

AQA GCSE MEDIA STUDIES (8572) · PAPER 2, SECTION B

The Kim Kardashian 20-Marker Masterclass

A complete top-band model answer to the extended online media question, annotated so you can see exactly where the marks are won.

The 20-marker on online, social and participatory media is the biggest single question in Paper 2 Section B. It rewards a sustained line of argument, not a list of features, and half of the marks reward the quality of your judgements and conclusions. This free extract from the Margin Notes Kim Kardashian unit shows a Level 4 answer with the margin notes that explain why each move earns credit.

The question (exam-style practice)

'Social media influencers succeed because of the audiences who choose to follow them, not because of the way the platforms are run.'

How far do you agree with this statement? Answer with reference to:

- the ways in which audiences use and interpret social media
- the social and cultural contexts of the media
- Kim Kardashian and Marcus Rashford (Close Study Products).

[20 marks]

How the 20 marks are awarded

Level 4 (16-20)	Assured, well-informed argument that stays focused on the statement; perceptive judgements supported by precise CSP detail throughout.
Level 3 (11-15)	Good understanding and frequent effective discussion; judgements usually supported with relevant CSP evidence.
Level 2 (6-10)	Sound understanding; discussion only sometimes convincing; CSP support is uneven.
Level 1 (1-5)	Limited discussion; points asserted rather than argued; little CSP evidence.

The mark scheme rewards depth and breadth equally, so a good answer keeps returning to the statement and weighs both sides before reaching a supported conclusion.

The annotated model answer

Left: the answer. Right: why each paragraph earns its marks.

The statement sets audience choice against platform power, but the Kim Kardashian CSP shows the two are not really rivals: her success depends on an audience that actively chooses her and on a platform business model that is built to reward that choice.

Frames the debate

Opens with a clear line of argument and signals a 'both sides' response, exactly what Level 4 needs.

Audiences clearly do choose to follow her. Using Blumler and Katz's Uses and Gratifications theory, her feed offers diversion through glossy, escapist content, personal identity through aspiration and role modelling, social interaction through comments and sharing, and information about products, trends and her ventures. No platform forces a follow: the audience is active, selecting her feed because it meets these needs.	Names the theory, applies it Blumler and Katz used precisely and mapped onto real feed content. The four gratifications give breadth; the 'active audience' point answers the statement directly.
The way audiences interpret her also supports the statement. A preferred reading sees her as aspirational, likeable and in control; but many followers take a negotiated reading ('great style, but it is all an advert'), and critics take an oppositional one, rejecting the feed as unrealistic or purely commercial. That range of readings comes from the audience, not the platform, which strengthens the 'audiences matter most' side.	Reception theory as evidence Preferred, negotiated and oppositional readings deployed to argue a point, not just defined. This is the interpretation strand of the question.
However, the platform is not a neutral pipe. Social media companies make their money by selling advertisers access to users' attention and data, and their design keeps audiences scrolling past adverts. Kim Kardashian thrives inside this creator economy: brands pay her because the platform can target and measure her audience. Her reach is manufactured by the same ownership and advertising model that runs the platform, so the way it is run is doing a great deal of the work.	Turns to industries Brings in the Media Industries content (advertising model, data, creator economy) to challenge the statement. This is the 'weighing both sides' the top band rewards.
Context matters too. Marcus Rashford shows the same pattern from a different angle: his campaigning reach depended on audiences choosing to amplify him, but also on platform features (sharing, trending, direct address to power) that made a footballer's tweet into national news. In both CSPs the social and cultural context of participatory media, where ordinary users circulate content, is what turns a personal following into influence.	Second CSP + context Rashford used as genuine comparison, and the social and cultural context bullet is addressed rather than bolted on.
Overall, the statement is only half right. Audiences are active and their choices and readings are central to Kim Kardashian's success, so influence cannot be reduced to platform power. But that success is inseparable from how the platforms are run, funded and designed. The most convincing judgement is that influencer success is co-produced: audience choice and platform business model depend on each other.	Judgement A supported, nuanced conclusion that resolves the debate instead of sitting on the fence. Judgement quality is half the marks here.

Want the whole unit?

This model answer is one page from the Margin Notes Kim Kardashian CSP unit: five ready-to-teach 60-minute lessons, a student revision booklet and full model answers across all four framework areas. Find it, plus the Marcus Rashford unit, in my shop: search Margin Notes on Tes.