Paper 4 : Media

'The two-step flow model accurately describes how people are influenced by the media.' Evaluate this view. (35)

Key focus of the question

Sociological attempts to explain media effects provide the underpinnings for this question. The two-step flow model was developed by **Katz and Lazarsfeld (1950s)** to explain how personal relationships and conversations with significant others, such as family and friends, result in people modifying or rejecting media messages. Occurs in 2 steps : (1) **Opinion leaders** are exposed to different types of media and form an interpretation of that content. (2) They then influence others in a social network. Good answers are likely to evaluate the two-step flow model by drawing contrasts with **other models of media effects** such as **uses and gratifications**, **reception analysis**, **cultural effects**, and **selective filtering model**. Evidence from studies may also be used to support arguments for and against the two-step flow model.

● There are a number of media effects models that aim to explain the influence that media has on individuals - how people choose, consumer and are affected by media. Hypodermic syringe views audience as passive, the rest view them as active, to varying degrees. Can twist question into evaluating whether two-step flow model describes how media influences people <u>more</u> accurately than the other models. Which ones is it better than? Give the pros and cons for each model, conclude with the notion that cannot objectively decide which model is most accurate, must use all of them to understand the complex, multifaceted relationship between media and audience. While it is largely agreed audiences are not passive, should not rule out power of media.

For:

• The general idea that audiences are not passive and that effects are dependent on audiences' relations with others is now widely accepted. **Katz and Lazarsfield** came up with this concept during 1950s when media was becoming more widespread, one of the first to view audience as active.

• The two-step flow model highlighted the limitations in the **hypodermic syringe model**, which had wrongly assumed that audiences are passive and are all affected in the same way. The model was used to explain the affects of propaganda posters on soldier morale after WW1, and essentially believed that the media acts as a syringe that ejects messages, attidues and beliefs into it's passive and powerless audience. Used by conventional marxists to explain the

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ideological power of media owners. The principles of this model has led to many moral panics regarding media effects, like not allowing your child to watch violent movies bc it'll make them violent. (**Cumberbatch** researched over 1000 studies and found no proven link however.)

• The hypodermic-syringe model also assumes the audience is an '**atomised mass**' whose response to media messages is unaffected by their social relations with others, two-step model contrasts with this. Interactionists therefore critique the hypodermic syringe model for being too deterministic, unrealistic to assume that there is a homogenous response to media content, interpretations will depend on variety of demographics such as age, gender etc. (**reception analysis model**.) Also little research to show that media has an immediate affect on audience, can use **Bandura's Bobo Doll experiment** to refute this, but also concede that the experiment was done in an artifical environment and may not actually represent how the children would have acted in reality. Can consider the hypodermic syringe model to perhaps have been applicable when it was created, i.e when media was first becoming widespread and audiences were relatively gullible, but outdated now because individuals better informed / actively question what they see.

• The two-step flow model was the first to emphasise that media consumption is often a group experience and that relations between members in the group should be studied in order to understand how media messages are interpreted. We form our opinions partially based on the influence of those around us, and that we internalise the interpreations and opinions of individuals who we respect and look up to, known as **opinion leaders**. (in media could be a celebrity or news anchor, in real life could be a supervisor or your father or something.)

• The model also introduced the idea that **opinion leaders** may be more significant than the media in influencing how media messages are received. This led to a questioning of ideas about mass society and the notion that the media had become an all-powerful force controlling the way people think and behave. So while audiences are active in the sense they discuss and evaluate whether they agree with ideas, can also be considered a bit passive in the sense they internalise the interpretations of opinion leaders.

• The two-step flow model laid the foundations for more sophisticated research and theorising about how audiences relate to and use the media, including the **uses and gratifications model** and the **reception analysis model**. So was a pioneer in viewing audiences as active.

Against:

• The two-step flow model is rather simplistic because audience members may or may not discuss what they see, read or hear with others and, even if they do discuss some messages, many messages will go undiscussed.

• By focusing on the key role of opinion leaders, the model underestimates the power of the media to directly or indirectly influence audiences. Marxists may argue that opinion leaders within the media are just puppets perpetuating capitalist ideology of ruling class. Two-step model overestimates the activeness of audience, only discussing what you're allowed to discuss.

• Belief that the media can have a powerful and relatively immediate effect in influencing audiences has encouraged companies to spend huge sums on advertising. Likewise, government regulations to restrict access to certain media content, particularly in the case of children, also implies a belief that the media can be an invasive influence. For instance, many argue that additional precautions should be put in place to prevent children from accessing porn, as it would affect their perceptions of love and sex. Feminist **Dworkin** suggests men who watch porn more likely to abuse women. Marxists would argue media advertisers try to socialise children into being consumers from a young age, benefit in toys sales due to **pester power**. (So this can be used in support of a passive audience, **HSM**)

• The **reception analysis model** by **Morely,** which he backed up with a study he did where he showed 29 groups of people the same piece of BBC media, suggests that all individuals interpret what they see, hear or read in the media according to their pre-existing views, attitudes and opinions. (**preferred**, **negotiated** and **oppositional** reading.) These readings will vary depending on their pre-existing attitudes and beliefs, which will depend on the demographic of audiences such as gender, ethnicity, age and class. Opinion leaders have little impact on this process. When people have already made up their mind, unlikely to change beliefs just because someone they respect disagrees. Although could be argued that disgareeing with someone you look up to and respect may lead to questioning those beliefs.

• The **selective filter model** by **Klapper** suggests there are 3 filters people apply when interpreting the media - selective exposure (people choose what media they consume), selective perception (people choose to reject/accept message depending on whether it fits with their world view, and selective retention (people will forget material that does not align with their views and interests). Therefore can be argued that regardless of opinion leaders, people will filter out or forget messages they do not agree with.

