



holy 6<sup>th</sup>  
family

# A-LEVEL MEDIA STUDIES TRANSITION WORK

Completing the following activities will help you decide whether A Level Media Studies is the right subject for you. These activities will also provide you with some understanding and knowledge that will ensure your transition to the subject is as smooth as possible. If you need any help or support with the activities you can email your questions to [kdymond@holyfamilyschool.uk](mailto:kdymond@holyfamilyschool.uk).

---

## **An Introduction to Media:**

Media is all around us, from the apps on your phone to Television, Music Video, Film, Advertising, Magazines, Newspapers, Radio, Video Games and Online Media. Therefore studying Media can lead into a variety of job roles and can open your eyes to the world around us through the exploration of set texts. Throughout the A-Level course you will explore these topics in relation to four key areas: Genre, Representation, Narrative and Audience and the theoretical perspectives surrounding each.

For the purposes of this transition work we will focus on Audience in relation to Newspapers & News. There are some theorists to apply to the tasks detailed towards the end of the booklet.

---

## **NEWSPAPERS & AUDIENCE:**

News is an integral part of daily life. When a significant event happens, everyone knows about it in a remarkably short space of time. This is partly because newspapers have become news brands and the increase in mobile technology has also made it incredibly easy to catch up with the news. We no longer have to wait for scheduled news bulletins or programmes. You can sign up to receive news alerts on your mobile phone/laptop/desktop. You can get football results and stock market figures sent directly to your mobile. News apps on your mobile mean you can get breaking news about your chosen topics direct to your phone. Facebook news pages you have liked show up in your feed and the more you like them, the more you see them. Twitter allows users to use hashtags to follow certain news stories.

The use of mobile phones has led to the rise of “**Citizen Journalism**” which is based around the public playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing and disseminating news and information. For example the first images from the terrorist attack at the Ariana Grande concert in Manchester and the terrorist knife attacks on London Bridge were from mobile phones.

In June we also saw this in action through the reporting of the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota and the use of phone footage shot by witnesses. This led to **#icantbreathe** trending on social media and the organisation of mass demonstrations across the world to protest against the brutality of the police and the inherent racism within their organisations. This in turn publicised the **#blacklivesmatter** movement. This has evolved into a demand being made to the British Government that statues of prominent slaver traders be removed and for the truth about British history and our involvement in slavery to be taught in schools.

The negative aspect of Citizen Journalism is the wide dissemination of **fake news** stories because there is no responsibility for validating the stories as would be the practice in a news organisation.

---

### Task 1:

Create a 500 word (min) presentation about a news story that was featured on the front page of at least two different newspapers as well as on social media and TV. You must include an image of your chosen newspaper covers.

First compare how the story has been presented in your chosen newspapers

- What kind of language is used – is it formal/slang, do they use alliteration or puns?
- What images are used?
- Is there any bias shown? Eg: Does the article clearly support the Government/organisation/person?
- Is the newspaper left wing (Labour) or right wing (Conservatives)?
- Who are the audiences for your chosen newspapers? Think about age, gender, class, political viewpoint etc

What background information can you find about the story? Is it a new headline or something that has been in the news for some time? Eg: Brexit, Coronavirus etc

How would different audiences react to the headlines and language used? Apply Hall’s Reception Theory.

If you don’t want to buy newspapers then you can use this site to find front pages:

<https://www.thepaperboy.com/uk/front-pages.cfm>

You can use the calendar at the bottom to look through the archive of front pages from other days/months.

---

### Task 2:

Watch the Tedx Talk by Journalist Paul Lewis about how Citizen Journalism can be used:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9APO9\\_yNbcg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9APO9_yNbcg)

Summarise the main points of the video.

How can you relate the information in this video to the **#icantbreathe** and **#blacklivesmatter** movements? You should write this in your own words and refer to examples. You can include images and can choose to create either a Word or Powerpoint document. You will need to do some research and reading around the topic.



**Task 3:**

Keep a media 'diary' for 14 days – write down which apps, TV shows, websites, films, podcasts, radio shows, games etc. you choose to access, for how long, and why – be as specific as possible. At the end of the 14 days - put all your information into a table.

