

STAGE 2 MEDIA STUDIES ASSESSMENT TYPE 3 - INVESTIGATION

Student Response

Media Investigation

KU1
Issue identified clearly.

How do both sides of the vaccination argument represent themselves on their own medium and what techniques are used to do so?

Topic question
(Representation)

Issue currency established.

On the first of March 2014 the popular political magazine *The Week* published an article on their website entitled "*The worrying rise of the anti-vaccination movement*". The article in question expressed a lack of support for vaccines or rather an increase in the anti-vaccine ideology. This article is an example of how the media views this discussion and how through the media has impacted the growth of movements such as these. Throughout this essay I will be discussing how the media portrays vaccination in children and will be exploring the that techniques are used by both sides of the discussion of vaccines.

KU2
Media influence on audience informed.

In 1998 the MMR vaccination sparked controversy in the western world. The controversy came from a study that linked the vaccine in question to autism, the media's coverage on this lead to a dramatic drop in vaccination rates that did not recover till early 2005. This is a key example on how the media influences peoples opinion and how it can be used to spread information, whether that information is credible is a different matter altogether. The anti-vaccine movement has existed since the introduction of the first vaccinations, but their influence has increased in recent years. The internet is becoming a more common outlet for anti-vaccine groups and also like many organizations they will use techniques and strategies in order to persuade their audience.

KU3
Bias - informed.

Previously 'Immunisation' was the preferred term when discussing this form of treatment and is still preferred by many medical professionals today. However anti-vaccine websites will often avoid using this term, presumably because the term 'immunisation' confers immunity to diseases. This is an just one example of how techniques can be used to effect the image of vaccines.

KU1
Concepts - well considered.

Television, much like any source of media, contributes to the public's opinion of an issue. In the case of the vaccine argument, television stations will often report on controversial information and present the viewer with an argument. This is an idea that controversy is entertaining and will keep the viewer more interested. A key example of this strategy can be seen on a majority of News channels, in which the viewer is presented with a live or prerecorded debate, in the case of vaccines the debate is usually between a medical professional and an anti-vaccine spokesperson. However when both of these people are presented together on live television it creates the appearance of credibility.

During these arguments the anti-vaccine side will often try to appeal to mothers of young children, trying to convince them that not vaccinating your children is the

KU2
Audience influence on media well considered and informed.

In previous years the anti-vaccine movement would attempt to persuade parents by claiming that vaccines are 'immoral' and would often appeal to the religious community, however within recent years the UK and America have witnessed a decline in Christianity with the UK shifting from 71.1 percent of people being reported as being christian in 2001, to 59.3 percent in 2011. It is because of this shift in public beliefs I speculate that most modern anti-vaccine websites have strayed away from this argument and has opted for a more "health-conscious" approach.

RA1
Range of media texts well considered.

The main focus of this "health-conscious" approach is to convince parents that the vaccines are harmful to themselves and their child. The majority of anti-vaccine websites will often state that vaccines are poison and contain chemicals which are harmful to the human body. An article on *The Liberty Beacon* (an American news site) stated that "The reason why vaccines are unsafe, or in other words harmful, is that they are made up of chemicals and other elements that are poisonous to the body." The article then explained why these chemicals were dangerous, the two key chemicals were formaldehyde (commonly used as an acid) and thiomersal (a form of mercury), the mentioning of these two chemicals is often present on anti-vaccine websites. Along side articles featuring the poison within vaccines, there are often articles that feature recounts from parents that explain the injuries, deformities and even death that they claim are the result of vaccinations. These recounts will often explain that the child was perfectly healthy before their first vaccination and then go on to explain the events that took place after the vaccination, while most of these stories are entirely anecdotal with no evidence to support them, I believe they are still highly effective when it comes to convincing parents to stay away from vaccines. The stories themselves whether real or not are very convincing and are often a cautionary tale to other parents. An anonymous story published on the *Thinktwice Global Vaccine Institute's* website had a clear focus on the lack of information claiming that "The attendant giving the vaccines never mentioned the possibility of side effects when we were rushed through the signing of the releases." other stories on this website also featured incompetence from doctors and other medical professionals, that they would dismiss questions or inquire and ignore parents concerns.

KU1
Concepts well considered.

Both of these techniques can be related to the media theory- The Kylie Effect. This theory stems from the media's coverage of Australian artist Kylie Minogue experience with breast cancer, Kylie's 'struggle' was covered by the media as it developed. It was later discovered that the percentage of mammograms performed in Australia had increased by 40%, this statistic shows that the coverage of Kylie's cancer made Australians more aware of breast cancer. This theory is used to reinforce the idea that media can be effective at influencing its audience when it uses a human figurehead. E.G Adding a face to a cause or belief.

