**AIU EXAM – Mass Communication: Culture, and Media Literacy**

**School**: Human & Social Studies

**Major**: International Relations

**Questions Part A (Chapter 1)**

1. What is culture? How does culture define people?

Culture evolves on phenomena that impact (positively or negatively) and sustain lasting

meaning to community, groups, individuals, country and the world. It is socially

constructed and maintained through communication. Culture may limits, liberates,

divides as well unites people. Further, it defines the reality of society, and shapes the

way people think, feel and act. (Baran, 2019)

Culture defines people in a pluralistic manner and divisions. Pluralistic manner can be

seen where all citizens of a country are of one nationality, speaking the same language,

common food etc., but are divided on ethnicity, gender, dress code, economic status or

religious belief. For example in my country Guyana, we are all Guyanese but divided on

ethnicity and religious beliefs. We have two major political parties- Peoples’ National Congress Reform (PNCR) and Peoples’ Progressive Party (PPP) formed in 1960s leading up to our country being an independent state in 1966. PNCR is heavily dominant by Blacks and the PPP is heavily dominated by East Indians. The Blacks came to Guyana as slaves, and East Indians as indentured servants therefore, both parties were built on separate culture and ideology that will be rooted and still practice among their supporters and the society at large.

Culture can criminalized or decriminalized individuals, groups or a particular ethnic

group. For example, after 9/11 attacks on the USA, Muslims are being discriminated

overtly in the US, despite they are American citizens and have no criminal records or

intended to be among criminal activities. (Baran, 2019).

On the other side, white Americans (civilians) can who openly bear arms when the

situation does not require such, identify themselves to be members of militia groups

Oath keepers, Percenters among others, and strongly argue to justify their actions on the

basis of the Constitution and the laws. It has been reported by top US Officials and

ranking officials within Homeland Security that, those militias pose more threat

domestically than Al Qaeda and ISIS. They conferred that the true enemy lies at home. (O'Connor, 2021)

Therefore, it is established that the Militias’ group are operating within the laws or

Constitution therefore, it is cultural that they would not be treated pre-control measures

or subject to any discrimination unless they breach the laws or the Constitution.

However, is it cultural that the Muslims be discriminated despite they are operating or

conducting themselves within the confine of the same laws and Constitution, or is it

white supremacy as a culture takes precedent over non-whites despite you are citizens of

the same nationality. Hence, these are some aspects where culture defines people.

2. What is communication? What is mass communication?

Communication is the transmission of a message from a source (sender) to receiver, but

to confirm that communication takes place, the message must be transmitted or

communicated via a medium (spoken words, action, letter, phone, radio, etc.,) to the

receiver thereby generating a response or feedback. Generally, it is expected that the

source of the message will be at the understanding of the receiver. However, should

there be a language barrier or distortion through the medium, the receiver in his/her

response now become a source, returning a response to the original source who now

becomes a receiver. These activities make communication becomes a reciprocal and

ongoing process among the parties in an effort to create shared meaning. Hence,

communication is better defined as the process of creating shared meaning. (Baran, 2019)

Mass Communication is the process of “creating shared meaning” between the mass

media and their audience. This is whereby encoded messages are transmitted with the

use of technology producing print or electronic medium such as the internet, televisions,

cellular phones, computers, radio broadcasting, newspapers, books, magazines,

pamphlets etc., They are all medium combined as media to promote mass

communication to large audience, groups and communities locally and externally. Mass

communication do anticipate feedbacks, but they are not spontaneous as interpersonal

communication. Mass communication will experience “inferential feedback” as to the

feedback of numbers of persons viewed or aired the program, and at times there may be

response in editorials, social media, radio broadcasting or televised programs. (Baran, 2019)

3. What are encoding and decoding? How do they differ when technology enters the

communication process?

Encoding is where a message is created in an understandable mode, while decoding is

the process of interpreting the (encoded) message. Encode is whereby the message (s) is

transformed into understandable signs or symbols such as speaking, writing, printing,

television program, drama. Decoding occurs when the (encoded) message is received

and interpreted through listening, reading and observation.

