

## The Media

Outline and explain two ways that the new media has changed representations of disability in the media (10)

One way in which the new media has changed representation of disability in the media is through greater representations of the normal lives of disabled people. Barnes suggested that traditional media often portrays an image of pity when representing disability in the media or as needing charity. This is certainly true of traditional media outlets such as terrestrial television, where representations of disability were either absent or as a result of an able-bodied character having suffered some form of tragedy. In recent years however, the growth of social media has led to increased discussion and the reduction of stigma around a range of disabilities. Social media has led to increased campaigns around awareness of disabilities and demonstrated empowerment of those with disability to lead ordinary lives. Campaigns around people suffering from Downs Syndrome and modelling, the reduction of stigma about stomas (colostomy bags) and women blogging about their ordinary lives living with breast cancer have all increased the positive representations of disability in the media as a result of ordinary disabled people being able to create content and tell their own stories.

A second way in which new media has changed representations of disability in the media is through making more content available. Before the advent of digital media, the limited number of channels meant that terrestrial channels did little to cater for smaller audiences. Therefore, programmes were targeted at the mainstream audience and representations of disability were often stereotyped or not visible at all. Barnes suggests the representations of disability centred around a range of characteristics, such as super human disabilities and disable people as villains (e.g. James Bond villains such as Blofeld and Scarramanga). With the arrival of digital networks and streaming services, this has enabled programmes that target specific markets to be shown and allows for more creativity in the representation of minority groups. The popularity of programmes such as *The Last Leg* which began with a focus

## #40DayChallenge Day 25

on the super-human aspect of disability (para-Olympians) but rapidly came to normalise disability to the extent that it became mainstream television programming that focused on a broader range of topics. This illustrates that the increased quantity has led to a normalisation of disability in mainstream media.