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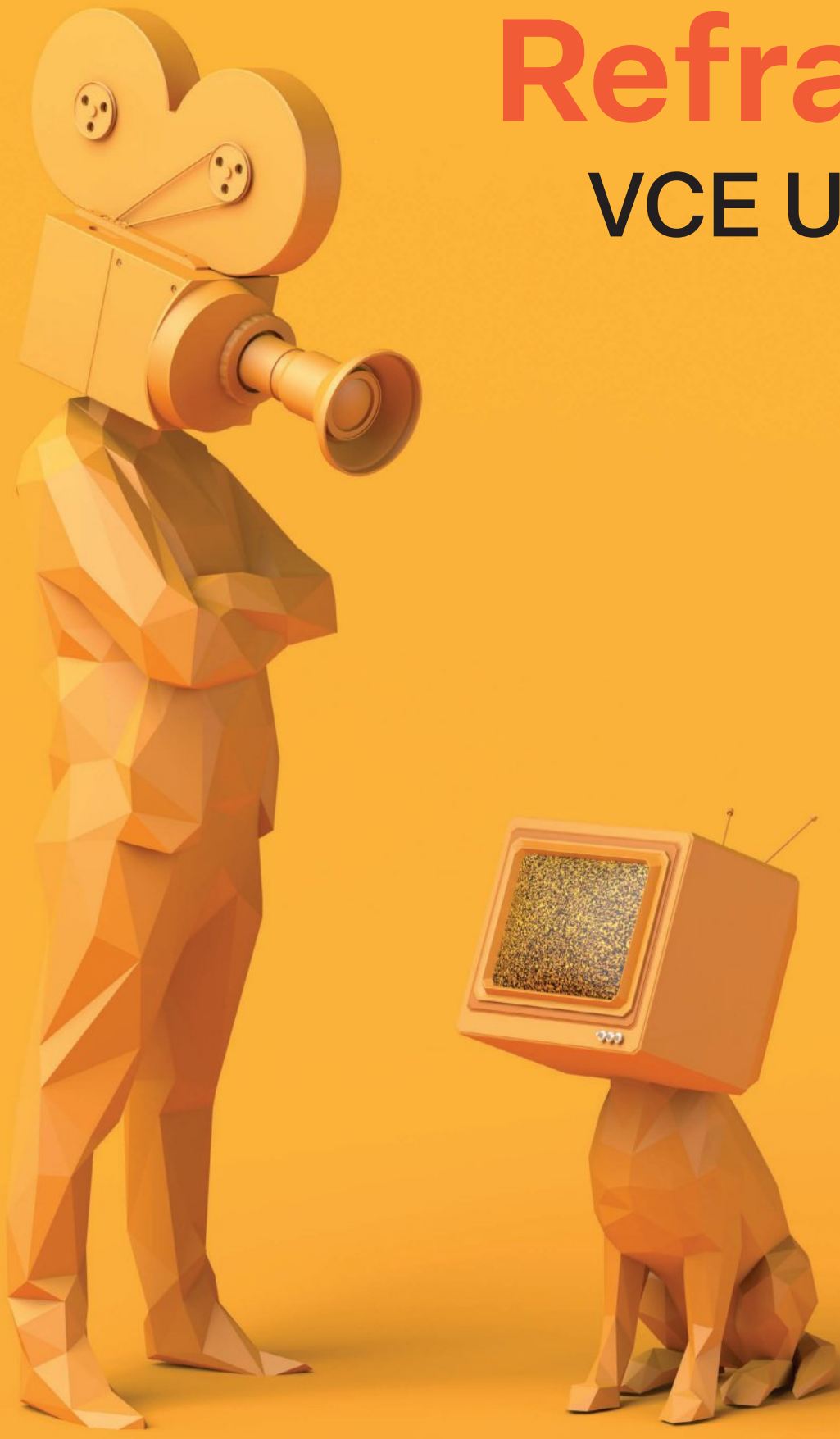
MEDIA Reframed

VCE Units 1–4

Second Edition

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Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India
103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

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First published 2018
Second Edition 2023
20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Cover and text designed by Shaun Jury
Typeset by Integra as Integra Software Services Pvt. Ltd
Printed in Singapore by Markono Print Media Pte Ltd

A catalogue record for this book is available from the National Library of Australia at www.nla.gov.au
Paperback

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Introduction

Welcome to the world of VCE Media! You have selected a study that is arguably one of the most relevant and important as we dive further into an age where developing a critical eye and mind are essential life skills. The first line of the Study Design reads, 'the media is ubiquitous' – whether it is our smartphones, streaming services, social media platforms, the 24-hour news cycle or the pervasive nature of data harvesting and targeted advertising, it is true that the media is omnipresent. It is crucial that students become informed, savvy and critical consumers and producers of media. VCE Media Units 1–4 have been written to develop solid media literacy skills, analytical and technical skills as well as an awareness of the impact the media has on an individual, collective and global scale.

About the authors

BEN HOBAN

Ben is a teacher of VCE Media and History and has been teaching both subjects at Balcombe Grammar School and in government education since 2009. Ben is the co-author of *Media Reframed* first edition, *Cambridge Humanities for Victoria* and *Modern History Transformed Year 12.* He is the Digital Pedagogies leader at Balcombe Grammar School and a passionate advocate for innovative learning and digital literacy. Outside of education, Ben has been widely published in pop culture and action sports media and is a skateboarder who is old enough to know better.

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NICK BOOTH

Nick studied film in San Francisco and teaches English and Media at Mentone Grammar. He is also the author of *Cambridge Checkpoints Media Units 3 & 4*. With a passion for video production, Nick enjoys helping students bring their stories to life.

DAVID CAUST

After graduating from the legendary Rusden State College, David Caust has worked as a teacher of Media and Art for 35 years, with the occasional breakout in the broader media–arts industry.

MARK HEWITT

Mark Hewitt has been a Media teacher for the best part of a decade. Working with students to create engaging films, animations, zines and everything in-between is the thing that keeps him returning to the classroom each year. Throughout his career, Mark's love of cult cinema and panache for hyperbole have been tolerated by scores of students.

Author acknowledgements

BEN HOBAN

I would like to thank my wife, Rebecca, for her inexhaustible support and constant encouragement. To my children, Jemima and Murphy, I hope you never tire of *The Simpsons* and *Star Wars*, for there you will learn all you ever need to learn. Thank you to the incredible team who worked on this book, Lauren, Nick, David and Mark. Thank you to Christina Burton and the Creative Arts Team at BGS and, finally, Nick Alexander at Cambridge University Press for your non-stop passion for media and this book.

LAUREN HUMPHRIS

Thank you so much to my good mate Ben Hoban, who I sat next to in VCE Media all those years ago, for inviting me to be a part of this incredible project – it is such an honour to be able to contribute to the VCE Media landscape in this way. Thanks to Nick Alexander at Cambridge for being the most understanding and patient publisher. Thank you to my amazing family, especially my two sons who are incredibly supportive while I write. I am so glad you love *Back to the Future* as much as I do. Most of all, thank you to my Media students – past, present and future. You make coming to work the most fun job ever.

NICK BOOTH

Thank you to my amazingly supportive partner, Amelia, for your love and patience. I dedicate my work on this text to our children, Rose, Jimmy and Rudy. Thank you again Nick Alexander and Cambridge for allowing me to be a part of this wonderful textbook.

DAVID CAUST

I would like to thank my wife, Vicki Hobbs, and daughter, Lucinda Caust, for their inspiration, and my colleagues in the Arts at Taylors Lakes Secondary College for their brilliance and support over many years.

MARK HEWITT

I would like to thank my family for sweetly listening to my dinner table monologues about Sam Fuller, Joseph H Lewis and Sergio Leone and for tolerating my anxiety during deadlines. To Nick Alexander for indulging my love of cult movies and allowing me to crowbar my thoughts into this new edition. And, finally, to the students reading this, remember, there's a whole universe of cinematic brilliance out there, hidden just beyond the multiplex and noise of the streaming queues.

Publisher acknowlegements

The publisher and authors would like to sincerely thank reviewers Sharon Davis of Goorlil Consulting, Daniel Hennequin, and Amy Robson for their time, expertise and valued contributions to the second edition. We would also like to acknowledge the work of First Edition authors Hugh Mason-Jones, Vic Tietze and Lisa Blumenstein – thank you.

The Interactive Textbook

The Interactive Textbook included with *Media Reframed*, second edition, includes a range of additional content, including:

- a range of examples of former VCE Media student productions, across different media forms, including Video, Photography, Print layout, Audio
- examples of student pre-production work across various media forms, including storyboards, scripts and media production design plans
- tips for the shooting process
- reflective video interviews with former VCE Media students about their experiences through the media production process and lessons learnt.

The Interactive Textbook also includes downloadable 'success criteria' checklists per chapter. Below is an example of how these look and an explanation of their purpose.

Checklist

The success criteria are linked to the learning intentions from each section of this chapter, and have been written based on the key knowledge and skills of the VCE Media Study Design. Completing the linked questions per success criteria will thoroughly prepare you for success in this subject. Fill in, print or photocopy this page (like the example below) and tick the boxes when you have answered the corresponding questions correctly.

Success criteria – I am now able to:		Linked question	Completed
2.2 Understanding audience **2.3** Pre-production process	• use media pre-production, production and post-production techniques and processes • research and apply media design and production techniques to represent ideas and achieve particular effects	Activity 2.1 Activity 2.2 Activity 2.3 Activity 2.4 Activity 2.5	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
2.4 Practical tasks **2.5** Submission and Statement of Outcome	• apply media codes and conventions to construct meaning in media products • operate media technologies to produce representations in a range of media forms • evaluate the characteristics of a range of media representations in media forms	Activity 2.6 Activity 2.7 Activity 2.8 Activity 2.9 Activity 2.10 Activity 2.11 Activity 2.12	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Throughout the chapter	• use media language appropriate to the design, production and evaluation of media representations in a range of media forms	Activity 2.6–2.12	☐

Assessment in VCE Media

VCE Media is a subject that combines theory and practice, and the types of assessment across both years of the study reflect this. This book is written with the intention of helping you to develop the skills you need to succeed in your studies; however, we recommend you speak to your teacher and visit the VCAA website for the latest information about assessment in this subject.

Endnotes

Please note that in this textbook you may encounter occasional endnotes, where the authors wanted to reference additional sources. A list of endnotes is available in the PDF and Interative Textbook versions of this resource.



STUDY SPECIFICATIONS

INQUIRY QUESTION

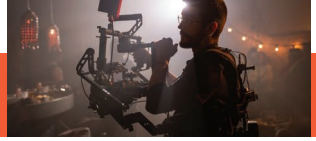
What are the key concepts used in VCE Media?

OVERVIEW

Underpinning VCE Media are the study specifications that allow for teachers and students to develop a common language and collective understanding of the terminology that is used throughout Units 1–4. It is essential that you delve into each of these specifications – learn them, use them and be able to draw upon examples to demonstrate what they mean. Through regular revision and use of these terms, your coursework – both written and practical – will consistently improve. So, without further ado … here are the VCE Media Units 1–4 Study specifications.

FIGURE 0.1 (above) A camera person on the set of a media production

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0.1 Study specifications used in VCE Media

Media literacy

> Media literacy is defined as an interrelated set of competencies that help people to maximise advantages and minimise harm in the new information, digital and communication landscapes. Media and information literacy covers competencies that enable people to engage with information, other forms of content, the institutions that facilitate information and diverse types of content, and the discerning use of digital technologies critically and effectively.
>
> VCE Media promotes media literacy by encouraging students to produce their own media products and engage critically with media as citizens in a democratic society.

FIGURE 0.2 VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, p. 12, used with permission

Media literacy is a brand-new study specification and a competency that is found in many Media courses around the globe. Essentially, this specification draws closely on the rationale for studying media – that with the rise of global media, ease of access to information and the ability to communicate widely and instantaneously, it is increasingly becoming important that young people have a strong ability to read, dissect and critique the media. Being media literate means that an individual has the ability to critically analyse narratives, news and information – all the assortment of 'stories' in the mass media.

The ability to be able to read, interpret and critically dissect the messages presented in the mass media is critical for citizens across the globe. The need for this to be explicitly taught and considered is conveyed by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) through its campaign for Media and Information Literacy.

> UNESCO supports the development of media and information literacy for all to enable people's ability to think critically and click wisely. The Organization particularly strives to enhance the capacities of policymakers, educators, information and media professionals, youth organizations, and disadvantaged populations in this area, assisting Member States to formulate national media and information literacy policies and strategies.

FIGURE 0.3 'About Media and Information Literacy', UNESCO website

Through the recognition of the need to make media literacy a global priority, UNESCO has developed the Five Laws of Media and Information Literacy. These Laws, alongside policy advice, advocacy for media and information literacy across the globe and a commitment to stand against false and misleading information, form the platform for UNESCO and much of the global work being done in the media literacy space.

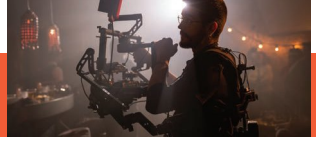
Further to the work of UNESCO in this area is the common understanding that media literacy is a term that encompasses several key ideas. Through a developed understanding that the mass media is playing in our lives, the goal of media literacy is to ensure that students develop critical thinking skills in all types of media. This means the ability to question, seek further details, opinions and perspectives, and to be able to decode the messages being presented.



FIGURE 0.4 UNESCO's Five Laws of Media and Information Literacy

In addition to this is the importance of developing an understanding of how media messages shape culture and society. While there are many theories and ideas around the ability and the extent of the media's role in the shaping of culture and society, through developing the skills of media literacy, citizens can be more aware of the connection between them.

Another goal of developing media literacy is to empower and enable citizens to advocate for media organisations and producers of media messages to be created thoughtfully and ethically.[1]



ACTIVITY 0.1

Defining 'media literacy'

1. Write your own short definition of what you believe media literacy means. You may need to do some further research.
2. As a student today, why do you believe it is important for people to be educated and aware of the role of the media in our lives?
3. Head to the UNESCO website and explore the Five Laws of Media and Information Literacy. Which of these laws do you believe to be the most important and why?

Media products

Essentially, media products are the tangible 'thing' that is consumed by an audience. A media product could be …

> Media products are the consumable output designed by media producers. They are distributed to audiences who engage with, consume and read them.

FIGURE 0.5 VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, p. 12, used with permission

A film, a magazine, a book, a podcast, a software product, a computer game, a TV series, a webpage, a photograph, a billboard, a social media post …

These products have been created, distributed, consumed and read within a specific context – time, place, cultural, societal. It is through this lens of context that we can see how media products are indeed a 'product' of the time and place in which they were created.

Media products are made by a creator and distributed via a range of media forms to an audience. See below!

Media forms

> Media products are designed and produced in a wide variety of media forms. The construction of a media product is dependent on the style and genre of the product and the intended audience, location, context and time in which the product was created, produced, distributed, consumed and read by audiences. Media forms refer to technological means and channels by which the media is created, produced, distributed, consumed and read. Media forms include:
>
> - Moving image: film, television, video, animation
> - Still image: photography
> - Audio: radio, podcast
> - Print: magazine, zine, comic, graphic novel, newspaper, poster
> - Digital: online video and audio, streaming video and audio, podcast, magazine, comic, graphic novel, newspaper, video game, blog, website, app.
> - Convergent or hybridised media: the combination or joining of two or more media forms, such as photography and animation, print productions and a digital game, augmented and virtual reality products.

FIGURE 0.6 VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, p. 12, used with permission

It seems really simple and easy to understand – media products = 'the thing' vs media forms = 'the mode/channel' through which we consume 'the thing'. However, it is a common error that students make in the use of the terminology. Media products and media forms are two separate concepts, and we need to understand how they are not one and the same. This is increasingly important as we can have media creators producing the same content and messages, but across multiple products and forms. For example, Taylor Swift can produce an audio form of her music in the product of the single, a digital form through a social media post about the single and a moving image form of a short film of the song as a music video. Essentially, all three 'products' are the same – the song – yet the forms differ through which they are distributed and consumed.

ACTIVITY 0.2

Analysing media forms

1 Make a list of all the media products you have consumed over the last 48 hours. Try to include the products you intentionally sought out and consumed and others you may have had only a secondary exposure to: e.g. the talkback radio on the bus into school! Be specific – e.g. Channel 9 news, an episode of your favourite TV show, a trip to the movies to see the latest Marvel blockbuster.

2 Look at your list and consider the media form that each of these products fits into.

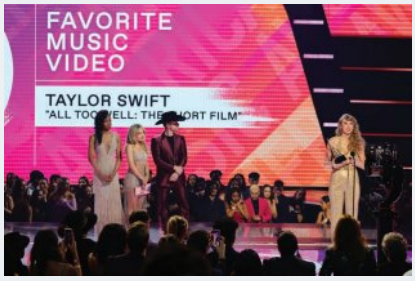


FIGURE 0.7 Taylor Swift releases content through a range of media forms.

Media technologies

> Media technologies are the analogue and digital technologies used in development of media products.

FIGURE 0.8 VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, p. 12, used with permission

There are many different types of technology that can be used in the development of media products, including digital audio and video editing software, animation and special effects software. Additionally, the internet and various digital communication platforms are often used to distribute media products. Some examples of digital technology used in the development of media products include Adobe Creative Suite, Final Cut Pro and Avid Media Composer for video editing, and Ableton Live and Pro Tools for audio production. Social media platforms continue to develop the ability for users to quickly and easily create, edit and distribute content. AI tools that can generate text and images, and edit video with a huge range of effects have resulted in all users of social media platforms being able to become their own legitimate producers in their own right.

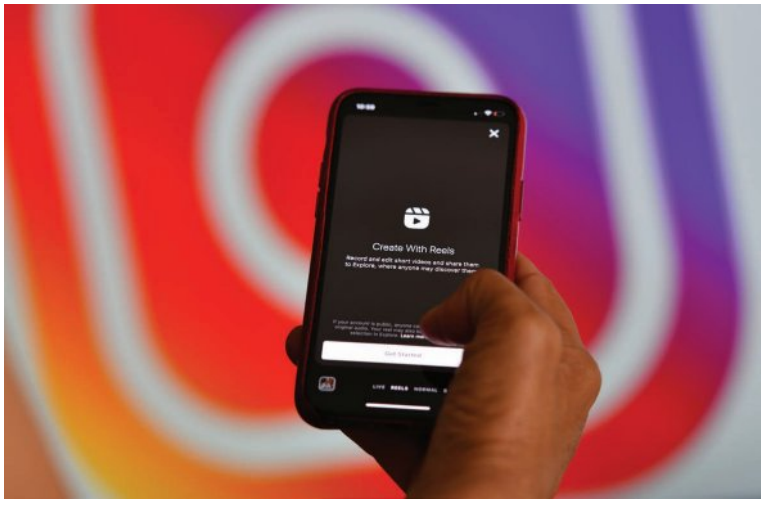
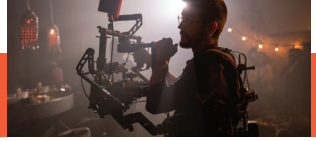


FIGURE 0.9 Your smartphone is a powerful form of media technology.



Analogue technologies refer to traditional methods of creating and producing media products such as film, music and photography. These technologies include film cameras and tape recorders.

In the film industry, analogue technologies such as film cameras and film stock were used to create movies before the advent of digital technologies. Filmmakers would use film cameras to shoot their movies and then process the film in a lab to create the final product. This process was time-consuming and costly, but it also had its benefits. Film stock provides a unique texture and grain that is not replicable in digital formats, and many filmmakers still prefer the look of film over digital. Similarly, in photography, analogue technologies such as film cameras and film stock were used to create photographs before the advent of digital technologies. Film cameras used film rolls to capture images and the film had to be processed in a lab to create the final product. Film cameras have a unique look and feel that is not replicable in digital formats and many photographers still prefer the look of film over digital. A high level of skill and technique when using such analogue technologies is important as there is limited ability to 'fix' the images in post-production. (Unless of course these images are digitised!) Analogue technologies require the knowledge of lighting and exposure techniques to ensure the images are clear.

Analogue technologies have played an important role in the creation of media products and many people still prefer the unique qualities that these technologies offer. While digital technologies have made it easier and more cost-effective to create media products, analogue technologies are still used by many professionals and enthusiasts.

ACTIVITY 0.3

Analysing media technologies

1. List five digital media technologies and find a media product that has been produced using each technology. For example, the digital technology of Photoshop – a heavily edited photograph with multiple layers.
2. List five analogue media technologies and find a media product that has been produced using each technology. For example, the analogue technology of a cassette player/recorder – a mixed cassette tape!