- Underneath summarise your main findings - how much time do you spend on your phone for example.
- Importantly, also include what you are NOT choosing to access – what do you actively avoid?
- How many different types of media do you use over your two week period and is it varied?
- How much is traditional media (eg: TV, Film, print) and how much is online or apps (including games, email, texts etc)?
- If you had to, could you exist without your main media useage (phone, TV etc) for one week? Summarise why you have said either yes or no – give reasons.
- Finally, choose one form of media and explain the positives and negatives of this media form for the consumer (you will need to identify the gender/age group it is aimed at) – refer to Blumler & Katz and Hall – think about how the consumer/audience might react to the media form and how they might use it.

**Task 4:**

Fill in the meanings of these words (you are allowed to look them up, but make sure you understand them):

Term	Definition
Unfathomable	
Mediocrity	
Fear-mongering	
Omnipresent	
Stimulus	
Cognitive	
Differential	
Desensitisation	

Add in below any words you come across that you do not understand and find out the meaning:

Throughout the A-Level course you will be expected and encouraged to complete wider reading around the topics covered in class. This will help you to improve your understanding and language knowledge that can lead to higher grades in exams. Read the following extract about media effects and answer the questions at the end.

### Media Effects & Audience

The media are often deemed to influence how people think and feel, although if you ask somebody, they are unlikely to confess to being influenced by what they watch, read or hear. In response to accusations of unhealthy effects, media providers of one sort or another claim they are merely giving people what they want, serving public interest, catering to popular taste, holding up a mirror to society and so on.

The truth is that public opinion - feeling, taste and mood – is very hard to gauge because it is so unfathomable, often divided and always unpredictable. In fact, the problem with public opinion is that it is not always the same as people's private opinions. We can say and do what we like in public - unless, of course, we break the law - but who knows what is said and done behind closed doors? One thing is for sure - the media do their best to peep through the keyholes of those doors, but their view is permanently obscured. Sometimes media providers do catch the mood of what people really want, think and feel. A pop song hovers at the top of the charts for weeks and weeks, a film becomes a box-office hit, a social networking site attracts millions of new subscribers, a TV game show 'sensation' is sold to countries across the world. But with each media hit go countless media flops.

Bearing in mind this competitive media marketplace, what really interests us here are the hits, because it is the stuff of popular culture that invariably becomes the focus of concern about media influences and effects. God-fearing folk may get caught up in their concerns about a particular TV show or song lyric, and neglect to acknowledge the endless 'media mediocrity' that consumers routinely turn their backs on. Worse still, public fear-mongering may unintentionally sky-rocket objects of censure up the pop charts and box-office hit lists.

Popular culture is not all mediocre and bad for you, of course. Think of TV shows like *Sesame Street* (1969-) or *Strictly Come Dancing* (2004-) that have inspired many viewers to learn their ABCs and the cha-cha-cha. But bad news is good news, so say journalists, which is why the bad and the ugly are talked and written about more than the good.

What we need to unravel are the different theories and methods used to identify and explain these largely negative media effects. A theme that runs through all effects research is the idea of mental persuasion and influence.

#### THE STIMULUS-RESPONSE MODEL

In this, the earliest, and still the most commonly discussed, effects model, the media directly affect individuals without interference or obstruction. Since the media are more or less omnipresent in all of our lives, this means we are all influenced to some extent by what we view, listen to, browse, play and read. This direct-effects approach requires a stimulus and a response - an external stimulus exerts itself on an object and causes an internal response. Human beings, like any other living organisms, must constantly evolve with and adapt to their environments.

The stimulus-response model, therefore, assumes that the media are very influential in shaping how we behave and act in the real world. It is also known as the 'magic-bullet', 'plug-in-drug' or 'hypodermic-syringe model' theory of media effects as it sees the audience as passive rather than active. The media infiltrate deep into our psychological characters, contaminating our minds and making us say and do things. The media are a powerful source of persuasion, publicity and propaganda. Sometimes the effect of the media stimulus isn't the intended one, but the point is that there will always be an effect on the individual - in some cases, a decisive and divisive one. For example, war propaganda has played a disputed role in various wars, provoking huge public protests in the wake of the first TV war (Vietnam) and more recent events associated with the so-called 'War on Terror' and events with ISIS.