• The **cultural effects model** by the **GMG** (lightly inspired by **Gramsci's** concept of cultural hegemony) claims that the media can have significant effects on attitudes and behaviour. These effects come about indirectly and through long-term exposure to media content; the short-term impact of consuming media content is very limited. Could tie into the idea that opinion leaders influence interpretation of media overtime. Through a drip drip effect, the gradual feeding of certain views by the media helps to establish hegemonic/dominant views, '**common sense views**.' **Stuart Hall** of the GMG used concepts of **encoding** and **decoding** to explain how media messages encoded with '**preferred reading'** by owners of media / journalists and editors.

• **Uses and gratifications model** by **Blumer and McQuail** suggest people use media to actively fulfill their own personal needs.

• It is not easy to prove or disprove whether opinion leaders play a key role in the way media messages are interpreted because of the difficulty of separating relevant variables and measuring the precise effects of media exposure. Is it the person saying it that matters? Or the news channel it is on?

• The two-step flow model lacks an analysis of why people would be influenced by opinion leaders and how far this resulted in people interpreting media messages in ways that differed significantly from the intentions of those who produced the media content. Puppets?

• With the rise of the new media and the internet, now much more opinion leaders than Katz and Lazarsfeld could have ever imagined (1950s). How many are we able to have? Can we consider it to be outdated?

‘Governments have no control over the media.’ Evaluate this view. (35)

Key focus of the question

The focus of the question is who controls the media and, specifically, **how much influence** do governments (nationally and/or through supra-national organisations) have on media organisations. Candidates may distinguish between different types of political regime: **authoritarian** versus **democratic**, for example. Authoritarian regimes usually exercise greater direct control over the media than is the case in democratic countries. Different means through which governments can seek to control the media may be discussed (**censorship**, **funding**, **publishing** and **broadcasting laws**, regulation, parliamentary scrutiny of media activities). Evaluating how effective these means are in helping governments control the media would form part of a good analytical response to the question. Evaluation could also be provided by considering other social actors and agencies who might play a role in controlling the media, such as media owners, editors and journalists, audiences, and non-governmental regulatory bodies. Good answers will draw conclusions about how far governments can control the media and what, if any, are the limits to government power in this regard.

For:

• Media conglomerates tend to operate on a global scale today and that makes it easier for them to avoid detailed control by particular nationstates, if they so wish. **Digital pessimist MacKinnon** warns of **sovereign cyberspace**, where companies today now have power only the government used to have. Not elected or held accountable, can exert control over governments. (threaten to shut down and move, causing job losses, if demands are not met.)

• **Democratic governments** are not involved in the day-to-day running of media organisations and so have little influence over decisions taken by editors and journalists at that level. Overall, it would be unrealistic for democratic governments to seek to control the detailed production of media content.

• Democratic governments are accountable to the electorate and measures such as censorship have not always proven popular with the wider population in countries where there is a high degree of support for media freedom. (USA, first amendment of ‘freedom of speech’).

• Regulating the new media has so far proved challenging for national governments, partly because global networks (such as the internet) take control of the new media beyond national frontiers. To-date, it looks like democratic governments have less control over the new media than they do over the traditional media. This may be changing as governments come under

pressure to ensure tighter regulation of social networking sites to prevent unwelcome content from, for example, terrorist groups and political extremists.

• The speed at which new media technology evolves makes it hard for governments to keep pace with developments. Some technologies are being used by individuals and groups who specifically want to avoid restrictions imposed on media use by national governments; these technologies include virtual private networks (VPNs), blockchain, cryptocurrency, and the dark web.

• Governments (or some politicians) realise that it might not be in their best interest to try to control the media directly; rather it is better to allow some media freedom in return for being able to influence the content of the media selectively when the government has most to gain.

• Conventional marxist view, such as **Milliband**, argue that it is the owners of the media that exert direct control over the media content produced. They are directly involved in the process of generating content that promotes capitalist ideology and increases false class conciousness within the audience. They do this to maintain their profits, media editors and managers have little control, must work within the boundaries set by owners. **Evan's** argues that media moguls such as Murdoch undermine editorial independence, force editorial staff to adopt similiar ideology. Therefore using this view, we can infer that government don't have much control over the media, because it is the owners (who have influence within the government due to their vast amounts of wealth and therefore can afford to prevent government interference) that directly control the media.

• Neo-marxist view argues against the government/media conspiracy of conventional marxists, believe the government is not entirely controlled by bourgeiouse, is relatively autonomous. Also does not believe that media owners directly control day to day operations of the media, instead believe that the media unwittingly does promote interests of ruling class due to **cultural hegemony.** This concept is associated with the work of neo-marxist **Gramsci**, which refers to the idea that some beliefs are considered 'common sense beliefs' due to their incessant promotion within the media (**cultural effects model**). In this way, editors and journalists have main control over day to day operations, they produce media that will generate profit (**pluralist** view), while also unconciously promoting ideas that reflect their social class status (editors and journalists largely middle class) therefore these ideas end up benefitting the wealthy. Therefore government doesn't really 'control' media, because the media is created by journalists and editors under media owners.

• Could also mention pluralist view that the audience controls media, shaped to meet demands of consumers in order to generate profit. Government has little control over profit driven private media corporations. (Just make sure if you go kind of off topic to connect each argument to original question - a one line sentence at end of each paragraph explaining how it relates).

Against:

• MacKinnon argued repressive, autocratic regimes such as North Korea legitimise their repression by censoring and controlling media output - undermining democracy. So level of control the government has over media content depends on the type of government itself.

• Examples suggest that **authoritarian** regimes are often very successful in controlling the media. (North Korea for example). **Simon** identified 3 broad categories that authorization or hydrbid governments may use to censor and manage information :

> ❖ **Repression** - directly censoring certain content
> ❖ **Masked political control** - censor content under guise of protection (terrorism!)
> ❖ **Technology capture** - blocking certain websites, monitoring online forums..

• Democratic regimes usually show greater respect for media rights and freedoms and, up to a point, are happy to accept a free market in media content. Nevertheless, many direct and indirect means are available to democratic governments to control the media, including censorship, allocation of state funding, regulatory supervision, and fines for media organisations that fail to conform to government regulations.

