AQA A LEVEL SOCIOLOGY COURSE COMPANION:

MEDIA

This A Level Course Companion has been designed specifically to support teaching and learning, taking a systematic approach closely based on the AQA specification. The media companion takes each point from the specification and breaks it down into sections. Each section makes a clear link to the specification, provides a checklist of what needs to be known and then explains key content, using both classic and some more contemporary studies and examples.

The sections are:

- The new media
- Ownership and control of the media
- Globalisation and the media
- Selection and presentation of the news
- Media representations of age, social class and ethnicity
- Media representations of gender, sexuality and disability
- The relationship between the media and audiences.

Each section includes regular evaluation of theories, studies or perspectives. This is written in the explicit and developed way that students would need to try to emulate in the exam. Each section concludes with a list of possible exam questions along with expert examiner hints. While potential questions are endless (especially in relation to specific wording and the items) all the types of questions that could be asked are included, providing opportunity to write about all the core content.

There is a separate section specifically for the “outline and explain” 10 mark questions because, for Paper 2 Topics in Sociology, these always involve applying knowledge from one area of the subject to another and therefore the questions do not clearly belong in any one section.

It is important to remember that in sociology you are encouraged to apply themes, knowledge and analysis across topic areas, including between different substantive topics. When attempting questions from one section, you should always be aware that you can and should use information from other sections. Two key features of this companion help to facilitate this synoptic approach. These are:

- ”making the link”: where a connection between content in this module and that of another is explicitly explored.
- ”links to core themes”: where AQA's core themes of socialisation, culture and identity, social differentiation and power and stratification are applied to each area of the specification.

The language is designed to be reader-friendly, yet packed with key terminology and the sort of academic style that A Level students need to develop in order to excel in their exams.
GLOBALISATION & THE MEDIA

Specification: sociological explanations of the media, globalisation and popular culture.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Outline, explain, analyse and evaluate the impact of social policies on families introduced by

- The nature of global culture
- The significance of global media and global culture in contemporary society
- The effects of globalisation on the media and on popular culture
- Debates relating to cultural imperialism.

The media and global culture

Globalisation refers to the increasing interconnectedness of all the countries in the world. This interconnectedness exists in such areas as economics and business, politics, technology and culture. Sociologists who argue that a process of globalisation is occurring are known as globalists and globalists can be further divided into hyper globalists and pessimistic globalists. The former see globalisation as an overwhelmingly positive feature of contemporary society, while the latter see it as a damaging and dangerous process. There are also sociologists who question whether globalisation is really happening at all, and those who question the extent to which it is inevitable and irreversible. Lechner and Boli (2005) argue that increasingly we can talk about

Strinati (1995) argues that the media today is a global industry, and it is a global industry that promotes (through advertising and the promotion of brands and logos) other global industries. Together this creates a global culture. Because of the internet, as well as satellite and cable television channels, media content genuinely can be transmitted, almost instantly, to almost everywhere in the world.

McLuhan (1962) wrote about the global village. This is the idea that, through global communications (which have clearly developed a great deal since he was writing!) we have neighbours all around the world. We no longer always need the filter or gatekeeper of a professional media production to hear about what’s happening on the other side of the world: through new media we can hear it instantly and from the source.

The internet, in particular has influenced this development, as discussed by Flew. It has developed the extent to which we understand a shared global culture. Increasingly our norms and values are global rather than national, and the news increasingly offers a global outlook rather than just focusing on national issues.

The important question for sociologists is whether these changes are positive or negative. Have we seen an enrichment of culture around the world through hybridisation, or does the West dominate the globalisation of culture, in a process often described as cultural imperialism?

Cultural imperialism

A number of sociologists, including Nicola Fenton, have suggested that the globalisation of the media has led to cultural imperialism: the Western world dominating the rest of the world through the media and the marketing of its own cultural products. It is suggested this happens in a number of ways:

- **Global conglomerates.** These are companies that combine various business interests and operate on an international level. Many media companies own businesses across different countries (for example Rupert Murdoch’s News Corp, which owns newspaper, television and radio companies in
several countries). In this way, large media companies can dominate the media market in different countries.

- But they don’t need to, in order to reach the audience. Through global communications and new media, big media conglomerates do not need to own the local businesses in order to dominate the local schedules or to reach global audiences. First, media companies like Fox (which is part of News Corp – although this could soon change), Disney, Warner Brothers, etc. make films and programmes that are viewed all around the world. They are aggressively marketed and distributed, made with big budgets and big stars, and allow these companies to completely dominate media production in the world. McBride (1980) suggests this deluge of Western-created media changes the culture and values of countries elsewhere in the world. One impact of that cultural shift is to stoke demand for Western products.

- Advertising. The internet in particular has revolutionised how products are marketed around the world. Through new media such as Google and Facebook, companies who can pay for expensive marketing packages dominate what people see and read on an everyday basis, all over the world. Companies like Coca-Cola and McDonalds are everywhere. The term “cocacolanisation” was developed in the post-war period, describing the way American movies and music helped to fuel the sale of Coca Cola around the world, spreading American hegemony with it. George Ritzer wrote about “McDonaldisation” – a concept that suggests that one impact of globalisation is the world is becoming more-and-more like McDonalds: standardised and low-skilled.

