

1 Make **five** criticisms of the claims in this advertisement.

[5]

**2½
times**

2½ times more effective!

With OUR weight-loss aid, you are 150% more likely to lose weight!

Clinical tests show that users of our weight-loss aid lose 150% more weight*

*than by diet alone

Questions 2, 3 and 4 refer to Documents 1 to 5.

- 2 Briefly analyse Simon's argument in Document 1: *Life's rich tapestry*, by identifying its main conclusion, intermediate conclusions and any counter-assertions. [6]
- 3 Give a critical evaluation of the strength of Simon's argument in Document 1: *Life's rich tapestry*, by identifying and explaining any flaws, implicit assumptions and other weaknesses. [9]
- 4 'TV companies should reduce their output of reality TV programmes.'

Construct a reasoned argument to support **or** challenge this claim, commenting critically on some or all of Documents 1 to 5 and introducing ideas of your own. [30]

DOCUMENT 1

Life's rich tapestry

Reality television has become increasingly popular over the past decade. Programmes like *American Idol* and *Big Brother* occupy more and more of the TV schedules, and are screened and imitated all over the world. It can be hard to define 'reality television', but it generally means programmes that show things really taking place, rather than a scripted drama or comedy show. It does not include news or sport.

Many of the older generation say reality TV corrupts society by portraying a false picture of reality. On the contrary, we should stop sneering at it and celebrate its existence. Reality TV does reflect society, which is not always pretty, and the advantages of reality TV far outweigh the risks.

Reality TV is very popular. It might not exercise the brain cells too much but, for most people, that is not what TV is about. People want entertainment, an escape from the worries of their mundane lives. That escapism can be provided by shows such as *I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out Of Here*. In one year alone, 176 different reality programmes were shown in the UK. Such supply must be as a result of enormous demand. We choose our governments on the basis of popularity: so that is a good enough reason for us to be comfortable with the rise of reality TV.

Some people complain about exploitation of participants in some of these shows, but these concerns are exaggerated. Reality shows treat their participants with respect. In any case, most people know what they are letting themselves in for: talent show contestants volunteer – indeed, the application process for things like *The Apprentice* can be lengthy. Moreover, organisations such as the restaurants that take part in *Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares* are commercial businesses, which deserve to be humiliated if their product is not good enough. One of the big plus points of reality TV is that 'real' people are shown in real situations. Many of the people who take part would have no other chance of getting on TV.

Reality TV is good for familial and even societal cohesion, as it brings people together in a way that has not happened for years. Once, there were very few channels; everyone watched the same programmes and then discussed them the next day. Reality TV is good for society as it recreates those 'water-cooler' moments. Most people watch reality TV in 'almost live' situations, rather than as streaming, DVDs, catch-up TV or repeats. This means that, once again, people can discuss a shared experience from the evening before. Reality programmes are enjoyed by people of all generations, so they can bring families back together around the TV.

Lastly, contrary to popular belief, reality TV is often educational. It allows us to study human behaviour and learn from it. Programmes such as *Big Brother* can illustrate the disastrous consequences of certain actions. Viewers can learn from this and then modify their own behaviour. *Fit Club* has got people thinking about their own health. *The Apprentice* has raised issues about business. Celebrity chef show *Jamie's School Dinners* has got people discussing the quality of school food and, in the UK, has led to a change in government policy. Without the TV funding and public popularity, meals provided in UK schools might still reflect what kids want to eat, not what they should be eating. So reality TV can improve societies, too.

Simon

DOCUMENT 2

Does reality TV affect behaviour?

In the first episode of a popular reality show, viewers are introduced to the 'cast' members. Within a few minutes one has questioned another's sexual morals. Someone is calling someone else stupid. The family is getting gossipy and aggressive.

This type of confrontational behaviour is good for ratings, but is it bad for the viewer? A recent study by a university psychology department has found that people who watch what's called 'relational aggression' – bullying, exclusion and manipulation – on reality shows are more likely to display aggression in their own lives.

Those taking part in the study were divided into three groups. Each group watched one of three types of TV show: a surveillance reality show that contained uplifting, heart-warming stories; a surveillance reality show that included a lot of aggression; or a fictional crime drama that contained violence.

There are ways to measure an individual's aggression. After watching one episode, people were asked to complete a game-like task that involved blasting a fake car horn at competitors. The researchers recorded how long participants waited to blast the sound, how long they blasted and how much they turned up the volume. Those who had watched the aggressive reality shows gave louder, longer blasts than those who watched the violent crime dramas.