War is by no means the only context in which the stimulus response model lives on. Every new fear about, say, the unhealthy effects of computer games, online gambling and offensive song lyrics - especially on young people - owes something to stimulus-response ways of thinking. But despite its ongoing currency in (press-fuelled) public discourse, most experts agree that there are many problems with the stimulus-response model too. Perhaps most glaring is the dubious suggestion that we are all helpless in the face of a malign media power. It is also assumed that everyone exposed to the media is equally infected, whereas those who avoid the media are immune to its effects. Stimulus-response advocates can be further criticised for adopting a simplistic view of the media as a dangerous centre of power, rather than appreciating the complex differences between the various media industries.

## **PRIMING**

Priming is an approach that places more emphasis on the relationship between media and personal memory. Priming effects occur, say, if hearing a song on the radio conjures up mental associations with past experiences in our lives. In other words, priming occurs when exposure to the media triggers thoughts and feelings pent-up from our past. Priming effects may cause us to become sad and depressed, or may bring back happy memories and help us to feel better about ourselves. So priming is a short-term effect with long-term consequences.

We are not always conscious of the subtle effects of priming either, given that we are prone to remembering banal moments in our lives as well as rites of passage, and mundane as well as dramatic media moments. Regardless of their subtlety, priming effects are not daily phenomena. Only occasionally do images, words and sounds resonate with the chapters of our own lives. Moreover, priming effects are mostly mild and rarely cause extreme reactions like tearfulness, anger or aggression.

Priming research has shown that certain media content has greater capacity to trigger our emotions. True-life drama, for instance, primes our memory on a more regular basis than purely fictional entertainment. We are also more susceptible to priming if we can identify with and believe in the characters or events, and can freely interpret the meanings of a film, song or TV drama in ways that fit with our life-histories. And because these cognitive associations rely on our memory recall, it is more common for media-priming effects to tap into our recent rather than our distant memories. Those rare media encounters that prime us for memories hidden deep in our pasts, though, are the most potent and memorable.

Popular networking sites like Facebook, Friends Reunited and a whole host of genealogy forums facilitate powerful priming effects by providing people with new means to go make contact with others from their past.

## **CULTIVATION THEORY**

Unlike social cognitive and priming effects, the cultivation effects analysed by American communications expert George Gerbner are honed through much longer exposure to the media. Gerbner and his colleagues carried out longitudinal surveys of people's opinions on certain subjects - the key variable being how much TV they watched. Variations in opinions held by those who watched lots of TV compared with those who did not were measured to obtain the 'cultivation differential'. In most cases, the cultivation differential was significant. In practice, this means that those viewers who watch lots of TV are found to have different opinions about the world outside their front doors than those who watch less TV. So TV cultivates the opinions of people who watch several hours of it each day, every day.

Gerbner identified a 'Mean World Syndrome' that afflicted heavy TV viewers. Put simply, the more TV you watch, the more likely you are to view the outside world as a hostile, crime-ridden, ghettoised world where danger and vice lurk in every corner. Why? Cultivation theory explains 'Mean World Syndrome' by equating its cultivation differentials with its TV content analysis. In terms of the latter, Gerbner found that crime on TV was ten times worse than crime in the real world. He also found that TV has a 'mainstreaming effect' on people's tastes and opinions. TV has to cater for the broad tastes of mass audiences, so, instead of innovative programming able to accommodate diverse cultural and political views, TV producers tend to fall back on tried-and-tested formulae. This mainstreaming effect cultivates a narrow-minded view of the world to which TV viewers become accustomed and cannot see beyond.

So it would seem that TV addicts make a direct connection between what they see on the small screen and what they think is happening in reality. TV's cultivating power means that it guides certain individuals into ways of dealing with the world beyond the box. The process of desensitisation - becoming less shocked by what we see on TV - is a classic cultivation effect. The problem is, of course, that TV realism is far removed from actual reality. Witnessing a drive-by shooting in the flesh would probably make us physically sick and mentally scarred for life, whereas witnessing it every night on TV, we hardly bat an eyelid!

But on a positive note, cultivation theory may go some way to explaining the 'release-valve model' of media effects in which an individual's negative energy (anger, frustration, jealousy, hatred) is unleashed upon, say, moving pixels in video games rather than real-life people.

