



# Getting to Know...

*The Voice*

for A Level AQA Media Two

Second Edition, January 2024

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# Contents

Product Support from ZigZag Education .....	ii
Terms and Conditions of Use .....	iii
Teacher's Introduction.....	1
What Should I Know? .....	2
Getting to Know... <i>The Voice</i> .....	3
1. <i>The Voice and black British identity</i> .....	3
2. <i>Reach and accessibility – audience breakdown</i> .....	5
3. <i>Design and layout</i> .....	6
4. <i>Industrial background and changing ownership patterns</i> .....	8
5. <i>Article content</i> .....	10
6. <i>Brand identity online</i> .....	12
7. <i>The Voice and specialised media production</i> .....	13
8. <i>The freedoms and limitations of the Internet</i> .....	14
Show What You Know .....	16
Answers .....	17

# Teacher's Introduction

This resource has been written for the AQA Media Studies A Level specification (7572), with a specific focus on Media Two: In-depth study: Online, social and participatory media: *The Voice*.

As a 'Getting to Know' pack, this resource has been constructed to actively engage students with the source material through a range of stimulating, focused and entertaining magazine-style articles exploring different topics across the media frameworks and theories. Discussion tasks are included throughout to recap knowledge. At the end of the resource, we have included a range of more challenging essay-style questions for students to test their learning.

The structure of the pack is as follows:

1. What Should I Know? – a brief overview of the key facts/information about the close study product.
2. Getting to Know... – eight articles on a variety of topics. In the articles, we have tried to focus on the more niche aspects of the product that may not have been covered by textbooks, to broaden students' understanding.
3. Show What You Know – four essay-style questions on the close study product complete with an answer section.

Our aim with this resource is to provide variety for those students who may feel overloaded by textbooks and other learning materials with a solely academic writing style. The blend of informative content and entertaining presentation style will not only help to strengthen a student's knowledge of the close study product, but also help to foster a genuine interest in it.

*January 2024*

## **Second Edition, January 2024**

Changes have been made to the resource to account for the changes made to the set products, for assessment from 2024.

# What Should I Know?

Please note that all figures and staff information are current at the time of writing that you check for any changes.

## **The Voice** ([voice-online.co.uk](http://voice-online.co.uk))

- Founded as a print newspaper in 1972 by **Val McCalla** for the **Afro-Caribbean** dissatisfied with the **2005** **racist** reportage on their lives/community.
- *The Voice* firm is **the only British national black weekly newspaper**
- **voice-online.co.uk** is the online edition, which operates like other mainstream update **new** stories.
- After the death of the founder in 2002, the ownership transferred to Jamaica **Company Ltd.**, which still owns *The Voice* in 2020.
- **Gleaner Company** publishes a major Jamaican newspaper, *The Gleaner*, which print version of *The Voice* is published by **G V Media Group**.
- *The Voice* focuses on **culture, current affairs, politics, entertainment, religion** focused on black British communities, and is involved in fundraising for relevant
- The company has its headquarters in London, and aims to employ its staff from communities to align with its aims.
- At the time of writing, it has accounts on **Facebook, Twitter, Instagram** and **YouTube**
  - **Facebook** – 611k likes
  - **Twitter** – 38k followers
  - **Instagram** – 24k followers
  - **YouTube** – 1.9m channel views, hidden number of subscribers

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# Getting to Know... *The Voice*

## 1. *The Voice* and black British identity

### A bloodstained history

History, both ancient and recent, plays an influential and inescapable part in the UK, and consequently how they have been represented in British media.

For hundreds of years, until around the mid 1900s, Britain was one of the major European colonial powers, along with France, Spain and the Netherlands, that established colonies and trade routes all over the world. As the largest and most expansive empire that ever existed, over a quarter of the entire global population lived under British imperial control.

Like all empires, this power and wealth was built on conquest, invasion and the exploitation of native peoples, whether through subjugation, genocide or slavery. Colonies claimed by Britain stretched over East Asia, Australasia, the Indian subcontinent and North America, and across the entirety of Africa – thousands of miles from the Mediterranean shores of northern Egypt to Cape Town at the southernmost point of the continent.

Slave trading, the eradication of local cultures through force and law, wars for territory against native populations, and the exploitation of natural resources to fuel the imperial machine are some of the violent and deeply damaging actions carried out in the name of British (i.e. white) supremacy. It might seem like another age, but many former colonies only gained independence from the British crown in the middle of the twentieth century.