Media narratives

In VCE Media, narrative is used to describe fictional and non-fictional media stories in all media forms. A narrative is composed of story and plot. The term 'story' refers to all events that contribute to the narrative, while plot refers to how the story is structured or told. Narratives are the depiction of a chain of events in a cause-and-effect relationship occurring in physical or virtual space over a period of time.

Fictional and non-fictional stories are fundamental to the media and are found in all media forms. Media industries such as journalism, filmmaking, publishing and photojournalism are built upon the creation and distribution of stories. Stories are constructed using the elements of plot in the form of a systematically organised series of interconnected images, sounds and/or words using media codes and conventions. The creator and the audience share an understanding of both the construction, distribution, consumption and reception of stories. Digital media forms enable creators and participants to develop and distribute stories in hybrid forms, including collaborative and user-generated content, which challenges the traditional understanding of story forms and advances new modes of audience engagement.

FIGURE 0.10 VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, p. 13, used with permission

What sets VCE Media apart from the other Visual Art studies is this key study specification – media narratives. In the other studies, there is arguably more scope to be more 'experimental' or 'abstract' – or in the case of Visual Communication and Design, the SAT (School-assessed Task) is based around client needs that fit a design brief. What sets this study apart is the notion that the practical work produced by students must tell a story. What underpins the work – in whatever form you choose to work in – is a narrative. The narrative that is at the core of your work can be used to entertain, to create a sense of suspense or to make a story more interesting. The narrative could provide a moral message, seek to educate or inform. A good narrative can make a media product more engaging and enjoyable for the audience, which can increase its appeal and its chances of success.

A strong media narrative is important in media products because it helps to organise and present information in a way that is engaging for the audience. Through codes and conventions, media narratives allow audiences to understand the concepts and ideas presented in a media product. A strong narrative can also create emotional investment in a story, which can make it more memorable and impactful for the audience. This is the case with both fictional and non-fictional media products. For example, the advertising industry understand the importance of a story to connect with their audience. Through this story, audiences become invested in the product or service, which, in turn, converts into sales.

A company that has mastered the concept of a narrative in its advertising is Qantas, which capitalises on the emotional pull of family and Christmas.



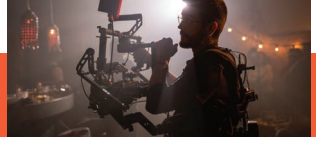
FIGURE 0.11 Qantas has capitalised in the power of narrative through its 'Feels Like Home' campaign

In non-fiction media products, narrative is just as important as fictional products. For example, in news stories the media narrative can also be used to shape the way an audience interprets and understands a story. By choosing certain facts, quotes and images, and by presenting them in a certain order, media producers can influence the way an audience understands and responds to an issue or event. Selection and omission are key elements of any narrative – what to include and what to leave out.

Narrative can also be used to frame a discussion or to create a certain story around a particular event, person or situation. This can be particularly useful for political or social issues, where the media can play an important role in shaping public opinion. Political parties aim to create a narrative around their policy platforms, especially during election campaigns. This narrative is practised and refined and fed to political journalists in order to communicate what the party represents.



FIGURE 0.12 Political parties aim to create a narrative around their policy platforms, especially during election campaigns.



Overall, the narrative is an important tool for media products, as it helps to organise and present information in a way that is engaging and easy to understand, and it should form the core of your production work throughout VCE Media.

ACTIVITY 0.4

Analysing media narratives

Find a media product from each of the following categories. Watch and/or read the content. Identify what the narrative is. What story is the media creator trying to convey?

- An advertisement for a sport/lifestyle brand
- A social media Reel
- A popular video or computer game
- An online news story

Media contexts

> Media contexts refers to the societal context in which media products are produced and read. The study of media contexts is an examination of factors (including social, cultural, economic, political and/or historical) that may influence production and audience readings. Media contexts are explored through an analysis of these factors and how they are reflected in media products studied, and how these products may implicitly or explicitly comment on, reflect on, develop, reject or ignore dominant views and values. Media products should be viewed in the light of the contexts in which they are produced and received. When producing their own media texts, students should also demonstrate an understanding of how their contexts help to shape their work.

FIGURE 0.13 VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, p. 13, used with permission

There is a common phrase that is used throughout many areas of study, society and everyday life situations – 'context is everything'. Context refers to the information or environment surrounding a particular situation or event. Context shapes almost everything we see and how we perceive a particular moment. It can greatly affect how something is interpreted or understood. Without a wider understanding of context, it can be very easy to misinterpret or misunderstand a situation. For example, have you ever come into a heated conversation and not fully understood the lead-up to it? It can lead to jumping to conclusions and a misunderstanding of what is being discussed.

When we discuss the concept of media contexts, it is quite similar. Without an understanding of the context in which a media product has been produced, we can become easily confused or even offended by what is being communicated. Media products are quite often a clear reflection of the society, time and culture in which they are made. Media creators are rarely producing content for past or future audiences – they are producing for an audience within the framework of their own context. The media often reflects the values, attitudes, beliefs and norms of the society it serves. It can shape public opinion and bring attention to social issues, but it can also perpetuate stereotypes and reinforce existing power structures.

Media creators are influenced by the cultural, social, economic, historical and political contexts in which they live and work. These contexts can shape the themes and messages of their films, as well as the techniques and styles they use to tell their stories. For example, a filmmaker living in a country with a strict censorship regime and conservative ideas around moral issues may have to be more subtle in the ways they address certain storylines, while a filmmaker working in a more liberal society may be able to be more direct. Additionally, filmmakers can be influenced by the cultural contexts they are immersed in, such as literary or artistic movements, which may shape their aesthetic choices. Also, the socioeconomic contexts of the filmmaker can play a role in their work, as filmmakers from marginalised communities may choose to tell stories that reflect their experiences and perspectives.

At times, these perspectives and points of view are overtly expressed within a media product. It is clear what position the media creator is taking towards a particular issue or event. For example, director Jordan Peele openly conveys his views around racism towards African Americans in his 2017 film *Get Out*. Through a mix of horror and comedy, the film highlights the various ways in which racism operates in contemporary society, including micro-aggressions and cultural appropriation. The film ultimately reveals the depths of the systemic racism that still exists in the USA and makes a powerful statement about the urgency of anti-racist activism. Peele created this film set against the context of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. The BLM movement seeks to address systemic racism, police brutality and the disproportionate use of deadly force against Black people. It has inspired a global conversation about the ongoing fight for racial justice. In 2023, the movement has continued to draw attention to ongoing incidents of police violence and to advocate for reforms to the criminal justice system.

On the other hand, there are media products that are far less overt or explicit in conveying the views and values of a time and place, yet are still clearly products of the context in which they are created. The media creator may subtly imply a view or position on what is going on in their world and how this is influencing their work. The 2016 Disney feature animation, *Moana* (dir. Ron Clements et al.), is a classic children's narrative with the usual big musical scenes and a princess who overcomes adversity. However, this film makes a clear statement about the impact of climate change, particularly in the Pacific nations and on Indigenous people who feel a deep connection to their lands. At the time of production, many nations were debating the impact of climate change and committing to the 2015 Paris Agreement to lower emissions to limit global warming.

While *Moana* is not directly about climate change, it does draw upon environmental themes. The film follows the journey of a young woman named Moana as she sets out to save her island and her people from the 'darkness' that has been caused by greed. The film touches upon themes of environmental conservation and the importance of caring for the Earth and its resources. The story highlights the consequences of neglecting the natural world, as the island and its inhabitants are suffering due to the depletion of its resources and overfishing. Moana's journey to restore the health of the ocean and the island serves as a metaphor for the importance of protecting the environment and restoring balance to the natural world.



FIGURE 0.14 Peele's film won the Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay and has become a catalyst for deeper conversations around racism in the United States.



FIGURE 0.15 The title character Moana, from the animated film *Moana*

Like Aesop's Fables, Moana's film fable has 'a moral to the story'. With its rare depiction of an intact, untouched Polynesian culture, Moana shows how the issues of native lifestyles and climate change are inextricably bound up with one another; how Indigenous peoples are among those most impacted by global warming. Moana and Maui's quest is to restore ecological balance to preserve traditional culture. Framed in the medium of computer-generated animation with some hand-drawn artwork, Moana presents an environmental, Indigenous vision via mass entertainment for children of all ages.

FIGURE 0.16 A quotation from a film review of *Moana* by Ed Rampell, 'Disney's Latest Motion Picture Is a Parable about Climate Change and Indigenous Rights', *Earth Island Journal* website, 2 December 2016



FIGURE 0.17 An advertisement for Surf washing powder from 1955. In the story featured, the male character decides the female character is 'his kind of girl' when he realises she is capable of washing a shirt.

When we view media products from the past or from a different cultural setting, we can find it difficult to relate or understand. When we explore advertising from the 1950s and 1960s, most audiences today would find the narrative and the images incredibly sexist and demeaning to women. This is due to the progress made by subsequent feminist movements and the societal, historical and cultural shifts towards women being seen as equal to men. However, at the time, these advertisements were widely accepted by the society in which they were produced. Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, women in Western society were defined by their marital status and their ability to be a perfect homemaker, wife and mother. These types of advertisements reflect this context.

ACTIVITY 0.5

Analysing media contexts

1. Summarise and define the concept of media contexts in your own words.
2. Explore media products from different periods of history. An easy way to do this is searching YouTube for '1980s TV' or '1960s advertising'. Choose a media product and research the time and place in which it was created. Does the media product reflect the context in which it was made? Or does it challenge or reject the mainstream views of the time?

Media codes

> Technical and symbolic tools are used to construct meaning in media forms and products. Media codes may include the use of camera, acting, mise en scene, editing, lighting, sound, typography, colour, visual composition, text and graphics and paper stock for print.

FIGURE 0.18 VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, p. 13, used with permission

Media codes and conventions are the cornerstones of the study of Media. Essentially, they form the basis for how we discuss media products and media forms. They are the tools you will use when you begin to make your own media products.

Media codes work alongside Media conventions (see next category) to create images and sound that convey meaning. Media codes can be separated into three distinct categories.

1. **Technical codes:** In media studies, refer to the equipment and techniques used in the production of media content, such as camera work, lighting, sound and editing. Within different media forms, there is a need for different technical codes. For example, in a print media product, the technical codes include the typography and the printing process.
2. **Written codes:** In media studies, refer to the language used in media content, such as scriptwriting, dialogue and narration, as well as the writing conventions and styles used in different forms of media.
3. **Symbolic codes:** In media studies, refer to the use of symbols, images and representations to convey meaning. This includes things such as characters, objects, costumes, settings and other visual elements, as well as the way they are used and the meanings they convey. These codes play an important role in shaping our understanding and interpretation of media content.

Media codes and conventions are covered in depth throughout this text and it is vital that you understand the toolkit that media creators draw upon.

Media conventions

> Media conventions are rules or generally accepted ways of constructing meaning or organising media products. Conventions may refer to:
>
> - Conventions of media forms and products: the rules and common practices for constructing and organising media forms and products.
> - Genre conventions: the rules that define genres are subject to debate and change, revealing cultural assumptions about the significance of media products; the type of audiences who consume media products; and practices of the media industries.
> - Narrative conventions: common narrative structures, such as character, character arcs, and three-act structures.

FIGURE 0.19 VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, p. 13, used with permission

When we go to see a movie, we have a pretty clear set of expectations of what the experience will be like based upon our choice of film. We know that if we are going to see a Marvel film, we can expect fast-paced action, special effects, superheroes and a booming soundtrack. Similarly, if we pay to see a supernatural horror film, we expect to feel a sense of fear. We expect to see jump cuts, chases, blood and darkness.

Media conventions refer to established norms, customs and practices within a particular media industry (e.g. film, television, journalism, advertising, etc.). These conventions dictate how content is produced, distributed and consumed within the industry, and often include things like:

- narrative structure
- character development and representation
- representation of social issues
- technologies and production techniques used in the construction of media products
- distribution and consumption methods.

Audiences develop an understanding of conventions through repeated exposure and familiarity with specific genre, cultural and societal norms, as well as personal experiences. They also use their own prior knowledge and critical analysis skills to interpret and make meaning from new media products they encounter.



FIGURE 0.20 Audiences develop an understanding of media conventions through repetition, for example, Little Red Riding Hood helps introduce children to sense danger around strangers.

From a very young age, audiences develop this awareness. For example, classic children's stories introduce us to fear of strangers through exposure to stories like 'Little Red Riding Hood' and 'Hansel and Gretel'. The incredibly popular and successful ABC animation *Bluey* is another example of how conventions are used to draw an audience in and have an instant connection and understanding with the content. The children's show is about a family of dogs, the 'Heelers' – Mum and Dad (Chilli and Bandit) and their two 'pups', Bluey and Bingo. Despite being dogs, audiences recognise the conventions of a family narrative – this is achieved through the structure of each episode, which follows the story of one of the members of the family usually trying to resolve a moral dilemma, the conventions of suburban life supported by the symbolic codes of a typical family house (the producers of the show pay homage to their hometown of Brisbane, Queensland through the symbolic code of the classic Queenslander-style house) and the development of the character conventions of the role of parents within the family structure.

ACTIVITY 0.6

Analysing media codes and conventions

Media codes and conventions work together to create media products that convey ideas, narratives and meaning to audiences. Have a look at these images, list the media codes and conventions you can identify and write a brief sentence about what you believe the media creator is attempting to communicate.

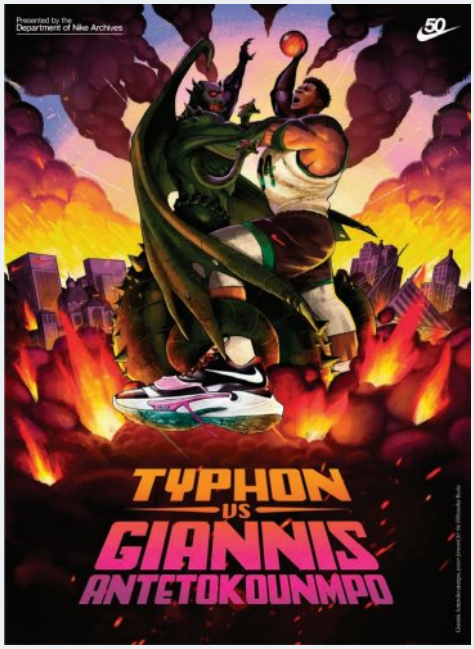


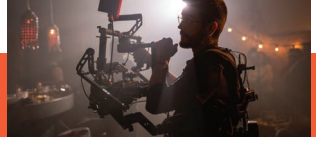
FIGURE 0.21 Nike marketing image: Never Done Inspiring



FIGURE 0.22 Drew Barrymore in *Scream* (dir. Wes Craven, 1995)



FIGURE 0.23 George MacKay as Schofield in *1917* (2019), co-written and directed by Sam Mendes



Media production process

> Production processes across media industries have developed to reflect the needs of practitioners. Audience engagement, consumption and reception, and the requirement to work under constraints including time, budget and skills, are all central to the media production process. The process identifies discrete stages that provide the framework for a media production applicable to all media forms. The stages of the process should not be seen as static or linear; rather, they are iterative and interrelated. Underpinning the media production process is ongoing analysis, reflection and evaluation requiring critical, creative and reflective thinking.

FIGURE 0.24 VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, p. 14, used with permission.

The media production process we follow in VCE Media allows for students to explore, research and develop quality ideas for their practical work. Each stage builds upon the previous stage and allows for students to critically reflect on their progress and their artworks.

The stages in the media production process are:

DEVELOPMENT

> Development involves exploring the ideas, intentions, narrative and audience of a production. In this stage, media practitioners may research other media products, analysing codes and conventions, narrative, genre or style and may consider the societal context of a product. Media practitioners may investigate equipment, materials and technologies in a range of media forms relevant to their audience and intention. They may perform experiments using materials, equipment and technologies to develop their skills.

FIGURE 0.25 VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, p. 14, used with permission

The development stage of the media production process is really important in gaining an understanding of what you like, what you dislike, what inspires you and what is possible. In this stage, students should cast their viewing, listening and reading nets wide. Look at older media products, play around with equipment and techniques, consider different media forms … this stage is all about getting your ideas down and building your skillset.

PRE-PRODUCTION

> Pre-production planning considers the concept, audience, intention, narrative and context of a media product. Pre-production involves planning a narrative, including how it will engage, be consumed and read by an audience. Media codes and conventions, genre and style are considered in the construction of the narrative. Documentation and planning may take visual and written forms, such as production notes or storyboards. Media practitioners may undertake technical tests and experiments prior to production, reflecting on their success or failure. Equipment, technologies and materials to be used in the production are documented. Media practitioners plan how the product will be distributed to an audience and the context in which it will be consumed.

FIGURE 0.26 VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, p. 14, used with permission

This is the stage where your ideas and concepts from the development phase begin to take shape. You will begin to consider your audience and how they will engage with, consume and receive your media product. You will start to refine your ideas around the narrative – what story are you trying to tell? It is a crucial part of the process and you will need to consider how you will document these plans. Pre-production is an exciting phase as your visions and ideas begin to take shape. Testing out the capabilities of the equipment – and indeed your own skillset! – can be a challenge, yet this is the part of the process in which you will learn the most. Perhaps your grand ideas for a cast of thousands becomes more of a smaller scale cast of two or three of your mates. This is the time to play around with the tools you have available. Explore the capabilities of the camera, the sound recording equipment or the software program. Complete YouTube tutorials to upskill or learn a new technique. The most important part of this stage is to set up a clear, realistic and manageable production schedule. Ensure that you know your dates and your timelines – alongside any other cast and crew – so that your production comes together in an organised and timely way.

PRODUCTION

> Production is when a product is captured or recorded. Production may be a collaborative process involving a number of people with specific roles or it may be an individual process. Reflection and evaluation of the production can occur through written documentation, oral feedback and visual feedback.

FIGURE 0.27 VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, p. 14, used with permission

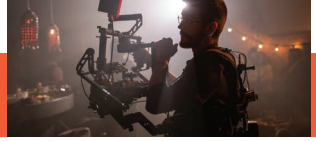
The time has finally come! You are now going to create your media product! The time of planning and developing, testing and experimenting is now over and you will draw closely on the process to create. Using your immaculately planned schedule, this part of the process should be a breeze. However, the hard work is not over yet. Media creators will continuously reflect and critically view their work. These reflections will be recorded throughout this stage of the process.

POST-PRODUCTION

> During post-production, the production is refined and resolved, considering the intention, audience and planned narrative. Codes and conventions are used to resolve ideas and engage audiences. Specific equipment and technologies are used in editing. Feedback is sought and the creator and participant will reflect upon the product and its relationship to the specified audience and intent.

FIGURE 0.28 VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, p. 14, used with permission

By this stage of the process, many students can feel a sense of fatigue or frustration around their media product; however, it is in this stage where many issues can be resolved and refined. In this stage, it is vital to seek feedback – from your teacher, your family and friends, your classmates. It is through this feedback – and acting upon it – that students can really develop their media product. At times, media creators may use the post-production stage to reshoot a scene, make changes or create a better ending. They may have a test audience view the work and give feedback. Media creators should always go back to their intention and see how this work reflects what they set out to do.



DISTRIBUTION

The product is delivered to the specified audience in a planned context and location. At this point, the creator and/or participants will seek feedback for future productions based on audience response and personal reflection.

FIGURE 0.29 VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, p. 14, used with permission

For each media creator, this stage of the process may look different. Is the media product going to be uploaded to your YouTube channel or social media? Perhaps you have entered a film competition or you will be presenting your podcast on air? It is important that this stage is planned for in the process. How will you reach your intended audience?

Audience

All media products are distributed to audiences who consume them in different ways. Factors such as technology, critical media literacy and the context of creation and consumption can alter the way audiences receive, engage with and respond to media products.

- Audience reception: This refers to both the physical way audiences consume media products and the context of the time and place in which they receive it.
- Audience engagement: This refers to how audiences are affected emotionally and cognitively by a media product and how these ways of engaging combine to form complex meanings and experiences.
- Audience response: This refers to the way a media product may influence audiences to act or change their behaviour.

All media products are made for target audiences, defined by their cultural, social and historical context, and demographics, as well as individual traits such as age, gender and values. A media product may be considered successful if the intended audiences receive, engage and respond to the product the way the media creator intended.