When technology enters into the communication process, it amplifies the process of

“creating shared meaning” to wider audience through several medium (plural media)

which amounts to “mass communication”.

4. What does it mean to say that communication is a reciprocal process?

Communication is deemed a reciprocal process when the parties involved are not clear

as to message sent by the sender to receiver, and in responding, the parties are engaging

in creating shared meaning.

Further, psychologist Charles E. Osgood posited that, the reciprocal nature of

communication is, where there is interpersonal communication between two or more

persons, may likely to show that there is no clearly identifiable source or receiver,

because communication is an ongoing and reciprocal process, where all that are engaged

are trying to create meaning by encoding and decoding messages. There is no source, no

receiver, and no feedback. There is no feedback because all messages are presumed to be

in reciprocation of other messages. (Baran, 2019)

For example, reciprocal process do occurs during a mass lecture or presentation within a

University lecture theater, and during a community outreach where the Police Chief or

Sheriff is speaking to a gathering about crime and social problems within that

community. In both settings there will be reciprocity. The lecturer, the Police Chief and

members of the audiences because they will be asking questions for clarity and answers,

persons will be there sitting quietly trying to understand what is being said because they

are not familiar with technical terms and jargons used by both professionals. During

these engagements, the parties are trying to “create shared meaning”.

5. What is James Carey’s cultural definition of communication? How does it differ from

other definitions of that process?

James Carey’s cultural definition of communication- “Communication is a symbolic

process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired and transformed”. (Baran, 2019)

James Carey’s definition highlights that, communication-

* Links to reality,
* Is part of our daily lives of understanding, reasoning and constructing our views of reality and the world,
* Is foundation of our culture,
* purposely, to maintain ever-evolving, fragile cultures, and
* Is that sacred ceremony that draws persons together in fellowship and commonality.

From my interpretation, James Carey brought communication within a cultural perspective to show that communication should not be seen as merely transmitting information, but rather seen that the information is linked to a community, people of culture or shared values and circumstances where they can interact in persons or via media, but undoubtedly they will embrace and maintain togetherness and beliefs which makes them diverse and outstanding, unlike the other writers who view communication as a means of social interaction and political control.

6. What do we mean by mass media as cultural storyteller?

Mass Media has been construed as the several medium with technology being used to

disseminate information or communication (or creating shared meaning).

Culture is defined as “Culture is a historically transmitted pattern of meanings

embodied in symbolic forms, by means of which people communicate, perpetuate and

develop their knowledge about attitudes towards life. (Baran, 2019)

Mass media as cultural storyteller is whereby cultural values and beliefs will be

communicated via the stories that will be told in the newspapers, books, magazines,

internet, radio broadcasting, movies and dramas at theaters. Those stories will define

society’s realities, shaping the ways they think, feel and actions. It is sensibly posited by

a scholar that, fictional accounts are constitutive material signs of a shared

conversation. Therefore, the storytellers have a civic responsibility to its fullest to be

professional and ethical in the stories that are being publicized or communicated. (Baran, 2019)

On the other side, society or the audience has a responsibility to question the tellers and

their stories in a consistent manner with society and the larger world. How to determine

what may have left out or what is the hidden agenda of the storytellers. What is

consistent and inconsistent with cultural values and truths, rather than just being

entertained, neglect and fore go the opportunity of bridging the gaps, dispel the

untruth or the myths among other wrongs from being repetitive. Failure on society or

the audience to maximize this opportunity will likely to cause cultural change or

misinformation through cultural storytellers.

Cultural storytellers are evident in movies on slavery, political leadership, comic books

promoting one race superior to the other, in gender based violence role play a particular

ethnic males are shown as the perpetrators. There are several other mass

communication events or activities can be accessed for cultural storytellers.

7. What do we mean by mass communication as cultural forum?

Mass communication as a cultural form is whereby the media industries and the

audience have a joint responsibility. The media industries are responsible to act

professionally and ethically, and the viewing and listening audience must be thoughtful,

critical and firm about the messages they consume.

To maintain a cultural forum by mass communication, it is the duty and responsibility

of media industries and the audience to promote good, fair and honest information.

