

THE WEIGHT OF WORDS

A Foundation in Journalism Practice

COMPLETE STUDY GUIDE & QUESTION BANK

With Model Answers for All 18 Chapters

180 Questions · 18 Chapters

Foundation · Intermediate · Advanced

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Questions are labelled by level and type:

[Foundation] — 100-200 level | [Intermediate] — 300-400 level | [Advanced] — postgraduate

D = Definition/Short Answer | T = Theoretical | E = Essay

Model answers are starting points. Strong exam responses develop the points further with specific examples, additional citations, and personal analysis.

CHAPTER 1

What is Mass Communication?

SECTION A — Definitions & Short Answer

Q1 [Foundation] D Define mass communication and explain how it differs from interpersonal communication.

Model Answer

Mass communication is the process by which messages are produced by professional communicators and transmitted through media technologies to large, heterogeneous, and geographically dispersed audiences simultaneously. It differs from interpersonal communication in three fundamental ways: scale (mass communication reaches thousands or millions at once; interpersonal communication typically involves two or a small number of people); mediation (mass communication requires a technological medium — newspaper, broadcast, digital platform — while interpersonal communication can be face-to-face and unmediated); and feedback (interpersonal communication allows immediate, direct feedback while mass communication traditionally involves delayed and indirect feedback). McQuail (2010) identifies further characteristics: one-to-many message flow, the public nature of content, and the institutional character of production.

Q2 [Foundation] D What is the communication process? Name and explain its key components.

Model Answer

The communication process is the sequence through which a message travels from sender to receiver. Its components are: Source/Sender (the originator — in mass communication, typically a professional communicator or institution); Encoding (converting the intended message into transmissible form — words, images, audio); Message (the content being communicated); Channel/Medium (the means of transmission — newspaper, radio, television, internet); Decoding (the receiver's interpretation of the encoded message); Receiver/Audience (the individual or group receiving the message); Feedback (the receiver's response); and Noise (any interference distorting the message — technical, semantic, or environmental). Shannon and Weaver's (1949)

mathematical model introduced noise as a concept; Schramm (1954) emphasised the role of shared experience between sender and receiver in successful communication.

Q3 [Foundation] D What are the four traditional functions of mass media as identified in communication theory?

Model Answer

Harold Lasswell (1948) identified three primary functions: surveillance of the environment (monitoring and reporting events — the news function); correlation (interpreting and explaining events — the editorial and analytical function); and transmission of social heritage (education and cultural continuity — the socialisation function). Charles Wright (1959) added a fourth: entertainment (relaxation, diversion, and pleasure). These four functions — surveillance, correlation, cultural transmission, and entertainment — remain the foundational framework for analysing what media does in society. Critical scholars have also identified a dysfunctional dimension: media can distort, manipulate, or suppress information in ways that serve powerful interests rather than the public good.

Q4 [Foundation] D What is the difference between a mass medium and a social medium?

Model Answer

A mass medium is a technology-based channel through which professional communicators transmit standardised messages to large audiences — newspapers, radio, television. A social medium is a digital platform designed around user interaction, network relationships, and user-generated content — Facebook, Twitter/X, WhatsApp, TikTok.

The distinction has blurred significantly in the digital age. Social platforms now serve as primary news distribution channels; traditional media organisations maintain active social media presences; and citizen journalists sometimes perform mass communication functions reaching millions. However, meaningful differences remain: mass media production is institutionalised, editorially filtered, and professionally verified; social media content is largely unfiltered and unverified. The distinction is better understood as a spectrum than a binary.

SECTION B — Theoretical Questions

Q5 [Intermediate] T Critically examine the claim that mass communication is an instrument of change. Use Nigerian examples.

Model Answer

The claim rests on mass communication's capacity to move knowledge from those who hold it to those who need it, shift public awareness, and mobilise action. Nigerian evidence is substantial. Nnamdi Azikiwe's West African Pilot contributed demonstrably to Nigeria's independence movement by shaping political consciousness against colonial rule. The #EndSARS movement (October 2020) demonstrates mobilising capacity: social media functioned as mass communication channels through which citizen documentation of police brutality reached national and international audiences, producing domestic protests and diplomatic pressure on the Nigerian government.

However, the claim must be qualified. Mass communication can equally serve the status quo — legitimising existing power structures, as Herman and Chomsky's (1988) propaganda model demonstrates. The change-making potential depends on who controls the medium, whose interests it serves, and whether it reaches communities whose circumstances need to change. The instrument is powerful; the direction of that power is determined by those who wield it.

