TSSM ™
Creating VCE Success

Media
Teach Yourself Series
Topic 2: Narrative – Audience Engagement, Consumption and Reception for present day and intended audiences
Units 1, 2 and 3

Contents

Audience Engagement, Consumption and Reception with Media Narratives

The relationship between the audience and the media is, at the most fundamental, the most important aspect of media operations. Whether it is producing for a new television series, or developing a new app for the newest smartphone, the concept of a media audience is what drives us in the industry to create our work. We in the media industry work for the audience, they are our client, our business, and the ones who can in effect make or break the products we choose to create.

Media products do not effectively exist without an audience to consume them. When it comes to making a profit from the newest cinema release (which is a common agenda for Hollywood), this can only be succeeded with the help of the audience. We must always keep the concept of media audiences in mind when in the development stage of media production, for it is the knowledge we have of their likes, dislikes, understandings about the world, etc that will guide what we make for them and release to them.

Keeping the audience in mind in terms of the consumption and receiving of your product is also very important. We must keep in mind that media products are designed to be consumed in certain ways – perhaps at the cinema, or through Netflix streaming. The decision of how to allow audiences to consume will have a major impact on the success of your product. We must be clear about how we want our products to be viewed and enjoyed by the audience. What would they expect as a consumption system? We have to cater for this. The reception of a media product also calls us into considering audience background. How audiences interpret (receive) a product depends on a range of textual as well as contextual factors (such as their individual personalities and belief systems). When we make media products we have to take this into consideration, for the intended message that we may wish to pass on to the audience may be lost in translation unless we target the message clearly and specifically to a target audience.

However, one of the more important factors of the audience we must consider in any sort of production or analysis work is the concept of engagement. Fundamentally, unless a media product connects to its audience, it will not succeed no matter the consumption system you have, no matter what celebrities are involved, no matter how much money has been invested. Audiences want to consume media that interests them and has something important and relevant to say. It is the job of the creator to fulfil the obligation they have to connect their product with the audience and ensure there is no room for error with the audience feeling a sense of belonging, or engagement, to the product. How this engagement looks changes according to the purpose of the product and even the type of product being created. How a film engages audience attention will be vastly different to a commercial radio show.

The main focus of your studies of audiences across Units 1 to 3 is showing an understanding and appreciation for:

- How audiences engage with media products
- The ways in which engagement changes over time and throughout societies
- The ways creators can 'construct' products to allow for maximum engagement
- How products are consumed and received by intended audiences and present day audiences

Intended versus Present day audiences

As it appears in Unit 3

The concept of media audience is not static and universal. In the media world we acknowledge that there are a multitude of audiences who exist. These audiences can have different personalities, ages, likes, backgrounds and interests. Knowing who to cater your product to can be a daunting thought, but it is fundamental in the production of a successful product. The content of a product, the views and values it promotes must be able to connect to certain audience types in order to succeed. As part of your studies in Media, you will always be asked to discuss your target audience – the group you want to have consume this product, the group who may obtain the most out of using and interacting with your product. An important feature of any media product analysis will also focus on how the product functions to engage its audience. If you understand these mechanisms, you are in a better state to create your own engaging media products.

In Unit 3, the concepts of 'intended' versus 'present day' audiences are introduced. Inherent in this dichotomy is the idea that products can be used and viewed by multiple audiences. Whilst a media product may remain the same, the types of audiences who engage with it very often change. Consider media products created in the Golden Age of Hollywood – 1930s and 40s. Films were crafted at a time where audiences expected to see attention to beauty and aesthetic in their films. The concept of a film star – and beautiful ones at that, was a key feature of films at this time. Audiences of this period expected to see these sorts of images on screen, which created and enhanced levels of connection to the product. In 2020, when modern audiences see the same films, levels of engagement drastically change – in positive and negative ways, due to changes in audience knowledge and expectations of these films, and their personal feelings about these sorts of media products.

These two different audience types are what are called 'intended' versus 'present day' audiences. Intended refers to the original target audience of the product. This group may be from a specific society, or even a specific time period. Present day audience refers to the current period of time and society that an audience lives in. The reason you are asked to analyse how audiences from different periods of time engage with, consume and receive media products differently, is to help you see that audiences are vast and diverse. That there is no one concept of 'audience' when considering media products and who they're made for, that there are multitudes of ways that audiences can connect with media products. It will help put into context that when you make your own products, there will be multiple audiences, and these will change and evolve over time.

For your narratives under study, it is vitally important that you can grasp these two specific audience types – including their backgrounds, the years they engaged with the products, how they engaged with the products, how they consumed and received them. Being able to focus on groups from distinctly different societies or periods of time is much more effective, so you can see drastic differences in audience behaviour over time. It is always good to be able to compare differences in the intended versus present day audience's experience of using media products. The comparisons will make it clearer and obvious about the changes that have occurred with the audience, and why the experiences have changed so much. Ensure you do as much research as possible about the different qualities that make up these two audiences, and draw links between these and the content and structure of your products. A fundamental question you should ask yourself is:

- *How did the intended and present day audience engage with specific aspects of our narratives? Why has there been such a change?*

- *How did the intended and present day audiences consume and receive the narratives? Are there differences and why have these occurred?*

Review Questions

1. Outline the intended audience of a media product you've studied this year.

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2. How did the present day audience engage with this same narrative? Was it similar or different to the intended audience?

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Solutions to Review Questions

1. Students must first identify a media product they've studied this year, including a quick outline of the story. After this, students need to ensure they outline the specific aspects of their audience that make them who they are. This needs to include the aspects of their behavioural traits, personality, likes, dislikes. It is not enough to simply outline age and gender. An outline means to give some general detail about the audience's background, not just identify certain features.

2. A different audience needs to be discussed in this answer – a modern audience. Ways that they engage with the product need to be discussed, including change in ideologies or changes in technology compared to the target audience. There needs to be clear and simple contrasts between the intended and present day audience in terms of the similar or different ways they all engage.

3. The answer needs to show a clear understanding of a specific audience's engagement through textual elements within a product, such as connection to characters, emotional or psychological engagement. Students need to outline very specific textual aspects of their narratives that created engagement – refer to specific aspects of characters, storylines, and then discuss what these did to audiences in terms of engagement with the narrative.

4. As above, students are initially expected to outline the very specific contextual aspects of their audience that are part of audience engagement – such as prior knowledge, genre expectations, etc. These need to be closely aligned with the narratives and the audience's engagement with them. For instance, explaining that audiences connected very closely with the character of Chris Gardner and felt sympathy for his life on the streets in *The Pursuit of Happyness* because some audiences may have also experienced poverty as he did.

5. Creating audience engagement is essential when creating media products because first, media products need to make money and generate profit in order to be successful and to ensure continual success. If a product connects closely with an audience, then chances are it will succeed for the audience but also for the creator. Secondly, it is important to create engagement because products are designed for audiences. They must appeal to them and resonate with them, otherwise the product is, in effect, not in existence.

6. You may choose to use yourself, or the intended audience for this answer. You must first outline a specific ideology that the named audience supports or believes. This will then lead into an analysis of how that ideology created some level of engagement through an aspect of the narrative – for instance, helping the audience to emotionally connect to a character who also shared a similar ideology in the film or television series under study. Ensure that you are specific to the narrative under study, and reference very particular aspects of it that show the ideology has impacted on engagement levels.