• Even democratic governments have intervened to shut down media outlets considered undesirable. Ultimately, considerable power is available to national governments to set the limits within which media organisations operate; the threat of government censure or closure alone may be sufficient to ensure that media organisations take care to avoid displeasing the authorities. Can use recent TikTok case in USA as a case study, certain states aiming to ban the media site.

• Governments may also put laws in place that restricts unethical media behaviour - like advertising to children (done by media to capitalise on **pester power**) or restricting certain pornographic websites to prevent exposure to youth who are still developing mentally. (**Dworkin's** views on porn causing violence towards women.)

• Governments are an important source of information for the media and that is another consideration encouraging media organisations to align themselves with government ideas about how the media should operate. Therefore may control media in the sense they use it to their advantage.

• The threat of government censure or attempts at punitive action may be sufficient to ensure that media organisations take care to avoid displeasing the authorities. For example, government criticism of various aspects of social media has resulted in increased efforts at self-regulation by owners of social media platforms.

• Organisations that own the traditional media also control large parts of the new media. National governments may be able to use their powers over the traditional media where they want to restrict or limit the powers of the new media. Essentially government may intervene to prevent media monopolies, where they will obtain too many media orgs and have too much control over audiences.

'Media owners control the content of the media.' Evaluate this view. (35)

Key focus of the question

The question invites consideration of which social actors or agencies control the media. Media owners have various means available to exert power relative to other social actors and agencies

who might seek to control the content of the media, such as editors, journalists, government regulators, audiences, and advertisers. However, sociologists disagree about just how much autonomy owners enjoy when it comes to making key decisions about the content and direction of the media. Good answers will consider different contributions to this debate and this might be explored through consideration of different theoretical perspectives, including **Marxist** (**conventional** and **neo**) , **pluralist**, **feminist**, and **Chomsky** and **Herman's** propagranda model.

For:

- Marxist sociologists argue that the content of the media is controlled by the owners of media conglomerates and, more broadly, by the capitalist ruling class. Conventional marxists such as **Milliband** take an **instrumental approach** and believe they are in direct control - journalists have little influence. Editors and employees must work within the boundaries set by owners, who directly control the media produced. Media that spreads ideology of ruling class, promoting false class conciousness and diluting the demand for worker uprising. Control what people media people do or don't have access to, can only think about ideas if they are presented to you (**1984**). Carry on exploiting and generating profit.

- Some owners exert close control over the editorial policy and content production in the media they own. The **Murdoch** family might be cited in this respect. **Evans** argues Murdoch undermines editorial independence, editors and journalists are forced to align themselves with the commercial interests of the media owners or they will lose their jobs. Also influences the political process, i.e winning over Murdoch is said to lead to winning elections. (favourable media coverage.)

- Large media organisations operate on a global scale and this allows owners to bypass restrictions on publishing and broadcasting that individual nation states might want to impose. Mostly known that the ownership of media is concentrated in the hands of a few large companies. **MacKinnon** warns of sovereign cyberspace, whereby multinational media corporations alongside other corporations such as Apple now have power that only the government used to have. Companies become apart of our political system, but not elected and cannot be held accountable.

- Various studies show how the power of media owners is reflected in the content of the media. Glasgow University Media Group (**GMG**) helped to explain how cultural hegemony is achieved. **Hall** explained that media owners encode their preferred reading in media messages for audience to decode, audience members then either do preferred reading, negotiated reading or oppositional reading (**Morely**).

Against:

- **Pluralist** theory states that power in relation to the media is fragmented with different groups in society each having some influence. Therefore control over the media content

does not lie soley with the owners of said media. (audience, advertisers, government and the independence of journalists and editors have varying degrees of control too. Can be argued in your conclusion that media owners do not have all control, but they do have MOST control out of all parties.)

- Audiences, for example, must have their interests taken into account by media organisations to some extent or sales of media products will be adversely affected. Media organisations must produce the content that audiences want in order to generate a profit. Therefore audience shapes and controls the media content by being consumers with various demands and tastes. Pluralists then believe they can then pick and mix whatever interpretations suit them. (Views audiences as active.)

- Advertisers have some influence too, as they provide vital funding for media producers. **Bagdikian** stresses the importance of advertising means news reports will be presented in a way that does not offend it's advertisors. For instance, if being sponsored by MNMs and a study comes out claiming that MNM's cause testicular cancer, will likely not cover the study or do so in a way that disregards it in order to keep getting the bag.

- **Gili** also argues that in order to avoid offending heterosexual advertisers or audience, gay people are either underrepesented within the media or portrayed in a very sanitised way.

- Government is another social agency competing to exercise control of the media, may put restrictions on certain content such as hate speech or spread of misinformation in democratic societies. (In authoritarian regimes government will have primary influence over media content, as they will likely be the media owners.)

- Editors and journalists have specialist skills and knowledge. Their ability to shape the content of the media, even against the wishes of a dominant owner, should not be underestimated. Interactionists would argue that only detailed study of individual instances of media control would shed light on where power lies.

- **Neo-marxists** such as **Gramsci** take cultural hegemonic approach that opposes the conventional marxist approach to media, where they do not believe the media owners are in direct day to day control, believe instead that editors and journalists have relative indepedence to create media. The media created is done to generate a profit, but unconciously also benefits upperclass because the ideas in the media reflect the social status position of the editors and journalists who created it (middle class). Therefore unconciously, it is due to the dominant culture within a society that media creators produce media with ideas and values that benefits the bourgeoiuse.

- Feminist sociologists would highlight the extent to which the media are controlled by men (most media owners are male) and serve male interests predominantly. Media content is shaped not so much by individual owners, but by the impact of a patriarchal culture and power structure. **Mulvey's** 'male gaze' theory applies here, so does **Tulchman's** theory of women being symbolicaly annihilated.