Q6 [Intermediate] T Compare the hypodermic needle model of media effects with the two-step flow theory. Which better explains media influence in Nigeria today?

Model Answer

The hypodermic needle model (Lasswell, 1927) holds that media messages are injected directly into passive audiences, producing uniform, predictable effects — a powerful stimulus producing a predictable response. It was developed in the context of wartime propaganda and early mass media, and has been largely discredited as a general model of media effects because it underestimates audience agency and the variability of individual responses to the same message.

The two-step flow theory (Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet, 1944) proposes that media messages first reach opinion leaders — individuals who actively consume media and are socially connected — who then relay and interpret those messages to less active audiences through interpersonal communication. This model accounts for the social mediation of media messages and the role of trusted community figures in shaping how information is received.

In Nigeria today, the two-step flow model has significantly greater explanatory power. Community leaders, religious figures, social media influencers, and professional networks function as opinion leaders through whom media messages are filtered and interpreted. The viral spread of information through WhatsApp networks — where messages are shared and commented upon within community groups before reaching many individuals — is essentially a digital form of two-step flow. The hypodermic model's passivity assumption is inconsistent with the active, social nature of Nigerian digital media consumption.

Q7 [Intermediate] T What is the difference between mass communication and journalism? Is all journalism mass communication?

Model Answer

Mass communication is the broader category: the process of transmitting messages to large audiences through media technologies. Journalism is a specific professional practice within that category: the systematic gathering, verification, and communication of news and information of public significance according to specific ethical and methodological standards. All journalism involves mass communication (it is designed to reach a public audience through media channels), but not all mass communication is journalism (advertising, entertainment, propaganda, and public relations also use mass communication channels without performing journalism's truth-seeking and democratic accountability functions).

The distinction matters practically. A press release distributed through a media channel is mass communication but not journalism. A fact-checked investigation published by Premium Times is both. The ethical obligations of journalism — accuracy, verification, independence, accountability — are not obligations of mass communication generally. This is why journalism education is distinct from communications education more broadly, and why the journalism student needs to

understand both the shared infrastructure of mass communication and the specific professional standards that distinguish journalism within it.

SECTION C — Essay Questions

Q8 [Advanced] E 'Mass communication is not a neutral tool — it reflects and reinforces the values of those who control it.' Discuss with reference to theory and Nigerian media practice. (Suggested length: 1,000 words)

Model Answer

A strong response should develop four elements:

1. **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:** Introduce Herman and Chomsky's (1988) propaganda model — five filters (ownership, advertising, official sourcing, flak, ideology) that systematically bias media content toward elite interests. Connect to Althusser's ideological state apparatus theory and McChesney's (2008) political economy of media framework.
2. **NIGERIAN HISTORICAL APPLICATION:** Apply to colonial press (explicit instrument of colonial control), regional government ownership (media as tool of regional political power), military era (state media as propaganda instrument; independent media suppressed), democratic era (politically connected private ownership creating structural conflicts of interest — Chapter 16 of the textbook).
3. **THE COUNTER-NARRATIVE:** The independent Nigerian journalism tradition — Azikiwe's nationalist press, TELL magazine under Abacha, Premium Times, FactCheckAfrica — demonstrates that media can resist the values of its controllers. This counter-evidence does not disprove the model but qualifies its determinism.
4. **CONCLUSION:** The tool reflects owner values structurally, but journalists and citizens have consistently contested that reflection. The student who understands both the structural constraint and the history of resistance is better equipped to practise ethical journalism within imperfect institutional conditions.

Higher marks for: specific Nigerian examples; theoretical citations; recognition of the tension between structural constraint and individual agency; a conclusion that goes beyond restating the question.

Q9 [Advanced] E 'The digital revolution has democratised mass communication, giving voice to the previously voiceless.' Critically evaluate this claim in the Nigerian context. (Suggested: 1,200 words)

Model Answer

A strong response should engage all three of these dimensions:

1. **THE DEMOCRATISATION ARGUMENT:** Digital technology has lowered barriers to mass communication production — any smartphone owner can produce and distribute content reaching national or global audiences. #EndSARS (2020) and #BringBackOurGirls (2014) demonstrate that citizen voices have achieved genuine national and international impact through digital channels previously unavailable to non-institutional communicators.

