Analyse two ways in which news media may influence the subjects people think about and how they perceive those subjects. (10 marks)

One way that news media may influence the subjects people think about could be by agenda setting. This is when people in control (such as newspaper owners e.g. Rupert Murdoch), use their power to control what is discussed in meetings by limiting the topics spoken about to what they want people to talk about.

Cohen says that while the news media may not be entirely successful in telling people what to think, but they are successful in telling people what to think about. This means that although people in power cannot determine other people’s opinions about topics, they can decide what content to produce and get people to think about using their position of power.

McCombs agrees with Cohen that the media decides what we have to think about, but believes that additionally news media also determines how we perceive the subjects spoken about. This is shown by the images that the media controllers put in their content, for example, the pictures of politicians used and the way that rioters or benefit claimers are written about. As the way the benefit claimers are written about is negative, people stigmatise those people due to the way that news media influences the subjects people think about and also how they perceive those subjects.

The GMG and Philo suggest that main media organisations and their journalist employees, work within a framework of the dominant ideology which helps to form the list of subjects that the public are encouraged to think about, and audiences have barely any choice of the news they receive. This is used to those in power’s advantage as they can actively discourage the public from believing things. This is proof that the social construction of the news encourages audiences what to think about the subjects that the news shows.

The second way that news media may influence the subjects people think about could be by gatekeeping. This is when those who are in power of the media refuse to cover some stories. The GMG says that the editors and journalists construct the news by taking on the role of a gatekeeper. They use this to their interest, influencing what the public have access to read and see. This idea can be seen in newspapers by looking at the way the news is presented as it influences how people are encouraged to view stories. Examples of this could be the position of the news stories on a website, the order of stories in a paper, camera angles and choice of headlines can all be manipulated within the media to their interest. All these methods influence the subjects people think about and how they perceive those subjects.

However, Pluralists disagree with all the points above and say that audiences are not as gullible to the media and they have the choice to accept or reject the opinions shown – they are not forced to believe them. This depends on their existing ideas or experiences. The impact of new media as a balance also shows that people have the possibility to have alternate views to those of the media establishment.