Even though the general public, the law and popular culture are more progressive, racial prejudice, institutional bias and the exploitation of black culture are all still part of British society that have by no means gone away. Recent scandals like the Windrush whereby the government deported Caribbean migrants who had been living in the UK, the racially motivated crimes in the wake of Brexit, and the ongoing issue of racism in the police are examples of the fact that it is still very real and important.

Equally, another key part of *The Voice's* premise is not simply to report on the scandals, but to be more the remit of a more activism-focused organisation or charity, but also to tell interesting stories and interviews, and, in its own words on its website, to promote 'black voices'.

### Representation

Paul Gilroy, a media and cultural studies theorist, has written extensively on the topic of race in British society, as well as the common cultural heritage shared by Afro-Caribbean people. He theorises that people from a diasporic population often feel a sense of feeling a distance from their country of origin but also feeling alienated and unwanted in the UK, now, often as a result of racial prejudice.

*The Voice* was founded in 1982, born out of the express desire for news that was relevant to the black community, instead of second-hand BBC reports that relayed news from countries in the Caribbean instead of from Britain itself. This could be seen as resulting from the 'disconnect' between the black community and the mainstream media.

Colourism is a form of discrimination based on skin tone, where lighter-skinned people are favoured over darker-skinned people. This is a common issue in many cultures, including the UK, where lighter-skinned people are often seen as more attractive and successful than darker-skinned people.

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and the decision to make *The Voice* acted as a way of saying 'we are black, and we are a community media outlet.

Like all texts, *The Voice* is a constructed piece of media, meaning that its version of the world is filtered and altered, whether consciously or not. The world is so vast, so fast moving and so complicated that nothing could ever accurately represent some 'true' version of the world; that life is an inherently subjective experience for each individual human being.

The key criteria for what aspects of the real world make it into *The Voice*'s representation are obviously in its tagline: 'Britain's First Black Newspaper'; that is, it chooses stories that affect, people of colour, and many from Afro-Caribbean backgrounds, in the UK. The paper's content and experience is what its editorial staff feel will connect meaningfully with their community's common ground and interests.

Stuart Hall has written extensively on stereotyping and what he has termed 'essentialism', which is a group of unique individuals become crudely reduced into a set of perceived characteristics, often out of a prejudicial or bigoted motivation. A piece of media that counteracts this process of essentialisation because it offers a broader representation of a stereotyped group in mainstream media. Instead of reducing black British identity into a single stereotype, it aims to give a more realistic and diverse insight into the experiences and current situation of the black community in Britain.

### Discussion questions

- 1) How is representation of a real person in a non-fiction piece of media different from a character in a fictional text?
- 2) What historical factors make stereotyping ethnic groups extremely controversial?
- 3) *The Voice* often features world news from Caribbean and African countries; how does this affect its target audience?

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## 2. Reach and accessibility – audience breakdown

### Demographics

Finding the precise statistics and insights into the audience of *The Voice* is difficult, but we can look at the published media pack from the Gleaner Company or G V Media Group. However, by looking at general industrial trends, we can make some educated guesses:

- **Race/ethnicity** – the target demographic of *The Voice* is blatant and is proud of it, with the tagline ‘Britain’s Favourite Black Newspaper’.
- This is not to say that the audience of a website like *The Voice* would be wholly black, as the website is clearly trying to cater for, as people who aren’t personally interested in the news can better understand what is happening in the Afro-Caribbean British community.
- **Age group** – given that the average print newspaper reader is aged at least 40, and that online newspaper content struggles to attract the younger generations, we can hazard a guess that the primary user base of *The Voice* is likely to be older.
- **Gender split** – with *The Voice* being centred around racial identity rather than gender, it is reasonable to assume that there is a relatively even split between male and female readers, as is the case with most newspapers.

### Psychographics

- **Interest in its community’s experience** – has an active interest in what is happening within the community, the notable people/celebrities from it, and what in wider society.
- **Distrust of mainstream media** – for a group that has been openly hated, mocked and misrepresented in mainstream news and media outlets because of race, with anti-discrimination laws in place, there may be a distrust of the mainstream media to be fair and balanced. In the black British community; for example, the portrayal of Meghan Markle in tabloids like the *Daily Mail*, which seemed to be exceedingly critical, leading some to believe it was racially motivated.
- **Religious beliefs** – given that the website has a ‘Faith’ tab, unlike many other news outlets, and reports often cover religious events in the UK, it may be likely that a regular visitor is likely to be of a religious or cultural background.
- **Support for black-owned businesses** – within a minority group there is often a strong sense of support for businesses owned by members of its own community. This may mean that someone may choose to subscribe to *The Voice*.