2. THE COUNTER-ARGUMENT — WHO IS ACTUALLY VOICELESS?: Digital democratisation is limited by internet access, which in Nigeria is concentrated in urban areas and among higher-income groups. The communities with least political voice — rural poor, elderly, communities in conflict zones without connectivity — are precisely those least reached by digital democratisation. The 'voiceless' who most need voice are often those the digital revolution reaches least.

3. THE NEW GATEKEEPERS: Platform algorithms, content moderation policies, and network effects create new forms of gatekeeping that are less visible than traditional editorial gatekeeping but equally powerful. Twitter/X's content moderation affected #EndSARS coverage; Facebook's algorithm determines whose voice spreads and whose does not; the digital advertising model creates commercial incentives that shape which voices are amplified.

4. CONCLUSION: The digital revolution has partially democratised mass communication — creating genuine new opportunities for previously marginalised voices while simultaneously creating new forms of exclusion. The democratisation is real but uneven, incomplete, and contested.

Q10 [Advanced] E Using the Aluu 4 tragedy as a case study, analyse how the failure of mass communication contributed to the deaths of four young men, and what this reveals about journalism's democratic function. (Suggested: 1,000 words)

Model Answer

A strong response should develop:

1. THE FACTS OF ALUU: On 5 October 2012, four University of Port Harcourt students — Lloyd Toku-Mike, Tekena Elkanah, Ugonna Obuzor, and Chidiala Biringa — were lynched by a mob in Aluu community, Rivers State, after being falsely accused of theft by a local debtor they had come to collect money from. The false information spread rapidly through the community; accurate information — that they were students, not thieves — spread too slowly and too narrowly to prevent the violence.

2. THE COMMUNICATION FAILURE: Apply misinformation theory (Chapter 14): the false accusation spread through informal interpersonal and community channels (not mass media) with the speed of rumour and the authority of community consensus. Mass media's absence — no journalist was present, no verified account reached the community in time — allowed misinformation to dominate. The first communication failure was the absence of a functioning public information environment in which false accusations could be quickly challenged.

3. JOURNALISM'S DEMOCRATIC FUNCTION: The case illustrates that journalism's truth-seeking function is not only a professional aspiration but a democratic necessity with life-or-death consequences. A functioning local journalism ecosystem in Ikwerre LGA might not have prevented the specific incident, but the sustained presence of credible, community-embedded journalism creates an information environment in which rumour has less total authority.

4. WHAT IT REVEALS: That the communities with least journalism coverage are those most vulnerable to the consequences of information disorder; that journalism's democratic function is not abstract but concrete; and that journalism education's civic purpose is grounded in real stakes.

CHAPTER 2

The Mass Media: Types, Characteristics & Their Social Place

SECTION A — Definitions & Short Answer

Q1 [Foundation] D Define print media. What are three characteristics that distinguish it from broadcast media?

Model Answer

Print media refers to mass communication channels that transmit information through printed text and images — primarily newspapers, magazines, journals, and books. Three distinguishing characteristics compared to broadcast media:

Permanence: print content persists physically and can be re-read, archived, and referenced. Broadcast content is ephemeral unless recorded.

Reader control of pace: readers consume print at their own speed and can re-read passages. Broadcast imposes its own pace on the audience.

Depth capacity: print can sustain longer, more complex arguments than broadcast formats typically allow — this is why investigative journalism has traditionally been strongest in print.

A fourth worth noting: geographic limitation. Print distribution is physically constrained in ways broadcast is not, though digital platforms have significantly transformed this for online publications.

Q2 [Foundation] D What is the difference between a broadsheet and a tabloid newspaper?

Model Answer

The terms refer to both physical format and editorial character. Physically, a broadsheet is a large-format newspaper (approximately 60cm x 38cm); a tabloid is approximately half that size. Editorially, broadsheets are associated with serious, long-form journalism for educated professional audiences — The Guardian Nigeria, Vanguard, This Day. Tabloids are associated with shorter, more sensationalised content with stronger emphasis on celebrity, sport, and crime.

In contemporary Nigerian journalism, the size distinction has become less meaningful as many publications produce digital editions alongside print, and some formerly broadsheet publications have adopted tabloid formats for economic reasons (smaller paper reduces print costs). The editorial distinction — depth and tone — remains analytically relevant.

Q3 [Foundation] D List and explain four characteristics of broadcast media.

Model Answer

Immediacy: broadcast can transmit information in real time as events unfold, giving it a breaking news advantage over print.

