

Chapter 4 covers the media platforms as defined by the AQA specification, and any media product should be considered in terms of its application to all three platforms: broadcasting, print and e-media. Clearly some products are naturally more at home on one platform than another, and it may sometimes be difficult to find examples of cross-platform material — particularly when discussing print and moving-image media. For example, representations of the moving image in print media largely involve publicity and marketing material that direct the audience to the moving image, and the role of the print medium is subsidiary to audio-visual media in these cases.

The same could be said of viral videos advertising a new film via a mobile phone — a phone is not the best medium on which to view a feature film. The important thing is the awareness and interest generated to encourage the audience to view the film in a more appropriate medium.

The specification repeatedly emphasises the importance of cross-media texts and the multiple ways in which audiences now access media products. This aspect of consumption should be discussed throughout the course. The section on intertextuality (page 38) provides opportunities for exploring further the ways in which media texts make use of each other to connect with audiences.

Ideas for discussion and development (page 38)

One of the challenges with this kind of task is that the possibilities are endless. *The Simpsons* — noted for its playful use of parody and pastiche — is a useful text for introducing the concept of intertextuality. For a more in-depth examination, it is worth focusing on a particular genre such as advertising or CD/DVD cover designs.

Broadcasting

The textbook provides a brief and condensed history of broadcasting to contextualise the debate (pages 39–48).

The discussion of television genres provides examples of how this area might be approached, but is far from comprehensive. For example, the discussion of soap operas (on pages 42–43) is limited because there is already an extensive amount of literature on this subject. However, the reasons why people watch soap operas can make an interesting exercise if students apply it to their own experiences and motivation.

You may wish to take these studies further, using either the genres mentioned or one of your own choosing.

Ideas for discussion and development (page 46)

If you are looking at documentary and hybrid forms as your cross-media case study, then the question of ‘dumbing down’ will inevitably need to be raised. A good way to address this is to assess a reality television programme — such as *Big Brother* or *I’m a Celebrity...Get Me Out Of Here* — and judge it against the aims and ethos of the GPO film unit (see pages 83–84 of the textbook). Ask students whether reality television shows have any social or educative agenda, or whether they are merely for ‘entertainment’ (the modern-day equivalent of freak shows).

A common error made by students is to dismiss older documentary texts as ‘boring’. It is worth reminding them that such documentaries belong to an older media context, whereas the modern media landscape is one of saturation, commercialisation and intense competition for audiences/revenue. Older texts should be considered, as far as possible, in their original context of production/reception and not held up for comparison with contemporary texts.

Teaching tip

The section on radio in the textbook is deliberately short. If it is a special interest of yours, or if you have students who wish to focus on this area, you could look at the ‘Ideas for discussion and development’ box on page 48, which offers the opportunity for exploring in detail how radio has adapted to a changing media environment.

Print

Print media are covered in great detail in the textbook, and this should provide you with all the background information you need for a detailed study.

The ‘Political terminology’ section (pages 59–62) should be used to encourage greater understanding and precision in the use of political terms. Students often have little or no understanding of the differences between, for example, socialism and conservatism, or fascism and communism, yet these words are in everyday use. It might be worth discussing this section on its own to develop students’ understanding of each term’s meaning and application.

The press

When teaching about the press, the best way to start is to collect samples of a morning’s national newspapers for a compare and contrast exercise. You can then consider with students the choice of news topics, and the character, politics and ownership of the newspapers concerned. To deal with any questions you might be asked, you will need to be familiar with all the newspapers — including knowing about their history, ownership, politics and readership (both in terms of numbers and characteristics).

This is a good opportunity to encourage students to scan the newspapers daily throughout their course and to visit the papers’ websites regularly to compare their coverage of news.

Teaching tip

Split students into groups of three and give them a selection of national newspapers. Ask students to compare and contrast the newspapers' coverage of one of the main stories of the day. The exercise can be adapted in different ways, for example by comparing coverage of a story across all the national dailies to establish:

- the difference between tabloids and 'quality' newspapers
- the different political biases of the papers
- the discrepancies that arise in the reporting of the items
- the different agendas of different papers
- the different sense of priorities experienced by the reader

Ideas for discussion and development (page 67)

The start-up costs for a newspaper are prohibitively high, and in an already saturated market it is unlikely that any new publications will emerge (let alone survive). However, the internet provides a more cost-efficient means of producing and distributing online 'culturally targeted' newspapers. It may be worth carrying out some internet research to find out which ethnic/cultural groups in the UK are using e-media to address the cultural needs of their communities.