There are rules and laws governing the responsibility and ethics of journalism which

falls within mass communication. They are responsible to present news stories that

inform and serve the needs of the citizens, present issues fairly, present stories in a

manner that addresses complexity, present diverse perspectives, and monitor

government and corporations. Despite media agencies are challenged by social media

with speed and who first to break the news, these ethics must not be compromised or

allowed to be compromised by the audience because of unfair competition, budgetary

constraint, short of staff, status of the official or the agency, or religion or ethnicity of

the victims who the report is relating to. At no time, should those challenges be allowed

to supersede accuracy and professionalism by the media industries and the audience.

(McFadden, 2001)

8. What is media literacy? What are its components?

Media literacy is deemed to be existing where viewers of mass communication identify

and condemn improper, unethical media performance and their harmful effects, but

take no appropriate action, and further continue to be reluctant in promoting or

demanding a change. For example, televised of uncensored movies and violent

programs that are likely to influence viewers, communities and relationships.

Scholars and writers posited that, media literacy is a skill that should all time be

improving and not taken for granted. It is key to note that mass media do create and

maintain the culture that define society and the life people live within that society. It is

further argued that, the links between literacy and democracy are inseparable from the

notion of an informed populace, being conversant with issues that affect their lives,

equipped with tools that allow them to participate actively in public deliberation and

social change. (Baran, 2019)

(Baran, 2019) posited that, medial literacy is made up of eight components or

characteristics-

* **Audience having critical thinking skills to independently judge media content** as to what and why they read, watch and listen to programs, songs and movies.
* **Understand the process of mass communication** to know the components of its process and their relationships, thereby causing the audience to have set expectation of service to be provided.
* **Individual and society must be aware of media impacts** to avoid ignoring them. To ignore the impacts, society and individual would likely to move along with the change, instead of controlling or leading them.
* **Have strategies to analyze and discuss media message** in relation to but not limited to content, background, trend and tone of the conversation, the limitation as to circulation of certain programs, why this particular media house and no other.
* **Understand media content as a text which provides insight into the culture and lives of society** through communication regularly as to their values, concerns and myths.
* **Ability to enjoy, understand and appreciate media content** whereby, in exercising media literacy, it is not expected that viewers will be always suspicious or negative about particular programs, movies and episodes. They must be seen where history can be learnt, where a particular group or community is indeed being suppressed despite being law abiding and willing to work through every recommendations but yet still being marginalized, or came out successful.
* **Develop effective and responsible production skills which enable the creation of useful media messages**. Rather than presuming or assuming that people who can read can write also, this must be clarified not only for effective and efficient comprehension of content, but its effective and efficient use.
* **Understand the ethical and moral obligations of media practitioners, functioning within the official and unofficial rules**. What are their legal and ethical obligations. What course of action available to the audience should the media operate legally, but yet still unethical.

9. What are some specific media literacy skills?

(Baran, 2019) posited that media literacy requires the following skills-

* **Willing and able to understand content and filter out noise at the same moment**. Any interference with successful communication is considered noise. Therefore, individual and society’ behaviour such as eating, chatting or being on the phone can interfere or distort mass communication messages.
* **Understand and respect the power of media message**. Media communication is free, widespread and easily accessible. Therefore, serious consideration must be given to the messages despite or banal, silly or simple they may appear. They have either positive or negative influence. Do not disregard media power through third-person. It may not affect individuals directly, but it can influence attitude, behaviour and values of others which can also impact outcomes for those who felt they would not have been affected.
* **Ability to distinguish emotional from reasoned reactions, to respond and act accordingly to content**. The audience do have emotion and will be touched by programs being communicated. If a song causes someone to sign lustily which may project a happy feeling, doesn’t mean it don’t have serious consequences upon that person’s life. Therefore, it is always important to know why, what and how this type of reaction resulted. What is the reasons this movie was filmed at this particular place.
* **Heighten expectations of media content** by knowing what to look for and view programs with reasons, rather than just look for something to pass time or restrict viewing to a particular program or fiction.
* **Knowledge of genre conversations and when they are mixed.** There will be categories of expression within the different media- news, documentary, entertainment etc., they will be characterized individually by something distinctive such as the reporter, new anchor, a particular setting or even a particular song before the program commences. These are conventions of that genre. These conventions are important, they cue or direct our meaning in accepting the program for genre it’s within.
* **Be critical about media messages despite how credible is the source**. Media plays a crucial role especially in a democratic society, therefore they are expected to report on a balance. Sometimes the media don’t report accurately or too lose in their footage thereby invoking hostility among the audience. This is where media literacy is crucial.
* **Know the internal language of various media and its effects, despite how complex it is**. Like how genre has its distinctions, each medium also has its specific internal language. The language is expressed in production values such as editing, lighting, music, camera settings, background, including font. Further, social media texting need to be understood because a different way in spelling and contracting words for example- in text messaging, b4 means “before”, lol means “laugh out loud”, among many others.