## **AGENDA SETTING**

This approach is concerned with how the media influence people's attitudes to issues of public interest. Agenda-setting theory explores newsworthiness and news values, both in terms of how they are practised by news producers and perceived by news audiences. At any given moment in time, journalists need to decide which news stories are the most important and which ones to leave out. Ideally, audiences would decide which stories to prioritise, but this is simply not possible amid a fast-moving, disorganised, unpredictable flow of breaking news items - and, anyway, journalists would argue that expertise is required in order to judge what is newsworthy and what is not.

In fact, the findings of agenda-setting research suggest journalists are good judges because news agendas nearly always give rise to public agendas over time. Of course, another argument would be that the news agenda is not merely a proxy for the emerging public agenda but a powerful effect on it too. The news

headlines are an everyday conversation piece. News stories feed the chattering classes. A young girl goes missing and a few days later the whole world is looking for her, or so it seems.

The agenda-setting approach seeks to understand long-term media effects on how we form opinions about each other and the world beyond our immediate locale. Other agenda-setting studies point to the 'status conferral function' of the media - how extensive media exposure improves the reputation of, say, a politician or pundit - and the capacity of the media to enforce 'social norms' like what we should wear to stay fashionable among friends.

However, public agendas don't always follow media ones. For instance, too much bland political news might bring about a wider trend for political apathy. So political apathy may well be an outcome of the media agenda – newscasters typically judge political stories to be highly newsworthy – being rejected by the public agenda, which may in turn reject the agenda of public representatives (i.e. politicians). Agenda-setting theorists have responded by arguing that news media can raise the public profile of politics and politicians with more sustained, in-depth coverage that enables audiences to learn about key issues and policies - not just image and personality.

**As a final activity:**

Explain in your own words the following:

1. The Hypodermic Syringe Model:

.....

.....

.....

.....

2. Priming:

.....

.....

.....

.....

3. Mean World Syndrome:

.....

.....

.....  
.....

4. Agenda-setting:

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

You have now completed the Media Transition Booklet – well done. Remember to hand it in to Mrs Dymond on your return to school in September.

## THEORISTS TO USE:

### **Stuart Hall: Reception Theory (Audience)**

According to Hall, "a message must be perceived as meaningful discourse and be meaningfully de-coded before it has an effect, a use, or satisfies a need". The main principles of this theory include:

The idea that communication is a process involving encoding by producers and decoding by audiences	The idea that there are three hypothetical positions from which messages and meanings may be decoded which he named Reception Theory.
--	---

Hall theorises that audiences will not always decode a news story or camera shot or a section of dialogue in the way intended by the media producer and suggests that there are three possible readings:

PREFERRED READING (DOMINANT/HEGEMONIC)	NEGOTIATED READING	OPPOSITIONAL READING
This reading is when the audience responds to a media text in the way the media producer intended. They take the dominant reading of the text and interpret the codes as the producer intended. The messages and ideas addressed through codes are not challenged, simply accepted.	This reading is when the audience agrees with some of the messages and ideas encoded, but not all due to the decoder's own individual experience or context. The audience will challenge the ideas that they disagree with and accept the ideas that they agree with.	This reading is when the audience completely rejects or disagrees with the ideas and messages encoded by the media producer. This may be related to the age, gender or culture of the audience.

### **Blumler & Katz: Uses & Gratifications Theory (Audience)**

The driving question of this theory is: *Why do people use media and what do they use them for?*

The theory holds that audiences are responsible for choosing media to meet their desires and needs to achieve gratification. This theory would then imply that the media compete against other information sources for viewers' gratification.

INFORMATION & EDUCATION	PERSONAL IDENTITY	ESCAPISM	ENTERTAINMENT	INTEGRATION & SOCIAL INTERACTION
An audience seeks to consume a text that will teach them or inform them of facts they did not know. <i>For example, watching the news will inform an audience of current affairs all over the world.</i>	An audience seeks to compare their identity to the identities and circumstances present within a media text. <i>For example, Reality TV shows such as Made in Chelsea focus on recognisable narratives about relationships of the cast.</i>	An audience wants to become immersed in the reality of the media text, so they can forget about issues in their own reality.	An audience seeks to escape the routine of everyday life through a media text and be entertained.	An audience seeks to consume a media text that can be discussed with peers, one that can result in the experience of interacting with others and discussing opinions. <i>For example, I'm a Celebrity is a live programme where an audience can discuss the contestants the next day.</i>