### Relatability and understanding

When it comes to the relatability of *The Voice*’s content, Stuart Hall’s theory of audience reception is relevant. Hall outlines that media is **encoded** with an intended meaning by the producer, which is then decoded by an audience to three different extents. It goes beyond the literal meaning of the text on a page, instead being the symbolic or ideological meaning that was intended by the producer. For *The Voice*, a **preferred** reading of the text is likely to rely on someone having the experience of being a British black person in order to fully decode the meaning of the content.

If you are not involved in the community, or you are from a different particular diasporic position, then *The Voice* is made by and for, then you may not be able to fully decode meaning that is intended by the creators because of the lack of relevant experience. If this was supposed to be a universal appeal to anyone, then it would be alienating; however, given the targeted nature of the website, this is not the case.

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### Discussion Questions

- 1) Why is the religious faith of their audience important to the creators of *The Voice*?
- 2) What aspect of the nature of the outlet’s content limits the reach of *The Voice*?
- 3) Can *The Voice* compete with a mainstream news site, and does it matter to the community?



### 3. Design and layout

Here's a breakdown of some of the key design elements and functionality of voice

- **Logo** – the logo is stylised text, with 'the' forming the dot of the lower-case 'i', a red square with a white 'V', matching the full-sized logo on the website.
- **Top banner** – the banner is a common feature of news websites, and it holds newspaper mastheads because of the size and placement, taking up a significant site. The logo is not fixed at the top of the page and disappears when you scroll.
- **Typography** – like most websites and online newspapers, the typography mirrors newspapers. For the most part, headlines, quotations and headings, a serif font with curlicues and flourishes is used, giving the site an air of respectability and seriousness. A light sans-serif font is used, giving the site an air of respectability and seriousness. For the category labels above the headlines, a bold, heavyweight font is used – mostly on a dark background, maximising its ability to catch a user's eye.
- **Icons** – the designers of the website have made use of commonly used symbols to indicate the functionality of the site. The icon comprising three vertically stacked horizontal lines can click to expand, while a symbol that uses a single circle and line to represent a magnifying glass indicates search functionality. These are symbols used across many websites and apps, so anyone familiar with other digital content will recognise them.
- **Columns and rows** – on the home page, the images and headlines are laid out in a grid, instead of downwards in a list. There is a visual hierarchy of these items, with the most important images and text at the top, and they become smaller the further down the page, indicating their significance or their newness.



<https://www.voice-online.co.uk/>

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## Photography

Photography is typically a freelance role and having staff photographers who work full-time is increasingly rare. For a moderately sized company like *The Voice* online, with a lot of content to keep up with the rapid and unrelenting pace of current affairs (even with its specialist time photographer is probably not an economic choice.

Instead, the editorial staff and content managers normally source their photographs from:

- **Stock photography** – companies such as Getty Images buy the rights from photographers and then sell images to outlets such as *The Voice* can buy from them.
- **Freelance photography** – hiring an independent photographer on an as-and-when-needed basis.
- **Self-shooting** – many TV reporters are camera-trained and can film their own content. Journalists can also shoot photos for their own articles, which eliminates any copyright issues.

This means that the creative choices that go into the photographs – lighting, composition, etc. – have been made by the photographer themselves, who might be separate from the editorial staff. These choices weren't influenced by a brief. However, when it comes to the creation and selection of these photos, the editorial staff make the choices in terms of **selection**, as they decide which photos to use, as well as the process of **combination** by deciding what words they pair with the images.

As an online equivalent to a newspaper, as opposed to a magazine, *The Voice* online focuses on real-world news in terms of illustrations on graphic art, solely focusing on photography to align with the content of real-world news.

### Discussion questions

- 1) Logos and photographs are often placed on the left of the screen; why do you think this is?
- 2) Why do you think online news sites still carry over the visual language of traditional print media? Consider the audience they are appealing to.
- 3) What factors might influence the decision to use licensed photographs, as opposed to self-shooting?