KU1
Interactions well considered and sustained.

Another prevalent theme on anti-vaccine websites is the demonisation of pharmaceutical companies, claiming that the mass media is fueled by the pharmaceutical companies. At first glance I thought that this strategy was simply the idea that people are often afraid of big business and monopolies, however it is now my belief that this is an attempt to 'de-humanise' pharmaceutical companies in a way that makes them appear to be nothing more than a machine fueled by money. This idea is reinforced by the appearance of 'community' that is produced by

anti-vaccine groups, they do this by publishing letters/emails that have been sent to them and by linking to other anti-vaccine groups. Often groups give off the impression that they wish to 'protect' the people, a big part of this is giving the parents of children 'power' by allowing them to make their own decisions. An example of this can be seen on the Australian hosted website VaccineDangers.com in which they warn parents to educate themselves about the "Medical Mafia" (referring to doctors or pharmaceutical companies). The self-proclaimed "Truth seekers of Australia" who host the site have said:

"It is your responsibility to do your own research and educate yourself, prior to your final decision on what is right for the health and wellbeing of your child. Ultimately when it is time for the Compulsory and Enforced Vaccination of your Children You must say no." [VaccineDangers.com]

KU2
Media influence on audience.

This statement is once again appealing to parents and very much personalises the issue through the constant use of words like 'your' and persuading parents to seek information while at the same time implying that they will inevitably come to the conclusion that vaccination is bad.

KU1
Concepts well considered and mostly sustained.

The techniques of dehumanizing pharmaceutical companies and warning people of health risks, can be related to the media theory known as *Mean World Syndrome*, in which it is speculated that the media can be used in order to make the world appear more dangerous than it actually. This theory was created from the *Cultivation Theory* by George Gerbner.

Use of primary source.

In order to understand how the medical community views groups such as these I interviewed two people, the first was a first year medical student with a degree in medical science studying at Wollongong University in order to become a Doctor of Pharmacy named XXXXXXXX. When asked about the effects of the anti-vaccine movement he stated: "I am not concerned with the spread of these beliefs, because there will always be strong scientific evidence against it"

The second person was XXXXXXXX who works at XXXXXXXX and has recently obtained her fellowship in General Practice, when asked about the media's view of vaccines she said

"The media relationship with medicine has always been complex, it's not only the case for immunisation, on one hand the media is important for alerting people to medical emergencies such as an early flu season or the outbreak of swine flu back in 2009, but on the other hand it can often be a platform for misinformation" she later stated that "Sometimes the media feeds off controversy and can often be very changeable towards an issue".

XXXXXX stated that the media was important for the medical community, and as such much like the other side of the argument the medical community has a variety of websites dedicated to educating people on the topic of vaccines. In the case of Australia most of these vaccines are

promoted and paid for by the government(s <http://www.immunise.health.gov.au/>). Much like the anti-vaccine websites these websites promote the idea of education but unlike their counterparts they do not imply the parents personal decision using phrases like "Informing parents and guardians on what immunisation is and why they should vaccinate their child"

KU1
Media structures and interactions.

As stated previously these websites are often funded by the government and it really shows, multiple Australian websites mention government strategies such as "The National Immunisation Strategy". The other big difference is use of the term *immunization*, unlike anti-vaccine websites these websites seem to often opt for that term when discussing this issue. The websites also help its users by linking them to other sites(much like that of the anti-vaccine groups), they also provide other forms of media rather than just a website, they also link to informational videos and provide telephone numbers.

Very thorough academic paper referred to but the student does not reference or fully utilise it.

The medical community has in the past attempted to "combat" the spread of these views, and some have even gone so far as to written thesis on the matter, Anna Kata stated in her thesis *A postmodern Pandora's box: Anti-vaccination mis information on the internet:*

"the internet acts as a postmodern Pandora's box releasing arguments that are not easily dismissible, yet each side of the debate labelling the other as "wrong" as has been the status quo-is ineffectual"

Perhaps this is the nature of this medium, maybe the simple ability to post ones opinion anonymously makes it easy to create something controversial. So with these techniques being used why has there been an increase in anti-vaccine support, my theory is that now as the internet becomes more popular with more of the general public using it, it has given people the ability to seek out groups that might be the minority.

Additional Comments

C2

Fluent with use of appropriate media terminology.

RA1

Generally well informed although range of media texts is small.

RA2

Representation of groups - identification.