- Could also reference **McRobbie's** belief that women are now being increasingly represented in a more powerful and strong way, this may be due these representations being more profitable as there is a cultural shift within society. So media driven by need to profit from audience demand.

- The new media have handed some control over media production to individual citizens and this may have lessened the role of owners as gatekeepers of what is published and broadcast. **Bivens** argues that citizen journalism through smartphone videos is transforming traditional journalism, empowering individuals over corporations.

- Essentially any argument that challenges the idea that media owners have **full** control.

'The growth of the new media has weakened the power of governments.' Evaluate this view. (35)

Key focus of the question

The growth of the new media has many implications for the relationship between individuals and governments. For example, it has provided **individuals** with **more opportunity to shape media content**, **network with a wide base of likeminded people**, form new social relationships, and **organise protest and/or resistance** to government actions with which they disagree. Good answers to the question will consider how far these developments have weakened the power of governments (**extent**). Debates between **digital optimists** and **digital pessimists** may feature in well-informed responses. Examples of particular political campaigns may be used in good answers as a way of debating the issues to which digital optimists and digital pessimists have drawn attention. Distinctions may also be drawn between different types of government (**democratic** versus **authoritarian**, for example) and the impact that has on how individuals use the new media.

- New media just refers to the digital, screenbased technology and use of internet and social media to distribute media content. Features include technological convergence, interactivity and global network. Consuming new media is considered an active process, we search for the media we want, have discussions in comment sections and like/dislike/subscribe to media content. Consumption of tradtional media such as radio or TV broadcasting can be considered a passive process, background noise.

For:

- Digital optimists argue that digital activists have used the internet and social media to challenge power elites in a number of ways, including harnessing mass support for political campaigns, raising awareness of government malpractice and maladministration, and coordinating protests and activism. The new media allow political activists to carry out the same activities as in the past, but more quickly, on a larger scale, and at lower cost. (used to have to print flyers, now can use hashtags.)

- The new media allow people to organise themselves without formalised bureaucracies and central leaders; protest groups emerge in a more spontaneous fashion and can quickly generate sufficient support to catch political opponents off-guard, as in the case of the **Arab-Spring anti-government movements** which spread across the Middle East and North Africa between 2010 and 2012.

- The new media can be used to monitor the illegal or immoral activities of big businesses and governments. Hacktivist networks such as **'anonymous'** can infiltrate corporate and government websites, potentially gaining access to information that would expose wrongdoing and injustice.

- The digital revolution has enabled citizen journalism with civilians having access to the technology to send instant messages and pictures around the globe (including to international media outlets) in order to report on events affecting citizen protests and government attempts to repress opposition. **Bivens** argues that the use of citizen journalism achieved with smartphone technology will revolutionise journalism - anyone can share a story, not reliant on media corporations which may be in the pockets of the government.

- Digital positivist **McNair** argues that the new media has led to greater democracy, ease of access to knowledge is important when knowledge is power. Anyone can report, publish or criticise institutions like the government. Democracy is better improved when individuals are more informed about who they are voting for. Digitial pessimist **McChesney** disagrees, believing new media poses a threat to democracy. He argues monopolising advertising has undermined journalism, internet news sources are poor, journalists unable to report on topics advertisors dislike etc.

Against:

- Digital pessimists argue that political protests organised through the new media have had relatively little success in achieving the aims of the activists. Authoritarian governments in particular have been ruthless in cracking down on internet use whenever opponents have any success in using the new media to advance their cause.

- There is little evidence that use of the new media has helped protest movements achieve their objectives. For example, in relation to the Arab Spring, only the uprising in **Tunisia** has **resulted in a transition to constitutional democracy**. In other countries, authoritarianism still prevails or civil wars continue.

- Authoritarian governments increasingly seek to limit the liberating potential of the new media by deploying censorship, masked political control, and technology capture. Therefore regardless of advancements in new media, if government is authoritarian they will seek to control, censor and restrict. (**MacKinnon** holds this belief about North korea.)

- Outside the wealthy, established democracies, large numbers of people still lack access to digital technologies. They are therefore reliant on government controlled traditional media.

- Technology providers are under increasing pressure to exercise closer control over how their technology is used and by whom. For example, Facebook has recently banned a number of account users who were seen by the company to be posting socially undesirable content. While some will see this as responsible monitoring of media usage, others will view it as a potentially troubling development that places restrictions on how individuals use the new media and who is judged suitable to post messages and organise protests. (threat to free speech)

'The media has a *significant* influence on how people behave.' Evaluate this view. (35)

Key focus of the question

The question invites consideration of how far the media influence how people behave. Good answers may be based on a **review of different models of media effects**. The **hypodermic syringe** model, for example, suggests that the media have a substantial and direct effect in influencing the thoughts and behaviour of audiences. By contrast, the **uses and gratifications** model is founded on the view that people are not passive consumers of the media; on the contrary, in order to satisfy their personal needs people actually make choices about how to use the media. Other models of media effects (**reception analysis model** and **cultural effects mode**l) suggest that the influence of the media varies between groups and may be subtle and indirect. Studies of media influence on behaviour may also feature in well-informed answers.

For:
- The **hypodermic-syringe model** sees media content as acting like a drug that is injected into audiences who are then directly influenced in the way they think and behave. **Bandura's Bobo Doll experiment** can be used as an example of this, however this can be critiqued for it's ecological validity as it was performed in an artical environment (lab).

- Marxist sociologists such as **Milliband** believe that the media play a part in promoting ruling class ideology. Through this ideology people are encouraged to think that the capitalist economic system is fair and acceptable. They would not think in this way without being influenced by ideological agencies such as the media.

- Neo-Marxist sociologists claim that the influence of the media is subtle and indirect; long-term exposure to the media results in people unconsciously absorbing certain ways of thinking and behaving that are contained within media representations. (**Cultural effects model**). Owners of media not in direct control, editors and journalists produce media that reflects their social status and cultural hegemony in society, thus promoting interests of ruling class and promoting false class conciousness within individuals, affecting their behaviour by making them accept exploitation and not revolt.