Reach: broadcast signals reach geographically remote audiences who may lack literacy or print distribution infrastructure — particularly significant in Nigeria where radio reaches rural communities newspapers do not.

Simultaneously shared experience: broadcast creates a collective public experience — a radio broadcast heard by many people simultaneously creates a sense of shared national or community moment.

Audio-visual impact: broadcast's combination of sound and image creates emotional and mnemonic impact that printed text cannot replicate.

A fifth relevant in the Nigerian context is transience — broadcast content disappears as it is transmitted, creating both immediacy and impermanence that distinguishes it from print's archival quality.

Q4 [Foundation] D What is digital media? Name three ways it differs from traditional mass media.

Model Answer

Digital media refers to content created, distributed, and consumed through digital technologies — computers, smartphones, and internet-connected devices. It includes online news publications, social media platforms, podcasts, streaming services, and digital-only media organisations.

Three differences from traditional mass media: Interactivity (digital media enables two-way communication — audiences can comment, share, respond, and create their own content in ways traditional broadcast and print do not allow); Convergence (digital platforms carry text, audio, video, and interactive content simultaneously, collapsing the distinct formats of print and broadcast); and Personalisation (digital platforms can tailor content to individual users through algorithmic recommendation — traditional mass media delivers the same content to all audience members).

SECTION B — Theoretical Questions

Q5 [Intermediate] T Examine how digital media has disrupted the traditional distinction between print, broadcast, and online journalism.

Model Answer

The traditional tripartite division was clear in the pre-digital era because each form operated through distinct technologies with distinct production processes, distribution mechanisms, and audience relationships. Digital media has disrupted this division in three specific ways:

Convergence: digital platforms allow the same content to incorporate text, audio, video, and interactive elements simultaneously — a Premium Times investigation may include the full document being reported, audio of an official's statement, and video of a press conference, collapsing categories previously distinct.

Distribution: newspapers now publish first to digital platforms where content is consumed through the same screen delivering streaming video and social media. The distribution channel no longer determines content type.

Production: smartphone technology means citizen journalists and professional journalists alike produce audio, video, and text simultaneously, making production distinctions between print and broadcast journalists operationally meaningless in many newsrooms.

However, the disruption is not total erasure. Editorial cultures, professional identities, and production values associated with print and broadcast journalism persist within digital organisations. The categories survive as professional traditions even as technological distinctions collapse.

Q6 [Intermediate] *T* Assess the argument that radio remains the most important mass medium in Nigeria despite the rise of digital media.

Model Answer

The argument rests on three foundations:

Reach: Nigeria's internet penetration remains below 50% of the population, concentrated in urban areas. Radio penetration is significantly broader, reaching rural communities, elderly populations, and low-income groups that digital media does not reach. The National Bureau of Statistics consistently shows radio as the most widely accessed information medium outside major cities.

Multilingualism: radio broadcasts in Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Ijaw, Edo, and dozens of other Nigerian languages — making it the only mass medium reaching communities in their primary languages at scale. Digital media is overwhelmingly English-language.

Oral culture compatibility: radio's audio-only format is compatible with literacy levels and oral communication traditions in communities where text-heavy content is less accessible.

The counter-argument: among urban, educated, younger Nigerians, digital media has overtaken radio as the primary information source — and this demographic is disproportionately influential politically and commercially.

The assessment must be audience-specific: for the urban educated elite, digital media dominates; for the Nigerian population as a whole, radio's breadth and language reach maintain its claim to primacy as a mass medium.

Q7 [Intermediate] *T* What is media convergence? What are its implications for journalism practice and media organisations?

Model Answer

Media convergence refers to the merging of previously distinct media forms, industries, and technologies into integrated digital platforms. Jenkins (2006) identifies three dimensions: technological convergence (the merging of media devices — the smartphone carries functions previously performed by telephone, camera, radio, television, and newspaper); content convergence (the same content appearing across multiple platforms — a story published simultaneously as text, podcast, and video); and ownership convergence (media organisations acquiring assets across previously distinct sectors — a company owning newspapers, television stations, and digital platforms simultaneously).

Implications for journalism practice: multi-skilling (journalists are expected to produce content across formats — text, audio, video, social media — that previously required distinct specialists); workflow compression (content moves from reporting to publication faster across digital platforms, reducing the verification time traditional print workflows allowed); and audience fragmentation (convergence produces multiple audience platforms requiring tailored content strategies rather than single-medium publication). For media organisations: convergence creates revenue diversification opportunities but also increases competition from non-traditional media actors, including technology platforms that distribute journalism without producing it.