FIGURE 0.30 VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, p. 15, used with permission

Media products are created to be consumed by an audience. While an audience may all receive the same message, what we as students of Media find interesting is how differently audiences can interpret or understand what is being communicated. Different audiences view the same text in different ways due to a variety of factors, including:

1. **Background and experience:** each person's life experiences, cultural background and individual values can affect how they interpret media messages.
2. **Context:** the social, cultural and historical context in which a text is consumed can impact its interpretation.
3. **Ideology:** an individual's political or cultural beliefs can influence the way they understand and respond to a text.
4. **Purpose of consumption:** why someone is consuming the text can affect their interpretation of it.

5 **Active interpretation:** audience members engage with texts and construct their own meaning based on their personal experiences and perspectives.
6 **Technological mediation:** the technology used to access a text can also impact interpretation, such as the size of the screen, sound quality or access to background information.

These factors demonstrate that media messages are not simply received and passively understood by audiences, but are actively interpreted and reconstructed through the lens of an individual's experiences and beliefs. There are countless examples of how audiences receive media products in different ways. What is hilarious and amusing to one person may be crude and deeply offensive to another. We only need to read the comments on social media to see the many varied ways in which people receive the same message.

Media context (see above) plays a significant role in how audiences receive messages. Time and place, political, historical and cultural factors all impact how an audience responds to a media product. This context can also impact the engagement or the emotional response. When we look back at many films from the past, often there is a sense that the message, the dialogue or the ways in which certain characters are portrayed or treated haven't aged well. The classic 1978 musical *Grease* (dir. Randal Kleiser) is an example of this. The film has not aged well due to its portrayal of gender roles and sexual harassment, as well as its stereotypical and insensitive representation of different racial and ethnic groups. Another example is the John Hughes films of the mid 1980s. Muse and star of several of these films, Molly Ringwald, penned an essay in the *New Yorker* in 2018 reflecting on how problematic the portrayal of girls and consent were throughout these films. She claimed to realise only in her thirties with the benefit of hindsight how inappropriate the *Sixteen Candles* (1984, dir. John Hughes) script was, especially a particular scene late in the film.

Perhaps the most significant consideration we as students of media have in relation to audience is the ability for the media to influence opinion, beliefs and behaviour. When we explore these topics throughout VCE Media, the notion of audience is always considered. There are audiences that we would consider to be more vulnerable – such as children – who require moderation of the media to which they are exposed. Laws and regulations exist to protect audiences and to try to limit the spread of misinformation.

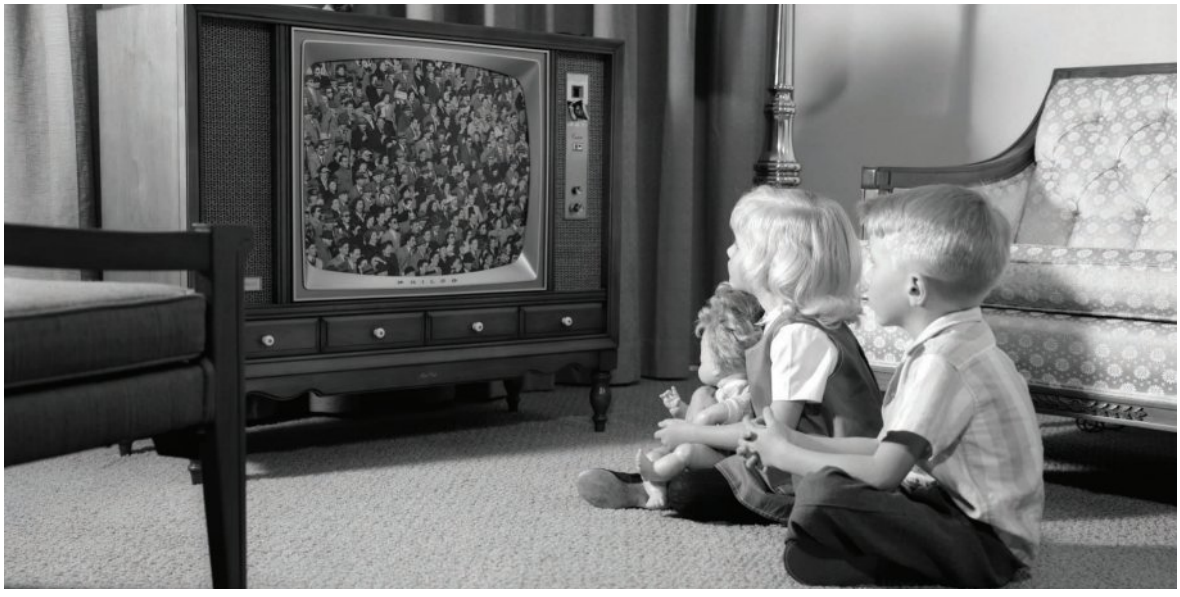
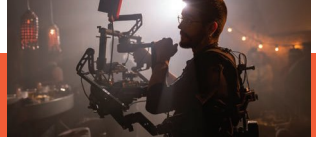


FIGURE 0.31 Children have always been considered to be the most vulnerable of audience members for media products.



ACTIVITY 0.7

Identifying media audiences

An understanding of audience is an important factor for all media creators. Knowing which segment of the population to target is a key part of creating successful media products. Influencers and YouTubers are masters at identifying and capturing a specific audience.

Imagine you have started a clothing brand – it could be any style – vintage, outdoor, formal, skate/surf … your choice. In order to be successful, you need to build an audience profile – who is going to 'buy-in' to your product? Who are you targeting? Follow the steps below to determine the audience – who in turn becomes the consumer – of your brand.

1. Identify your target audience – consider factors such as age, gender, education level, location, interests and values.
2. Gather data – use market research techniques, such as surveys, focus groups and demographic data, to get a better understanding of your target audience.
3. Create segments – divide your target audience into smaller groups based on shared characteristics, such as age, interests or behaviours.
4. Develop personas – create detailed profiles that represent the typical members of each segment, including information on their values, interests, challenges, goals and motivations.

By building a detailed audience profile, you can gain a better understanding of your target audience's needs, behaviours and preferences and use that information to create more effective and relevant media strategies to engage your consumer.

Media language

> Media language is evolving and dynamic. Students develop knowledge and use of the language of media in terms of design, production, distribution, consumption, engagement with, reception, reading and critique of their own and others' media products. They also examine the terms used by media practitioners and institutions.
>
> For the purposes of this study, media language is a framework for both the construction of media products and discussion of the ways the media communicates meaning to audiences. Creators, producers and audiences share an understanding of media codes, conventions and technologies and how these are selected and sequenced dependent on the media form, the intent of the product, genre, style and the making of meaning.

FIGURE 0.32 VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, p. 15, used with permission

Like many other subjects, Media has a language all of its own. It is highly likely that even reading through these study specifications, you have been introduced to terms and vocabulary you have not been exposed to before. One of the most effective ways to improve your written responses in Media is to confidently and correctly use media language throughout your responses. It is a key knowledge and key skill point throughout Units 1–4 and well worth investing time and energy into understanding.

Media language encompasses technical terminology that is used when discussing – and developing – media products. An effective strategy is to create your own glossary of technical terms drawn from the media codes, conventions and technologies. Practise using this technical and specific language when analysing media products.

In addition to the technical language of media, there is also the analytical language that is used to describe how audiences consume, read and engage with media products. The language is evolving rapidly in this area of study. Terminology we would not have heard of five years ago has now become part of the discussion of media products and media forms.

ACTIVITY 0.8

Using media language

Make a list of at least 20 words or phrases that would form part of the media language dictionary. Some examples of words or phrases could be:

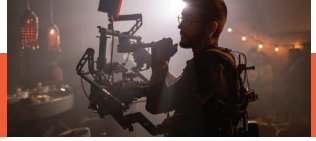
- consumption
- time-lapse
- assemble edit
- target audience
- colour saturation
- key lighting.

For each word or phrase, create a meaningful sentence with the word or phrase the focus. For example:

> *Coppola's use of washed-out, low-key lighting gives her film* The Virgin Suicides *a nostalgic and vintage vibe. Through the use of a pastel palette, the characters appear young and innocent.*



FIGURE 0.33 Kirsten Dunst in *The Virgin Suicides* (1999, dir. Sophia Coppola)



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge, cultures and histories

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the first Australians and the oldest living cultures in human history. They have diverse cultures, social and kinship structures, cultural traditions, diverse languages and dialects. Through these traditions and structures, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a history of unique and complex knowledge systems.

Through engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander creators and media products, all students develop respect for a recognition of the world's oldest continuous living culture and understand the significant contribution of Australia's First Peoples to the Australian media landscape, through traditional, historical and contemporary media narratives and voices. The inclusion and acknowledgement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media texts and content will assist in the building of intercultural understanding for students. This understanding helps support cultural learning, encouraging students to make connections between their own world and the worlds of others, encourage collaboration and develop a mutual understanding with others. It will also provide students with the insight to understand themselves as part of a diverse and global community.

Teachers are encouraged to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and perspectives in the design and delivery of teaching and learning programs related to VCE Media. Many local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have protocols that they have developed in relation to education. The Victorian Koorie community-preferred education model enables teachers to focus on inclusively supporting students to consider Victorian Koorie education matters, and systematically support students to learn about local, regional, state and national Indigenous perspectives. VCE studies involve a focused extension of this model and include a broader application of national and international perspectives.

The Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI) has developed *Protocols for Koorie education in Victorian Primary and Secondary schools*, and other resources relating to the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and perspectives. This can be accessed at the VAEAI website.

FIGURE 0.34 VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, pp. 15–16, used with permission

An exciting and timely addition to this new study design is the acknowledgement of the contribution of First Nations stories to our national narrative. Throughout the study – and, in particular, Unit 2 – teachers and students are encouraged to explore media products from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander creators. Through the purposeful engagement, the goal is for teachers and students to gain a deeper appreciation and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives. First Nations voices and perspectives in the media are important for several reasons:

1. **Representation:** First Nations peoples are often underrepresented or misrepresented in the media. Providing their voices and perspectives helps to counter these harmful narratives and provides a more diverse and accurate representation of Indigenous experiences.
2. **Empowerment:** Giving First Nations peoples a platform to share their stories and perspectives helps to empower them and promote their rights and issues.

3 **Cultural preservation:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have unique cultural heritage and history. Sharing their perspectives helps to preserve and celebrate their cultural heritage and promote cultural diversity.

4 **Education:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices and perspectives can provide new perspectives and insights on current issues, educate the public, and contribute to a better understanding of Indigenous experiences.

5 **Decolonisation:** The media has played a role in the colonisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Amplifying Indigenous voices and perspectives helps to promote decolonisation and challenge colonial narratives.

In recent years, there has been a growing awareness and appreciation of First Nations media products. *Black Comedy*, *Cleverman* and *Australian Wars* are all media products created by First Nations people and have enjoyed mass success and a large audience.

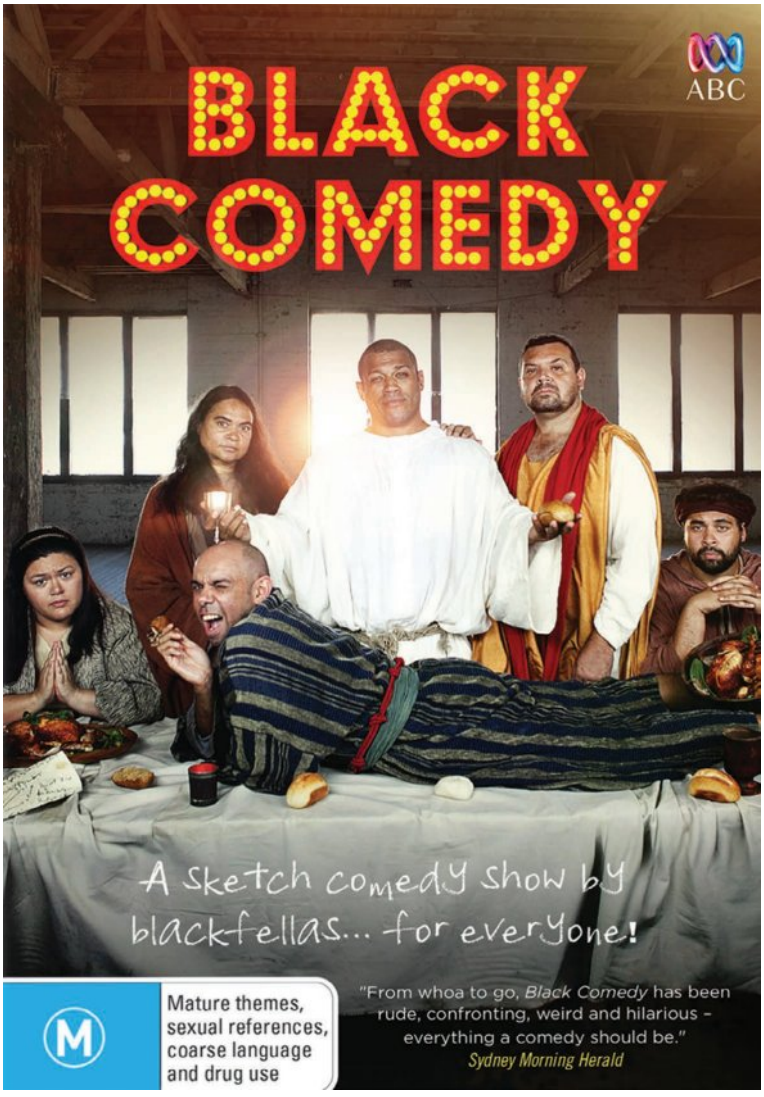


FIGURE 0.35 The cast of *Black Comedy*

ACTIVITY 0.9

Research task

Research a media product created by an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander creator.

If possible, watch, listen to or read the narrative. Find out about the creator.

Write a paragraph about how this media product helps to build intercultural understanding and a dialogue between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

UNIT 1
MEDIA FORMS, REPRESENTATIONS AND AUSTRALIAN STORIES

I never paint dreams or nightmares. I paint my own reality.

— Frida Kahlo

OVERVIEW

The images we see in the media have been constructed, read and interpreted over centuries. From the early days of the printing press and photography, media makers have been constructing versions of reality for society to examine and interpret for themselves. As society has developed, the technology available to media producers has made for more detailed and intricate representations of reality. With those developments, the audience has matured in the way it views itself and makes sense of the images, sounds and ideas expressed in the media. Even today, as you look across the words and images included within this book, you bring with you centuries of practice in determining meaning. You will use your personal, family and broader cultural experiences for each image you look at, each visual clip you deconstruct and every media product you will make.

Welcome to Unit 1 of VCE Media! Across this unit, you will learn how media messages are made and understood by audiences all around the world. You will learn about the codes used to determine meaning and the conventions by which audiences interpret them. You will examine how your understanding of Australian society has been constructed and represented back to itself as well as the role you are actively playing in the creation of a new Australian identity in the media. You will, of course, become the creator yourself and employ the knowledge of centuries of media creation to represent your own version of the world.

WHAT'S AHEAD

CHAPTER 1	CHAPTER 2	CHAPTER 3
Area of Study 1: Media representations	**Area of Study 2:** Media forms in production	**Area of Study 3:** Australian stories

IMAGE ON OPPOSITE PAGE: A professional media production during shooting: Rachel Brosnahan and director Daniel Palladino are seen at the film set of *The Marvelous Mrs Maisel* (2017–23) on 30 June 2022 in New York City.


ND .3



CHAPTER 1 AREA OF STUDY 1

MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS

INQUIRY QUESTION

How do we see ourselves and our world in media products?

— VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, p. 17, used with permission

OVERVIEW

The Greek philosopher Plato once told a story of three men who had been chained to a wall in a cave. The men had been imprisoned there since birth and behind them a fire would project shadows on a wall. The three men spent their days inventing characters and stories to accompany the shadows, which had come to represent their only reality. Eventually, one of the men escaped the cave to find that the world was not represented by shadows at all. VCE Media is a place where you will become enlightened about the representation and construction of the very messages and stories you have spent so many years consuming. You will become educated in the ways in which the media has been used to represent countless realities and learn how to craft your own. But beware: like the man who escaped the cave, beyond this point there is no going back!

FIGURE 1.1 (above) Through the development of social media platforms and simple editing, we can be anyone and anywhere, constructing versions of ourselves to present to the world.

OUTCOME 1

On completion of this unit the student should be able to explain the construction of media representations in different products, forms and contexts, including how audiences engage with, consume and read these representations.

To achieve this outcome, the student will draw on key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 1.

KEY KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING INTENTIONS

Key knowledge	Learning intentions – at the end of the chapter I will be able to:
• the nature of media representations within and across media products and forms from different periods of time, locations and contexts	• explain the nature and form of representations within media products and forms from different periods of time, locations and contexts
• media codes and conventions used to construct media products and meanings in different media forms	• analyse the media codes and conventions used to construct media products and meanings in different media forms from different periods of time, locations and contexts
• the construction of representations within and across products and forms from different periods of time, locations and contexts	• compare the construction of representations within and across media products and forms from different periods of time, locations and contexts
• audience engagement with, and consumption, reading and production of media representations in different media products and forms from different periods of time, locations and contexts	• discuss how audiences engage with, and consume, read and produce representations in media products and forms
• the social and institutional relationships between audiences and the media that is created, produced, distributed, consumed and read	• discuss the social and institutional factors influencing the distribution of and relationships between audiences and media representations
• appropriate media language in the analysis and discussion of media representation	• use appropriate media language in the analysis and discussion of media representation

(**Source:** Adapted from VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, p. 18, used with permission)

WHAT'S AHEAD

SECTION 1.1	SECTION 1.2	SECTION 1.3	SECTION 1.4	SECTION 1.5	SECTION 1.6	SECTION 1.7
Introduction: What are media representations?	Purpose of representations	Construction of representations	Interpretation of representations	Representations of individuals	Changing representations of females	Representation of identity and self

ISBN 978-1-009-36510-9 Hoban et al
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1.1 Introduction: What are media representations?

The way we make sense of the world through the media is based on how we communicate complex ideas and messages. The building blocks of this communication are found in the way in which we communicate concepts such as people, places, locations, objects, animals, institutions and organisations. Unless we witness something ourselves, how we understand the world is through how the media presents it.

representation the ways in which the media portrays particular groups, communities, experiences, ideas or topics from a particular ideological or value perspective

purpose the intention of the author

media products consumable media, such as literature, film, television or games

media forms refer to technological means and channels by which the media is created, produced, distributed, consumed and read. These include film, television, radio, magazine, podcast, website or app.

As a **representation** is a media reflection or re-presentation of reality, made for a specific audience to achieve a specific **purpose**, how we view the world can be quite different to the reality. Just how a representation is assembled depends on how we understand the world and those depicted in the media. Examining these re-presentations of reality can reveal a lot about the society that created them. We can also find out a lot about ourselves and how we believe we should be depicted.

Ever since people have been creating **media products**, they have aimed to construct representations in particular ways. One of the first aims was to create a representation that was as realistic as possible. The early cricket radio broadcasts that covered the matches Australia played in England in the 1930s are examples of this attempt at realism. The radio commentator would read the ball-by-ball deliveries that had been sent to them via cable and tap a pencil on the desk near the microphone to simulate the ball being struck. The effect that this had upon the audience was to make them feel like they were listening to the actual match.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. What is the media?
2. Does the media present us with reality?
3. Define the term 'representation' in your own words.
4. Could you provide a recent instance where the media utilised representation?

The rise of social media platforms has seen this concept of constructing reality become an everyday occurrence for millions of users around the globe. This **media form** enables users to present a version of themselves and their lives that can appear real and authentic, yet is carefully controlled and manipulated by the individual. On social media platforms, people construct representations of themselves and others through various forms of content, including text, images, videos and audio such as the carefully curated posts of the D'Amelio sisters. The ways in which these representations are constructed can have significant impacts on how individuals and groups are perceived and understood by others on the platform. The use of filters and other editing tools allows the user to alter the appearance of their photos and videos. Individuals can present a highly curated and idealised version of themselves that may not accurately reflect their true appearance or experiences.

1.2 Purpose of representations

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- the nature of media representations within and across media products and forms from different periods of time, locations and contexts
- media codes and conventions used to construct media products and meanings in different media forms.

No matter how credible a representation seems, it is not just a window onto the world; all representations are constructed with a particular purpose in mind. The author creates a product to reveal and reflect certain key pieces of information that they want the audience to understand. Consider a nature documentary about sharks. There have been many documentaries made about sharks (hello, *Shark Week*!), however, the manner in which the author wants to construct the representation depends upon how the audience will view them.