The lead scientist said, "This is not enough to ban reality TV but it's probably worth thinking about if you're a parent or a TV executive."

DOCUMENT 3**Some comments on a news website following a report about reality TV**

Reality shows show real life. The insight these shows provide into human behaviour is interesting and informative. Just because the setting is artificial does not mean that the interactions are not real or observing them not worthwhile. I don't care if the characters are deliberately cast to be confrontational and 'tasks' are included to encourage tension. It only adds to the enjoyment and does not detract from the educational value of seeing how they cope.

ZY, Argentina

There was a big talent show a few years back that had an openly gay contestant who was clearly the best singer. The fact that he lost in the final demonstrated the homophobia of American society. It's not the reality shows that are corrupting: it is society itself. In order to solve a problem one must first accept that a problem exists. Reality shows can often illuminate such problems. The producers of these programmes should be praised not criticised.

WV, Canada

We can all watch The Godfather without becoming a gangster and affecting an Italian accent. Grown adults are capable of watching reality TV shows without mimicking any examples of bad behaviour they see.

UT, Estonia

Television ought to provide a wide range of programmes – drama, sport, news, documentaries and entertainment. Reality TV has its place in the smörgåsbord of provision. Indeed, reality TV is cheap to make and very popular. Therefore it generates a lot of money for broadcasters. This money allows them to fund other types of TV that are less profitable. Far from ruining it, TV has benefitted greatly from reality shows.

SR, Greece

Most countries operate a free market in terms of TV provision. As long as there is no harm in giving the people what they want, then what they want should not be restricted. I don't believe that reality shows are responsible for bad behaviour. You get loads of violence and unpleasantness on soap operas.

QP, Ireland

As reality shows increase, other programmes dwindle, to the extent that, at certain times, there is nothing else on! Reality shows cost little to make and series can run for hundreds of hours, filling up schedules. TV stations are cutting back on the more expensive drama, music, comedy and current affairs in favour of rubbish. Public service broadcasters like the BBC, Télévisions or Rai have a duty to inform and educate the public but they are not exempt from the creeping banality of reality. They should be made to honour their public service responsibility – indeed, as Rai in Italy has said, it will not show any more reality TV shows.

NO, Kenya

DOCUMENT 4

Respected news broadcaster criticises reality TV

John Humphrys, presenter on the respected current affairs programme, *Today*, on BBC Radio 4 and chairman of the high-brow BBC quiz show, *Mastermind*, has attacked reality television as “seedy, cynical and harmful to society”. During a speech to media executives at the Edinburgh Television Festival the veteran broadcaster said, “Some of our worst television is indeed indefensible.”

Humphrys, known for his straight-talking style and for badgering politicians during interviews, called for more regulation of television, even to the extent of government intervention.

The grey-haired former print journalist was delivering the prestigious McTaggart lecture. He said reality TV “eroded the distinction between the public and the private, which is a profoundly important aspect of our culture”. He called the hit show *Big Brother* “damaging” and said the most recent series of shows had “bequeathed us a legacy; the way to get ratings is to get evil”. He added, “Reality TV turns human beings into freaks for us to gawp at.”

People who are desperate to watch reality television could do so on subscription channels if they wish, but government should “limit the harm” done to those who have not made that choice by increased regulation of free to air channels, the Cardiff-born presenter said.

He added that TV had become “a battle between people who are concerned about society and those whose overwhelming interest is simply to make programmes that make money”.

The former TV newsreader also warned that coverage of politics on TV news should not be made “more fun” in order to try to boost public interest. In saying this, he disagreed with a former director general of the BBC who said it was the broadcaster’s job to make politics less boring by making the coverage less boring. “We shouldn’t be trying to lure [members of the public] into politics by pretending that it’s just another game show.” He said news needed “more, not less, in-depth interviewing of politicians”.

He said during the speech that he had not watched television for five years, but told delegates he had based his opinions on viewing programmes sent to him by TV companies as examples of the best of what reality TV has to offer.