- Cultural homogenisation. This is the idea that local cultures are killed off by globalisation and the whole world becomes the same, with the same shops, films, television programmes and brands. This idea was expressed clearly by Naomi Klein (2000) in her book *No Logo*.

- These ideas suggest that the globalisation of media and culture is effectively and simply Americanisation.

### Cultural Hybridisation

However, some sociologists, including many postmodernists, argue that this pessimistic globalist view is too bleak. They suggest that in fact culture moves in multidirectional flows not just from West to East. An example which is often used is Bollywood films: not only are they popular in many countries outside India, they have influenced Western culture too, with Hollywood films incorporating Bollywood-style features and some Bollywood stars crossing over into Western culture. Sreberny-Mohammadi (1996) points out that, as well as India, South America has a strong media industry.

By hybridisation, sociologists mean that local cultures, global cultures and alternative cultures have mixed, sometimes creating something new (a hybrid culture), sometimes existing side-by-side as cultural diversity. This optimistic hyperglobalist view sees cultural globalisation as a force for good, then, where cultural globalisation adds to our cultural options and enriches culture rather than displaces it.

Even Ritzer’s McDonalds example can be criticised, as McDonalds does not actually just export its American menu and experience and replicate it in every other country. In Delhi, the Big Mac is replaced by the Chicken Maharaja Mac, in Egypt you can order falafel. Hyperglobalists, then, point to McDonalds as an example of a global brand responding to local culture rather than obliterating it.

Cultural hybridisation is sometimes suggested as a halfway house between the idea of cultural divergence (what Huntington calls a clash of civilisations; the entrenching of mutually exclusive and incompatible regional cultures) and cultural convergence (cultural homogenisation, where the whole world becomes effectively the same.)

The idea of a cultural divergence or a clash of civilisations is also worth noting as a criticism of the concept cultural homogenisation: while Western culture is dominant in many ways, there is strong resistance to
this in some places, with a revival of fundamentalism and nationalism. One aspect of these sorts of movements is often to reject Western media. However, they also increasingly use new media technology to spread their message and organise their campaigns. For example, ISIS made significant use of YouTube and Twitter to recruit people to their fundamentalist terrorist movement.

Evaluating cultural hybridisation

- Some sociologists, including Curran, have suggested that postmodernist and pluralist hyperglobalists fail to take into account economics and economic inequality in their analysis. The West dominates global culture because of its economic power. It co-opts some aspects of other cultures if it is able to exploit it for a profit.
- Western consumers like to buy the exotic and therefore features of local cultures that can be marketed as exotic will be (and always have been, since the earliest days of Empire). Again, that is a long way removed from the sort of equality suggested by the concept of multi-directional flow.

MAKE THE LINK: New Media

The globalisation of the media has been rapidly accelerated by the development of new media. While all technological innovations in the 20th century have contributed to the globalisation of the media, especially the use of satellites for broadcasting, it is the digital revolution of recent years that has been most revolutionary.

For this reason, when answering questions about globalisation and the media, it is a good idea to include content from the new media section, and the same is true the other way around. Debates about globalisation are important to a detailed and well-developed response to questions about the new media.

Links to core themes

- This links very clearly to core themes of culture and identity. The concept of culture is not a straightforward one. What exactly do we mean about it? It is at once a term which refers to ways of life, ideas, values and behaviour, but also to arts and leisure pursuits. It is in this way separate from economics or politics, and yet all are closely intertwined. The idea of a global culture, then, is hugely important. Is there now a single way of life, set of ideas and values across the whole world? If so, what impact does that have on people’s identities?

Possible exam questions

Item M

Some sociologists argue that media globalisation, and the consequent globalisation of culture, is really cultural imperialism: the domination of global cultures by the West. In this view, local cultures are obliterated, leading to cultural homogenisation and Americanisation.

Applying material from Item L analyse two criticisms of the view that the globalisation of the media is a form of cultural imperialism. (10 marks)

Exam hint: This is a tricky question because of the item. The item is telling us all about globalisation of the media as cultural imperialism and does not suggest criticism. In other words, the hooks need to be turned on their head in order to answer the question. So “local cultures are obliterated” could be developed with reference to nationalist/separatist/fundamentalist resistance to cultural imperialism.
“Cultural homogenisation” could be developed in terms of contrasting it with cultural hybridisation. “Americanisation” could serve as an alternative hook, in relation to other centres of cultural production, such as Bollywood.

**Item N**
Some sociologists are pessimistic about globalisation in general and the globalisation of the media in particular. They worry about the erosion of traditional and local cultures and that Western culture will become dominant, in order for big media businesses – often based on America – to make lots of money.

Others are more positive, saying that culture flows in many directions, and increasingly we enjoy a mix of cultures.

Applying material from **Item N** and your own knowledge, evaluate the view that globalisation of the mass media has had a positive impact on society. (20 marks)

*Exam hint: This is quite a nice general essay, and the sort that could well be asked about media and globalisation. The item and the question nicely sets up a classic debate between globalisation of the media being a good thing: establishing a positive, global culture, with cultural hybridisation, etc. vs. a negative vision of cultural imperialism, homogeneity and potential conflict.*