For instance, by using menacing music – the famous *Jaws* (1975, dir. Steven Spielberg) soundtrack by composer John Williams comes to mind – over the top of footage of sharks swimming through the ocean presents them as predatory creatures on the hunt for prey, including humans. The filmmaker can focus on the idea of sharks being ferocious killing machines. On the other hand, they may create a documentary that contains many images of sharks gracefully moving about their habitat, an essential apex predator that keeps our oceans healthy and is also under threat from humans. Depending upon which documentary is being watched, the audience will receive different messages about sharks. Both are representations of sharks; however, the difference between the two is the purpose of the filmmaker.

In every representation, the background and intention of the author can influence the reading of the media product. However, the audience will bring their own background, understanding and knowledge of the product being read, which can, in turn, create a new understanding. For instance, you may have experienced a close encounter with a shark in the ocean and it could influence your appreciation and reading of the media product. What is important, however, is the attempt by the author to 'position' you to think and feel a particular way.



FIGURE 1.2 Depending upon which documentary the audience watches, they will receive different messages about sharks.



FIGURE 1.3 The Discovery Channel has aired *Shark Week* every year since 1988. It was originally devoted to conservation efforts and correcting misconceptions about sharks.[1]



Selection and omission

As representations are constructed from reality, it is impossible to include everything that reality has to offer. What is left out is referred to as **omission** and what is left in is the **selection**. Selection and omission play an integral role in the construction of representations. For instance, if you were representing a school in one shot, it would be impossible to include the whole school in that image. Choices need to be made and the information to be included needs to be selected. There are certain things that could assist in immediately identifying it as a school. The information included would depend on *how* the author wanted to portray the school. Similarly, decisions need to be made about what the author is going to leave out of the representation. As not all information can be included into the one representation, less important information is often left out to ensure the representation is more easily understood. In your school, there may be parts that you are familiar with that don't look like a school at all. In this case, if the author was to include them it may add confusion to the representation, rather than assist its construction.

Advertising, marketing and brand strategists rely heavily on selection and omission to emphasise as well as cut out certain aspects of their product or image. Symbols, colours and text can be easily manipulated to persuade, influence or mislead an audience.



FIGURE 1.4 To drive awareness and debate on International Women's Day about how women are paid on average 25% less than men, American advertising agency J. Walter Thompson London has created a provocative outdoor campaign using clever word play to drive home just how offensive the world can seem with 25% missing.

omission what was chosen to be excluded

selection what was chosen to be included

ACTIVITY 1.1

Analysing selection and omission

1 This ad (Figure 1.5) for a very famous brand uses the selection and omission concept in an effective way. Identify what has been selected and what has been left out.

2 What do you believe is the intended impact on the audience?



FIGURE 1.5 The advertisements for Activity 1.1

Audience

As with all media products, representations are made with a specific audience in mind. Understanding the audience is essential for the author to ensure that the representation fulfils its purpose. Knowledge of the audience is therefore vital. For example, knowing what the audience likes and dislikes are two basic things that an author needs to know in order to create a representation for a particular audience. Also, knowing the level of knowledge an audience has about the media is also important, particularly their understanding of codes and conventions.

FIGURE 1.6 Representations are made with a specific audience in mind.





Media codes and conventions

media codes technical, written or symbolic codes used by the author to create representations

mise en scene literally, 'put in the scene' (French), refers to all the theatrical elements necessary in composing a scene to be filmed: props, sets, lighting, sound effects, costumes, make-up and actors' placement (blocking)

media conventions when media codes are used in ways that help an audience understand a representation

genre a way to categorise different types of stories, characters and plot structures

Codes and conventions are tools used by the author to create (or encode) representations; likewise, the audience uses codes and conventions in order to understand (or decode) representations.

Codes are the building blocks of the construction. **Media codes** can be technical, written or symbolic. Technical codes can include the use of camera, editing, lighting, sound, acting or a combination of these elements, sometimes known as **mise en scene**.

When these codes are used in ways that help an audience understand a representation, they are known as **media conventions**.

Conventions are the set of accepted rules or ways that media producers create meaning. Using media codes, the structure of a story, its characters and **genre** can be communicated through common conventions, as can the way the audience understands the effect of specific events or the way time passes in a story. An understanding of conventions dictates how codes are used in order to create meaning. By using conventions, an author ensures that the representation they make is understood by the intended audience because they are used to, and expecting, certain events and behaviours.

For example, we arrange our letters into understood words, sentences and paragraphs to create meaning. If we misspell a word or don't construct a sentence correctly, meaning can be lost, as the way in which we've used the codes isn't accepted or understood. This is the same with representations: if an author doesn't construct it in a recognisable way, it can be difficult for audiences to understand what is meant.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. Who are media 'creators'?
2. Why is it important to consider the media creator's purpose in constructing representations?
3. How might an understanding of a target audience change the decision-making of a media creator?
4. Give examples of different audiences and what media they engage in, such as:
   - age
   - gender
   - culture.
5. Give an example of a media code.
6. Give an example of a media convention.

FIGURE 1.7 The Western is a famous genre with easily recognisable media codes (setting, costume, acting) and conventions (the types of story and characters in them)



SYMBOLIC CODES

Symbolic codes are where a visual object or a piece of audio possesses greater meaning than just the literal. Symbolic codes can be broken down into the following categories:

- symbols
- iconic signs
- index signs.

Symbols carry meaning of which the audience needs prior understanding in order to interpret them, otherwise these symbols are meaningless. Symbols like Mars (male), Venus (female), signs of the zodiac, or even symbols for peace or Mercedes-Benz all require prior understanding as the symbol itself doesn't carry any suggestion of associated meaning; these symbols are reliant upon the audience possessing additional information to create meaning.

In this case, when using symbols, the author must ensure that their intended audience has an understanding of the symbolic code being used. If they don't, meaning will be lost and the representation will not have been communicated effectively. However, these kinds of symbols can be used strategically to increase the authenticity of the representation.

symbols a sign, shape or object that is used to represent something else



FIGURE 1.8 Monsters and grotesque creatures are symbols in the horror genre, such as the title character of *Dracula* (1931, dir. Tod Browning & Karl Freund)

ACTIVITY 1.2

Analysing representations

Look at the following images and, with a partner, discuss the symbols and identify what genre of media product they could belong to.

1



2



3



4



ACTIVITY 1.3

Research task

1 In pairs, list five different narrative genres.

2 For each genre, research and identify common symbols found in these media products. For example, a dark, stormy night in horror.

3 As a class, come up with some specific examples of films, television shows or advertisements where these symbols are evident.

Iconic signs are pictographs that are the most basic representation of the original object. As these don't rely on any additional information being possessed by the audience, they can be interpreted without prior knowledge. For instance, the male and female figures on toilet doors to indicate the gender designation don't require specialist knowledge to **decipher** their meaning. Similarly, with video control buttons or universal traffic symbols, iconic signs can be decoded without prior knowledge being needed.

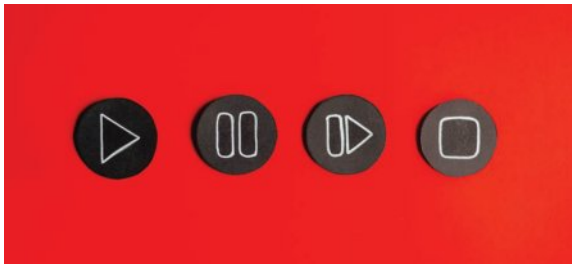


FIGURE 1.9 Video control buttons are iconic signs

Index signs are the most common symbolic codes used in the construction of representations. Index signs refer back to prior understanding of the **connotative** meaning that society has for things such as objects, colours, expressions or clothing. For example, a red rose is not just a colourful, fragrant flower; it is also Western society's symbol of love and romance. Similarly, a character wearing a baseball cap may be wearing it to keep the sun off, but if it was being worn backwards, additional meaning is added to the character.

iconic signs pictorial symbols for a word or phrase

decipher to understand or interpret

index signs society's symbolic meanings behind certain objects, colours, expressions, etc., which help us understand representations

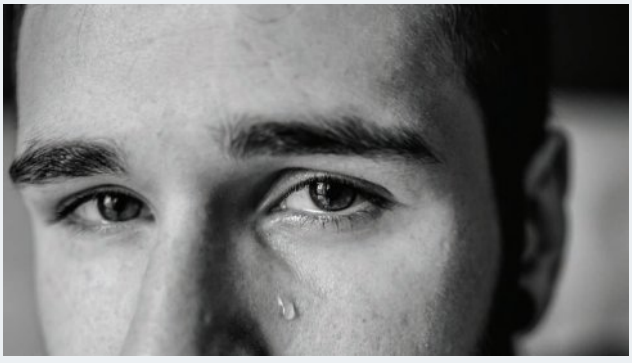
connotative the meaning that the audience attaches to the people, objects and things we see in the image

ACTIVITY 1.4

Analysing representations

Look at the following index signs and discuss with a partner what you believe they mean. Are your answers the same? Factors such as cultural background, gender, beliefs, prior experience and age can all impact individual reading and understanding of these symbols.













ACTIVITY 1.5

Analysing representations

A mother watches her children explore an exhibition about hygiene in Japan. Explain how much knowledge is required for these children to understand the symbols used here.



FIGURE 1.10 A mother and her children at the toilet exhibition at the National Museum of Emerging Science and Innovation in Tokyo

The context in which these index symbols are used is also important in creating and interpreting meaning. A photo frame with a picture of a couple on a shelf in a bright, sunny room communicates quite a different meaning from the same photo in a cracked frame on the floor in a dimly lit room. While in both cases there is the literal meaning of a photo frame either being on a shelf or knocked onto the floor at different times of the day, there is also the connotative meaning that can be read into the image about the nature of the relationship or the wellbeing of the couple.

ACTIVITY 1.6

Analysing representations

Use as many symbols as possible to create a collage page about one of the following topics:

- love
- hate
- death
- life
- peace
- greed
- anger
- friendship
- honesty
- childhood
- danger.

Make sure you use as many things that symbolise the idea as possible.

Once you've included them, swap with another person and classify each of their symbols into 'symbols', 'iconic' or 'index' signs.

ACTIVITY 1.7

Analysing representations

Working in pairs, examine the following images and note down the symbols used.







FIGURE 1.11 A 'Long Live Chairman Mao' poster from China in the 1960s; a Chesterfield cigarette advertisement from an American magazine, 1939; and *Fearless Girl* statue outside the New York Stock Exchange, 2023

- How many can you interpret?
- What information would someone need to understand their meaning?

WRITTEN CODES

As we as a society respect the written word, written codes are incredibly powerful in **anchoring** the meaning of a representation through the use of text within the world of the representation (**diegetic**) or through a caption outside the world of the representation (**non-diegetic**). By using written codes, an author can remove any confusion that may be caused through an element of the representation that could produce multiple meanings. In television or movies, text is often used at the beginning of a scene to indicate the time and location in which a scene is set. As an audience, we do not question this, thereby demonstrating the power of written codes.

anchoring the process of attaching a meaning to an image through the use of text

diegetic within the world of the story or narrative; from the Greek term *diegesis* (meaning 'recounted story')

non-diegetic outside the world of the narrative



ACTIVITY 1.8

Analysing representations

Look at Figure 1.12. At the moment, this headline could be communicating many different things. Your job is to come up with as many images for it as possible to shift the meaning of the headline as much as you can.

Find your own image online and see how you can alter the meaning by applying different captions.



FIGURE 1.12 How can *you* use this headline to good effect?

TECHNICAL CODES

Technical codes are the codes of construction. While each medium has unique technical codes and conventions for their use, there are some which are shared by all. For instance, a close-up is always going to be used to bring the audience's attention to a specific object or expression, while a low angle is often used to suggest power and significance.

montage an edited sequence in a film that compresses story time, usually to show the development of a character, most often accompanied by non-diegetic music

In the construction of audiovisual representations, technical codes include: camera angles, shot sizes, camera movement and editing conventions. Some examples of editing conventions are **montages**, cutaways, reaction shots, the construction of settings, acting and movement, the timing and use of sound, the size, placement and font of credits, subtitles or captions and the use of filters or effects.

In visual representations (print or photography), technical codes include: cropping, the use of captions, drop caps, columns, size, colour and placement of font, or the use of filters or effects.

SOUND CODES

In an audiovisual representation, an audience expects sound to accompany the moving image, as sound codes are used to enhance the realism or emotion within the construction. Sound codes consist of dialogue, sound effects or soundtrack and can either be *diegetic* or *non-diegetic* in nature. When we view a character talk to another character or interact with an object, we expect to hear appropriate voices or noises. If this dialogue or audio effects is not consistent with our expectations, we become distracted and begin to question the authenticity of the representation, with our attention being brought to the construction rather than the intended meaning.

When watching movies, we also expect non-diegetic codes to be used. If a character begins narrating a scene, we understand the convention that the story is being told from their **perspective**. We also understand that the audio code of the soundtrack is used to indicate the mood of the scene. For example, when the leading lady and leading man are about to kiss for the first time, we understand that there isn't a string orchestra setting up, about to play the love theme. We understand that the director has used the sound code to

perspective the person from whose point of view the story is being told

communicate to the audience that the two characters are in love. Likewise, with television sitcom, the laugh track is used to indicate where there is a joke and where the audience is expected to laugh.

TikTok and its original platform Musical.ly has changed the ways in which audio and sounds are used by creators. Taking sound bites from famous films, interviews, celebrity quotes and musical tracks, users have a huge library of sounds that they can use and manipulate to grab the attention of the audience. Certain sound bites attract huge numbers of views through the use of hashtags. Quite often the sound bite has little to nothing to do with the vision and the more obscure and creative, the better. Artists have realised the power of the platform because once a song is trending, users begin to create content featuring the track.

It is not only music artists harnessing the power of TikTok. Renowned documentary-maker and journalist Louis Theroux found himself trending on TikTok. In April 2022, Theroux went viral after a clip of him on the YouTube show *Chicken Shop Date* – in which he performed a short rap he had originally written 22 years earlier – was autotuned by a TikTok user and turned into a reusable audio track with backing music. The trend saw users lip-syncing to the sound and performing an accompanying dance. By the end of 2022, over six million videos had been uploaded featuring the interview and song with everyone from teenage girls to ED doctors getting in on the fad.



FIGURE 1.13 TikTok and Musical.ly are changing the way creators use music and sound.



FIGURE 1.14 Louis Theroux went viral on TikTok with millions producing videos featuring his rap song.

ACTIVITY 1.9

Manipulating sound

The manipulation of sound and vision is a fun and insightful activity that we can do to see how simple it is to change the meaning of a media product.

Choose a famous monologue or speech from a film – a great example is the closing monologue of John Hughes' *The Breakfast Club* (1985). Re-imagine the sound grab by shooting vision that matches up to reinterpret the meaning of the narrative.



1.3 Construction of representations

LEARNING INTENTION

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- the construction of representations within and across products and forms from different periods of time, locations and contexts.

A simple way to understand how a representation is constructed and read can be found in Figure 1.15. An author will create a representation and it will be interpreted by an audience after the codes and realism are read and decoded. This can often be referred to as a 'life cycle' of a representation.

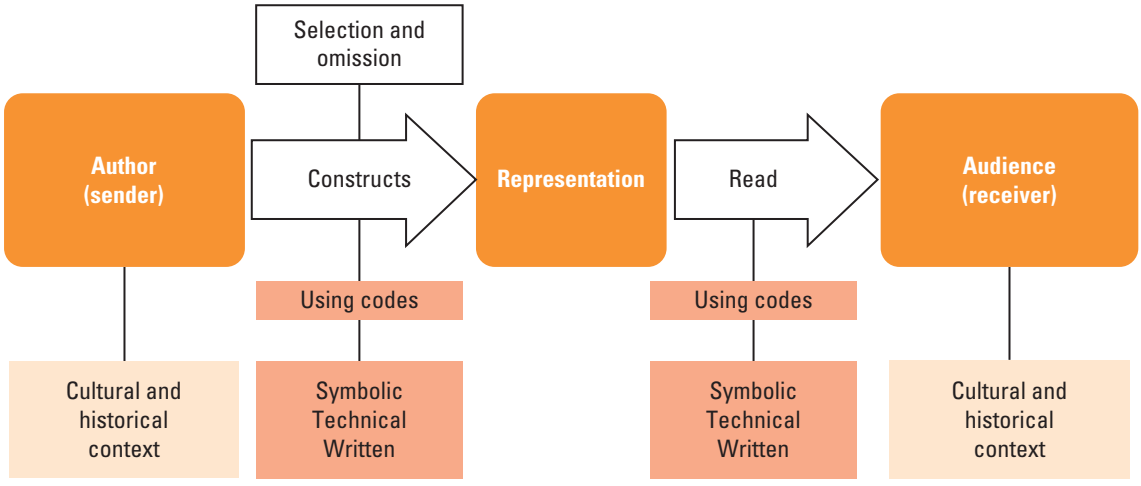


FIGURE 1.15 The life cycle of a representation

Stereotypes

stereotype an overly simplistic representation

An oversimplified version of a representation is called a **stereotype**. These can often be quite negative as they don't give a detailed, accurate portrayal of the truth. These representations are mostly used in advertising. Stereotypes operate on many assumptions that a society makes towards a certain social group. They can be highly dangerous and cause a significant amount of damage to not only how a group is perceived by others, but also how a group perceives itself.

Through stereotypes, audiences can gain an understanding of social groups that may have a basis in reality, but are not applicable to all.

If we take the stereotype that all teenagers are lazy and untrustworthy, audiences who are not teenagers could potentially discriminate towards them, based upon an understanding built on stereotypical representations. However, teenagers who are constantly exposed to these stereotypes could begin to perceive themselves in a negative way and believe that the stereotype is what society expects from them. This too could have a significant negative impact on audiences.

Stereotypes play a significant role in media products that do not require the audience to develop a complex understanding. In advertising, for example, an author may have only 30 seconds of TV time to grab your attention and communicate meaning. And that is quite long compared with some alternatives: you may be able to skip a YouTube ad after five seconds, or the advertisement may be travelling past on the side of a bus. Wherever the ad appears, the advertiser must grab your attention and communicate ideas about a product immediately. Stereotypes are therefore an easy way to communicate meaning quickly and can be used by advertisers to influence people to buy their products.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. How could stereotyped representations lead to real-life problems?
2. Why are stereotypes used in media products?

ACTIVITY 1.10

Analysing representations

Use the image in Figure 1.16 to deconstruct a stereotype.

1. Deduce what Australian stereotype this image reflects.
2. Identify all the symbolic and technical codes of this representation that make it a stereotype. Consider selection and omission, acting, camera cropping and angles, colour, text and symbols.
3. Assess whether this is a positive or negative stereotype. From the list of codes you have made, which codes contribute most significantly to this?
4. In what kind of advertising would such an image appear? Explain your answer.

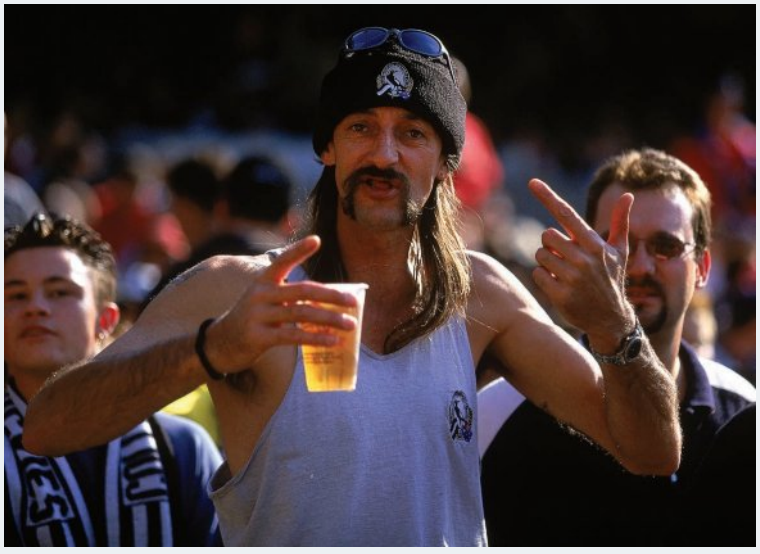


FIGURE 1.16 What kind of Australian (especially Victorian) stereotype is this?

Realism

The reality of a representation is influenced by the point of view of the author and the experiences of the audience. The level of knowledge possessed by both the author and the audience will determine the perceived level of realism contained within a representation.

Additionally, the audience's experiences and knowledge can also affect their interpretation of the representation. For example, a person with more background knowledge about a particular subject may perceive a representation differently than someone who is less knowledgeable about the same subject.

