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SCHOLARSHIP EXEMPLAR



Mana Tohu Mātauranga o Aotearoa
New Zealand Qualifications Authority

Scholarship 2025 Media Studies

Time allowed: Three hours
Total score: 24

ANSWER BOOKLET

Check that the National Student Number (NSN) on your admission slip is the same as the number at the top of this page.

Answer all THREE questions from Question Booklet 93303Q, and write your answers in this booklet.

Begin your answer to Question One on page 3, your answer to Question Two on page 11, and your answer to Question Three on page 19.

If you need more room for any answer, use the extra space provided at the back of this booklet.

Check that this booklet has pages 2–28 in the correct order and that none of these pages is blank.

Do not write in the margins (///). This area will be cut off when the booklet is marked.

YOU MUST HAND THIS BOOKLET TO THE SUPERVISOR AT THE END OF THE EXAMINATION.

Page 1

INSTRUCTIONS

Answer all **THREE** questions. Plan and write your answers below.

For EACH question:

- You should refer to a wide range of specific evidence to support your analysis.
- You may respond by agreeing or disagreeing with your chosen quotation or statement, OR by considering a variety of points of view.

Do NOT use the same material to answer more than one question.

QUESTION ONE: The relationship(s) between media and wider society

With reference to ONE of the quotations or statements below, **analyse the development** of a medium / media industry and / or the factors that shape it.

Quotations / statements (Choose ONE)

- ☐ 1. "Old media is now scared stiff. They finally have figured out that they must adapt – or die." *Ted Gioia*
- ☐ 2. "... in its current state, the country's [New Zealand] film and television sector is 'on its knees'." *Shayne Currie*
- ☐ 3. "AI will reshape industries; it will not end industries." *Nathaniel Whitemore*
- ☒ 4. Social media services are now the shapers of mainstream culture.

PLANNING

attention economy for-profit motives, consumers attention= currency. social media has shaped mainstream culture, by creating an "attention economy" which is now a part of daily life (as we can see how it has permeated into democratic health, a culture where nuanced views are lost etc)

Mainstream culture conclusion with analysis: it is continuing to shape a late-stage capitalism culture, attention economy is fueled by social media, and social media in turn also increases attention economy. YIPPEE!

ANSWER

Type your answer to **Question One** in the space below.

B I U     

Social media is everywhere; there's no doubt about it. Its prevalence reveals to us the significant cultural role social media has secured in 21st-century life, to the point where social media services are now the shapers of mainstream culture. Social media's for-profit motive has led to the actualisation of the attention economy. The attention economy operates with one key currency: consumer attention. The attention economy has gone on to reinforce social media's addictive design to the point where cultural values have substantially shifted in strong alignment with late-stage capitalism. By outlining how social media and the attention economy are inherently linked, I will demonstrate how social media has shaped changes in a key element of mainstream culture: global democratic health.

Herbert A. Simon first theorised the attention economy in 1971, saying that "a wealth of information will lead to a poverty of attention". The attention economy didn't become fully actualised, however, until the early 2000s when digital marketing created a digital economy, largely in part due to social media. O'Reilly Media coined the phrase "Web 2.0" in 2004, which marked an era of the internet that involved user engagement and user-created content, a defining element of social media. A major player in this development was Facebook. In 2004, digital advertising on Facebook was simply "Facebook Flyers": small, local advertisements to cover costs. Then, in 2007, "Facebook Ads" changed the game. Now, social media services had the ability to provide targeted advertising based on data harvested from users' previous online activity. The attention economy was up and running, fueled by digital marketing: a profit-based motive. The attention economy went on to further shape social media platforms, leading to the development of "Facebook gifts" and the iconic "like" button - the metric for measuring user engagement for further advertisements, showing that the attention economy and social media are inherently linked. This late-stage capitalist profit-based motive is integral to understanding how social media has gone on to shape mainstream culture so pivotally, as social media providers only have one desire: your attention. The implications for mainstream culture, namely democratic health, are left uncared for, off to the side, in favour of profit.