- Companies and governments would be unlikely to spend so much money on media advertisements if they believed audiences were unaffected by exposure to media content.

- Studies suggest that the media play a pivotal role in the creation of moral panics and in deviancy amplification. This shows that under certain circumstances the media can have a significant impact on audiences. **Cohen's** study on the **mods and rockers** (working class youth groups that went against traditional norms of society) showed that the media exaggerated the extent of the violence between the two groups (likely for profit). This led to a moral panic, whereby the media predicted more violence from the groups, and this resulted in a deviancy amplification spiral where due to the coverage the mods and rockers became more violent towards each other (self-fulfilling prophecy.)

- **Anderson** claimed that research indicated media violence increased the liklihood of agressive and violent behaviour. **Cumberbatch's** study done prior to this claim researched over 1000 studies and found no direct link to media violence and long-term violence.

- Nevertheless remains some uncertainty about prolonged exposure to media violence on individual behaviour. Argued that violence in the media can lead to copy cats and imitation, desensitisation, cause psychological disturbances, or result in amplified fear of becoming a victim of violence.

- Argued that media provides a distorted image of crime. Argued that media represensations of crime can lead to crime by arousing deviant behaviour, transmitting knowledge of criminal techniques or even stimulate desires for unaffordable goods. **Lea and Young** refered to this as **relative deprivation**, where the media portrays a materialistic image of a 'good life' as the norm that people should ascribe to, and this results in envy in marginalised/impoverished individuals who cannot afford the items shown. This results in stealing in order to achieve this 'good life'.

Against:

- People are not passive consumers of the media, rather they choose how they use the media in order to satisfy their own personal needs. Use it for diversion, personal relationships, background noise or to construct their personal identity. (**Uses and gratifications model** - **Blumer and McQuail**)

- Fears prevalent in the 1930s that people would be brainwashed by the media have proved unfounded.

- Media messages can be interpreted in different ways; how individual and groups interpret those messages is influenced by factors which the media have little control over, such as gender, class, age, ethnicity, and community. **(Reception analysis model - Morely)**

- **Klapper's selective filtering model** suggests people filter the media they consume, the ideas they disagree with, meaning consumption of media is an active process that doesn't necessarily control how individuals behave.

- Studies of whether exposure to violence in the media leads people to behave violently have been largely inconclusive. Isolating the influence of the media in order to study effects on the way people think and behave is very difficult to achieve, so there is a lack of conclusive evidence about media effects.

'The media still portrays women in traditional gender roles.' Evaluate this view. (35)

Key focus of the question

The question invites discussion of how far the media still portrays women in traditional gender roles. Answers might discuss the use of **gender stereotypes** in the media and the **objectification of women** for the purposes of attracting male audiences. Gender disparity in the roles assigned to males and females within the media might also be examined. The role of the media in promoting idealised images of femininity would be another relevant line of analysis to pursue. Evaluation of the view expressed in the question might focus on **changes in the media** in recent years and how this has affected media representations of women. For example, some blatant forms of sexism have largely been expunged from the media in the UK. Some media today try to directly challenge gender stereotypes and to expose the injustices associated with patriarchy. However, other media outlets continue to present women in ways that are stereotyped and sexist. Overall, researchers disagree about the extent to which gender inequality is reflected in media representations of women.

For:

- Much media advertising still portrays women in traditional gender roles. **Ferguson** argues that teenage girl magazines prepare and socialise girls for these feminised, tradtional roles. They generate a **cult of feminity** which included themes of how to be a good wife, how to dress, how to cook and how to do makeup in order to meet beauty standards. "How to make a boy like you" sections, as if thats the most important thing in life. Ferguson argued these magazines helped socialise young girls into solely dreaming of being somebody's girlfriend or wife, not of having a career.

- The media often use gender stereotypes that present women in a negative light and reflect patriarchal ideas about the appropriate role of women in society.

- Some media outlets use objectified and sexualised images of women to advertise products and attract interest from male audiences. **Mulvey's** theory of the **male gaze** applies here, whereby women are shown as sex objects through methods such as linger shots or slow motion in order to appeal to heterosexual male audiences. In these instances, priority is shown to appeasing male audience rather than portraying women characters as actual individuals that exist outside of their bodies and sexual appeal.

- Men dominate positions of power within the media and women are often employed within the media in support roles to men. Study conducted in **2015** by Global Media Monitoring Project (**GMMP**) analysed gender inequalities within the news sphere of media. Shown that women are overrepresented as voices of general masses (wives, parents, customers..) but underrepresented as voices of experts or covering 'hard news' content such as finance or current affairds. These spaces were dominated by men.

- Women in advertising are often airbrushed and filtered to the point of being unrecognisable, these perpetuate beauty standards and capitalise on female insecurities to purchase the product being sold. Marxist feminists would argue this is an economic tactic to generate profit.

- **Tuchman's** concept of **symbolic annihilation** refers to the underrepresenation of women in media, within a limited set of social roles. Priority is placed on women's looks. While men are represented in a wide range of social roles, women often represented through sterotypical gender roles such as housewife, mother etc.

- Her idea can also apply to elderly women within the media, who are greatly symbolically annihilated due to the fact women's main values are placed on their looks. Men in contrast are allowed to age into 'silver foxes' and develop 'dad bods' that are celebrated by society, women do not receive the same treatment.

- In advertisements, women are often seen representing cleaning products or baby items like diapers, men usually with cars or outdoor appliances. This reinforces stereotypical gender roles on both sides.

- When arguing against the idea that women are now being presented differently, we can give the feminist observation that the 'strong female characters' within media are often only expected to be considered strong because they adopt male characteristics such as aggression or impulsiveness. Additionally, these strong female characters still perpetuate beauty standards.