An example of where this can be divisive is in the representation of marginalised groups. The disabled community is chronically underrepresented in mainstream media. Rarely are media products created about



disabled people, and those that are frequently employ people without disability to create and feature in these roles. This has resulted in media products that represent disabled people and their lives in unrealistic ways. Musician, producer and filmmaker Sia came under fire for her 2020 film, *Music*, which centres around an autistic teenage girl. Sia, who at the time did not publicly identify as neurodivergent or on the autism spectrum, was criticised for aspects of the film as well as the casting of her muse, neurotypical Maddie Ziegler. Writer and autism advocate Sarah Kurchak wrote in *Time* magazine in 2021 that Sia's film was patronising and offensive to the autistic community.[2]



FIGURE 1.17 Sia and Maddie Ziegler

Following the release of the film in 2020, and in response to the criticism that the depiction of physical restraint of an autistic child is potentially dangerous, Sia announced that future screenings would be preceded by a warning and the scenes involving restraints would be removed from the film. In 2023, Sia announced her own autism diagnosis.

1.4 Interpretation of representations

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- audience engagement with, consumption, reading and production of media representations in different media products and forms from different periods of time, locations and contexts.

narrative story structure

The construction and interpretation of representations depends heavily upon time and place. To determine the role and position of characters within a traditional three-act Hollywood **narrative** we draw on cultural and historical understandings that have developed over time. The development of media institutions like film and television have coincided with the tumultuous events of the 20th and 21st centuries. Since the popularisation of cinema, the globe has experienced two world wars, the invention and use of nuclear weapons, space travel and the internet. The media has the power to reflect and represent interpretations of seismic shifts occurring within society.

The 1967 film *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (dir. Stanley Kramer), a love story between a black man and white woman, tackled race relations in America at a time when the American civil rights movement was in the midst of its arguably most violent and chaotic period.



FIGURE 1.18 The 1967 Hollywood film *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* reflected changes in American society at the time of production.

However, two years later, the same nation transcended what was thought humanly possible when Neil Armstrong was the first human to walk on the moon in 1969. Billions around the globe crowded around television sets to see his first steps. Films like *The Deer Hunter* (1978, dir. Michael Cimino), *Apocalypse Now* (1979, dir. Francis Ford Coppola) and *Platoon* (1986, dir. Oliver Stone) provoked national discussion within American and Australian society about their involvement in the Vietnam conflict (1955–75) and altered the way men and women were represented.

Regardless of the era, film and television as well as many other media formats have represented people from an interpretation of the era in which they were created.

The most popular method of placing these representations in context, in cinema especially, came via the 'three-act narrative'. Typically, these types of films centre around a **protagonist** – the leading character or characters upon whom the story is focused. In the first act, we meet our characters, the setting in which we find them and the challenges they may face. In some cases, the protagonist encounters a crisis that he or she must resolve in the second act. The crisis is often created by the **antagonist**. The final act usually focuses on the resolution of the crisis created at the end of the first act.

protagonist the main character in a story or a play

antagonist a character opposed to the hero/main character/protagonist; usually a villain whose actions create the dramatic conflict and tension

FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. Do media products reflect the times (social and historical context) in which they are produced?
2. What is a narrative?
3. In your favourite film or TV show, who is the protagonist? Who is the antagonist? Are there more than one of each?
4. Discuss a media form from the past year that represented race or culture. How was it represented? In your opinion, was it represented positively or negatively?
5. Discuss a media form from the past year that represented the patriarchy. How was it represented? In your opinion, was it represented positively or negatively?
6. Discuss a media form from the past year that represented the pandemic. How was it represented? In your opinion, was it represented positively or negatively?
7. Discuss a media form from the past year that represented technology. How was it represented? In your opinion, was it represented positively or negatively?
8. Discuss a media form from the past year that represented political figures. How were they represented? In your opinion, were they represented positively or negatively?



ACTIVITY 1.11

Research task

Think about this idea for a film:

Act 1: Introduction

Girl meets Boy. Girl is a genuine and honest character, but must pretend she is 'something she is not' to attract Boy. Girl and Boy fall in love.

Act 2: Crisis

A 'Jealous Villain' disrupts the relationship and forces the two apart. 'Jealous Villain' threatens to reveal the truth. Girl tries unsuccessfully to win Boy back.

Act 3: Resolution

Girl realises that honesty and truth are the only way to reignite the love with Boy. Through a series of well-planned actions, Girl proves her love to Boy and defeats 'Jealous Villain'.

You've seen it before, haven't you?

1. Research and identify three films you have seen that employed the formula mentioned above.
2. Explain how each film employs this method to follow, alter or subvert this 'three-act narrative' formula.
3. Assess how any or all of the stereotypes you found in Activities 1.10 and 1.12 (see page 43) fit into these narratives.

1.5 Representations of individuals

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- media codes and conventions used to construct media products and meanings in different media forms
- the construction of representations within and across products and forms from different periods of time, locations and contexts.

The following section goes through popular representations and stereotypes of individuals found in the media. What we've included are examples of extreme stereotypes rather than realistic representations. By exploring these and discussing how they are used, it will allow you to understand the purpose that an author has in using one of these characters.

Representations of traditional gender roles

The way men and women are represented in the media depends upon the medium and genre that is being constructed. There are some representations that seem to exist only on TV and others that seem to exist only within the world of movies. All representations are created for a specific purpose and for certain audiences. Activity 1.12 includes just a few common representations of men and women, how they are usually characterised, where they are usually found and how they are usually constructed. This is by no means a definitive collection of stereotypes; however, they are the building blocks of many others.

ACTIVITY 1.12

Analysing representations

Working alone or in groups, you should carefully examine the following stereotypes in a variety of *media forms*. Examine your favourite films, TV and online serials to see how many of these stereotypes you can find. For each one, explain the use of sound and symbolic codes used in their construction. The first and third ones have been are filled in as examples for you.

Stereotype	Description	Symbolic codes	Sound codes
Tradesman (Tradie)	The Tradie is usually found on a construction site. He might be the builder, the plumber, the electrician or the gardener. Generally, the Tradie is not fussed by much, and there's nothing he likes more than finishing a hard day on the job and enjoying a couple of beers.	Easily identified through his costume, which usually consists of stubbies shorts, a blue singlet, a work belt, a pair of Blundstone boots and sunnies. It's an outfit for hard working outside for long periods of time. Food choices are usually a chocolate milk and meat pie at 'smoko' break.	The Tradie can be introduced and reflects many of the values within many classic rock bands, such as AC/DC or Guns N' Roses. His dialogue is straight and to the point, no unnecessary long speeches, with phrases such as 'no worries', 'righto' and 'she'll be right'.
Hopeless Husband/ Boyfriend	The Hopeless Husband is usually found in or around the home or flat. He is either the husband or boyfriend of a much smarter woman. The Hopeless Husband means well; however, his role is to not understand simple, everyday tasks or products, therefore requiring his partner to laugh at him (along with the audience) and come along to save the day.		
Housewife	The Housewife is rarely seen outside her territory: the home, the supermarket, the school. She spends most of her time cooking and cleaning and maintaining a perfect home environment for her husband and children. She is always there to solve 'home' problems and provides hugs and support for family members.	She wears dresses and pale colours and drives family vehicles such as station wagons and vans. She wears a wedding ring and gets her hair done professionally.	The Housewife talks a lot about her kids and her house and she is surrounded by the noise of gossiping neighbours and a happy-go-lucky soundtrack that suggests happiness.



Stereotype	Description	Symbolic codes	Sound codes
Working Mother	The Working Mother has to balance her home life and work life and she is constantly torn between the two worlds. Usually, she needs to pretend at work that her family life does not exist to be taken seriously by male co-workers. She is often challenged by her work for not showing enough commitment and by her family/ children/husband for not putting in enough time in the home.		
The Queen Bee	The Queen Bee is the leader of her group of popular and wicked friends in a school or workplace setting. She has gained her position of power through taking other people down. She is usually dating an attractive male character who is also the dominant character in his group. She is superficial and judges people on their outward appearance and economic status. Her 'friends' are close to her because they want to become her, take her place when she falls down the social ladder, or because they are scared of her.		
Nerd	The Nerd is the man who is interested in scientific, pop culture or computer pursuits, bordering on an obsession. His mind is a complex and powerful aspect of his character, often allowing him to understand the intricacies of complex ideas and stories. He has an appreciation for all things that are clever, intelligent and non-physical, as the Nerd usually lacks the coordination or the physique, not to mention interest, to participate in contact sports, or any sports for that matter.		

The producers of reality TV shows are acutely aware of gender stereotypes and purposely seek to cast these 'characters' to pit against one another.

ACTIVITY 1.13

Watch the opening credits of a number of reality TV shows such as *Married at First Sight*, *Love Island*, *Masterchef*, *The Bachelor*, *Survivor* or another show of your choice.

Note down each of the characters and the use of media codes and conventions used to create a representation of a stereotypical male or female character.



FIGURE 1.19 Gender stereotypes rule in reality TV shows such as *The Bachelor*.

Representations of race and ethnicity

Mainstream media – particularly in Australia – can often be criticised for lacking diversity through the representations presented. Despite being one of the most multicultural nations on Earth – alongside being home to the world's oldest continuing living culture – Australian media products remain predominantly 'white'. While there is no doubt this is beginning to shift and we are seeing more diversity on our screens, our media often falls victim to the stereotyping we explored in gender roles. Ethnicity is a complex and multifaceted aspect of identity, and it is often portrayed in mass media in a variety of ways. Here are some examples of how ethnicity is represented in mass media:

- **Stereotypes:** Unfortunately, stereotypes are a common way that ethnicity is portrayed in mass media. These stereotypes can be harmful and perpetuate negative attitudes and beliefs about certain groups. For example, the stereotype of the 'angry Black activist' perpetuates the idea that people of colour are overly aggressive and hostile.
- **Tokenism:** Tokenism occurs when a character from a particular ethnic group is included in a show or movie to give the impression of diversity. However, the character is often one-dimensional and lacks depth. For example, the character of Apu on *The Simpsons* has been criticised for being a one-dimensional caricature of an Indian man.
- **Positive representation:** Positive representation occurs when characters from various ethnic groups are portrayed as complex, multidimensional individuals with unique personalities and backgrounds. For example, the TV show *Gogglebox Australia* features a range of people from various ethnic and First Nations backgrounds who are portrayed as a complex, multifaceted people with a range of experiences and emotions. The show features friends and families from the Sri Lankan, Greek, First Nations, Malaysian and Lebanese communities and the show allows the audience to understand how the lens of culture can impact the reading of media products.



FIGURE 1.20 The character of Apu in *The Simpsons* has been criticised for being a stereotypical representation of an Indian man.



FIGURE 1.21 Members of the cast and crew of *Crazy Rich Asians*, winners of the Best Comedy award at the 24th Annual Critics' Choice Awards, Los Angeles, 2019

- **Cultural appropriation:** Cultural appropriation occurs when elements of one culture are taken and used by another culture in a way that is disrespectful or insensitive. This is often seen in fashion and music, where elements of a particular culture are used for their aesthetic value without understanding the cultural significance behind them.
- **Empowerment:** Empowerment occurs when members of a particular ethnic group are given a platform to tell their own stories and share their own experiences. For example, the movie *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018, dir. Jon M Chu) was celebrated for featuring an all-Asian cast and showcasing Asian culture in a positive and authentic way.

ACTIVITY 1.14

Research task

The news and current affairs programs on Australian television networks are some of the most watched programs each day. Research the current hosts and anchors of these programs and see if they reflect the diversity of Australia's population.

Representations of subculture

From the disco dancers of *Saturday Night Fever* (1977, dir. John Badham) to the skinhead neo-fascists of *American History X* (1998, dir. Tony Kaye), subcultures are another way in which media creators develop representations of the individual. Subculture can bring another dimension to the character. The media often portrays subcultures – groups of people who share a distinct set of beliefs, values, behaviours, image and interests that differ from those of the dominant culture. Here are some examples of how subcultures are represented in mass media:



FIGURE 1.22 Goths represent a distinct subculture

- **Music:** Music is often associated with various subcultures. For example, punk rock is associated with anti-establishment and anti-authority values, while heavy metal is associated with rebellion and nonconformity. Dance and techno music is often linked with drug usage – see *Trainspotting* (1996, dir. Danny Boyle).
- **Fashion:** Subcultures often have distinct fashion styles that reflect their values and beliefs. For example, gothic subculture often has a preference for black clothing, leather and metal jewellery, while the hip-hop subculture often wears baggy clothing, baseball caps and sneakers.

- **Sports:** Action sports like surfing and skateboarding have their own unique style, music, language and fashion. These subcultures are often represented as 'slackers', refusing to conform to adulthood. Other sports such as soccer, football and basketball all have their own individual characteristics of a subculture. Films such as *He Got Game* (1998, dir. Spike Lee) and *Above the Rim* (1994, dir. Jeff Pollack) reflect basketball culture.
- **Film and television:** Movies and TV shows often portray subcultures as well. For example, the show *The Big Bang Theory* (2007–19) represents geek subculture, while the movie *The Breakfast Club* (1985, dir. John Hughes) represents high school subculture.
- **Social media:** Social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok have also become a way for subcultures to be represented. For example, cottagecore subculture, which celebrates a romanticised version of rural life, has gained popularity on social media, as has WitchTok – breeding a new generation of goths.

It is important to note that while the media can provide representation for subcultures, it can also lead to misrepresentation and stereotypes. Therefore, it is essential to seek out diverse sources of information and media to gain a more accurate understanding of subcultures.

ACTIVITY 1.15

Research task

Find at least four representations of different subcultures and then discuss the representations created. You can look at advertising, the news, websites, comic books, movies, etc.

For example, you could look for:

- a skateboarder
- a punk
- a hippie
- a goth.

The Eurocentric view

If you examine Western and Hollywood cinema over the past century, it can be easily described as a **Eurocentric** version of what is safe and normal. Eurocentrism describes an old view of the world that places predominantly Anglo-Saxon and European culture at the centre of the world and considers everyone else as inferior.

Eurocentric reflecting a tendency to interpret the world in terms of European or Anglo-American values and experiences to the exclusion of a wider view of the world

This view is not exclusive to cinema. It is an attitude developed over centuries in European and Western cultures like the United States, England and Australia. Take the following excerpt from 'The White Man's Burden' by English writer Rudyard Kipling.

> Take up the White Man's burden –
> Send forth the best ye breed –
> Go send your sons to exile
> To serve your captives' need
> To wait in heavy harness
> On fluttered folk and wild –
> Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
> Half-devil and half-child

FIGURE 1.23 Rudyard Kipling, 'The White Man's Burden', 1899

STUDY TIP

'Hollywood cinema' refers to the types of films made by the American film industry – the dominant form of mainstream fictional film in the world. 'Hollywood' is a location in Los Angeles, California, where film studios produce movies and other media.



Written in 1899, Kipling encouraged his fellow British to take on (what he believed to be) the noble and ultimately moral cause of civilising the rest of the world in the name of reshaping non-white cultures in the mould of Britain. While not specifically stated within his poem, Kipling represented an idea that non-white cultures needed to be saved from themselves and would only benefit from the introduction of European ideas, practices and technology.

'The other'

Kipling's view of non-Europeans is clear. Those 'half-devil, half-child' people of the uncivilised world were inferior and, thus, sat outside of the mainstream, civilised society – unless of course they were able to conform. Kipling's notion of this outsider creates an individual that is different, wild, untamed and out of step with the 'dominant' culture. This view is often used to cast the majority against the minority.

Western literature and cinema utilised this view to create 'the other' as a character who challenges the dominant and normal. For cinema, in particular, 'the other' is often presented as a lesser person, someone to be treated with scorn, suspicion, ridicule and fear. Using Kipling as a stepping stone, it may be someone who is of a different race, gender, culture, religion, social class, sexual orientation or nationality.

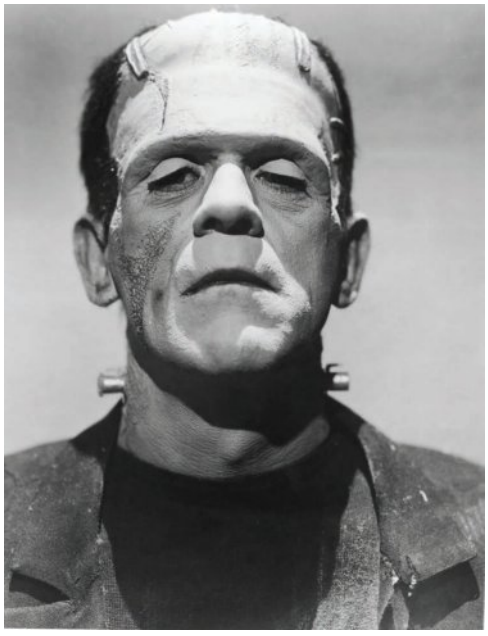


FIGURE 1.24 The monster in *Frankenstein* (1931), played by Boris Karloff, is a well-known male villain.

Consider the monster created by scientist Henry Frankenstein in the 1931 film version of the Mary Shelley book, *Frankenstein* (dir. James Whale). Obsessed with bringing the dead back to life, Dr Frankenstein wants to create life that can exist in his own subjective, Eurocentric view of what is normal and safe. In many ways, he is trying to impose a set of values upon a raw, uncivilised being. However, the monster the scientist creates is hideous and does not understand how to behave within the rules and boundaries of the society around him. Due to its inability to conform, Dr Frankenstein commits to destroying his monster. Desperate to survive, be loved and understand those around him, the monster accidentally kills a young girl, turning the local villagers against him, leading to his death. The monster's inability to meet the expectations of the dominant culture made him a focus of fear and, ultimately, an object of hatred.

As *Frankenstein* shows, this role of 'the other' in Hollywood cinema was therefore often taken by the 'villain'. A film which plays on this idea is *Edward Scissorhands* (1990, dir. Tim Burton). In the film, Johnny Depp plays a creature who has, like Frankenstein's monster, been created by a scientist in his workshop. However, we quickly learn that Edward is kind-hearted and simply misunderstood. While Edward is initially accepted into the community because he is 'extraordinary', he quickly runs foul of the local community as his understanding of social and cultural norms is undeveloped. His communication is limited and he is extremely awkward in large social gatherings. His hands make normal human functions difficult and dangerous.

While the notion of 'the other' continues to play a common role in contemporary media narratives, there is a clear shift in how these characters are represented and, ultimately, celebrated. As we become more accepting of 'the other' in society, these characters which were once constructed to be polarised and unaccepted by the mainstream are now championed.

The popular TV series, *Heartbreak High* (2022–), stars Chloé Hayden as Quinni, one of the series leads. Hayden's performance as Quinni is groundbreaking as it is one of the rare examples of an autistic person playing a character with autism. Quinni defies expectations and subverts the stereotypes of autistic people usually depicted in media. The world is seen through her eyes, instead of through the lens of people reacting to her.

Similarly, contemporary TV shows aimed at younger audiences, such as *Sex Education* (2019–), have turned the Kipling version of 'the other' around to recognise the changing world views around diversity.



FIGURE 1.25 The diverse cast of *Heartbreak High*, including Chloé Hayden (far left), demonstrating 'the other' is actually far more common today than ever.

REPRESENTATION OF THE TRANS COMMUNITY

The representation of trans people in mainstream media has historically been limited and often problematic. Transgender individuals have often been portrayed in stereotypical and sensationalised ways, perpetuating harmful and inaccurate myths about their lives and experiences. An example of this is from the 1986 blockbuster hit, *Crocodile Dundee* (dir. Peter Faiman), where the main character, Mick, gets a laugh from assaulting two trans women throughout the film.

Stories about trans people were often negative stories punctuated by acts of violence and prejudice. *Boys Don't Cry* (1999, dir. Kimberly Peirce) was the first mainstream film to focus on a transgender man, and while this was a milestone, we can see that the film is very much a product of its time. The film is based on the tragic true story of Brandon Teena, a 21-year-old trans man who was raped and murdered in Nebraska in 1993. The character of Brandon was played by cisgender female actress, Hilary Swank, who went on to win the Oscar that year. In her speech she thanked Brandon and used his pronouns as he/him to





FIGURE 1.26 Hilary Swank as Brandon Teena in *Boys Don't Cry* (1999, dir. Kimberly Peirce) and receiving the Oscar for Best Actress



FIGURE 1.27 Dua Saleh, who plays Cal Bowman in *Sex Education*



FIGURE 1.28 Elliot Page is a high-profile actor and advocate for trans rights.

affirm his male identity. However, the fact that a cisgendered actress played the role of this pivotal character does not sit well with modern audiences. In 1999, the conversations around transgender lives were virtually non-existent, taking a backseat to the huge visibility and progress of the LGB activists such as Ellen DeGeneres. The image of trans people was that of playing dress-ups and deceit around gender and identity.

