# 6.1 The Media: Ownership, Control and the Pluralist versus Marxist Debate

AQA 7192 · about 65 minutes · Write-in edition

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

**Answer ALL questions. For the longer questions write full sentences where asked. Time guidance: 65 minutes.**

**1** Describe two ways digital platforms can change patterns of ownership and control in the media landscape.

**(Total for Question 1 is 4 marks)**

**2** 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 2 is 10 marks)**

**3** Identify and explain two ways owners can influence media content without direct editorial orders.

**(Total for Question 3 is 4 marks)**

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

**(Total for Question 4 is 4 marks)**

**5** 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 5 is 12 marks)**

**6** Define the term 'conglomeration' as used when discussing media ownership and control in mass media studies.

**(Total for Question 6 is 2 marks)**

**7** Define what pluralist media theory means by 'audience choice' in the context of media diversity and control.

**(Total for Question 7 is 2 marks)**

**8** Identify and explain two features of the pluralist view of media ownership and control.

**(Total for Question 8 is 4 marks)**

**9** Which perspective argues that media professionals, not owners, largely shape news content through routines and cultural assumptions?

- ☐ A) traditional Marxism
- ☐ B) pluralism
- ☐ C) neo-Marxism or the hegemonic view
- ☐ D) functionalism

**(Total for Question 9 is 1 mark)**

---

**10** Define 'media professional routines' in relation to neo-Marxist explanations of content production.

**(Total for Question 10 is 2 marks)**

---

**11** Item A: A national media group has recently bought a leading regional newspaper, a local TV station and a popular social app. The group issues a new 'efficiency' policy that shortens investigative time and centralises editorial decisions to the capital. Local journalists report less space for local stories and fewer challenges to powerful local businesses.

Using Item A and your own knowledge, explain two consequences of concentrated ownership and centralised editorial control for local public accountability.

**(a)** Identify one consequence shown in Item A and explain it. **(2)**

**(b)** Identify a second consequence shown in Item A and explain it. **(2)**

**(Total for Question 11 is 4 marks)**

# Mark scheme · 6.1 The Media: Ownership, Control and the Pluralist versus Marxist Debate

## Question 1

| | |
|---|---|
| identifies one way, e.g. platforms enable new global tech companies to own distribution channels | **B1** |
| development, e.g. this can shift power from traditional broadcasters to platform owners | **B1** |
| identifies a second way, e.g. platforms allow user generated content which can decentralise content production | **B1** |
| development, e.g. but platform algorithms and monetisation policies still influence what content succeeds | **B1** |

**Answer: Digital platforms allow global tech companies to own major distribution channels, shifting power from traditional broadcasters, and enable user generated content which decentralises production, although algorithms and monetisation still shape what gets attention.**

## Question 2

| | |
|---|---|
| **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 3

| | |
|---|---|
| identifies a way, e.g. control of budgets and resource allocation | **B1** |
| explains linking to content, e.g. limited budgets reduce investigative reporting and favour cheaper entertainment | **B1** |
| identifies a second way, e.g. appointment of editors and senior managers | **B1** |
| explains linking to content, e.g. hiring managers who share owner values shapes editorial priorities without explicit orders | **B1** |

**Answer: Owners can influence content by controlling budgets and resources, which limits investigative journalism and favours cheaper entertainment, and by appointing editors and managers who share owner values, shaping editorial priorities without explicit orders.**

## Question 4

| | |
|---|---|
| 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 5

**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.

## Question 6

identifies conglomeration as ownership of companies across different industries by one parent company or group (oe) **B1**

development, e.g. a media company owning TV channels, newspapers and a film studio **B1**

**Answer: Conglomeration is when one parent company or group owns companies across different industries, for example a media group owning TV channels, newspapers and a film studio.**

## Question 7

identifies audience choice as the idea that consumers pick what they want to watch or read, shaping media output **B1**

development, e.g. pluralists argue this limits owner control because media firms respond to audience demand **B1**

**Answer: Audience choice is the idea that consumers pick what they want to watch or read, so media firms respond to demand; pluralists argue this constrains owner control and promotes diversity.**

## Question 8

identifies feature one, e.g. market competition promotes a range of media products **B1**

explains how this produces diversity, e.g. producers create different content to attract different audiences **B1**

identifies feature two, e.g. audience choice and regulation keep media accountable **B1**

explains how this limits owner power, e.g. firms risk losing audiences or being fined so they avoid totally manipulative content **B1**

**Answer: Pluralists say market competition leads producers to offer a range of products to attract different audiences, producing diversity, and that audience choice plus regulation keeps media accountable because firms risk losing viewers or regulators sanctioning harmful practises.**

## Question 9

C (neo-Marxism or the hegemonic view) **B1**

**Answer: C**

## Question 10

identifies routines as standard practices journalists use, such as sourcing, deadlines and reliance on experts **B1**

development, e.g. these routines favour official voices and normalise dominant ideas in news output **B1**

**Answer: Media professional routines are the standard practices journalists use, such as sourcing from official experts and working to deadlines, which can favour official voices and normalise dominant ideas in news content.**

## Question 11

(a) identifies a consequence from the item, e.g. less investigative journalism into local power **B1**

(a) explains why, e.g. shorter investigative time and central control reduce resources and local editorial autonomy **B1**

**(a) Answer: One consequence is less investigative journalism into local power, because shortened investigative time and centralised control reduce resources and local editorial autonomy needed to challenge powerful local businesses.**

(b) identifies a second consequence, e.g. reduced coverage of local issues and voices **B1**

(b) explains why, e.g. centralised decisions favour national agendas and cost saving over local reporting **B1**

**(b) Answer: A second consequence is reduced coverage of local issues and voices, because centralised editorial decisions tend to favour national agendas and cost saving over local reporting.**