It's important to understand how social media is able to function so effectively as a cultural shaper; just how are these platforms able to hold our attention so mercilessly? The answer lies in "positive intermittent reinforcement". Every time you use social media, you don't know if you are going to "achieve success" (e.g see a video you like, or get a comment). In the hopes of achieving this success, we keep scrolling. Google design ethicist Tristan Harris says that "(you) are literally being reprogrammed, redesigned for this (social media usage)" due to our neuroplasticity: our brain's ability to be constantly shaped and moulded by stimuli. In fact, a 2018 neuroimaging study discovered that using social media, especially "liking" behaviours, activated core dopamine centres in your brain. Effectively, social media platforms are rewiring users' brains towards their continued use of these platforms for maximum profit in the attention economy. Algorithmic Recommendation Systems (ARSS) take this a step further, directly shaping what content users access to the point of hyperpersonalisation. ARSS ensure that users see content that will specifically engage them, utilising technology to further hold onto user attention. Mathematician Cathy O'Neil explains the danger: "algorithms are not inherently fair, you can't just use algorithms blithely and blindly and expect fair results". She applies this to social media by highlighting how a user's understanding of success on social media may be reliable, quality, perhaps humorous content, whereas the services simply care only to keep you engaged. In conjunction with positive intermittent reinforcement, ARSS fuel the attention economy through social media services.

The hyper-personalisation of social media has quickly led to a major shift in mainstream culture, where users only engage with thoughts and beliefs similar to their own in "echo-chambers" online. Author Eli Pariser summarises this by saying that "the internet is showing us what it thinks we want to see, not necessarily what we need to see". Social media services provide users with content that they know they will like, because this has been shown to hold their attention in the past, so it should continue to hold it in the future. This is a manipulation of the psychological phenomenon of "confirmation bias", where humans are more likely to engage with ideas that align with our own. Confirmation bias and hyper-personalisation-fueled echo chambers have quickly led to political polarisation on a significant scale. Politically extreme views are given a metaphorical megaphone through the design of social media services, as these are more likely to garner strong user engagement. Author Jonathan Haidt points out that "saying something reasonable is the most dangerous thing you can do" on social media. Social media services shape political divide within mainstream culture, as shown by the January 6th insurrection at the United States Capitol. Twitter played a major role in spreading the "stop the steal" message, with the explosive messaging gaining traction in a culture that had already been divided by excessive use of hyper-personalised and addictive social media services.

Furthermore, the fundamental pillars of democratic health globally are being upheaved by social media services in the most explicit example of shaping mainstream culture possible. Democratic health requires good, varied flow of information, which social media services are directly threatening. Journalism has lost substantial funding in the face of (more profitable) social media platforms. Statistics NZ stated that there has been a 32% decline in newspaper publishing services in the past 20 years - aligning exactly with the timeline of social media and attention economy development. The public is losing access to reliable information through a breakdown in journalistic integrity. Information is being sourced from social media services rather than reliable journalism due to the funding loss (a direct mainstream cultural implication of social media) because ARSS don't take into account if information is reliable, balanced, accurate, or well-researched (key elements of the journalistic process) if it generates user interest. Journalism is the fuel of the "public sphere". This concept was theorised by Habermas in 1991 as a social domain where public opinion can be formed. Designed to be independent of the government and to hold the government accountable, the public sphere is the rational, evidence-based discussion of ideas and issues relevant to the people. Although it has been theorised that social media services could shape mainstream culture through providing an "international public sphere", its divisive and hyper-personalised nature means that social media will never be able to achieve the level of integrity required for an international public sphere. Instead, social media services are shaping mainstream culture through the prevention of a balanced flow of information (echo-chambers) and access to reliable information (ARSS' for-profit idea of "success" over ethical obligations).

In conclusion, the design of social media, influenced by and influencing the continual development of the attention economy through the commodification of users' attention, is directly shaping mainstream culture by creating a divisive, politically polarised world that is a threat to democratic health. Even those who don't use social media are bound to feel the implications of these attention-hungry services, as social media services are now shapers of mainstream culture.

Page 2

QUESTION TWO: Media production

With reference to ONE of the quotations below, **demonstrate critical understanding of one medium and its production context**, including reference to your own production experience.