However, in recent years, there has been a growing push for more positive and accurate representation of trans people in the media. This has been driven in part by increased awareness and advocacy around trans rights and issues, as well as a greater willingness among some media outlets to listen to and work with trans individuals. The iconic Australian brand Bonds has made major inroads in un-gendering their iconic underwear. Throughout the campaign, Bonds used trans people as the faces of their famous brand, leading to wider conversations and visibility in mainstream consumer and retail culture.

Some examples of positive representation of trans or non-binary people in the media include the critically acclaimed TV series *Pose* (2018-21) which features a predominantly trans cast and crew and explores the lives of queer and trans people of colour in the ballroom scene of the 1980s and 1990s. The groundbreaking *Sex Education* also featured an important storyline of Cal, a non-binary character who joined the cast in Season 3 and tackled the bigoted views of Moordale's conservative principal. The actor who played Cal, Dua Saleh, identifies as non-binary and they praised the inclusion of the character as important for teens to see.

Additionally, several high-profile celebrities, such as Laverne Cox and Elliot Page, have come out as trans and have used their platforms to advocate for trans rights and visibility. However, despite these positive steps, there is still a long way to go in terms of achieving full and accurate representation of trans people in the media. Trans individuals continue to face significant discrimination and marginalisation in many areas of society, including in the media, and there is a need for continued advocacy and action to address this issue.

ACTIVITY 1.16

Research task

1. Analyse and compare representations of trans people in different forms of media.
2. Select a variety of media sources, such as TV shows, movies, news articles, social media posts, etc., that feature trans individuals.
3. Watch or read each piece of media and take notes on how the trans individuals are represented. This could include looking at factors such as the language used to describe them, the portrayal of their gender identity and/or transition, the casting of trans actors, and the overall message conveyed about trans people.
4. Compare and contrast the different representations of trans individuals across the different media sources. Students could create a chart or table to record their findings and identify any common themes or patterns that emerge.
5. Reflect on the impact of these representations on broader public perceptions of trans people. Students could consider questions such as: How do these representations contribute to or challenge dominant stereotypes about trans people? How might different audiences interpret these representations differently?

DECONSTRUCTING 'THE OTHER'

The notion of 'the other' in media narratives refers to the characters that are purposely constructed to represent the outsider – those that sit on the margins of the society in which they exist. Whether it is due to gender identity, race, disability or social class – sometimes a combination of these! – 'the other' is an important character that often reflects or rejects the values of the society.

Tim Burton is a director known for his celebration of the outsider and these characters are central to each and every one of his films. While many narratives follow a protagonist venturing out into the unknown, Burton's characters are inherently different from everyone else in their world – sometimes even ostracised. Take *Edward Scissorhands*, for example, where Edward is quite literally inhuman and finds it difficult to fit in and understand society's norms. The film's poster (Figure 1.29) creates a strong contrast between normal society and Edward 'the other'. By examining and deconstructing the representations evident on the poster, we can see how the author of this image has been able to create this meaning. The symbolic code of costume has been used to place Edward as 'the other'. Wearing primarily black against the bright whites and blues of the background presents a dark contrast against the positive sentiment of bright blue sky. Stylised acting and make-up combine as Edward (Johnny Depp) casts his eyes downward, and furrows his brow in a concerned and troubled expression. His unkempt hair and patchwork costume

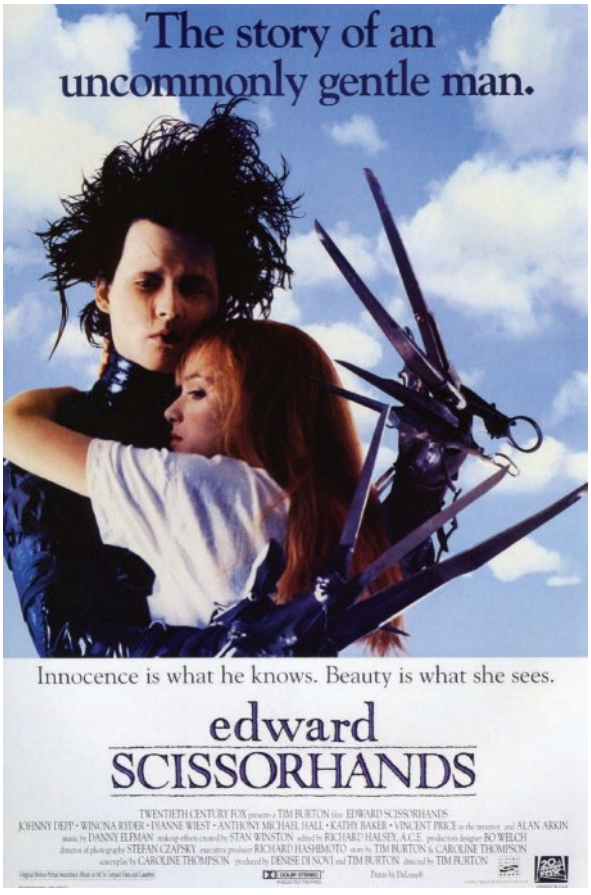


FIGURE 1.29 A poster for the movie *Edward Scissorhands* (1990)



FIGURE 1.30 Movie posters are created to promote a film to new audiences and they must express the ideas of the story in a simple way for the audience to understand. Therefore, simple common codes and conventions must be used to create meaning.

creates the connotation that he does not conform to the normal American teen stereotype so heavily represented in the film. The scissors, of course, present a jarring image of a not only troubled but potentially dangerous character. Holding him closely is Kim (Winona Ryder), dressed in white t-shirt with rich red hues in her hair. The warm tones in her complexion contrast heavily with the pale white face of Edward. Clearly there is a deliberate attempt to use the symbolic code of colour to place Edward as the cold, colourless outsider.

Another film that champions 'the other' is the 2019 film by Tyler Nilson and Michael Schwartz, *The Peanut Butter Falcon*. Rarely do films accurately portray the challenges and triumphs of disabled characters, yet this low-budget film follows the journey of Zak, a young man with Down syndrome who is desperate to escape the confines of his life in an aged-care facility. Escaping with the help of his roommate, Zak meets fellow outsider, Tyler, a broken and poverty-stricken young man on the run. The film follows the classic Mark Twain-style narrative of two vagabond characters escaping the harsh realities of the world in which they exist and a society that rejects them. It takes the original themes of struggling to fit in with society and refocuses it through Zak's (played by Zack Gottsagen, who has Down syndrome) and Tyler's characters, showing how the lives of the disabled and those living below the poverty line represent a sizeable amount of modern-day alienation.

ACTIVITY 1.17

Research task

Collect examples of films that represent the outsider. Find the promotional posters of three films, deconstruct the use of codes and conventions on each and present your findings to your class.

1.6 Changing representations of females

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- audience engagement with, consumption, reading and production of media representations in different media products and forms from different periods of time, locations and contexts
- the social and institutional relationships between audiences and the media that are created, produced, distributed, consumed and read.

When we watch, engage and listen to the media we are constantly faced with portrayals of females; however, it is very important to understand that these portrayals are 'representations' of females, and not the women and girls themselves. The notion of women as weak and incapable characters in fictional media products has no doubt experienced challenges in the past few decades. The work of feminist movements and media producers of all genders have helped to destabilise this pattern of female objectification. However, it does not take long to find examples in contemporary media that support the idea that women are seen to be objects that are **deconstructed** and valued not for their character, resilience, intelligence or talent, but only their beauty.

deconstructed simplified or stripped back; reduced

Many media commentators have argued that women have been deconstructed into objects. Representations of legs, thighs, bodies or faces are elements of a human's body, rather than that of a complete human being. Across contemporary media you can and will find countless examples where women are objectified and broken into parts, rather than presented as a whole. The overt sexualisation of women in media has led to a distorted representation of the role of women in society. Reality TV shows bank on these representations of women, where physical appearance plays a key role in the success and likeability of a contestant.

Over time, this has created challenges for societies looking to introduce new representations of women in the media and for the means by which women see themselves in the mass media.

Consider the impact the media has on young and impressionable audiences. A 2008 study of female leads in G-rated films, those targeted at children, found that nearly all leading female characters were valued for their appearance and were focused on winning the love of the lead male character. Clearly, female representations have long been controlled and constructed by those with the power to create them.



FIGURE 1.31 An old advertisement for Drummond Sweaters from the 1950s



Throughout history the portrayal of women in the media has changed to reflect changing attitudes in society. The representation of women in the media varies in different cultures and countries, depending on what the particular society's values are.

Real women, such as celebrities and politicians, are also 'represented' in the media. Although these women are not characters (fictional representations), when we see, hear and read about them we are only ever getting a small part of the information about them, yet in many cases they face a different set of expectations around their looks, presentation, private lives and leadership styles. In recent years, there has been much scrutiny and analysis around how female leaders are represented – and largely critiqued – as opposed to their male counterparts.

Take, for example, the former Prime Minister of Finland, Sanna Marin, who came under intense criticism after leaked video showed her enjoying herself at a private function with friends. PM Marin was accused of being 'irresponsible' and 'undignified', and was pressured by media outlets into taking a drug test to prove she was not under the influence. New Zealand's former Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, is another example of how female politicians and leaders are unfairly represented in the media. When the two world leaders met, they faced a press conference where a New Zealand journalist asked:

> 'A lot of people will be wondering, are you two meeting just because you're similar in age and, you know, got a lot of common stuff there.'
>
> Ardern replied: 'My first question is I wonder whether or not anyone ever asked [former U.S. President] Barack Obama and [former New Zealand Prime Minister] John Key if they met because they were of similar age.
>
> We of course have a higher proportion of men in politics. It's reality. But because two women meet, it's not simply because of their gender.'[3]

FIGURE 1.32 Jacinda Ardern to a reporter, 30 November 2022



FIGURE 1.33 Sanna Marin and Jacinda Ardern

While these narrow and limiting stereotypes of women and girls continue to exist, we can see there have been some dramatic shifts in challenging these representations, starting with media narratives aimed at younger audiences. Disney films continue to evolve their female characters from princesses who need rescuing to heroines who save their worlds. The need for a 'love interest' plotline has vanished, so no longer are young audiences watching narratives that reinforce the idea of traditional marriage and a 'happy ever after'. Characters such as Queen Elsa in *Frozen* (rejector of marriage at all costs), Nerida, Chief of the Village, in *Brave*, Moana the brave seafarer in *Moana*, and the unassuming Mirabel in *Encanto* all reflect modern-day values of courage and the ability to challenge what is expected of them.



FIGURE 1.34 Opening night fan event display for Disney's *Encanto* (2021, dir. Byron Howard and Jared Bush), Los Angeles

ACTIVITY 1.18

Analysing representations

Examine the following images of famous female characters. Make notes about their appearance, character traits, body language and role in their respective narratives.

How do these representations reflect or challenge the beliefs and values about the role of women at the time in which the narrative was produced?



FIGURE 1.35 Sarah Michelle Gellar (centre) as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and other members of the cast (1997–2003)



FIGURE 1.36 Linda Carter, the star of *Wonder Woman* (1975–79)



FIGURE 1.37 Jennifer Aniston as Rachel in *Friends* (1994–2004)



FIGURE 1.38 Madame Tussaud's wax image of Jennifer Lawrence as Katniss Everdeen in *The Hunger Games* (2012, dir. Gary Ross and Francis Lawrence)



FIGURE 1.39 Judy Garland as Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939, dir. Victor Fleming)



FIGURE 1.40 Elle (Reece Witherspoon) in *Legally Blonde* (2001, dir. Robert Luketic)



FIGURE 1.41 Eleven (Millie Bobby Brown) in *Stranger Things* (2016–24)

'It matters who makes it'

A 2011 San Diego State University study found that women made up only 18% of the producers, directors, writers, cinematographers and editors of the top 250 grossing films of that year. Women have made significant inroads in the media industry; however, their limited impact on a male-dominated industry has been difficult to ignore. A French study carried out in 2000 found that, due to the higher-than-average representation of women employed in the French news media, there was 5–9% more coverage of issues that directly affected women.

Other regions around the world, with lower numbers of women employed in the news media, did not reach this level of coverage. Over the last two decades, audiences have been inundated with superhero films based on male comic book heroes. By 2016, only two of those films were directed by women; however, since 2016 there has been a notable push by Marvel Studios and DC to hire female directors, with films like *Wonder Woman* (2017, dir. Patty Jenkins), *Birds of Prey* (2020, dir. Cathy Yan), *Black Widow* (2021, dir. Cate Shortland) and *Eternals* (2022, dir. Chloe Zhao) being notable releases.

Historically, though, women have not had the opportunity to author enough work to address this imbalance in the representation of women. As authors, women have the ability to present and represent an authentic version of themselves. San Diego State University communications professor Martha Lauzen states that when women have more powerful and influential roles in creating media products, the audience get 'more powerful female characters on screen, women who are more real and multi-dimensional'.

A University of Illinois study by JC McNeil in 1975 examined the role of women in television sitcoms, dramas and soap operas. McNeil found there were seven characteristics that dominated the representation of women on television at the time.

JC MCNEIL'S WOMEN IN MEDIA

- Female characters are fewer in number and less central to the plot.
- Marriage and parenthood are considered more important to a woman's life than to a man's life.
- Television portrays the traditional division of labour in marriage.
- Employed women are shown in traditionally female occupations, as subordinates to men and with little status or power.
- TV-women are more personally and less professionally oriented than TV-men.
- Female characters are more passive than male characters.
- Television dramatic programming ignored the existence of the women's movement.

FIGURE 1.42 University of Illinois study by JC McNeil, 1975

The representation of women in the media, in 1975, was clearly defined by those who authored it. Overwhelmingly, the authors were men. As McNeil found, women were consistently represented as secondary characters to their more driven male counterparts.

So what has changed since 1975? A little and a lot. It depends on what you're watching. A number of strong female-driven narratives like co-creator Issa Rae's *Insecure* (2016–21) have brought a definitive focus back on the authenticity of women creating their own representations.



FIGURE 1.43 Co-creator of *Insecure*, Issa Rae



FIGURE 1.44 Reese Witherspoon

Influential actress, producer and director, Reese Witherspoon, is one of many voices now speaking out against the imbalance in the film and television industry. Witherspoon began the media company Hello Sunshine in 2016, in response to the amount of misogynistic stories and scripts she and her peers were receiving. Witherspoon stated that:

> Hello Sunshine is on a mission to change the narrative for women … we are a media company that puts women at the centre of every story we create, celebrate and discover.

FIGURE 1.45 Reece Witherspoon, 'About Us', *Hello Sunshine* website

Since its inception, Hello Sunshine has gone on to produce award-winning television such as *Big Little Lies* and *The Morning Show*.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. Why does it matter 'who makes it'? Do you agree or disagree?
2. Is the writer/director/producer of your favourite movie or TV show male or female? What impact might this have had?

Women in advertising

Since the birth of advertising, those doing the selling have looked for every angle possible to reach their buyers. The sexualisation of women's bodies became a strong focus of advertisers during the 1950s and 60s. Many would argue that little has changed; however, it was the growth of the idea of the 'nuclear family' that not only stereotyped the role of women in society but cemented patriarchal views of the roles of men and women in Western society.

After the end of World War II in 1945, much of the Western world experienced strong economic growth, which led to an increase in the manufacturing and purchasing of consumer goods. The dark old days of rationing during the war were over and Americans, as well as Australians, were now concerned with the idea that the accumulation of wealth and material possessions led to happiness. Suburbs grew out of the major cities and a developing middle class had new expectations about what constituted a life well lived. In order to reach the goals of a house, a car, a smiling spouse and happy, well-adjusted children, there had to be order within society and this was reflected in the notion of the nuclear family. Conservative politicians and community leaders believed that a stable family unit was one of the cornerstones of a successful Western democracy, and for this family unit to be successful, each member of the family needed to conform to specified roles.

The husband's role was to work and provide for his family. The wife's role was to remain at home, keep it clean and tidy, cook for the family and raise the children. As such, it was common for advertisers of what was an exploding market in home consumer goods, like washing machines and domestic cleaning products, to represent women in these roles.

In this family unit, the father was the dominant authority, as represented by the TV show *Father Knows Best* (1954–60). Programs such as this promoted the values of a happy, nuclear family as the mother and father worked together to raise and educate their children; however, gender roles were reinforced as the son 'Bud' was consistently encouraged to pursue more masculine tasks like carpentry and the daughter 'Betty' was encouraged to do more feminine tasks like cleaning, especially for her brother. Within this show, the representation of female characters simply served to reinforce the idea that women played secondary roles to men within the nuclear family.

ACTIVITY 1.19

Analysing representations

Closely examine these cast photos, deconstruct the images and write down what you see.

Selection and omission

- Identify what has been included within each image and what you think has been left out.
- Explain why you think these decisions were made.

Technical codes

- Describe how the characters have been positioned within each shot.
- Assess whether there is a hierarchy of importance and deduce what this suggests about family roles.

Symbolic codes

- Examine the clothing and facial expressions of the characters.
- Assess what this suggests about the family.

Realism

- Assess whether each image is realistic.
- Do they reflect a reality of a time past, present or both? Explain your answer.



FIGURE 1.46 A still from the television show *Father Knows Best* (1954–60)



FIGURE 1.47 The cast of *Gilmore Girls* (2000–07)



In advertising, women are used to market products that are perceived to be interesting to them, and certain values and stereotypes are shown in these advertisements. Cleaning products and cosmetics are good examples. In these ads, we sometimes see the woman depicted as the person who cleans the house or the bathroom and feels under pressure to do so, as some sections of society assume that homes are predominantly cleaned and maintained by women. However, companies and advertisers are becoming far more aware that this strategy is no longer as effective as it once was.

In a 2021 Roy Morgan survey, it was reported that around a third of Australian households have a woman as the main 'breadwinner'.[4] Around 85% of all household consumer spending is controlled by women, therefore the changing roles of women need to be reflected in the promotion of the products and services.[5] Yet, many advertisements still represent women as the main carer and maintainer of the home and family, with the male representation the 'hopeless husband' trope.

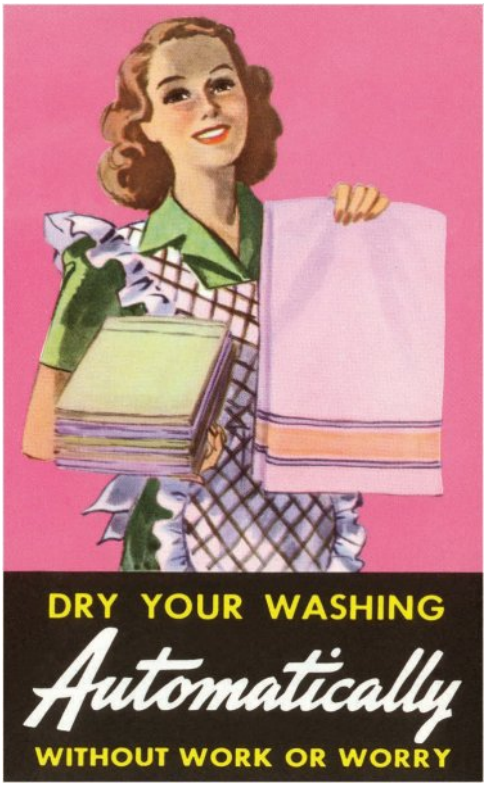


FIGURE 1.48 Vintage advertisements often featured depictions of women cleaning...

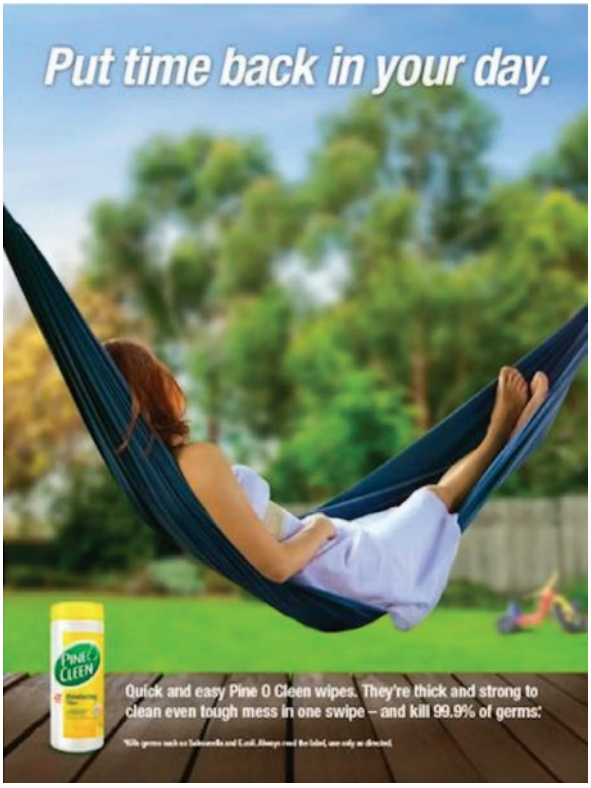


FIGURE 1.49 ...as do modern advertisements, such as this Pine O Cleen ad.