Against:

- There have been changes in the way women are presented in the media in recent years to reflect opposition to sexism and gender stereotyping. Feminist **McRobbie** argues a new popular feminism has emerged in postmodern society, whereby media now promotes female assertiveness and independence, which provides strong role models to little girls.

- Some media outlets are committed to combatting gender inequality in the media. Women working within the media have been effective in confronting some elements of

gender inequality within the media industry. Now have more power within the media industry, therefore have more control over content produced

- Growing cultural trends in female empowerment has led to media corporations attempting to capitalise on this by creating and showing strong female characters

- The new media have provided opportunities for more women to create media content (Facebook and YouTube, for example) and to challenge gender stereotypes and sexist representations of women in the media. Taking control of media content creation means they are not limited to performing

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'Postmodernists are right that social reality today is shaped by the media.' Evaluate this view. (35)

Key focus of the question

The context for this question is the debate about the power of the media to **influence the way people think and behave**. More specifically, the question invites candidates to consider the postmodernist view that we are currently living in a world where engagement with the media increasingly shapes our lifestyle choices and sense of reality. Concepts to consider in this respect include: **hyperreality**, **social construction**, **media representations**, **hyperconnectivity**, simulations, simulacra, **media consumption**. Answers may engage with theoretical debates about the extent to which the media influence thought and behaviour. This may be developed through considering different models of media effects. In higher scoring answers there should also be some direct consideration of the strengths and limitations of the postmodernist view of the media. For example, the postmodernist idea that due to the influence of the all-pervasive media people can no longer distinguish between what is real and what is fake may be analysed. Likewise, **Baudrillard's** claim that people today allegedly learn to identify with the simulated world of television more readily than the real world around us might also be scrutinised.

For:

- The media dominate the flow of information in society today. Postmodernists argue that we live in a media-saturated society in which we are surrounded by media images and spend an increasing amount of time each day consuming media messages.

- The way we understand the world is increasingly filtered through the representations of reality provided by the media. In a mediasaturated society we struggle to separate representations of reality from reality. Postmodernists refer to this phenomenon as **hyperreality**. (gender, race, age stereotypes that lead us to believe that is how certain groups act in reality.)

- Postmodernists claim that the media is a particularly powerful influence on social identity, helping shape the images we project about ourselves, the groups we identity with, and the judgements we make about others.

- Evidence from studies provides some support for theories that emphasise the powerful influence of the media in shaping social reality. For example, the studies by Hobson and by Buckingham.

- The Frankfurt School highlighted some features of mass society that create a conducive background for media manipulation of the way people think and behave.

- The media are heavily dependent on support from advertisers, and the latter have an interest in manipulating consumer behaviour and more broadly in shaping social identities in ways that support a vibrant capitalist economy. Advertisers would be unlikely to spend such huge sums on advertising if the media were not able to influence behaviour to a considerable extent.

- Celebrities are seen as important opinion formers and role models today and, to some extent, they can be seen as a product (an extension) of the media and an example of how many people look to the media for guidance on matters such as fashion and lifestyle choices.

- For **Baudrillard**, entertainment, information and communication technologies provide experiences that are so intense and involving that everyday life cannot compete. People's needs and tastes are largely shaped by the media, in this view. Evidence showing the significant increase in time that individuals spend consuming media products provides some support for this view. Growing interest in virtual reality games can also be seen as an example of the point that Baudrillard is making.

- Postmodernists believe that individuals actively consume the media to construct their identities. Globalisation has provided population with more chocies to do so

- **Strinati** emphasises importance media in shaping consumer choices, popular culture (which is unchallenging, dumbed down media fit for the masses) forms our sense of reality and how we view ourselves.

- Growing belief in conspiracy theories that are disseminated through the new media may be seen as evidence of the power of the media to shape social reality today.

Against:

- Postmodernist claims that the media have a powerful impact in shaping human behaviour are largely theoretical. These claims lack support from extensive empirical research.

- Classic studies of media influence, such as Bandura et al, have been heavily criticised both in terms of findings and methodological soundness. Indeed, it is very difficult to measure both the short-term and the long-term effects of exposure to media content.

- Functionalist and pluralist theories would see the media as reflecting the values and attitudes of society more than shaping them. They would reject the idea of the media as a monolithic force manipulating the way people think and behave. Interactionist would

point out that media content can be interpreted in different ways and various factors affect the way particular audiences respond to the messages transmitted by the media.

- Feminists would agree that the media exercise a very powerful influence on how women see themselves and are perceived by men, but would also note how feminists have been successful in resisting those media influences and campaigning against negative representations of women in the media.

- Research that has been carried out on, for example, TV soap operas, suggests that audiences are able to distinguish between reality and representations of reality, suggesting that media influence in this respect is not that powerful. Audiences are not passive consumers of the media; the uses and gratifications model of media effects notes that people actively choose how they use the media and select content that meets their personal needs and interests. In this view, the media are used by people to serve pre-existing personal needs; the media doesn't shape those needs as such. Studies, such as those by Lull, provide empirical support for this view.

- Rather than being manipulated by the media into accepting particular ways of thinking and behaving, people often challenge media content and seek to change the way media operators work. Examples include campaigns against sexism in the media, the alt- right's efforts to expose so-called fake news among established media outlets, and the work of the 'underground press' in challenging the state-controlled media in many oppressive, authoritarian regimes. Philo and Miller argue that it is perfectly possible to compare media images with reality and to highlight inaccuracies and misrepresentations.

'The media serves the interests of a wide range of groups.' Evaluate this view. (35)

Key focus of the question

The idea that the media serves the interests of a wide range of groups is associated with pluralist theory. Good answers are likely to use the ideas of pluralists such as Dahl and Whale to explain the view expressed in the question. Contrasting perspectives will then be deployed to provide an evaluation of the claim that the media serves the interests of a wide range of groups. Marxist sociologists argue that the content of the media is controlled by the owners of media conglomerates and, more broadly, by the capitalist ruling class. Interactionists would argue that only detailed study of individual instances of where decisions are made about media content would shed light on who controls the media and what interests are served. Feminist sociologists would highlight the extent to which the media is controlled by men and serves male interests predominantly. While differing from **pluralist theorists** to some extent, postmodernists would point out that the new digital media has created opportunities for more people to influence the media than was perhaps previously the case and this has taken some power away from elite groups

For:

• Pluralists argue that in relation to the media power lies with the consumer or audience rather than with owners or media professionals.