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## 4. Industrial background and changing ownership

### Would it have existed in the past?

In the past, the rigidly prejudicial attitudes of mainstream society towards people that a company like *The Voice* wouldn't have had the opportunity to exist. It would have been a viable prospect from a commercial perspective, especially given the fact that the top positions in the British media would still have been held by the establishment. The print edition was founded in 1982 by a businessman named Val McCalla, who catered for a generation of black people who were born and raised in the UK, as opposed to those who had migrated from countries formerly under British rule, such as Jamaica or Botswana.

Financial support came in the form of a government loan of £62,000, as well as support from companies looking to mitigate the fact they had South African investors during the time of Apartheid, as companies and countries were boycotting them. This seed money helped *The Voice* start being published, printed and distributed weekly across the country. In 1982, an entirely new newspaper would have needed to go up against established contenders with a long history cementing their place in the industry or were newer papers that had the backing of media moguls such as Rupert Murdoch. But because *The Voice* was filling a niche previously ignored by the establishment, it wasn't competing in an already-full market; it was meeting a need for a public service.

Ownership transferred to a Jamaican publishing firm, the Gleaner Company, in 2001 and remains this day.

### The changing tides

It has been put forward by theorist bell hooks that the structures of power in Western society have been, and largely continue to be, in the hands of white men, and there is a distinction between persons of colour to the lower rungs of the pyramid, with black women being at the bottom steps. These structures of power are sociopolitical, cultural and industrial – and they are still the same as they were with

*The Voice*, when it first started in the early 1980s, would have been a rarity as a black-owned media outlet. Nowadays, as more companies prioritise increased diversity among their employees, the issue has lessened, but it is still significant. Curran and Seaton have proposed that a lack of black ownership in the media has been detrimental in a number of ways, including in the range of opinions that the general public has been exposed to, and *The Voice* could be seen as a challenge to traditional patterns of ownership in British media.

### Technical diversification and adaptation

The combination of societal change and technical innovations has broken the stranglehold that media companies over the ability to create and share media to an audience.

Modern mainstream media is more inclusive in terms of who makes it and who is represented, but it does not mean there is true equity or balance. This is still a recent shift, and many media companies continue to be held by white, male, elite wealthy men from Western countries. However, the Internet and other digital technology has given so many more creators and producers a platform to share work and ideas, and to create audiences online, has been highly beneficial. While diversity still are not fully represented in mainstream media.

At the time of writing, *The Voice* is still a print newspaper as well as an online outlet, using a 'bi-media' strategy, whereby the same content is produced on two platforms simultaneously. This **diversification** enables *The Voice* to remain relevant and profitable in the digital age, even though it has been thoroughly surpassed by new technology.

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For a news site, a web version is advantageous because of the instantaneous communication. A newspaper has an inevitable delay between something happening and its readers seeing it the next day. Publish an online article, or tweet about it, and people can be reading about something as it happens, and developing stories can be updated live with new information.

Keeping a print edition could be seen as a safe decision in order to stay appealing to a wider audience. It is unlikely to want to fully switch over to digital, but having an online version also means less cost of production to save on the material/manufacturing expenses.

### Discussion questions

- 1) Why is it unusual for a British media company to be owned by a Jamaican public figure?
- 2) According to Homophobia's theories of cultural industries, does *The Voice* conform to the idea that media companies are profit-driven above all else?
- 3) How does *The Voice* reflect changing patterns of ownership in the media?

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## 5. Article content

As already established, the function of *The Voice* is delineated by the racial/ethnic group it is aiming to cater for, and this dictates the choices they make in terms of reportage. If it doesn't directly affect black British people or else it's not deemed relevant – these rejected by mainstream online news outlets, such as BBC News, would be unlikely to cover because. In the same vein, the editors and writers of *The Voice* are unlikely to depict members of the community in a prejudicial or overwhelmingly negative way, but it still aims to cover all manner of issues that they are relevant.

### 'Faith' as a topic

One of the topics in the header that stands out as fairly unusual for a news site at this level, 'faith' as a word holds cultural associations of belief, most commonly associated with religious belief. For *The Voice*, 'faith' is referring to Christianity in particular, as it is the most common belief. A census reported that 69% of black British people identified as Christian, whereas the overall figure for the total population was 59.5% (source: Office for National Statistics). The articles in this section revolve around black British churches and figures, reflecting the aforementioned importance of churchgoers among *The Voice*'s target audience.