Quotations (Choose ONE)

- ☐ 1. "... knowing and understanding genre conventions informs my decisions ... and whether to conform to or subvert genre expectations." *Raelke Grimmer*
- ☐ 2. "'Make me care' – please, emotionally, intellectually, aesthetically, just make me care." *Andrew Stanton*
- ☐ 3. "With every film that I am doing, I am learning new things either about myself, or about film-making." *Sanya Malhotra*
- ☒ 4. "Part of film-making is always a guessing game, and part of it is always a game of trust." *Greg Kinnear*

PLANNING

a game of trust: will this work or will this not? effect on audiences through trial and error. taking risks: eg embracing stuart hall's reception theory through lady bird case study and how this shaped my subsequent design choices, experimental combined with linear narrative, repression, resurgence, recognition over equilibrium, disruption, new equilibrium, to provide more negotiated or oppositional readings, where viewers have to bring their own experiences to the table, resulting in more strong connection between them and my film.

trust in the audiences to make something of it, trust in what I put forward, that everybody could at least get something out of it

"mothlight" resurgence cutting scenes

"wes anderson" colour grading influence

"dreamwork" overlay with childhood videos

"man with a movie camera" sound choices

ANSWER

Type your answer to **Question Two** in the space below.

B I U     

By making my short film "In Colour", I discovered that film-making is all about taking risks and trusting that you understand your target audience enough for them to land. Greg Kinnear said that "part of film-making is always a guessing game, and part of it is always a game of trust". Through explaining how I used Stuart Hall's reception theory to guide my film-making process, and used influences from a range of films (including "Mothlight", "Dreamwork", and "Lady Bird") that were both traditional and experimental, I will demonstrate that decisions that are a little risky and involve a lot of trust are all parts of the film-making process.

"In-colour" explores the social messaging prevalent in day-to-day life, especially amongst older teenagers (my target audience) as they make career decisions: productivity trumps all. This is a popular message, with productivity being constantly portrayed as being at odds with, and superior to, artistic creativity. I wanted to create a film that connected with audiences' experiences of this message to show that artistic creativity should be encouraged into adulthood, as it elevates every aspect of life. Stuart Hall's reception theory, where viewers either accept your main "dominant" message, or take a "negotiated" or "oppositional" view through the case study of Lady Bird informed by the decision to take the largest risk of the whole film: I wanted to encourage negotiated readings of my film just as much as dominant readings. I saw how in Lady Bird, viewers were able to connect much more with the story line when there were elements that were heavily open-ended and personal, requiring higher viewer investment to the message though higher viewer engagement: they had to bring their own experiences to the table. Therefore, I decided to combine both a linear narrative structure, common in "coming-of-age" films, informed by Torodov's narrative structure, but slightly more open-ended, as well as integrating experimental elements. By reframing the "equilibrium", "disruption", and "new equilibrium" into "repression", "resurgence", and "recognition", I now had the means of telling a narrative, but in an experimental context, I would allow my viewers to bring their own lives to the table.

I had to have trust in the established experimental work to achieve success in my films resurgent stage. I wanted the "resurgence" stage to harness the same level of authenticity and natural integration seen in "Mothlight", where colours and common imagery are shown in rapid succession, but I wanted to use this technique in a way that was also disruptive. A "natural disruption"... a bit of a shot in the dark, and exactly the kind of technique that would generate a negotiated reading. I decided to cut in rapid shots of vague and non-specific artistic imagery (flowing brushstrokes, artful sketching, cohesive paint smearing, etc) within mundane and harshly framed symmetrical shots of daily life. The imagery I had reintroduced into the film was cohesive and demonstrated the same natural feeling of the rapid shots in Mothlight, but the contrast between the two types of living (with and without artistic creativity) wasn't strong enough yet. Having all the "resurgence" shots the same length of time wasn't effective, so I made them all random and sporadic times. This allowed my viewers to experience a strong sense of discomfort and attack, hopefully allowing them to not just accept my storyline that "art=good" in a simplistic way, but bring their own nuanced experiences of how artistic creativity is expressed in their daily life in a potentially negotiated reading.