• Pluralists argue that in order to attract viewers and readers media organisations must produce content that appeals to different sections of society.

• Government regulations often require some or all media organisations to operate in ways that allow scope for different groups in society to influence the media (for example, the BBC Charter). Government censorship also acts as a check on bias in the media that might favour the interests of one group over another.

• There are many examples of where powerful lobby groups representing different sections of society have been successful in influencing the decisions taken by media organisations.

• Digital optimists argue that the new media has provided powerful new means for individual citizens and protest groups to oppose established authorities (such as the ruling class) and argue for changes in society that benefit the less privileged and the poor.

Against:

• Marxist sociologists argue that control of the media rests in the hands of owners of the media and companies that fund the media through paying for advertisements. Their interests are aligned with the capitalist ruling class as a whole and the media therefore are supportive of capitalist values and objectives. Other groups have little or no opportunity to influence the content of the media, in this view.

• Media conglomerates operate increasingly on a global scale and, arguably, this has extended their power to promote capitalist interests free from any controls or restrictions that national governments might seek to impose.

• Studies of the media by the Glasgow Media Group showed that the media represent power holders and other privileged groups in society in a favourable light. News coverage of industrial action, for example, tended to present owners and managers as reasonable and moderate while trade union officials represent the workforce were presented as aggressive, militant, and disruptive. (using language such as trade union 'demanded', but owners 'offered'.)

• Just how diverse the media is in terms of the range of views presented can be questioned.

• Do the public get what they want from the media, or come to want what they are given? (Marxist idea that people can only want what they have the options to choose from, these options are decided by media owners.)

• The extent to which the new media has opened up opportunities for individuals to influence media content can be questioned – increasingly a handful of platforms control which ideas and opinions are seen and shared, it can be argued.

‘The hypodermic syringe model accurately describes how people are influenced by the media.’ Evaluate this view. (35)

Key focus of the question

Sociological attempts to explain media effects provide the underpinnings for this question. The hypodermic syringe model was an early attempt to describe how the media influences audiences. Media content acts like a drug injected directly into a vein using a syringe, having a direct and powerful effect. Later theorists have generally accepted that the media isn't quite so overwhelming in its influence as the simple syringe analogy suggests. However, if taken less literally, the hypodermic syringe model is a useful reference point for sociologists who want to argue that the media have a powerful influence on the way people think and behave. Other models of media effects stress that audiences are not passive consumers of the media and, where the media is an influence on thoughts and behaviour, the processes involved are quite subtle and possibly indirect. Good answers are likely to evaluate the hypodermic syringe model by drawing contrasts with other models such as uses and gratifications, reception analysis, and cultural effects.

For:

• In the context of mass society where the media are the main source of information for many people, it is plausible to think that the media has a powerful influence on the way people think and behave, even if the influence is not quite as direct and overwhelming as the syringe model implies.

• Confusing media representations with reality has provoked mass panic at times (Orson Welles War of the Worlds radio dramatization, for example). Likewise, the role of the media in creating moral panics that have measurable short-term effects on the way some people think and behave has also been well documented.

• It is not easy to prove or disprove whether the media have a powerful, direct influence on behaviour because of the difficulty of separating relevant variables and measuring the precise effects of media exposure. However, there is a large body of anecdotal evidence of some people claiming they have personally experienced, or witnessed in others, a dramatic change of behaviour associated with exposure to certain media content.

• Belief that the media can have a powerful and relatively immediate effect in influencing thoughts and behaviour has encouraged companies to spend huge sums on advertising.

Likewise, government regulations to restrict access to certain media content, particularly in the case of children, also implies a belief that the media can be an invasive influence.

• Affect of violence and crime represented in media on real life crime (**Lea and Young** - relative deprivation, copycats, arousal, knowledge etc.)

Against:

• The syringe model wrongly assumes that audiences are passive and that audience members are all affected in the same way.

• The syringe model also assumes the audience is an 'atomised mass' whose response to media messages is unaffected by their social relations with others.

• The reception analysis model question how much influence the media have on audiences, because the latter interpret what they see, hear or read according to their pre-existing views, attitudes and opinions.

• By contrast with the reception analysis view, the cultural effects model is closer to the hypodermic syringe model in arguing that the media can have significant effects on attitudes and behaviour. But sociologists who support the cultural effects model say that media effects come about indirectly and through long-term exposure to media content; the short-term impact of consuming media content is very limited.

'Media content is influenced mainly by editors and journalists.' Evaluate this view. (35)

Key focus of the question

The question invites consideration of which social actors or agencies control the media. Editors and journalists play a key role in media production and so are well placed to influence decisions affecting the media. They have various means available to exert power relative to other social actors and agencies who might seek to control the media, such as media owners, government regulators, audiences, and advertisers. However, sociologists disagree about just how much autonomy editors and journalists enjoy when it comes to making key decisions about the content and direction of the media.

Good answers will consider different contributions to this debate and this might be explored through consideration of different theoretical perspectives, including Marxist, pluralist, feminist, and postmodernist theories. Marxist sociologists argue that the content of the media is

controlled by the owners of media conglomerates and, more broadly, by the capitalist ruling class. Interactionists would argue that only detailed study of individual instances of media control would shed light on where power lies. Feminist sociologists would highlight the extent to which the media are controlled by men and serve male interests predominantly. Pluralists argue that the media serve a diverse range of interests in society and no single group controls the media. Postmodernists would point out that the new digital media has created opportunities for more people to influence the media than was perhaps previously the case and this has taken some power away from media professionals, such as editors and journalists.