10. What is the difference between genres and production conventions? What do these have to do with media literacy?

Genres are characteristics that are associated with media that brings about a difference in each to categorize them and make each distinct from the other. For example, each media source such as CNN, BBC, CBS, FOX News, Aljazeera they all have different opening songs and specific news anchors assigned to each category of media broadcasts, that anyone who familiar with them will know when it is time for news update, breaking news and regular news as schedule or routine. Genres is also evident in movies and entertainment. For example, 20th Century production and Warner Brothers production of movies, each has a distinct song at the opening of the introduction of the movie that will make you know it is either a 20th Century or Warner Brothers’ production, without looking at the screen but by hearing the songs.

Production conventions are rules and generally accepted ways of constructing, layout formats and meaning to media productions. They are principles, form and structure of media stories, character and story arcs, causes and effects, point of views, structuring of time, image settings, type of paper and it layout among several other things.

Genres and production conventions assist viewers in making distinctions among the several categories of media communication and their authenticity. The timing of the media communication as to whether it is live, rebroadcast, documentary or fake news. To determine the genuity of the media content as to know whether efforts are being made maximize viewers and making profits. Finally, it will assist viewers to decide which media house or producer has the best or balance media content to look at, the timings and whether it is good for the children too. These are some of the reasons genres and production conventions have to do with media literacy.

Chapter 2

1. What is convergence?

Media Convergence is the combination or interconnection of information and

communication, and eroding the distinctions among media. It transforms established

industries, services and work practices thereby enabling new forms of content to

emerge.

Convergence among media has been propelling by three related phenomena that have

overwhelmed the mass communication process collaboratively;

* Digitization of almost all content, making it possible to transmit and share information across all platforms,
* Increasing data speed of both wired and wireless networks, allowing fast, easy and seamless access to digitized content, and
* Fast and ongoing advances in communication technology, remarkably making ideas a reality beyond imagination.

Concentration is one the major reasons for convergence. A company that owns television station, newspapers, on line service and others, has a strong incentive to get the maximum use from its content. It is called synergy, and being the driving force for several mergers and acquisitions in the media and telecommunication industries.

2. What is media multitasking?

Media multitasking is the concurrent use of multiple digital media steams such as

listening music, talking on the phone and playing a video game together. It has been

deemed to be associated with depressive symptoms and social anxiety. it also presumed

that people involved in media multitasking have shown poorer performance in several

cognitive domains. It may not show a change in attention and memory, but it is an

inefficient practice that requires task switching which is cost. (Nass, n.d.)

3. Differentiate between concentration of media ownership and conglomeration.

Concentration of media ownership is beyond economic issues and challenges. It hinges

on democracy and the interest in promoting a fundamental right to information from a

diverse range of viewpoints giving the audience a range to choose from. In 1945, the

supreme court (by Justice Hugo Black) in the case of Associated Press v. U.S. ruled that,

“The First Amendment rests on assumption that the widest possible dissemination of

information from diverse and antagonistic sources is essential to the public’s welfare,

that a free press is a condition of a free society.” (Baran, 2019)

Conglomeration is whereby media companies and ownerships are being increasingly

reduced into a few hands and elite owners including non-media owners, and

multinational corporations. Conglomerates through mergers, acquisitions, hostile

takeover and buyouts are in control of the world’s essential media outlets. In 2015 six

companies-Comcast, News Corp, Disney, Viacom, Time Warner and CBS own 90% of

the media content consumed by US citizens. Concentration promotes synergy. (Baran, 2019)

Therefore, concentration of media ownership is to have as many as possible media

stations to provide diverse media content for mass communication, which is also a

positive indication of democracy through freedom of information. While on the other

hand, conglomeration monopolizes media ownership into a few hands of elites who have

the power and influence to determine content and promote it primarily for economic

gain. These are some of the differences.