### Narratives in non-fiction

In terms of the structure of *The Voice*'s articles, they are non-fiction reports and do not conform to Todorov's conventional narrative structure. Instead, like most journalistic writing, they tend to have an **inverted pyramid** structure. What the inverted pyramid means is that the article begins with the most important information at the top of the page, and slowly narrows down to the precise, extraneous details. This is because not everyone will read the entire article; therefore, if you front-load the crucial facts in the first few paragraphs, you can still get the gist of the story across.

For the opinion pieces, which are more about the writer's personal take on either an event or a news item, they have a more narrative structure as opposed to the reports, but this is inevitably going to vary from commentator to commentator based on their individual style of writing.

The ideological stance of the producer can be displayed within how they choose to structure a narrative of a real-world event. They can't make up characters or story beats, but they can choose to downplay certain events that undermine their point, and vice versa. They can, through their linguistic choices, frame a person in the events as the antagonist – consider how articles in the *Daily Mail* blaming migrants for social problems often blatantly do this.

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## Tone and formality

As a journalistic text, *The Voice* is conventional in the formal register of writing in e.g. capital letters for proper nouns, and the use of correct punctuation and sentence structure. It avoids overly long, descriptive sentences (that would be more suited to prose or texts meant to be read more like traditional stories), instead favouring short, punchy sentences that convey facts and information.

The 'news' isn't a singular entity, it's made up of thousands of different separate sources. Some sources have the same approach while others differ in terms of what degree of sensationalism they use. Red-top tabloids and their equivalents are renowned and often parodied for being so sensational that they are often criticised for being so emotionally charged that they read as if someone were screaming. *The Voice* is more comparable to a broadsheet newspaper or a more mainstream news outlet. Its headlines still use **enigma codes** by dangling bait, summing up the story but not revealing the full story in the headline, as opposed to being aggressively emotional designed to instil a strong emotion.

### Discussion questions

- 1) Why is sensationalism in journalism often criticised?
- 2) How does the content of *The Voice* differ from that of a larger news site, such as the BBC?
- 3) Why is the 'inverted pyramid' structure used for news articles?

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## 6. Brand identity online

### What's in a name?

Despite the fact that *The Voice* has existed as a newspaper since 1982, there has been little in the website in terms of visibility, and that is also *The Voice*. But not the website with the extremely popular singing talent show featuring spinning chairs that is essentially *X Factor* (but it has spinning chairs so it's totally different and unique).

Even though *The Voice* (the newspaper), predates the TV franchise – which is also Vietnamese, Romanian, Chinese, and many other regional versions being broadcast in larger size markets – it means that the niche British community news site gets lost.

This is where **SEO** comes in. **SEO**, which stands for 'search engine optimisation', is whereby using specific keywords and phrases makes them appear higher in search results. Higher ranking means more clicks, more clicks means more unique visitors, and more visitors means more ad revenue. In fact, it's such an important part of online marketing that there are degrees to SEO.

For *The Voice* to be in the shadow of a massive international entertainment franchise with a huge audience but far deeper pockets as well, means that SEO is a key priority. Even so, with hundreds of thousands of results for the TV show, and voice-online.co.uk doesn't even let alone right at the top.

However, for *The Voice* – the one we're studying, not the show with the spinning chairs – it's an issue for its survival. The news site has a specific niche audience and is not competing with the TV show. It might be slightly frustrating on a practical level, but it's unlikely to have significant impact.

### Convergence

Convergence might sound like the characters in a sci-fi film call the apocalypse, but it's how all forms of media – that were once discrete, separate entities – now overlap. YouTube ads, social media, shooting something on your smartphone, playing games with screen capture and DSLRs/webcams, and so on; whatever you want, it's all there to achieve.

For brand identity, the overlapping nature of all these media formats and technologies means you can create your content and create a consistent brand identity across platforms. *The Voice* has a good use of convergence – it has icons on its website that point to its social media, and it posts on social media that point back to the website – but it's not extensive. Its involvement is about the same as any other brand, whereby it has social media to direct traffic to stories, but it doesn't really use it to its full potential. It's a perfunctory use of convergent technology and formats, not an innovative one.

### Discussion questions

- 1) What is SEO, and why does SEO matter?
- 2) List some of the unique aspects of digital marketing that aren't possible in print.
- 3) How might *The Voice* increase its engagement on its social media sites?

