Michael Moore's 'Fahrenheit 9/11' documentary (2007) was considered to be influential. It suggested that George Bush's election was a conspiracy, as Al Gore was initially claimed to be the presidency, and later re-announced as George Bush, by right-winged News Corporation 'Fox'. Moore says the chairman of his campaign was also the 'vote-count woman', thus it was rigged. The audience whom are affected are the American election voters. It's influence was to affect the perception of George Bush as it conveyed him a lazy 'hick' by playing country music. It influenced the American audience as it received positive acclaim and earned multi-millions in the Box-office.

In 2012

The Media Influence section was well done by many students, with the majority showing a good grasp of major theories and models of media influence, together with a solid understanding of media regulation. 'Theories of audience' was also well understood. The questions in this section asked students to apply their knowledge to a new scenario. This seemed to be a skill that many students lacked.

This question gave students the opportunity to compare two communication theories or models. Most students performed well on this question. Students who had difficulty comparing two communication models or theories of media influence generally had problems with other questions in this section, demonstrating the foundational role these theories and models have in discussions of media influence. Students could have drawn on a wide range of communication theories or models. Some students included more information than was needed by the question, and by the space and marks allocated.

The following response fully dealt with the question and demonstrated knowledge and comparison of the characteristics of two communication models.

The Agenda Setting Function Theory of 1972 by McCombs and Shaw holds that the media does not have the power to tell audiences what to think, rather it has the ability to tell us what to think about. This is done through processes such as framing, gatekeeping and priming in which the media can dictate which issues are given more screen-time and what tone is to be set. It acknowledges that audiences have an active role in interpreting what media is given to them, and discredited popular beliefs of the media being an all powerful force. In contrast the Cultivation Theory of 1960, created by theorist George Gerbner argues that the media are indeed extremely powerful. The more one views television the more they are to perceive its representations as an actual reality. Gerbner argued that the media's influence was gradual, yet culmative and significant. However, with the advent of modern convergent media, both theories are ultimately limited by their origins in the 60's and 70's. Gerbner restricted his theory to television, which is slowly losing its momentum to the internet, whilst the Agenda Setting Theory, which places an emphasis on newspaper journalism, which is a slowly fading industry.

This question required students to describe the varying theoretical characteristics, behaviours, attitudes and/or consumption of two theories of audience. Many students merely named and briefly identified fundamental characteristics of 'passive' and 'active' audience theories. The more successful responses focused on audience theories rather than communication theories, though many students successfully introduced an audience theory via a relevant communication theory/model. This is evident in the following extracts from student responses.

High Response:

The Reinforcement Theory, established by Joseph Klapper in the 1960's, is a reception theory which positions the media as having very little power in shaping public opinion. Here Klapper theorised that the media only re-emphasises and reiterates to people, and audiences what they already believe, it also suggests that people are much more influenced by the family, friends and peers than they are by the media.

Audiences can be either active or passive. When audiences are active they actively engage with the media, deciding which content they wish to consume and how they wish to consume it. When audiences are passive they are influenced entirely by the media – they are usually unable to make objective choices or decisions in regards to media consumption.

Regulation Question:

This question was well answered by students, demonstrating an understanding of the two main forms or categories of media regulation in Australia: 'government' and 'industry' or 'self-regulation'. Many students provided examples of two or more organisations to show their understanding of the forms, then went on to briefly mention what that organisation does in terms of media regulation. Limited responses

listed inaccurately named organisations such as OFLC or merely stated 'censorship' as a form of regulation.

The following response answered the question well.

There are two major forms of media regulation in Australia. The first is regulation of media at the hands of the government created bodies, to protect our society. (eg. ACMA who are responsible for online regulation and telecommunications regulation). As well as self-regulation (eg. Bodies such as the Advertising Standards Bureau, Free TV).

Two arguments for media regulation:

Students were required to outline two arguments for media regulation together with relevant empirical or anecdotal evidence. Generally, arguments focused on protection of vulnerable groups such as children; for example, many people in favour of media regulation comment that there is a need to protect children from violent and disturbing programs that could essentially have mental ramifications... or civil rights and freedoms. Some students misinterpreted the question, which asked about arguments and evidence for media regulation, and instead answered generally or even argued against regulation. Little relevant evidence was provided to support the regulation of this, as it was largely anecdotal and very general. Use of appropriate empirical data, statistics or citing of case studies was minimal. Some students only provided two arguments with no evidence.

The following extract from a student response provides a clear argument along with relevant evidence.

One major argument for the regulation of media is to protect vulnerable/susceptible audiences such as children from content which may harm them. The ARACY (Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth) released a report which described how violent media can negatively effect and distress young children, upsetting their sleeping patterns and even leading to harmful and inappropriate thoughts. As children are seen as an investment in the future and brain development patterns in children mean that cognitive and thinking abilities are not fully formed, it is widely recognised that it is because of this, vulnerable audiences and in particularly children should be protected from material likely to harm them and hence it is necessary. Another major argument in favour of media regulation is to stop the monopolisation of the mass media. Many people believe that there should be a large number of opinions and ideas expressed in the media and hence just one person or organisation should not be completely in charge. ACMA aims to regulate this by ensuring that one person's broadcasting licence does not reach more than 75% of the population and that there are a minimum of 5 'voices' in metropolitan markets. This entails that there is a diversity in media, a reason why many believe regulation is vital.

Question relating to issues raised for media regulation:

A wide range of examples of issues arising from the attempt to regulate media were mentioned in response to this question. These included the banning or censorship of materials, warnings or classification restrictions, filters or the timing and scheduling of programs, civil freedoms and rights. Most students were able to discuss an Australian media regulatory issue; however, fewer students provided any analysis. Though this was only a three-mark question, it still provided students with an opportunity to analyse their issue.

The following response demonstrates this ability.

In a modern society such as Australia, one issue in attempting to regulate the media is trying to find a balance between protecting vulnerable and susceptible audiences while still allowing adults to access material which they want to use. An example of this has been the regulation of video games by the Australian Classifications Board. Currently, there are only ratings for games from G (General) to MA 15+. As a result, any material deemed too violent for the MA 15+ category has been refused classification. One of the chief principles of the Commonwealth Classification act which the Classifications board adheres to is that adults should be able to see, hear and read what they want to while minors should still be protected from harmful content. As a result an issue has arisen as not all adults are able to play games which they want to because many can exceed this MA 15+ category and thus are illegal to buy or sell. As a result, as of 1st January 2013 the Classifications Board will introduce an R18+ category for video games. This resolves the issue of adults not being able to access content which they want to, but then creates the new potential problem of minors potentially being more easily able to access material which could harm them.