Sometimes you take a guess... and you're wrong. This happened when I used old childhood videos towards the "recognition" stage of my film. I wanted to make a thematic connection between recognising the importance of artistic creativity and recognising the importance of connecting with your "true" younger self. I simply added in a few clips I had sourced, but this didn't work. Feedback from my classmates said that it felt random and not integrated enough into the recognition stage. So, I made the childhood videos more explicitly linked, but once again, I did it in a manner that required a high level of trust, as I was integrating an experimental element inspired by the overlays and extreme close-ups in "Dreamwork". Because I was filming just on an iPhone, I used the clear plastic from an old bread bag and covered the lens and then painted over it. Then, I recorded charcoal sketching with an extreme close-up on white paper. I then overlaid this footage with the childhood videos. The combination of bright painted colours and dark charcoal tonal values with the overlay setting makes it appear that the childhood footage was being actively "painted" and "sketched" onto the screen. This created an overall cohesion within the recognition stage, where art and childhood are intrinsically linked, combined with warmer colours and smooth editing to create a nostalgic tone at the end of my film. Without taking a guess at the effect of the experimental techniques and having trust in how I understood the needs of my audience to fully connect with the film, my film would not have been as successful at showing the importance of artistic creativity.

Without placing trust in both established film techniques (such as rapid sequencing and overlay) and trust in my own understanding of audience needs and tastes to slightly subvert film techniques and conventions (such as a strict linear narrative structure), my film would not have been able to connect with audiences as richly as it did. "In Colour" shows that artistic creativity always has a place in everyday life, and that part of film-making is always a guessing game, and part of it is always a game of trust.

Page 3

QUESTION THREE: The close reading of media texts

With reference to ONE of the quotations below, **analyse media texts (from any medium)** that you have read closely.

Quotations (Choose ONE)

- ☐ 1. "My films have often looked at the whole dilemma of identity as a straitjacket for people ..."
Todd Haynes
- ☐ 2. "You have to entertain people first before you can educate them."
Danny Boyle
- ☐ 3. "We have to break the rules if we want to tell stories in new ways."
Lulu Wang
- ☐ 4. "Film-making [or other media productions] is a way of understanding the world."
Alice Rohrwacher

PLANNING

we have to break the rules if we want to tell stories in new ways aligns perfectly with Thomas Schatz's evolution of genre theory.
Steve Neale: "film genres are made up of reputation and difference" Schatz takes this a step further and says that film genres are constantly evolving in alignment with changing cultural taste and familiarity with conventions: experimental, classic, parodic, and revisionist.
how stories are told in new ways through subverting conventions within vampire horror subgenre as it has evolved.
"breaking the rules"

F. W. Murnau 1922 *Nosferatu* potentially influenced the eternal Jew 1940 the Reich production of propaganda programme, plague = stylises vampirism as a cultural parasite
Taika Waititi 2014 *What We Do in the Shadows* (WWDiTS) post-modern humour, Maori, Wellington setting and Christianity mockery shows humour and points out how are dramatic representations of "monsters" are just that: dramatic (extreme copy of the character Peter from *Nosferatu* pokes fun at harmful Jewish depictions)
sometimes we steal pants, don't want to kill the police, more police, or even worse, Christians.
Ryan Coogler 2025 *Sinners* 2020 George Floyd, Black Lives Matter, "Jim Crow South", white guys = bad, music influence, hoodoo vs Christianity, setting allows for American discussion.

ANSWER

Type your answer to **Question Three** in the space below.

B I U

To tell stories in new ways, in alignment with changing cultural expectations and relevant issues, demands the changing and shifting of genres in film to evolve alongside society. Using Thomas Schatz's theory of genre evolution, I will examine the development of the vampire horror subgenre through the films *Nosferatu*, *What We Do in the Shadows* (WWDiTS), and *Sinners* in the context of their unique societal setting. The use of established conventions will only take you so far, in order to make new points and explore new ideas, these conventions must eventually be subverted. This demonstrates that "we have to break the rules if we want to tell stories in new ways" (*Lulu Wang*).