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## 7. *The Voice* and specialised media production

### Why does specialised media exist?

Mass media is often aimed at the broadest possible sector of society because it's sent to an individual consumer with their own personal needs and wants, a mass media instance a national news site like BBC News – can be *too* broad and general. It might be emotionally engaging, or it might simply not be particularly interesting.

You can see examples of this need for media with greater relevance to the actual lives of news networks, in both their broadcast and digital versions, tailor the content you see to your location. National news might matter to everyone, but an important story for someone living in Northern Ireland, for example.

### What is specialised about *The Voice*?

Media can be specialised or niche because of its form and/or content. A film might be about a particular topic, but it might have extremely unconventional cinematography that makes it a niche text that might not be palatable for your average cinemagoer. *The Voice* is not conventional for the genre. It doesn't scrap the web design rulebook and break it. The distribution is also not specialised; it's a website that can be accessed by anyone. You have to solve a puzzle or do something weird to unlock the site – and its links are part of a media network.

The content is what makes voice-online.co.uk *specialised*. It exists because there is a focus on current affairs about the black British population, and the producers aimed to fill a gap. Features, videos and other content that focused on this community is what sets it apart from mass media companions.

### Profitability

There is a limit to how financially successful specialised media can be if it remains focused on a particular topic or audience. It is likely to have kept the company afloat, but mass media cannot meet. Local, community news/broadcasting, such as a village news website, is something along those lines. It is an apt example of how this type of media is not designed for major commercial success. *The Voice* is a larger scale and more professional example of this type of media. It is an asset owned by a billionaire media mogul to assert political influence over the black population – it is news for a group of people that have been historically overlooked by mainstream UK media.

### Theoretical perspective – Hesmondhalgh

A major aspect of Hesmondhalgh's theories about cultural industries is that they are designed to make a few people at the top extremely wealthy. You think Hollywood is art? No – expression is the goal? No – it's all about selling tickets and making those huge profits. Oil or whatever, contemporary mass media is all about playing it safe and turning a profit.

But the key word in that last sentence is 'mass'. Hesmondhalgh is not talking about niche media and companies, because they are inherently limited in how much money they can make. Not only that, but they are riskier when it comes to survival, whereas mass media is designed to be profitable.

Specialised media, like voice-online.co.uk and *The Voice* on social media, has been a product of the nature of the Internet as a platform. But Hesmondhalgh theorises that, in recent years, media has become more commercialised and profit-driven (cultural content being turned into a commodity). Companies such as Facebook and Google operate in a similarly profit-driven manner. So, although it is true, specialised media online can be successful and profitable in the short term.

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### Discussion questions

- 1) What is a risk of producing specialised media that mass media doesn't have?
- 2) Do you think *The Voice* is successful in its aim? Why, or why not?
- 3) How has the Internet aided niche texts to find an audience?



## 8. The freedoms and limitations of the Internet

Taking a step back from the website – how it looks and functions, etc. – the Internet is a critical cog in the societal mechanism. Remove it and the whole thing grinds to a screeching halt. However, just as with every new media format and industry, there's a whole web of positives and negatives that are all inextricably intertwined, as well as a number of pressing questions about what to do in the future.

### The benefits

- **Niche interests and communities** – pretty much anything, as long as it's not illegal or hate speech, can be published on the Internet, meaning that subcultures, minority groups, smaller communities and other niches outside the mainstream can create spaces to build and strengthen their group bonds. For *The Voice*, this means being able to spread news to a cultural community that has historically been pushed out of the mainstream.
- **Cost-effectiveness** – as a major company running and hosting a website, you need technical equipment, and you no longer require supplies of raw materials – paper, ink, etc. – if you were printing out physical copies. If you're not a business but just want to share your art or showcase your photography (whatever you want really), you can use a bunch of hosting services such as Wix or Squarespace for far lower prices. In short, you can maintain a pretty slick and professional-looking website with a laptop and some internet access.
- **Global connectivity** – the world is now connected on a level once thought to be impossible. A major component of that is the Internet. *The Voice* is a London-based website, but its content is accessible across the globe instantaneously with no problems whatsoever. This means that people who have been limited by their geographical location can no longer face that problem and can access information further than ever possible before.
- **Increased knowledge and awareness** – for information that you would have had to go to a library or a specialist to find, you can now search for it on your phone wherever you are (and get the answers). Resources, tutorials and access to information are available faster by multiple degrees of magnitude.