ACTIVITY 1.20

Research task

1 Can you find a household cleaning product ad for men, using a man as the main character?

2 If so, describe how it differs from the ads with women.

Cosmetics ads use attractive women to encourage their audience to buy cosmetics by supporting the value that women should be beautiful and young-looking, and if they are not, they are less valued in society. The advertisers infer through their attractive characters (sometimes well-known celebrities, which tends to add another level of authenticity to their statements) that their products will make the people who buy them look or feel this way.

Also, we 'see' only what the author of the media product wishes us to see. In a newspaper, we might see an unflattering photograph of a celebrity combined with a caption (text) that infers that she is not as attractive as normal or that her life is out of control because she is not maintaining the façade of beauty.

As such, simplified representations of women abound. Media producers and authors often use stereotypes of women to position them within a product and to influence the audience's reading of them. Depending on the nature of the media product, these representations, like those of men, can be positive as well as negative.

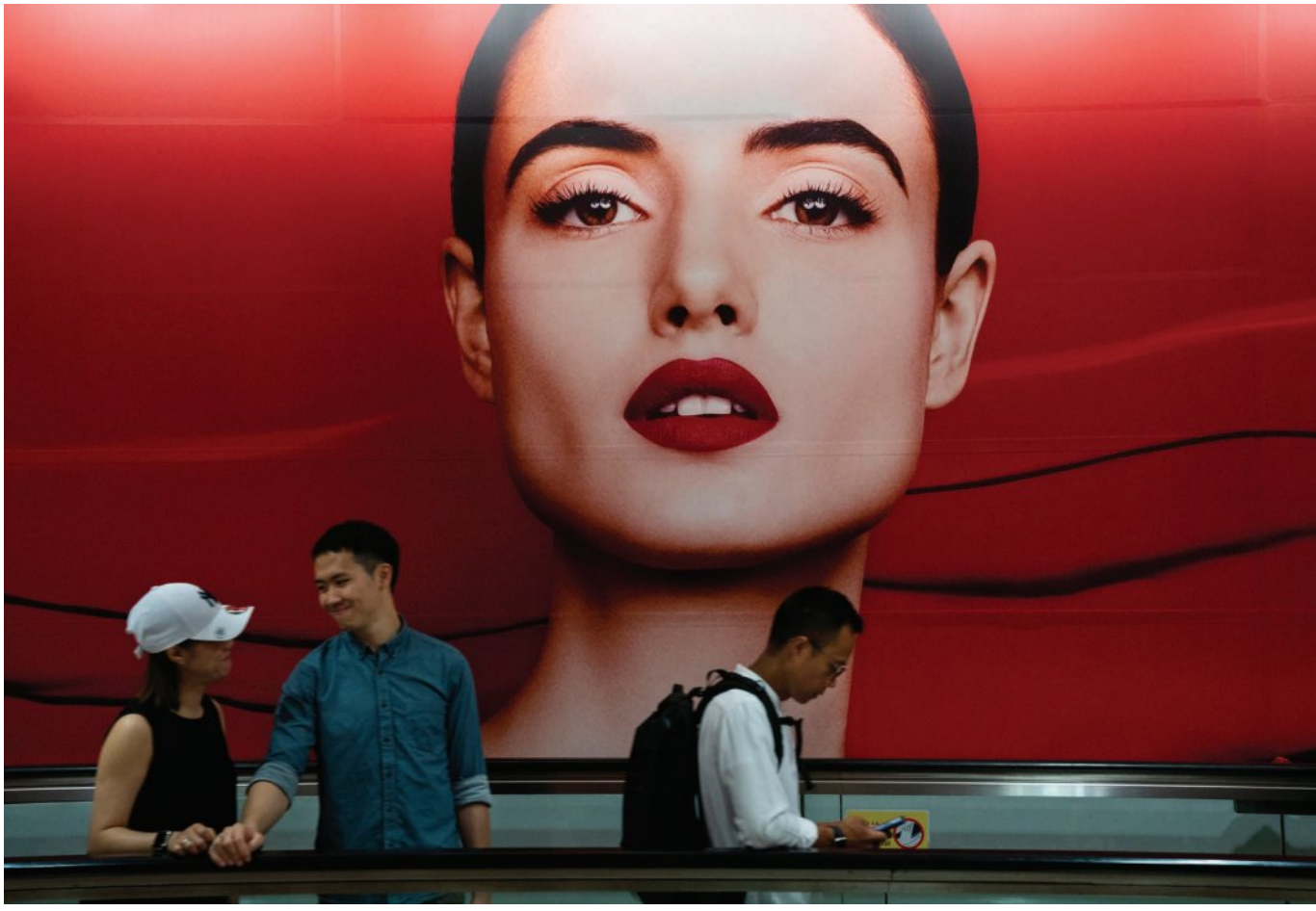


FIGURE 1.50 Advertisements for cosmetics products usually feature models or endorsements by celebrities. Here, commuters pass by a large Givenchy luxury fashion, cosmetics and perfume house advertisement in Central MTR subway station, Hong Kong.



ACTIVITY 1.21

Analysing representations



FIGURE 1.51 An advertisement for Kelvinator fridges from the 1960s

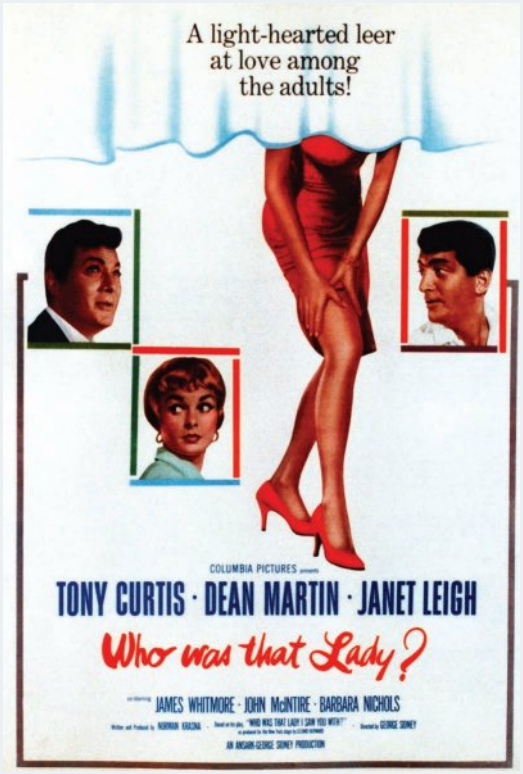


FIGURE 1.53 Poster for the Hollywood comedy *Who was that Lady?* (1960, dir. George Sidney)



FIGURE 1.52 A print advertisement for Puritan Soap, 1953



FIGURE 1.54 A L'Oréal cosmetics print advertisement from 2002 featuring actress Andie McDowell

For each of the images, examine their denotative and connotative content.

1 List all of the denotative elements that you can identify within the image.
2 What are the connotations of these images? Explain each as best you can.

Codes and conventions have been used to represent women within these images:

3 Explain how technical, written and symbolic codes have been employed.
4 Assess whether this representation would be considered realistic today. What reasons do you give for your response?
5 Interpret what it suggests about the author's view of women and their role in society.

The male gaze

Film theorist Laura Mulvey wrote in 1975 that women in film are typically the objects rather than the possessors of the 'gaze' that is used to analyse visual culture. Put simply, Mulvey believed that men were the primary producers of media at that time in history, in control of the camera and therefore the perspective that tells the story. In her essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', the 'male gaze' assumes that men are the watchers and women are the watched in popular media. The theory was initially applied to film; however, it can be transplanted and applied wherever males can or could be found as the primary producer of the content, such as advertising, television and fine arts.

If you carefully examine the representation of women in contemporary advertising, popular cinema, gaming or music videos, it does not take long to find examples of the male gaze. Advertising has a longer history with this than most. The male gaze has married the idea that if you use women to sell a product, you can also sell an idea that gets the girl. Or, buy a product so women can be the girl that gets the ideal man. The male gaze forces female audiences to view themselves through the eyes of the men who created the representation. Either way, women are turned into commodities that help get a product sold.

If you look back across the images from the previous activity, you will be able to apply Mulvey's theory quite easily. The poster for the movie *Who was that Lady?* is a perfect example. The advertisement features a woman's body, with the face obscured by a curtain. The two male characters appear to be looking at the woman, while the tagline literally mentions 'leering' – meaning to look at someone in a sexually interested way. The title of the film also suggests that the identity of the woman should be determined by her physical features.



FIGURE 1.55 Film theorist Laura Mulvey, creator of the media theory of the 'male gaze'

ACTIVITY 1.22

Analysing representations

1 Look over the images from the previous activity and apply your new understanding of Mulvey's 'male gaze' theory.
2 Does the idea of the male gaze change the way the advertisement represents your original understanding? Explain your response to each image.

With this in mind, it is worth considering how women challenge this representation and the influence it has on other representations. Later in this chapter, you will examine the role the male gaze has played not only



in representations of women, but in how it has impacted the way identity and self is constructed with new media technologies. However, one way to determine the influence of the male gaze over a representation is to conduct the Bechdel test.

The Bechdel test

The Bechdel test was developed in 1985 by cartoonist Alison Bechdel in an attempt to draw attention to gender equality in fictional cinema, and it can be applied to almost any feature film. To pass the test a film must have the following characteristics.

THE BECHDEL TEST

1. Two female characters
2. Who talk to each other
3. About something that is not a man



FIGURE 1.56 Cartoonist Alison Bechdel created the Bechdel test in 1985.

While it appears simple, almost half of the top 100 grossing films from 2015 failed the test. When you examine the films that failed, the reasons can be surprising. Some only had one female character, thus making it impossible to have a conversation with another woman, while others failed because, despite there being a number of named women in the script, they only ever discussed the men within the story. Cinema producers may argue that films that contain mostly male casts that have women in secondary roles, especially in blockbuster action films, are more likely to make money at the box office or that there is a limited number of women in writing, producing and directing roles in the Hollywood system compared to men. However, in the top 10 highest grossing films of 2015, only one failed the test – but 2015 was the exception that proved the rule. Why then, do so many films that fail the test get made?

In the 2021 statistics, it appears that there has been some positive shifts towards more films passing the Bechdel test. At the box office and the awards podium, change is also beginning to show: 60% of the top-grossing movies in 2021 passed the Bechdel test, implying that equality is slowly resulting in more successful movies.

The test was originally designed to examine film; however, you can look to other media forms for a challenge to the existing order of media production. Action and superhero films have often been guilty of not only failing the test but for having a firmly fixed male gaze. However, examples in popular television have emerged that not only pass the test but subvert the traditional male-oriented structure of media narratives we have examined in this chapter.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. What is the Bechdel test?
2. Does your favourite movie or TV show pass the test?
3. Why do you think a considerable number of popular films fail the Bechdel test? What does this tell us about gender representation in mainstream cinema?
4. How could the Bechdel test be a useful tool for filmmakers and scriptwriters who want to improve gender representation in their work?
5. The Bechdel test is not a comprehensive measure of gender equality in media. Can you discuss some of its limitations and suggest additional criteria to better evaluate gender representation in films?

CASE STUDY 1.1

Foundation

HBO's *Foundation* is a science fiction television series based on the acclaimed novel series by famous author Isaac Asimov. In the original novel, there were no female characters; however, series creator David S Goyer has reimagined Asimov's world for a contemporary setting and audience.

> The first question that I posed to the Asimov estate was, given that this was written in a post-World War II environment, where there were virtually no speaking female characters in the first book, where very few members of the science fiction community or readers were women, was, 'We're going to be doing this for an audience of today and I want the characters in the show to reflect our audience. How do you feel about gender swapping some of the characters?' he recalls. Robyn Asimov and the estate completely embraced it. They said that Asimov himself would have embraced that and they were absolutely comfortable with that.

FIGURE 1.57 David S Goyer on the gender swapping of original book characters for his streaming adaptation of *Foundation*, quoted in Don Kaye, 'Foundation: Why Isaac Asimov's Estate Approved Modernizing the Sci-Fi Classic', *Den of Geek*, 24 September 2021

The show features several female characters who play important roles in the storyline, and their characters are portrayed in a way that empowers women.

- The character of Gaal Dornick: Gaal is a young mathematician who travels to Trantor to work with Hari Seldon, the creator of psychohistory. Gaal is portrayed as intelligent, resourceful and courageous, and she quickly becomes an essential member of Seldon's team. Gaal's character breaks the stereotype that women are not good at maths and science, and she serves as an excellent role model for young girls who aspire to pursue careers in STEM fields.
- The character of Salvor Hardin: Salvor is the Mayor of Terminus, a planet on the edge of the galaxy. She is a strong and determined leader who fights to protect her people against threats from other planets. Salvor's character is portrayed as powerful and fearless, and she is not afraid to take risks to protect her community. Salvor's character is an excellent example of a woman in a leadership position, and she serves as an inspiration for girls who aspire to become leaders.
- The character of Eto Demerzel: Eto is a high-ranking official in the Empire and serves as the right-hand woman to the Emperor. She is a master manipulator and is portrayed as intelligent and cunning. Eto's character challenges the stereotype that women are not good at politics or leadership roles. She serves as an inspiration for women who aspire to enter politics or leadership roles.

Foundation portrays women as intelligent, capable and strong. The female characters in the series are not just supporting characters but are essential to the storyline and are portrayed as equals to their male counterparts. The series presents a positive message of female empowerment, and it is a step towards breaking gender stereotypes in science fiction and other entertainment media.



FIGURE 1.58 Leah Harvey as Salvor Hardin in the Apple TV series *Foundation* (2021–)



ACTIVITY 1.23

Research task

Find at least four representations of different women and then discuss the representations created. You can look at advertising, the news, websites, comic books, movies, etc.

For example, you could look for:

- a mother
- a woman in a position of power
- a female superhero
- a young girl child.

1 Where did you find the representations? How old are they? What are they saying about women?
2 Compare the images and discuss each shot's angles, framing and colour. Are they negative stereotypes? What is your understanding about these women?
3 Present your images to the class, and ask them to briefly interpret the images before you discuss your own findings.



FIGURE 1.59 Brianna Wu, software engineer and the founder of Giant Spacekat, which makes games with female protagonists. Wu is one of three women who were targeted for abuse and death threats by the gaming community after posting online about the misogyny in the gaming industry. She stands next to a poster of her video game characters. (Picture from October 2014)

Gender in contemporary media

Women make up half of the population and thus half of the media audience. However, the male dominance of the creation of media products leads us to clear conclusions on how women are so disproportionately represented, at least in modern cinema. It is important that you carefully examine the role of these representations on the creation of identity. The prevalence of women in media products as secondary, overtly sexualised and objectified characters has a potentially negative impact on the positive intentions men and women usually have for themselves.

Gamergate was a controversial online movement that began in 2014. The movement was sparked by accusations of unethical conduct in the video game journalism industry, but quickly spiralled into a larger movement that was marked by misogynistic and harassing behaviour.

Gamergate supporters claimed to be advocating for ethics in video game journalism and exposing corruption in the industry. However, the movement quickly became known for its aggressive attacks on women who were critical of video games, the gaming industry or the Gamergate movement itself. Women who spoke out against the movement were often subjected to threats of violence, rape and even murder. Several women in the industry were forced to leave their homes due to the harassment they received.

The movement also targeted women who were perceived as having an influence on the industry, including game developers and journalists, and accused them of using their sexuality to manipulate their careers. This led to a larger conversation about the role of women in the gaming industry, and the issue of sexism and misogyny in video games.

Overall, Gamergate was offensive to women because it was marked by a sustained and organised campaign of harassment, threats and intimidation that specifically targeted women who were critical of the video game industry. It sought to silence and intimidate women who were speaking out about issues of sexism and misogyny, and contributed to a toxic and hostile environment for women in gaming.



FIGURE 1.60 Media commentator Clementine Ford

Similarly, social media has become a toxic space for female voices of influence who face misogynistic messages and retorts for speaking out against a range of issues. Clementine Ford is a high-profile media commentator, acclaimed author and journalist who regularly comments on the hate and vitriol she receives from male trolls. Ford discusses the way in which perpetrators of online abuse rely on secrecy and intimidation, and uses her platform to expose those who use social media to harass.

A 2022 report analysing thousands of direct messages sent to high-profile women on Instagram has uncovered what researchers describe as 'systemic' failures to protect women in the public eye from 'misogynist harassment'.

The report, released by the Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH), analysed thousands of messages sent to five well-known Instagram users, including actor Amber Heard, UK television presenter Rachel Riley, activist Jamie Klingler, journalist Bryony Gordon and magazine founder Sharan Dhaliwal.

Researchers examined a cache of 8717 messages from the women who participated and say they uncovered a wave of misogynistic abuse, pointing to various ways in which Instagram, owned by Meta, has been 'negligent' in addressing the problem.

> 'There is an epidemic of misogynist abuse taking place in women's DMs,' said Imran Ahmed, CCDH chief executive director. 'Meta and Instagram must put the rights of women before profit.'

FIGURE 1.61 Quoted in Kari Paul, 'High-profile Women on Instagram Face "Epidemic of Misogynist Abuse", Study Finds', *The Guardian*, 6 April 2022

ACTIVITY 1.24

Reflection

1. What role should social media companies have in ensuring all users are safe from abuse?
2. In groups, discuss the following topic: 'Real world penalties should apply to perpetrators and carriage services of online abuse'. Come up with affirmative and negative arguments for both sides.



Women as heroes

Since 2000, there has been an influx of superhero films in popular cinema. No matter the incarnation, origin story or reboot, the superhero has been the dominant force on screens for a decade or more. While the comic book universe is vast and often champions women and strong, complex female representations, its popular cinema incarnations rarely feature women in such roles.

While Lois Lane is a fierce and unrelenting reporter and Jane Foster is a brilliant scientist, they invariably end up as a swooning prop in the arms of a dependable male hero. Those women with superpowers who are depicted in positions of strength, such as Catwoman, Electra, Silk Spectre or Black Widow, often appear in tight, revealing outfits that are unrealistic when considering the bold action they engage in. Black leather catsuits are incompatible with agility. Many of these female characters use their beauty as a weapon and, as such, are valued by the author of the media product not for their ability, but for their allure within the male gaze. Unlike their male superhero counterparts, they are not allowed to exist exclusive of their looks – in fact, they are often defined by their looks.

Suicide Squad (2016, dir. David Ayer) is one such film that came under specific scrutiny for its representation of Harley Quinn (played by Margot Robbie), a psychiatrist turned psycho. Her normal persona, the straight-laced and conservative doctor, Harleen Quinzel, is replaced by a racier alter ego – Harley Quinn. Not only is this identity created by a seemingly inferior male character, The Joker (Jared Leto), but her previous professional styling is replaced with skimpy shorts and pigtails.

ACTIVITY 1.25

Analysing representations

1. Examine the use of costume in this image from the film *Suicide Squad*.
2. Assess the role played by costume in the construction and reading of the Harley Quinn character.
3. How does Harley Quinn's costume contribute to her character's representation? What does it tell us about her personality, background or role in the story?
4. In what ways does Harley Quinn's costume play a role in her perceived femininity or sexuality? How does this align or contrast with traditional or expected representations of female characters in superhero films?
5. Can you identify any aspects of Harley Quinn's costume that challenge or reinforce gender stereotypes? Provide specific examples from the film.
6. How does Harley Quinn's costume evolve throughout the film, if at all? How might these changes reflect her character development or the progression of the film's narrative?
7. If you were to redesign Harley Quinn's costume to challenge gender norms further, what changes would you make and why? Consider how these changes might impact the audience's perception of her character.



FIGURE 1.62 Harley Quinn (Margot Robbie) in *Suicide Squad*

The media is full of complex, well-developed female characters; however, it is easy to understand why they rarely appear in major superhero narratives when female audiences made up less than 42% of the total audiences for the top-grossing superhero film of 2015: *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (dir. Joss Whedon). This statistic is a pattern that had been set by the two previous hits, *Guardians of the Galaxy* in 2014 (dir. James Gunn) and *Iron Man 3* in 2013 (dir. Shane Black). However, in 2015, women made up 51% of the total audiences in American cinemas.