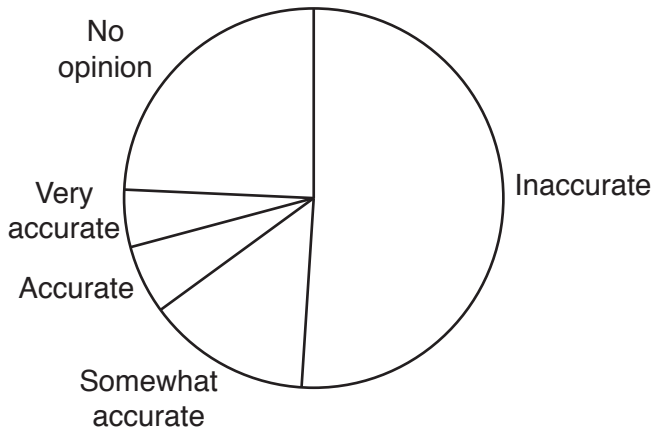
He did not think all TV was bad and reserved praise for certain programmes, including Channel 4’s *Operatunity* (a talent search show for potential new opera singers) and nature documentary *Life of Mammals* on the BBC. “Television...can help maintain the momentum that takes us from barbarity to civilisation...a vast amount of the rest is simply mediocre.”

The former BBC foreign correspondent warned that television was “more aggressive and confrontational...vulgar and obsessed with sex” than he remembered. He also said that such television could “coarsen” and “brutalise” and that the level of aggression in soaps “fits my definition of harmful”. He admitted that the BBC produced its share of rubbish and poor quality programmes. He also said, “The quality of the best television is just as good as it ever was, I suspect...some of it is even better”.

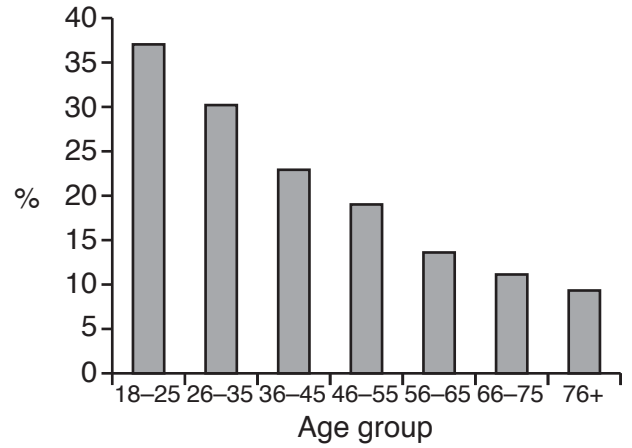
DOCUMENT 5

Some statistics about reality television

Do you think what is shown on reality TV shows is accurate?

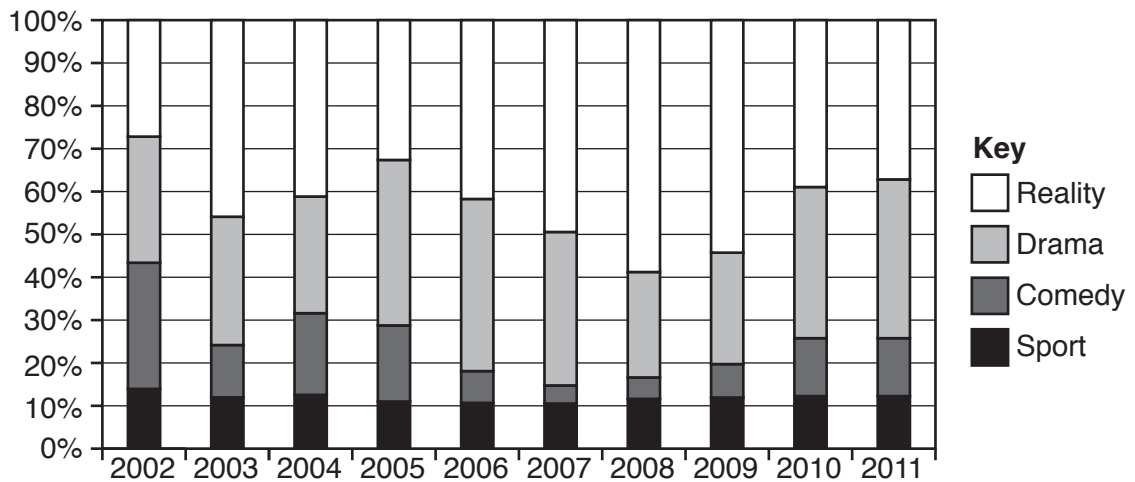


Who watches reality TV*



* data collected from homes fitted with TV monitoring device

Percentage of total of 4 genres of TV programme offered by all TV stations during prime time



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