### The problems

Nothing is clear-cut or straightforward when it comes to the Internet, and the problems are complex. Freedom is one of the great benefits of the technology, but it throws up questions about regulation and censorship.

Legislation has not caught up and updated to the digital age, so it becomes difficult to regulate speech and other illegal activity in the bud.

- **Censorship and freedom** – censorship is a hugely controversial talking point and it's not the same everywhere. In some countries with authoritarian governments, such as North Korea and China, the Internet is heavily censored to control what information is accessible to the public. Conversely, here in the UK, there have been accusations that web companies have been enough to censor hate speech or illegal material. As a result, to censor or not to censor is a difficult question for organisations and democratic government. If you say 'anything goes' then you risk the growth of a digital wilderness. But if you restrict too much, or restrict the wrong things, you risk stifling creativity and infringe on their rights.

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- **Psychological impacts** – being constantly online can be potentially detrimental to the user. Issues such as the idealised version of life that social media influencers present, or the increased visibility of unrealistic beauty standards on Instagram, are a result of social media usage.
- **Copyright and piracy** – for content creators and media producers such as the BBC, intellectual property online can become an issue. There are laws about digital rights, but they are ineffectual, and the practice is so widespread, that it's like trying to put out a fire with a tea towel.

### Discussion questions

- 1) How has the Internet been beneficial for *The Voice* specifically?
- 2) The Internet is global. Why is this a problem when it comes to the issue of regulation?
- 3) What aspects of the Internet might be viewed as postmodern?



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## Show What You Know

1. *The Voice* has a specific purpose; how does this influence and affect the way conveyed and understood in various audiences? Refer to theories of audience.
2. What are some of the major advantages and disadvantages of the Internet as answer to *The Voice*, as well as its effects relating to regulation and audience.
3. Describe the way in which industrial factors have influenced the media production process: production, distribution and circulation.
4. Discuss how *The Voice* conveys ideology in its content despite being a non-fictional text. Refer to semiotics, narratology and other relevant theories.

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# Answers

## 1. *The Voice* and black British identity

- 1) A real person is not a character who has been purposefully constructed and written. The representation of them is based on how the media chooses to depict aspects of their life.
- 2) Historical factors such as racism, and the racist depictions of black people in the media, are designed to mock, insult and denigrate.
- 3) The news from these sources might be relevant to them because they have an interest in the Afro-Caribbean global community.

## 2. Reach and accessibility – audience breakdown

- 1) Part of their content focuses on the Church and Christian faith, which 69% of them believe in (as at 2011).
- 2) The specific focus on a specific community means that it has limited accessibility to that community.
- 3) *The Voice* cannot compete with a mainstream news site in terms of commercial matter as *The Voice* is intentionally catering to a smaller, specialised audience.

## 3. Design and layout

- 1) Logos and photographs are often placed on the left of the screen because people also scan images from left to right, so placing key visual information on the left is more effective.
- 2) Online newspapers such as *The Voice* are still aiming to appeal to older demographics accustomed to print media, and the shared aesthetic is likely to make it feel more familiar to audience members.
- 3) Time – as news stories often happen unpredictably and can't be planned like a photograph, it is much cheaper to buy the rights to a photograph than it is to hire a photographer.

## 4. Industry background and changing ownership patterns

- 1) Britain has a much larger media industry than Jamaica, so it is unusual for the roles to be reversed.
- 2) *The Voice* is niche media that has been created by members of a community for representation, and this seems to be the major motivation as opposed to profit.
- 3) *The Voice* is owned and produced predominantly by persons of colour, who have not held these positions in the past due to prejudicial attitudes.

## 5. Article content

- 1) Sensationalism is often criticised for distorting facts through emotive language.
- 2) The content of *The Voice* differs from mainstream news as it focuses on the specific community, which is the specific premise and goal of the website.
- 3) The inverted pyramid structure is used because it prioritises the key information that the reader needs to know the most – any extra detail at the bottom of the pyramid can be skipped.

## 6. Brand identity online

- 1) SEO stands for 'search engine optimisation'. SEO matters because it makes a website more prominent on a search engine ranking, increasing click-through traffic.
- 2) Examples include: algorithmically targeted ads that are unique to the user; video content that can alter the advert; interactivity and direct engagement with an advert.
- 3) They could increase the post engagement by posting more unique content as well as more articles, or by encouraging commenting through asking audience members questions.

