6.1 The Media: Ownership, Control and the Pluralist versus Marxist Debate: 30-minute Pack

AQA 7192 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. For the longer questions write full sentences where asked. Time guidance: 30 minutes.

1 Item B: A report shows that an influential streaming platform's recommendation algorithm promotes content from a small set of production companies that pay for prioritised placement. Independent producers complain their shows get far fewer views unless they pay the platform. Regulators note the platform is both a distributor and a producer.

Using Item B and relevant theory, assess how far this example supports the view that digital platforms have reduced the power of traditional media owners.

(Total for Question 1 is 10 marks)

2 Explain two effects algorithms can have on the diversity of media content available to audiences.

(Total for Question 2 is 4 marks)

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3 Item C: A campaign group presents evidence that a small number of international tech platforms now control key means of distribution and set policies that determine which news brands can monetise content. The group argues this gives platform owners cultural and political power comparable to traditional media barons. Other researchers point out the platforms also enable independent creators to reach global audiences without traditional gatekeepers.

Discuss how far sociologists would agree that ownership and control are less important in the digital age than in the era of print and broadcast, using Item C and named perspectives. You should reach a judgement.

Using Item C and named perspectives, discuss how far sociologists would agree that ownership and control are less important in the digital age than in the era of print and broadcast.

(Total for Question 3 is 12 marks)

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Mark scheme · 6.1 The Media: Ownership, Control and the Pluralist versus Marxist Debate: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

Level 1 Simple or partial points showing limited knowledge, for example describing the item and making undeveloped links to one perspective. **1-3**

Level 2 Clear answers that apply the item to one or two perspectives, such as noting platforms both empower new producers and can concentrate power through paid promotion and platform ownership. **4-7**

Level 3 Well developed answers that use Item B to compare pluralist, Marxist and neo-Marxist views, weighing evidence that platforms decentralise production against evidence they reproduce concentrated control via algorithms, paid placement and vertical integration, and drawing a balanced judgement. **8-10**

Indicative content:

- Apply pluralist view: new digital platforms increase choice for consumers and give independent producers access to audiences without traditional gatekeepers, suggesting reduced traditional owner power.
- Apply Marxist view: platforms that combine production and distribution and favour companies that pay show that new tech firms can reproduce concentration and commercial bias, so traditional owners may lose some power but similar capitalist control persists under different companies.
- Apply neo-Marxist view: media professionals and algorithms may shape content; routines and platform policies reproduce dominant ideology without direct owner editorial orders, so ownership shifts but ideological control continues.
- Use Item B specifics: algorithmic prioritisation and paid placement show economic incentives shape visibility; the platform acting both as distributor and producer is a new form of vertical integration similar to conglomeration.
- Consider regulation and audience response: regulators noting the dual role suggests concerns about market power; audiences still choose but their choices are shaped by algorithmic recommendations.
- Balanced judgement could conclude that platforms change who holds visible power, but do not automatically reduce concentrated commercial control; power may be shifted to platform owners and algorithms rather than dispersed.

Question 2

identifies one effect, e.g. algorithms can personalise and diversify content recommendations **B1**

development, e.g. personalisation can expose users to niche content they would not otherwise find **B1**

identifies second effect, e.g. algorithms can create filter bubbles or favour high engagement content **B1**

development, e.g. this may reduce exposure to challenging or minority viewpoints if they generate less engagement **B1**

Answer: Algorithms can personalise recommendations and expose users to niche content, increasing apparent diversity, but they can also create filter bubbles or favour high engagement content, reducing exposure to challenging or minority viewpoints.

Question 3

Level 1 Basic statements about digital change with limited use of sociological theory and little or no balanced judgement. **1-3**

Level 2 Clear explanation of one or two perspectives applied to Item C, showing some balance, for example pluralist optimism about new voices vs Marxist concern about concentrated platform power. **4-6**

Level 3 Detailed discussion that compares pluralist, Marxist and neo-Marxist positions using Item C, considering aspects such as algorithms, vertical integration and user agency, with a tentative judgement. **7-9**

Level 4 A well developed, balanced evaluation that uses Item C to weigh evidence; considers how power may shift to platform owners and algorithms while also noting increased distribution opportunities for independents, and concludes with a supported judgement about continuity and change in ownership and control. **10-12**

Indicative content:

- Pluralist perspective: digital platforms increase choice and lower barriers to entry, supporting the idea that traditional ownership matters less because independent creators can reach audiences.
- Marxist perspective: new platforms concentrate power in new corporate hands, monetise content, and reproduce capitalist interests; ownership remains central though the identity of owners may change.
- Neo-Marxist perspective: professional routines, algorithms and platform policies reproduce dominant ideas and commercial priorities without direct editorial orders from traditional owners; ideological control continues via new mechanisms.
- Use Item C: the campaign group's evidence supports Marxist and neo-Marxist concerns about concentrated distributive power; other researchers' point supports pluralist claims about new opportunities for creators.
- Consider algorithms and monetisation: algorithmic gatekeeping and payment systems can limit which brands or creators prosper, showing continuities with earlier gatekeeping despite decentralised production.
- Consider regulation and global reach: platforms' global scale can outpace national regulation, giving them new influence, but grassroots movements and viral content show some limits to platform control.
- Conclusion could argue ownership and control remain important, but their forms and mechanisms have changed; power may be more fragmented in production but concentrated in distribution and algorithmic control.

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