For:

• Editors and journalists have close control over the day-to-day running of the media and their specialist knowledge and managerial brief may provide an edge in terms of dominating the decision-making process with the media.

• Editors and journalists in particular media outlets are bound by close work ties and this may help form a unity of purpose and mutual support that makes the group formidable in any battles to secure and maintain control of the media. Moreover, editors and journalists across all media outlets have an interest in supporting each other and protecting their professional status and employment position, again making this a powerful group with many levers to pull in terms of controlling the media.

• Media production is an increasingly technical process, which may advantage individuals who have specialist skills and knowledge, such as editors and journalists.

• Editors and journalists can use the media to influence the agenda in their favour when it comes to issues of public debate about the role and powers of the media.

Against:

• Marxist sociologists argue that control of the media rests in the hands of owners of the media who ruthlessly use their property assets to generate maximum profit. Editors and journalists are forced to align themselves with the commercial interests of the owners or they will lose their jobs.

• Feminist sociologists point out that most editors and senior journalists are men, which means that women are less well placed to exert influence over decision-making processes within the media.

• Pluralist theory states that power in relation to the media is fragmented with different groups in society each having some influence. Audiences, for example, must have their interests taking into account by media organisations to some extent or sales of media products will be adversely

affected. Advertisers have some influence too, as they provide vital funding for media producers. Government is another social agency competing to exercise control of the media.

• The new media have handed some control over media production to individual citizens and this may have lessened the role of editors and journalists as gatekeepers of what is published and broadcast.

'Access to the new media has given people more power to challenge existing power structures.' Evaluate this view. (35)

Key focus of the question

The new media are seen as more interactive than the traditional media, giving individual citizens more opportunity to shape media content, network with a wide base of like-minded people, and organise protest and/or resistance to government actions with which they disagree. Good answers to the question will consider how far people have been empowered by the emergence of the new media and whether claims about greater power to challenge existing power structures can be substantiated. Debates between digital optimists and digital pessimists may feature in well-informed responses. Digital optimists argue that digital activists have used the internet and social media to challenge power elites in a number of ways, including harnessing mass support for political campaigns, raising awareness of government malpractice and maladministration, and coordinating protests and activism. Digital pessimists argue that political protests organised through the new media have had relatively little success in achieving the aims of the activists. Authoritarian governments in particular have been ruthless in cracking down on internet use whenever opponents have any success in using the new media to advance their cause. Examples of particular political campaigns may be used in good answers as a way of debating the issues to which digital optimists and digital pessimists have drawn attention.

For:

• The new media allow political activists to carry out the same activities as in the past, but more quickly, on a larger scale, and at lower cost.

• The new media allow people to organise themselves without formalised bureaucracies and central leaders; protest groups emerge in a more spontaneous fashion and can quickly generate sufficient support to catch political opponents off-guard, as in the case of the Arab-Spring anti-government movements which spread across the Middle East and North Africa between 2010 and 2012.

• The new media can be used to monitor the illegal or immoral activities of big businesses and governments. Hacktivist networks can infiltrate corporate and government websites, potentially gaining access to information that would expose wrongdoing and injustice.

• The digital revolution has enabled citizen journalism with civilians having access to the technology to send instant messages and pictures around the globe (including to international media outlets) in order to report on events affecting citizen protests and government attempts to repress opposition.

Against:

• There is little evidence that use of the new media has helped protest movements achieve their objectives. For example, in relation to the Arab Spring, only the uprising in Tunisia has resulted in a transition to constitutional democracy. In other countries, authoritarianism still prevails or civil wars continue.

• Authoritarian governments increasingly seek to limit the liberating potential of the new media by deploying censorship, masked political control, and technology capture.

• Outside the wealthy, established democracies, large numbers of people still lack access to digital technologies. They are therefore reliant on government controlled traditional media.

• Technology providers are under increasing pressure to exercise closer control over how their technology is used and by whom. For example, Facebook has recently banned a number of account users who were seen by the company to be posting socially undesirable content. While some will see this as responsible monitoring of media usage, others will view it as a potentially troubling development that places restrictions on how individuals use the new media and who is judged suitable to post messages and organise protests.

'Media representations of men and women are largely based on gender stereotypes.' Evaluate this view. (35)

Key focus of the question

The question invites discussion of how far media representations of men and women are based on gender stereotypes. Topics for consideration include, for example, the objectification of women in the media for the purposes of attracting male audiences. Gender disparity in the roles assigned to males and females within the media might also be examined. The role of the media in promoting idealised images of femininity/masculinity would be another relevant line of analysis to pursue. Evaluation of the view expressed in the question might focus on changes in the media in recent years and how this has affected media representations of men and women. For example, some blatant forms of sexism have largely been expunged from the media in the UK. Some media today try to directly challenge gender stereotypes and to expose the injustices associated with patriarchy and the limitations of male gender stereotypes. However, other media outlets continue to present men and women in ways that are stereotyped and unrepresentative of the range of male and female identities today. Overall, researchers disagree about the extent to which media representations of men and women are no longer based on gender stereotypes

For:

• The media often use gender stereotypes that present women in a negative light and reflect patriarchal ideas about the appropriate role of women in society.

• Some media outlets use objectified and sexualised images of women to advertise products and attract interest from male audiences.

• Media representations of men also reflect gender stereotypes, with males characterised as breadwinners, decision makers, emotionally strong, and interested in hobbies such as sport and cars.

• Studies have shown that media content often defines key concerns for women as beauty, appearance, family, relationships, and childcare.

Against:

• There have been changes in the way men and women are presented in the media in recent years to reflect opposition to sexism and gender stereotyping.

• Some media outlets are committed to combatting sexism in the media.

• Women working within the media have been effective in confronting some elements of patriarchy within the media industry.

The new media have provided opportunities for more men and women to create media content (Facebook and YouTube, for example) and to challenge gender stereotypes and sexist representations in the media.