Vampire horror is a horror subgenre that focuses on vampires being the central villains, terrifying audiences through their blood-sucking and supernatural abilities. Vampire horror narratives often align with the villainous vampire following a "monstrous" stereotype that represents some social fear, with later iterations of the subgenre becoming increasingly political, questioning the underlying cultural influences of these established conventions. Such conventions include gothic settings, physical characterisation of the vampire as the "Other" (an external, foreign threat), and Christian iconography. Steve Neale defines film genre as a series of repetition and difference, with repeating conventions providing the familiar basis for audiences to understand the genre and differences keeping the genre fresh in line with audience demand and taste. Thomas Schatz takes this further in his theory of genre evolution, which is exemplified by the vampire horror subgenre, allowing new stories to be told in alignment with changing tastes and audience understandings of the genre through the four stages: experimental, classic, parodic, and revisionist. The experimental stage involves establishing the genre conventions, with a large amount of variety, until the classic stage is reached and these conventions become established. The parodic stage is highly self-aware and plays on viewers' understanding of conventions, often in a humorous and sarcastic manner to potentially critique elements of the genre. If a film genre has reached the revisionist stage, this is where a new story is beginning to be told, and, as Lulu Wang says, this requires the breaking of rules: often total subversion of genre conventions.

Nosferatu (1922) is a film by F.W. Murnau that fits into the "experimental" period of vampire horror. The social context behind this film is a frankly depressing Weimar Germany. In a state of total economic ruin post WW1, by the time Nosferatu was released, one US dollar was worth 4,000,000,000 marks in Weimar Germany: the young state was in total economic ruin. Jewish people were used as a scapegoat for this financial struggle, and this aligned with the increasing rise of antisemitism deliberately constructed by the increasingly powerful Nazi party. The characterisation of the main villain Count Orlock is considered highly anti-semitic, with his rat-like features (pronounced front teeth rather than elongated canines described in established vampiric literature), hooked nose, and freakish frame: Orlock is the embodiment of the xenophobic social fear raging through Weimar Germany, he is the "Other". Although not directly related, the Reich of Public Information and Propaganda in Nazi Germany played on similar conventions as they used film to fuel harmful depictions of Jewish people (The Eternal Jew (1940)). Christian iconography, such as main character Hutter finding refuge at a convent after escaping Orlock's castle, or being provided with a crucifix as a token of protection, aligns with the significant role religion played in daily life in the Weimar Republic. Despite the young nation being secular, the Catholic Church had a strong influence on the government's development, and the public voted to have religious influence in schools and policy. The Gothic setting of Orlock's castle creates a sense of drama and "foreignness" that allowed the film to tap into audience fears of the "other" penetrating the domestic sphere (Wisborg, the town that Orlock invades). This is further shown by the supernatural elements and association of Orlock with the plague that he brings upon Hutter's town. This tapped into a longstanding, misleading, antisemitic belief that Jewish people were the cause of the Black Death. The plague was inherently supernatural and a byproduct of Orlock's vampirism, which framed vampirism as a cultural parasite in the genre. This was the original story of vampire horror told, heavily flooded by anti-semitic subtext. In order to tell a story that was based on different cultural fears and beliefs, some of these conventions had to be broken.

WWDITS (2014) directed by Taika Waititi is a prime example of the "parodic" stage in genre evolution. Nearly 100 years after the release of Nosferatu, the vampire horror film genre was oversaturated. To make matters worse, the late 2000s and early 2010s saw a major boom in vampire content through the Twilight film franchise, which garnered a 3.3 billion box-office success. It was time that somebody did something a little different - it was time that somebody told a new story. Enter stage: Waititi. The parodic stage is inherently post-modern, and Taika Waititi uses this post-modern thematic focus to tell a new story that provokes audiences to question what our understanding of a "monster" is through understated Kiwi humour. The character of Petyr is a direct reference to Count Orlock in Nosferatu, and this use of extreme conventions alongside banal depictions of daily life following the juveniles and immature vampires in WWDITS makes it obvious to the audience just how extreme the monstrous depictions are in established vampire horror. Waititi has himself play the character of Viago, putting a Maori actor in a previously Jewish-coded physical role. This provokes further consideration, a new story explored, on how film is used to perpetuate cultural understandings of "monsters" like Orlock, often tying into harmful stereotypes. Comedic devices include the setting of Wellington, joking about Christianity's significance, and the vampires' dialogue, all of which encourage audiences to understand the conventions of the vampire horror genre, but also use this knowledge to poke fun and reevaluate who we consider to be "monsters". The vampires consider killing the police, but ultimately decide not to: "that could bring more police, or even worse: Christians". The character Viago describes how they get clothing: "sometimes you're sucking someone's blood and then you think... hmm those are really nice pants!". This ironic and self-aware humour at the use of tired conventions allows WWDITS to play upon a post-modern cultural context to tell a new story.