4. What is globalization?

Media Globalization is the concentration of media ownership and shared media

acquisitions with conglomerates, including multinational businesses (who are non-

media) to provide mass communication to a global audience. It is of concern that

involvement likely to have overwhelming influences (through financial power) to tailor

the news and entertainment for their interests. This will also create a promotion and

transplanting of culture and content that will override the local content including

folklores and matters of interests to the sustenance of that particular state democracy.

Several countries including developed and developing countries are skeptical about

media globalization where they tried as much possible to regulate the content of

television, newspaper and radio programs, but there are many other escapable routes or

platform via internet that are open to the discretion and being used by the larger

audience of mass communication. On the other hand, some advocates and influential

personality especially multinational corporations supported the position that,

globalization is important in order to reach a fragmented and widespread audience, and

persons will learn different cultures and issues, while it will solve in their economic

interests with most modern technologies being invested into. (How are governments staying safe? ITU releases its third Global Cybersecurity Index, 2019)

5. What is hyper-commercialism?

Hyper-commercialism is identifying all possible ways to combine program content with

promoting and the selling of products through advertisements. There are increased of

commercial minutes in all forms of mass media communication including facebook,

Twitter and others. Some scholars and writers are concerned that increasing of

commercial and non-commercial media content can be troublesome. Angela Courtin as

recognized Chief Marketing Officer for media expressed concerns that, it is at a juncture

of media and content, where marketing is content and content is marketing. If is further

argued by others that, product placement is not a commercial, rather it represents a new

form of content, brand entertainment; brands are in fact, part of and essential to the

program. (Baran, 2019)

Hyper-commercialism extends to direct payments to television and radio stations for

exposure rather than mere branding, even for promoting artists’ song for an entire

segment. These were illegal acts, but now become acceptable and supported by

approved sponsorships.

Despite viewers and audience criticize the damage to the integrity of the media and

disservice being offered especially due to globalization and concentration, there are

advocates and influential personalities are defending hyper-commercialism, and it

should be accepted as economic reality of the existing media’s world. Hyper-

commercialism can be influenced by power, manipulation, or

persuasion. (Rochester,2010)

6. What is audience fragmentation?

Audience fragmentation occurs where the mass communication process is changing,

and the audience too is being broken into segments base upon their program choices.

Earlier, when there were radio, newspapers and magazines, including a few television

stations-CBS, ABC and NBC, the viewers or audience would have remained closed

because of the limitation upon the information, content control and specific timing and

channel for specific programs. The advent of information technology has brought a wide

range of mass communication to the audience generating and widen the gaps of

audience fragmentation.

It is noted that, with digital technologies, audience fragmentations have been grouped to

specific community, neighbourhood, individual homes, and even frequent reminder of

information base upon one’s frequent internet search or engagements. This requires the

mass communication process to change itself because technologies are changing the

nature of mass media audience.

Audience fragmentation will affect national culture, storytelling and even move away

from being objective in service but rather subjective. In some aspect, it is argued that,

despite the audience fragmentation the activity that occurred via digital media

(facebook, Twitter and Instagram) could reconnect and reconfigure audience or viewers

into more robust, and strong community through shared concerns and information with

viable solutions. This is evident in home remedy solution to an injury or illness while

awaiting medical experts, and carefully and successful solutions to gender based and

gang violence.

7. What are the two major concerns of globalization’s critics?

* Worry that high-quality American media content will overwhelm local media industries and local cultures, and
* Distant, anonymous, foreign corporation with vast holdings in a variety of non-media businesses, likely to use their power to shape news and entertainment content to suit their own ends.