SECTION C — Essay Questions

Q8 [Advanced] E Critically evaluate Marshall McLuhan's proposition that 'the medium is the message.' How does this apply to the Nigerian media landscape? (Suggested: 1,000 words)

Model Answer

A strong response should develop:

1. **McLUHAN'S ARGUMENT:** McLuhan (1964) holds that the form of a medium — its specific technological characteristics — shapes human experience and social organisation more fundamentally than the content it carries. Television does not simply carry stories; its visual-temporal properties restructure the audience-narrative relationship. Radio creates one kind of national imagining; print creates another; television a third.
 2. **PRODUCTIVE APPLICATIONS IN NIGERIA:** The spread of radio in the colonial and post-independence era did not simply distribute information — it created a new kind of national imagining, an experience of simultaneous Nigerians sharing a broadcast moment. The mobile phone's diffusion — including in communities without reliable electricity or internet — restructured the economics of personal communication, political organisation, and market information in documented ways.
 3. **LIMITATIONS IN THE NIGERIAN CONTEXT:** McLuhan's framework assumes Western patterns of media consumption. In Nigeria, the same medium — radio — has simultaneously served as military propaganda, vernacular cultural expression, and political accountability journalism. The meaning of the medium is shaped by its content, ownership, regulatory context, and social conditions of reception — not only by its technological form. McLuhan captures something real but overstates its explanatory power.
 4. **CONCLUSION:** The medium shapes but does not determine. A journalism student informed by McLuhan will attend to how different media formats create different relationships with audiences — but will not conclude that the format is the whole story.
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Q9 [Advanced] E 'New media does not replace old media — it repositions it.' Evaluate with reference to Nigerian print journalism in the digital era. (Suggested: 1,000 words)

Model Answer

A strong response should engage:

1. **THE DISPLACEMENT THESIS:** Evidence for declining Nigerian newspaper circulation; the closure or downsizing of print operations at major Nigerian titles; the migration of advertising revenue from print to digital platforms.
2. **THE REPOSITIONING COUNTER-THESIS:** Newspapers repositioning as investigative and analytical brands rather than breaking news sources — Premium Times launched as digital-first investigative journalism, demonstrating that the investigative function historically associated with print journalism is viable in digital form. The Punch's digital subscription launch represents a repositioning toward reader revenue rather than advertising dependency.
3. **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:** Bolter and Grusin's (1999) remediation theory — new media does not eliminate old media but forces it to redefine its identity. Print journalism's new identity emphasises what it does that digital cannot easily replicate: long-form depth, document-based investigation, verified factual authority.
4. **CONCLUSION:** Both displacement and repositioning are occurring simultaneously in Nigerian print journalism. The displacement is real — print volumes and revenues are declining. The repositioning is also real — serious print and digital brands are carving out sustainable niches based on depth and credibility. The question is whether the repositioned form preserves the democratic functions of journalism that print historically performed.

Q10 [Advanced] E A media organisation owns a newspaper, a television station, a radio station, and a digital news platform. What are the editorial and democratic implications of this cross-media ownership? (Suggested: 800 words)

Model Answer

A strong response should address:

1. **THE CONCENTRATION PROBLEM:** Cross-media ownership by a single entity concentrates editorial power — one owner controls multiple channels through which a community receives information. Herman and Chomsky's (1988) first filter (ownership) applies across all platforms simultaneously. If the owner has political interests, those interests shape the editorial line of multiple media types reaching the same audience from different directions.
 2. **SYNERGIES AND EFFICIENCIES:** Cross-media ownership allows content sharing across platforms (a newspaper investigation becoming a television documentary and a podcast), potentially enabling more ambitious journalism than any single platform could finance. Convergence offers a public interest rationale.
 3. **DEMOCRATIC IMPLICATIONS:** Media pluralism — the presence of genuinely independent, competing editorial voices — is a democratic value. Cross-media ownership by a single entity, even if that entity maintains formal editorial independence between its outlets, reduces the diversity of perspectives available in a media market. The BBC model (public ownership with statutory editorial independence) and the trust model (Guardian) demonstrate alternatives that preserve editorial independence while enabling multi-platform operations.
 4. **REGULATORY RESPONSE:** The NBC Act's cross-media ownership restrictions in Nigeria, and their inconsistent enforcement, illustrate both the regulatory recognition of the democratic risk and the institutional failure to manage it adequately.
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