The revisionist stage of vampire horror is best exemplified through a film released only this year: Ryan Coogler's "Sinners" (2025). No longer was comedy appropriate to make commentary on the vampire horror subgenre. Instead, Coogler decided to actively subvert and break almost every core element of the genre to tell a new story that amplified the often-forgotten voices of Black Americans. This film comes about after a long history of racism in America, exemplified by the film's setting of the Jim Crow south, where segregation laws systematically oppressed Black people well into the mid-20th century. Additionally, social tensions have been high in America during the 2020's following the death of George Floyd in May of 2020, which reignited the Black Lives Matter Movement. Now, more than ever, there was high cultural demand (and the means to do so) to explore and share "new" Black voices and stories ("new" to media and media representation, not "new" to existence). By immediately choosing to have a non-Gothic setting (instead, choosing 1932 Jim Crow America), Coogler was breaking a convention, breaking a rule, to tell a new story of the uniquely African-American experience. The cultural influences of Weimar Germany were no longer applicable in Sinners. In fact, the "other" characterisation of the vampire villain was totally flipped on its head through the use of a white vampire (Remmick) acting as a cultural parasite to the Black community. This cultural parasitism is further exemplified by Coogler's use of music as a metaphor for cultural appropriation: "white folks like our music just fine, they just don't like the people who make it". This "new" thematic focus ties into discussions of Christian religious hypocrisy that totally "breaks the rules" of significant Christian conventions in vampire horror. The character of Annie uses Hoodoo rather than Christianity to protect Stack against vampires with a necklace token, showing how the film is moving away from Eurocentric conventions to tell a new story. Religious hypocrisy is explored to tell the "new" story of how religion is often used to assimilate and control oppressed groups, rather than genuinely lift them up through Remmick's hypocritical justifications of his actions by portraying himself as a victim ("the men who forced that religion on me, who took my father's land..."). The character Delta Slim ties the link between religion, music, and the power of breaking conventions to tell a new story in this quote: "music wasn't forced upon us like that religion. We brought this from home".

It was absolutely necessary that the genre conventions were, at first, teased, then fully "broken" to elevate the genre to a whole new level, where new stories with significant political weight could be brought to the silver screen. Over 100 years since Nosferatu let the vampire subgenre begin, the conventions that Murnau helped to establish are best used to tell new stories within the genre when they are "broken" such as in WWDITS and Sinners. Thomas Schatz's stages of genre evolution show that conventions demand to be ever-changing and broken, that genre isn't a static classification, and that we have to break the rules if we want to tell stories in new ways.

Scholarship

Subject: Media Studies

Standard: 93303

Total score: 15

Q	Score	Marker commentary
1	5	The candidate demonstrated convincing knowledge of social media as a shaper on mainstream culture, as it relates to the attention economy, in response to their chosen statement 4: "Social media services are now the shapers of mainstream culture". The candidate consistently engaged with the statement, beginning with a clear overview. They provided a clear analysis of algorithms (ARS) and the way they shape content users, including echo chambers, confirmation bias, supported by some relevant evidence (January 6 insurrection, etc). They also provided some insightful reasons and consequences of social media influence on mainstream culture and the health of democracies.
2	5	The candidate discussed their short film, in relation to Stuart Hall's reception theory and film texts Lady Bird and Mothlight, integrating their chosen quotation 4: "Part of film-making is always a guessing game, and part of it is always a game of trust" (Greg Kinnear) throughout with a detailed, clearly referenced analysis of their film process. They referenced narrative theory (Tzvetan Todorov), in relation to their own production and offered insightful reflections/evaluations of their creative process. Overall, the candidate offered an engaging and thoughtful response that addressed the quotation.
3	5	The candidate provided a convincing understanding of the vampire genre via a range of film texts (Nosferatu, What we do in the Shadows, and Sinners), in response to their chosen quotation 3: "We have to break the rules if we want to tell stories in new ways" (Lulu Wang). They offered some film theory (Steve Neale and Thomas Schatz) and analysed how the genre has evolved over time with relevant evidence. Overall, the candidate created a convincing argument, in relation to the quotation.