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census/key-statistics-for-local-authorities-in-england-and-wales/rpt-religion.html>

Anti-Vaccination Websites:

<http://www.vaclib.org/sites/debate/raiseachild.html>

<http://www.vaclib.org/sites/debate/about.html>

<http://www.whale.to/v/dettman.html>

<http://www.vaccinationnews.org/home-page>

Performance Standards for Stage 2 Media Studies

	Knowledge and Understanding	Research and Analysis	Producing	Communication
A	<p>Comprehensive and sustained knowledge and understanding of media structures, issues, concepts, and interactions.</p> <p>Perceptive knowledge and informed understanding of how audiences influence, and are influenced by, forms and content of media texts.</p> <p>Insightful and informed understanding of facts, opinions, and bias in media texts or products.</p>	<p>Thorough and well-informed research into and analysis of different points of view, bias, values, or intent across a range of media texts and in the media investigation.</p> <p>Comprehensive research into and analysis of the ways in which groups and individuals are represented in media.</p> <p>Perceptive analysis of interactions with media.</p>	<p>Comprehensive design and planning of media products for selected audiences.</p> <p>Highly proficient use of appropriate production techniques and technologies, and media conventions.</p>	<p>Comprehensive reproduction of the structural and conventional features of media texts, to clearly and consistently convey meaning.</p> <p>Fluent expression, using consistently clear and appropriate media terminology.</p>
B	<p>Well-considered and mostly sustained knowledge and understanding of media structures, issues, concepts, and interactions.</p> <p>Well-considered knowledge and informed understanding of how audiences influence, and are influenced by, forms and content of media texts.</p> <p>Well-considered and informed understanding of facts, opinions, and bias in media texts or products.</p>	<p>Well-informed research into and analysis of different points of view, bias, values, or intent across a range of media texts and in the media investigation.</p> <p>Well-considered research into and informed analysis of the ways in which groups and individuals are represented in media.</p> <p>Well-considered analysis of interactions with media.</p>	<p>Thorough design and planning of media products for selected audiences.</p> <p>Proficient use of appropriate production techniques and technologies, and media conventions.</p>	<p>Sound reproduction of the structural and conventional features of media texts, to clearly convey meaning.</p> <p>Mostly fluent expression, using clear and appropriate media terminology.</p>
C	<p>Considered knowledge and understanding of media structures, issues, concepts, and interactions.</p> <p>Considered knowledge and informed understanding of how audiences influence, and are influenced by, forms and content of media texts.</p> <p>Considered and informed understanding of facts, opinions, and bias in media texts or products.</p>	<p>Considered and informed research into and analysis of different points of view, bias, values, or intent across a range of media texts and in the media investigation.</p> <p>Considered and informed research into and analysis of the ways in which groups and individuals are represented in media.</p> <p>Considered analysis of interactions with media.</p>	<p>Considered design and planning of media products for selected audiences.</p> <p>Competent use of appropriate production techniques and technologies, and media conventions.</p>	<p>Competent reproduction of the structural and conventional features of media texts, to convey meaning.</p> <p>Generally fluent expression, using appropriate media terminology.</p>
D	<p>Partial knowledge and basic awareness of media structures, issues, concepts, and interactions.</p> <p>Basic awareness and some understanding of how audiences influence, and are influenced by, forms and content of media texts.</p> <p>Recognition and some understanding of facts, opinions, and bias in media texts or products.</p>	<p>Basic consideration and recognition of different points of view, bias, values, or intent in one or more media texts and in the investigation.</p> <p>Identification of some of the ways in which groups or individuals are represented in media.</p> <p>Description of one or more interactions with media.</p>	<p>Partial design and some planning of media products for a selected audience.</p> <p>Basic use of some simple and appropriate production techniques and technologies, and some basic media conventions.</p>	<p>Some reproduction of the structural and conventional features of one or more media texts, to convey basic meaning.</p> <p>Occasionally clear expression and use of basic media terminology.</p>
E	<p>Limited awareness of media structures, issues, concepts, or interactions.</p> <p>Limited awareness of how audiences influence, and are influenced by, forms and content of media texts.</p> <p>Limited recognition of facts, opinions, or bias in a media text or product.</p>	<p>Attempted description of a point of view, bias, value, or intent in a media text, and/or the investigation.</p> <p>Attempted recognition of one way in which a group or individual is represented in media.</p> <p>Attempted description of an interaction with media.</p>	<p>Attempted design or planning of media products.</p> <p>Attempted use of a production technique or technology, and one or more basic media conventions, which may be appropriate.</p>	<p>Attempted reproduction of the structural and conventional features of one media text.</p> <p>Limited expression or use of basic media terminology.</p>