8. What three elements are fueling today’s rampant media convergence?

* Digitization of almost all content, making it possible to transmit and share information across all platforms,
* Increasing data speed of both wired and wireless networks, allowing fast, easy and seamless access to digitized content, and
* Fast and ongoing advances in communication technology, remarkably making ideas a reality beyond imagination.

9. Differentiate between notions of content producers, audiences, messages, and

feedback in the traditional view of the mass communication process and more

contemporary understandings of these elements of the process.

**Traditionally**, Content producers in the mass communication process were heavily

built on a hierarchical structured organization. There were set rules, regulations and

practical stages including scant room for individual vision or experimentation.

Traditionally, media outlets routinely used people as sources and they were called

amateurs, contributing to an unpaid network made up of several dozens of civilians. The

**contemporary** age having birthed internet, has dramatically changing the content of

mass communication landscape. There are dozens of websites, provision of personal and

real time information. For example, an individual can market or advertise his/her skills

or product online, a lone blogger, a solitary online scrapbooker, or two friends created a

digital video. The distinction between content consumers and content providers

disappear. For example, Fox Television network stations are assigning stories to be

covered and providing “citizen journalists” with an app-“Fresco” being operational 24/7

like a newsroom. Once the users’ images and video are verified for accuracy and aired,

persons are paid for their work. Also, millions of videos, photos, incidents and activities

of interest via Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and Tiktok are used by top media

establishment within their content because those social media sources are cheap or free of cost in many

instances, and mass communication becomes money making rather content oriented.

**Traditionally,** message via mass communication is typically produced mechanically,

simultaneously sent, inflexible and unalterable. Programs or episodes being aired were

not given feedback by the audiences as to whether it was good, need a rebroadcast,

needs improvement or reschedule air time for a wider spread of audience. The audience

either accept it for what it is, or the programs either succeed or fail.

**Contemporarily**, technologies have changed mass communication to be selective,

allows individuals to create their own content music videos, song lists, movies including

educational materials among several other choices. They can be categorized by names,

rhythms, series, and authors, among several others, by users programming their

aggregator. Further, when new content are being released in preselected categories, they

automatically appear on line. Traditionally, there were monopoly over mass

communication with popularity and profitability. (Baran, 2019)

Producers were in control of programs content, time and space; specific theaters for

specific movies, news hours, entertainment and educational programs, censored rated

movies only to be aired among others controlled activities. On the other hand,

contemporary changes through technologies have made anything possible, even where

audiences in mass communication can create infinitely alterable messages. It also

constantly changing content to consumers’ desire individually and collectively thereby

affecting popularity and profitability.

**Traditionally**, feedback of mass communication was inferential and delayed. The

audience was typically seen as large and heterogeneous (diverse), and known to content

producers and distributors in a limited way. Their desire were being tailored on basic

demographics. **Contemporarily**, digital media have changed and opened the feedback

process to spontaneous and direct. Richard Yanowitch a market consultant relates that,

“The internet is the most ubiquitous experimental lab in history, built on two-way, real-

time interactions with millions of consumers whose individual consumption patterns

can for the first time be infinitesimally measured, monitored and molded.” (Baran, 2019).

Even further, it is alluded by scholars and experts that traditionally, the primary focus

was on messages going out, but it has proven that the information coming back is

important or more important than the messages going out. It has proven at present,

almost all mass communication via websites, including transactions with use of

credit/debit cards provide a feedback to someone. (Baran, 2019)

However, it raises concerns as to who collects and what the feedback information are

being used for. Whether it is content providers who want to improve customers’ service

because of knowing them more than rudimentary. Or persons who would make less

honorable use of the feedbacks, but rather targeting customers through identity thefts,

or discrimination due to political, cultural and social affiliations.

10. What is the significance of low cost of entry?

Mass communication in the evolving world has been so relaxed to the extent that, content providers are seen similarly as individuals who believe and say what they believed because they are more inclined to capture huge audiences and profit making. Added to that, sources are the people know as the audience. The audience now becomes the producers not only because of technological change and give them added voice, but more so due to the meager or zero cost for entering the digital space and content production. Digital technologies have contributed to making anyone a creator. As readers we consume, as authors we create. Society is changing from consumers to creators. (Baran, 2019)

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