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## 7. *The Voice* and specialised media production

- 1) Specialised media is more financially risky because the potential audience base is smaller.
- 2) *The Voice* has been successful because it still remains one of the few websites for black British people, and one of the few news sites.
- 3) The Internet allows anyone to access content regardless of location, and therefore it is a more accessible medium for distribution.

## 8. The freedoms and limitations of the Internet

- 1) *The Voice* is niche media for a racial minority community, and the Internet has unlimited potential for media that might not have had an equal opportunity in the past.
- 2) The global nature of the Internet means that it becomes extremely difficult to govern, unlike broadcast or print media that is limited geographically.
- 3) Implosion – the Internet and social media could be seen to have broken down the boundaries between the real world and the digitally simulated world that have become intertwined.

## Show What You Know

1. ***The Voice* has a specific purpose; how does this influence and affect the way the message is conveyed and understood in various audiences? Refer to theories of representation in your answer.**
  - The purpose of *The Voice* is to be a news site for black British people that reflects their experiences and lives, as opposed to previous outlets that would simply relay information from mainstream media that had diasporic populations.
    - Because of this community-focused approach, it automatically means that it has a high level of relatability that is not attainable for people outside that community.
    - As a racial minority in Britain, Afro-Caribbean people have experienced racism and injustices because of structural inequalities against them.
    - This experience informs the meaning of its content, and this is something that is likely encoded into the intended meaning into the text.
    - Hall's reception theory would mean that a non-black British person would not be able to decode said intended meaning for a preferred reading, although they might still attain a negotiated reading.
    - Paul Gilroy's notion of a shared transatlantic black identity would suggest that black Americans would be able to also relate to the content in *The Voice* because of shared culture and history, having all experienced extremely similar racial experiences.

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2. What are some of the major advantages and disadvantages of the Internet answer to *The Voice*, as well as to theories relating to regulation and audience?
- Advantages
    - The Internet allows for niche content to flourish – whether the niche is the creators, the subject matter or the style.
    - For *The Voice*, which appeals to a minority group whose cultural capital has been historically excluded from the mainstream, this is a massive benefit.
    - Online media is much more cost-effective to produce, something that *The Voice* has benefited from.
    - Digital marketing, which *The Voice* employs on its website through targeted advertising, is far more targeted and effective than printed adverts. It can also be easily and directly interacted with by a user.
    - Global connectivity allows media to find audiences all over the world, rather than being geographically limited by physical distribution networks. *The Voice* has a large user base across the world as a result of this.
    - Content can be posted and accessed at any time, meaning that new stories can be posted with less of a delay than physical printing, and items can be updated with new information.
  - Disadvantages
    - Lack of accountability – online harassment and hate speech can be anonymous. For *The Voice*, which often publishes content on social media as well as its website, this means it faces racist and sexist abuse. Unlike face-to-face interaction, the Internet away accountability and lessen consequences for aggressive/offensive behaviour.
    - The global nature of the Internet means that individual governments struggle to regulate. Livingstone and Lunt note that there is a struggle between the active role of regulatory boards and the rights of citizens, as censorship of the Internet can be seen as a violation of freedom of speech and freedom of information.
3. Describe the ways in which industrial and technological changes have influenced the media production processes of production, distribution and circulation.
- a. *The Voice* began as a printed product that was published weekly.
  - b. The introduction of digital and online media has drastically reduced the need for a printed edition, making it a financially unviable option for many media producers.
  - c. *The Voice* still has a physical edition; however, in recent years the distribution has changed to monthly – a 75% reduction.
    - i. The fact it still has a physical edition indicates the older average age group of its audience.
    - ii. Online news sites often fail to appeal to older age groups who are less familiar with digital technology, whether out of inexperience or preference.
    - iii. Their website, however, is updated frequently and is likely to be more appealing to younger audiences because of the increased practicality and accessibility.
    - iv. They also have social media accounts, which are used primarily to generate click-through traffic.
4. Discuss how *The Voice* conveys ideology in its content despite being a non-fictional text, using semiotics, narratology, and other relevant theories.
- *The Voice's* political beliefs are not necessarily clear; it would appear that it is more of a generalist publication.
  - Instead, it focuses on stories that affect black British people, which is the result of its target audience and its selection.
  - As a news text, it typically uses the inverted pyramid structure for articles, starting with the most important information at the top and working downwards to the smaller details at the bottom.
  - However, as a news text, it can choose which facts it feels to be the most important, and present them in a way that order to better fit an article.

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