Magazines

Some history of the development of famous titles is provided in the textbook to contextualise the study (pages 69–78). A large amount of contemporary material is also included, with questions designed to get students talking about their own consumption of magazines.

Teaching tip

A useful exercise could be to ask groups of boys to analyse girls' magazines and girls to analyse lads' magazines. The feedback could provoke a lively class discussion.

Task (page 76)

The apparent objectification of women on the covers of lads' mags raises a number of crucial issues about representation. You could ask students to consider whether, in a supposedly 'post-feminist' era, such images are 'empowering' or 'disempowering' to women. You could also raise the notion of postmodern 'irony' and the idea that such images are an 'ironic' parody of the more outwardly sexist 1970s. (The poses are highly suggestive of the now infamous Pirelli calendar.) Does this 'ironic' referencing of past practices allow these texts to slip under the radar of political correctness?

E-media

When discussing e-media versions of print-based products, it is useful to compare the two versions by producing a list of pros and cons.

Questions have been raised about whether online versions of newspapers — being more interactive and immediate — will eventually replace the print versions. The reality is that, although print versions of newspapers may have to adapt further and some titles may fold, with print runs and circulations eventually being smaller, it seems unlikely that they will disappear altogether. The obvious conclusion, therefore, is that print media will be with us for many years to come.

With the use of e-media being part of most students' experience, you can make maximum use of their knowledge and engagement with these forms.

Cross-media texts

Documentary

This section has been angled to focus on the evolution of the documentary form, and your use of it will depend on your own interest in the topic and whether or not you wish to make it an area of special attention.

Ideas for discussion and development (page 87)

Supersize Me (Morgan Spurlock, 2004) is a good documentary text on which to carry out this type of analysis. Invite students to consider the types of people that Spurlock has focused upon as representative of the 'typical' McDonald's customer. Does his representation rely on negative imagery and stereotypes, and what impact do they have on the overall narrative of the film?

Ideas for discussion and development (top of page 88)

Touching the Void (Kevin McDonald, 2003) is a good example of a 'new' documentary, where media language techniques — of mise-en-scène and editing — are more reminiscent of film fiction techniques than documentary. Look out particularly for the use of colour codes and enigma codes.

Ideas for discussion and development (bottom of page 88)

A useful homework exercise would be to record the number of instances (e.g. over a week) in national or regional news broadcasts where 'amateur' mobile phone or handheld digi-cam footage shot by eye-witnesses is used to authenticate or validate news stories. It is worth pointing out to students that although such techniques have become fairly common practice — owing to the current availability of inexpensive equipment — there is a long history of amateur footage being used in this way, including filming the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963 and the beating of a black man, Rodney King, by Los Angeles police officers in 1991.

Film fiction

Since this is a media studies (and not a film studies) course, detailed histories of cinema and the star system have not been included in the textbook. (These are, in any case, widely available elsewhere.)

The material provided focuses on the marketing and consumption of film texts, the institutions, and the importance of film in reflecting and even changing social attitudes. Students can therefore concentrate on their own consumption of film and think about the ways in which films reflect attitudes, beliefs, values and ideology.

The list of key films on pages 95–98 is not intended to be comprehensive and you could usefully add to it following discussion with the class. Obviously, many students will never have heard of some of the films cited, but they provide important contextualisation for discussion of contemporary material.

Discussion of the influence of film on social attitudes could focus on the sex and violence debate. This has been an area of ongoing controversy since the abolition of the Hayes Code in 1963 (the code, established in 1930 and applied from 1934, was a 'voluntary' code of self-censorship which had restricted the representation of both sex and violence in US cinema).

Scenes depicting graphic violence and sexual relationships began appearing in films from the mid-1960s onwards. The issue is whether or not representations of this kind encourage similar behaviour in viewers or merely represent changing social attitudes. For further discussion of audience behaviour, see Chapter 10 of the textbook on audience theory (pages 233–41).

Ideas for discussion and development (page 94)

Jamie Oliver started his television career with the BBC (*The Naked Chef* series, BBC 2, 1998–99) but was forced to move to Channel 4 after the BBC objected to his commercial involvement with Sainsbury's. However, it is interesting to note that Nigella Lawson moved from Channel 4 to the BBC in 2007. Is the BBC able to tolerate Nigella's alleged involvement with Waitrose because it is 'unofficial'? Or has the BBC's attitude to commercial involvement changed in the last decade?