The solo 2017 *Wonder Woman* film continues to be the template for how to film a female-led superhero movie properly. Wonder Woman possesses superhuman strength, flight, durability, agility and speed, which make her one of the biggest superheroes of all time. Not only was the film critically acclaimed, but the massive success behind *Wonder Woman* led to the character being the first female superhero to have a solo franchise following the release of *WW84* in 2020.



FIGURE 1.63 Gal Gadot as Wonder Woman

CASE STUDY 1.2

Female heroes

Closely research and examine the representation of the following female characters. You will need to examine both the visual representations and also their role within the plot of the film or TV show.

Break into groups and choose one character to examine. For each character you must:

1. Examine the construction and representation of each image. Define it by the:
   - **a** Selection and omission
   - **b** Codes and conventions
   - **c** Denotation and connotation
   - **d** Has the representation been defined by the male gaze? Why or why not?
2. Explain the role of the character within the film or TV show by answering the following questions:
   - **a** Do they act as the protagonist? Describe how this character is motivated.
   - **b** What role do they play in resolving that narrative?
   - **c** Are they reliant on any male characters?
   - **d** Are there other female characters within the film? What role do they play?
   - **e** Does the film/TV show pass the Bechdel test?

Princess Leia Organa: *Star Wars: Episode IV: A New Hope* (1977, dir. George Lucas)

A leader of her people, Princess Leia (Carrie Fisher) is a dominant character in the science fiction series *Star Wars*. As a strident revolutionary, Leia risks her life to steal the plans of the evil empire to build a deadly weapon of mass destruction. Insistent on leading her own escape from the villain Darth Vader (voiced by James Earl Jones), she comes into personal conflict with her rescuer Han Solo (Harrison Ford) over her assertive personality traits.





Ripley: *Alien* (1979, dir. Ridley Scott)

Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) takes part in a dramatic battle against an alien life form in deep space. As Ripley and her fellow crew members investigate a distress signal from a deserted planet, a mysterious life form enters their ship. One by one the alien attacks the crew and after the loss of the Captain and Executive Officer, Ripley is left to lead them to safety. Clear and direct, Ripley is able to command the authority of her team in the face of impossible odds.



Clarice Starling: *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991, dir. Jonathan Demme)

A rookie FBI detective on the trail of a serial killer, Clarice Starling (Jodie Foster) must employ the assistance of jailed psychopath Hannibal Lecter (Anthony Hopkins). Using her own physical and mental fortitude, Starling faces a race against time to stop the killer, Buffalo Bill (Ted Levine), from striking again.



Gamora: *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014, dir. James Gunn)

Gamora (Zoe Saldana) is a warrior princess and one of a group of space-travelling criminals who band together to save the galaxy from an intergalactic megalomaniac, who happens to be her father!



Max Mayfield: *Stranger Things* (2016–)

Max (Sadie Sink) is the skater girl, a tomboy character. Max quickly gained a reputation at the Palace Arcade for topping the game leader boards, her high scores submitted under the player name 'MADMAX'. Max's high scores captured the attention of arcade regulars Dustin, Lucas, Will and Mike, who mistakenly assumed her to be a boy. After Maxine joined the boys' class at Hawkins Middle School, they realised the new girl and the mysterious MADMAX were one and the same.



Eve Polastri: *Killing Eve* (2018–22)

Eve Polastri (Sandra Oh) is an MI5 security operative, whose job as 'an intelligence agency grunt' once involved more paper pushing than intrigue, her intellectual curiosity going unrewarded and underemployed by her superiors. Polastri becomes involved in a cat-and-mouse game with the psychopathic hired assassin Villanelle, the two women becoming mutually obsessed. Agent Polastri tracks assassin Villanelle across Europe.



Arya Stark: *Game of Thrones* (2011–19)

Arya Stark (Maisie Williams) is the younger daughter of Eddard 'Ned' Stark (Sean Bean), a noble lord in the medieval setting of Westeros. While her older sister Sansa Stark (Sophie Williams) obediently follows the structured life of a noblewoman, learning to sew and act like a proper lady, Arya craves a life of adventure and action.



Jessica Jones: *Jessica Jones* (2015–19)

A private detective with superpowers, Jessica Jones (Krysten Ritter) fights battles for her clients, as well as against her tormentor, Kilgrave (David Tennant). Suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, which she appears to be self-medicating with alcohol, Jones has only a small circle of friends as she attempts to reconcile events of her past with her future.



Ellie: *The Last of Us* (2023–)

Set in a postapocalyptic version of 2023, where a global pandemic has turned people into murderous zombies known as 'the infected', Ellie (Bella Ramsey) is a survivor with a unique genetic mutation which makes her immune to the virus. Joel (Pedro Pascal) protects Ellie as they search for scientists who can extract a cure from Ellie; however, Ellie proves to be more than Joel's match in terms of surviving in this dangerous world.





1.7 Representation of identity and self

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- audience engagement with, consumption, reading and production of media representations in different media products and forms from different periods of time, locations and contexts.

The ability to author representations is no longer the sole domain of a few media creators, as new technologies like smartphones and editing apps have given the power to create representations to the audience. Social networks and platforms such as YouTube and TikTok have created channels through which the distribution of these media products is now instantaneous. The creation of identity by contemporary audiences has led to the reinvention of pre-existing ideas about stereotypes and values; however, many challenges still remain in constructing reality. So much of what appears to be 'real' and 'authentic' is filtered and constructed to only show the good bits and flattering angles.

The 'selfie' of the smartphone era has redefined some of the values considered important within contemporary society. Millions of self-portraits are taken everywhere around the globe every day. From the mirror to famous landmarks or at significant events, millions of images are taken that have helped redefine what the audience and author consider to be important in a photograph. The author creating these images has presented a version of themselves to be shared with an audience. Within that, there is a version of reality that the author wishes to convey. In this reality? What is it that they consider important? The location or event? That they are popular, happy or otherwise? Or is it that the individual author is represented in it?

An author has the power to create a representation of themselves and their identity through careful selection, omission and the use of codes and conventions. The concept of a 'curated' grid is now an important aspect of many users of social media. An entire industry has emerged with job titles such as social media manager, social media curator and audience researcher, whose responsibilities include developing strategies to increase followers, creating and overseeing social campaigns, producing content and reviewing analytics.

Celebrities and professional athletes rely on social media to build their own personal brand to sell an image to their fans and audiences. However, individuals have the same power to present an idea of their ideal or 'true' self to their friends and followers. Within this, audiences now have the power to reflect what they value as true or important.

The rise of TikTok – and, as a result, YouTube Shorts and Instagram Reels – has seen both the creator and the audience be able to demonstrate this type of agency and redefine how identity and the concept of 'self' is portrayed. The bite-sized, easily digestible form of these media products mean that audiences are constantly exposed to content based on their user profile – their age, gender, ethnicity and consumer habits are closely monitored by the apps to target, through algorithms, specific types of videos. TikTok also appears to be faster than any other platform at detecting interest. The app's For You feed seems to know its users' desires and interests so well it has sparked memes and articles about how the app is able to identify someone's sexual preferences before they do.

The COVID-19 pandemic has illustrated the impact of the platform on users' lives, especially younger users. When the world went into lockdown, use of TikTok exploded. The app was flooded with young people posting

about the ways in which the pandemic was upending their lives. On Instagram, users are more focused on achieving a particular look and on Twitter, users are opinionated and confrontational. However, TikTok has led to the explosion of the weird, funny and creative. This is possibly why the platform experienced such growth throughout the pandemic, which saw nearly one-third of the world's population trapped at home throughout 2020 and 2021.

STUDY TIP

Twitter? At the time of writing, Elon Musk had not yet changed the name of Twitter to X. Therefore this book uses the term Twitter throughout.

Concerns about the mental health impacts of social media activity are longstanding, and have only intensified in recent years. In 2021, for example, internal research from Instagram, which was made public, showed the drastic mental health impacts of the photo app on teen users – including increased rates of eating disorders among teen girls – and sparked widespread calls for stronger regulation. The internal research revealed that the app has made body image issues worse for one in three girls. In one Facebook study of teenagers in the UK and the US, more than 40% of Instagram users who identified feeling 'unattractive' said the feeling began while using the app.

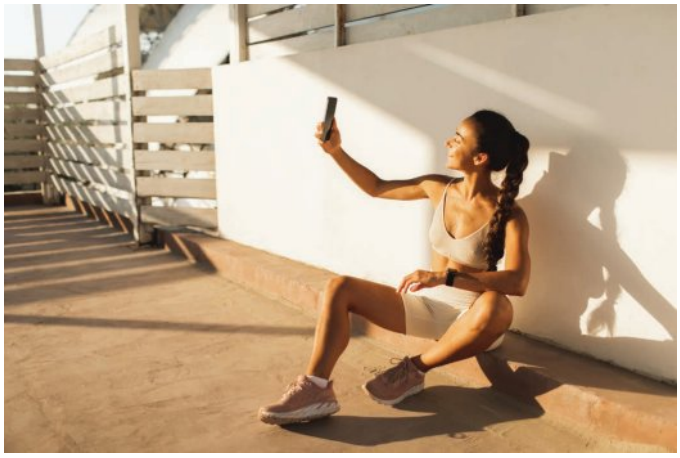


FIGURE 1.64 The selfie has redefined how people represent reality.

Social media and the 'selfie' have the ability to create a representation for an audience of friends and followers that reflects our true identity, but also to potentially redefine how society understands and defines reality.

Digital technology is the essential element of this process of representation. Prior to smartphones and high-speed internet, most representations were created by large media corporations and governments, who had a vested interest in presenting ideas that were commercially or politically useful to those who constructed them. However, now that the audience has control over how we are represented, it has created a huge shift away from the **homogeneous** stereotypes found in popular media representations like film and television.

homogeneous consisting of parts or people that are similar to each other or are of the same type

ACTIVITY 1.26

Social media representation analysis

The creation of representations is now in the hands of the social media audience. Odds are that you have one or more social media accounts to share images, videos and thoughts. All of these play a role in constructing the way your friends and followers understand, perceive and react to the identity you have created using these media tools.

1. What ideas do you place in your own self-portraits? Summarise the key themes – for example, friends, travel, wealth, beauty.
2. Are these representations a true reflection of reality? Why or why not? Explain your answer.
3. Explain the role you have in defining the reality that others see of you.
4. Discuss how you think traditional forms of representation have influenced the way you represent yourself.



Identity and realism

Digital technologies and social media platforms allow us to create candid and unrefined representations of our lives. As authors, we have the ability to craft and construct a reality we want our audience to see and perceive as true. It is sometimes difficult for audiences to interpret and determine the level of realism they see in social media, as it is not always bound by the codes and conventions of traditional media like film, television and advertising. In a cinema, an audience understands that it must 'suspend its disbelief' as an action hero hangs from a helicopter by one hand while shooting at villains in slow motion. We understand this is not necessarily a realistic reflection of reality; however, we are familiar with the conventions of these films and their characters and accept that the impossible is always possible in traditional action films.

However, on social media platforms, the audience's ability to determine realism can be more challenging. If the representation does not come from a film or television studio, audiences do not always have the familiar understandings that years of television and film viewing have developed. The author, on the other hand, has an endless variety of video, photographic, sound and editing tools to construct any version of reality they wish. The author may not be understood to be an actor at all and, thus, can present a version of reality that is as carefully crafted as any created in a major Hollywood studio.

TikTok and YouTube have come under criticism for allowing videos of 'fun' challenges to be distributed. Some of the challenges that have gained popularity on TikTok involve ingesting dangerous substances, participating in dangerous stunts or activities, and engaging in harmful behaviours. The 'Outlet Challenge' involved partially inserting the prongs of a phone charger into an outlet and then touching the exposed metal with a penny, causing an electrical spark. The 'Salt and Ice Challenge' saw users placing salt on the skin and then pressing an ice cube onto it, causing a chemical reaction that can lead to severe burns. These challenges can lead to serious physical harm, including injury or even death. The 'Blackout Challenge' has been linked to numerous deaths of children. TikTok was aware that children not old enough to have profiles on its app were dying doing the 'Blackout Challenge'. The danger of these media products is that unlike the Hollywood studio, where reality can be suspended through special effects and actors, users – many of whom are too young to fully comprehend what is real and what is fake – are blindly following and copying these challenges.



FIGURE 1.65 Many 'fun' social media challenges can lead to serious injury, or even death.

A number of celebrities have become famous simply from the use of social media. In 2015, an Australian Instagram model cancelled her photo-sharing account in protest against the dishonest nature of the platform. After claiming that each shot posted often took 50 or more takes to perfect, which meant that it did not reflect the candid reality it claimed to represent, the account was deleted. What do you see as the challenge for audiences in determining realism in social media representations?

ACTIVITY 1.27

Creative task

Authors have the power to construct a realistic representation of themselves using technical, symbolic, written and sound codes.

Your task is to construct multiple versions of your own reality at school.

1 Using your phone or a digital camera, consider how you can construct the following realities:
   - **a** a sports champion
   - **b** a rebellious student
   - **c** a model student
   - **d** a wealthy student
   - **e** a popular student.
2 Demonstrate your understanding of technical, symbolic, written and sound codes through your five different representations.

ACTIVITY 1.28

Reflection

Through your exploration of the world of representation and what you now understand about the construction and values that they contain, in a short, written report respond to the following statement:

> 'There's nothing wrong with how individuals are represented in the media as they merely reflect reality.'

Think about the various representations of individuals that were explored and assess the following points. Use examples from media products and real life to support your stance on the topic.

- Do you agree with the stereotypes? Do you believe that the media has enough power over audiences and society for this to matter?
- Has the rise of social media and the ability for 'ordinary people' to create content led to these stereotypes being challenged? If so, how?
- What is reality? Is it such a problem if we see these representations, because viewers understand how they are constructed?
- Do they actually reflect reality and are we just being too sensitive about ourselves?

Whether or not you agree or disagree, you will no doubt be reflecting on the nature in which the media reflects our world and whether or not it shapes the world more than we believe. Good luck!



CHAPTER REVIEW

Summing it all up

Reading representations is a complex business. From the very moment of its construction, a representation is embedded with the codes and common conventions that explain their meaning. However, this meaning can be heavily influenced by the time and place of their construction. As you can see across the chapter, the key socio-political events of the 20th century had an enormous influence over the construction of representations in popular media forms. The representations of gender were subject to societal and cultural influences that changed over time. As we have moved into the 21st century, the way audiences consume and create their own representations of reality has shifted dramatically. However, you are now an active participant in the creation of meaning and will be able to play a larger role in the development of codes and the creation of representations.

Revision questions

1 Are representations reality? Or are they a construction of reality?
2 **Explain** the process or 'life cycle' of a representation.
3 What is the purpose of selection and omission?
4 How do codes help construct representations?
5 **Explain** the role of realism in representations.
6 What is a stereotype and why are they commonly used in representations?
7 Using examples, **explain** how the events of the 20th century created representations of 'the other'.
8 Using examples, **explain** how events of the 20th century created representations of women.
9 **Explain** how an evolving society and audience expectations have changed the representation of women in some media products.
10 **Explain** how the realism of representations has been affected by the evolution of technology and audience participation.
11 **Explain** the role of realism and representations in the creation of self and identity.
12 **Discuss** the potential dangers of how new technologies have skewed our perception of what is 'real'.

Practice assessment questions

1. Using examples, **define** how an author's intention for a representation can be significantly altered by an audience member.
2. Using examples, **define** how one representation has been created and read by the society it was created within.
3. Gender roles have shifted and swayed over time. **Explain** how codes and conventions have been used to position men and women in different positions within the societies in which they were represented.
4. Outsiders and 'the other' have played an important role in media products. Using examples, **explain** how the authors of dominant societies have used media codes and stereotypes to position audiences to fear and ridicule outsiders.
5. How has the history of representation influenced the construction of self?

Digital content

- Access the Interactive Textbook via Cambridge GO to access a downloadable Success Criteria checklist, digital quizzes and additional digital content for this chapter.



CHAPTER 2 AREA OF STUDY 2

MEDIA FORMS IN PRODUCTION

INQUIRY QUESTION

How can we manipulate codes and conventions to create representations?

— VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, p. 18, used with permission

OVERVIEW

Now it's your turn to create a representation. As a creator, you must conceive your idea and follow it through all stages of production to distribution – where your audience will consume your product. Your goal is to employ the ideas and skills of constructing a representation that will be consumed by an audience that will, in some shape or form, have a reaction to your representation of reality.

FIGURE 2.1 (above) Students shooting a film scene

In this chapter, you will learn the skills required to effectively participate in the creation of a media product. While the process may at first appear overwhelming, take your time to appreciate the nature of collaborative media production and, most of all, have fun!

OUTCOME 2

On completion of this unit the student should be able to use the media production process to design, produce and evaluate media representations for specified audiences in a range of media forms.

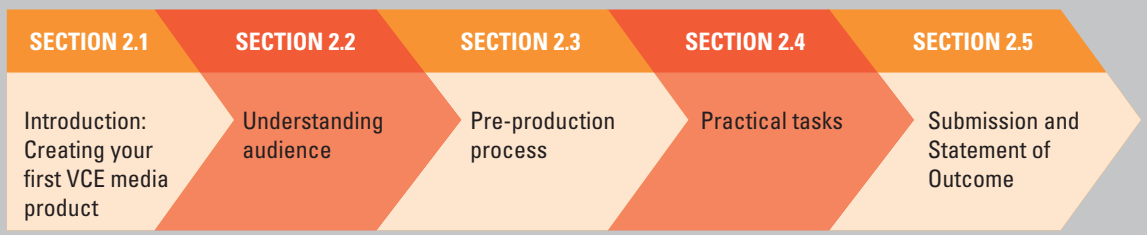
To achieve this outcome, the student will draw on key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 2.

KEY KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING INTENTIONS

Key knowledge	Learning intentions – at the end of the chapter I will be able to:
• stages in the media production process, including pre-production, production and post-production	• use media pre-production, production and post-production techniques and processes
• media pre-production, production and post-production techniques to represent ideas and achieve particular effects	• research and apply media design and production techniques to represent ideas and achieve particular effects
• media codes and conventions used to construct meaning in media products	• apply media codes and conventions to construct meaning in media products
• media technologies used to produce representations in a range of media forms	• operate media technologies to produce representations in a range of media forms
• the characteristics of a range of media representations in media forms	• evaluate the characteristics of a range of media representations in media forms
• media production language appropriate to the design, production and evaluation of media representations in a range of media forms	• use media language appropriate to the design, production and evaluation of media representations in a range of media forms

(**Source:** Adapted from VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, p. 19, used with permission)

WHAT'S AHEAD



ISBN 978-1-009-36510-9 Hoban et al
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2.1 Introduction: Creating your first VCE media product

Before creating a meaningful media product, you must take into account how audiences decode and apply meaning to stories based on established codes and conventions, such as camera and editing techniques or symbolic codes. Prior contextual knowledge and understanding of the historical and contemporary context will help you design a task suitable to a specific audience's interests. Additionally, knowledge of recent developments in digital technologies and online and mobile platforms will inform how you structure your product. You should also work in a range of media forms to show your knowledge of both representation in media forms as well as the impact digital technology has had on the creation of identity and self. If you have a clear idea of the people who will consume your product, you will soon have a much better idea of how to make it. This understanding of the audience and their needs is crucial to the success of any media product.



FIGURE 2.2 Planning and preparation are important before you pick up a device.

2.2 Understanding audience

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- stages in the media production process, including pre-production, production and post-production
- media pre-production, production and post-production techniques to represent ideas and achieve particular effects.

There is no such thing as 'one audience'. When a large number of individuals enter a cinema to see the same film, they bring a wide range of interests, personal experiences and cultural influences. They may have different motivations for seeing that same film and may also have entirely different readings and reactions to what appears on screen. The same can be said for any media form and you must be clear on the specific audience member you want to target. It is too simplistic to see 'teenagers' or 'adults' as a single audience. You would know that while teens and adults are often attracted to similar styles of media products, you only need to look around your own classroom to see that not all 'teenagers' are the same. As such, you need to dig deeper into your target audience and find out more about what they want so that you can tailor your media product to them.

ACTIVITY 2.1

Research task: Survey your target audience

The easiest way to find out what your audience wants can be to ask them. Surveys can be conducted including a variety of questions, not just about what media product your audience wants, but also how they want it, when and in what form. You can conduct these in person or create an online survey that can be shared and turned into data.



FIGURE 2.3 Surveys are a great way to learn about your target audience.

Once you have a basic idea for your product, a survey that asks questions on that topic will help identify the specific needs of your audience. You need to think about the styles, topics, genres or production techniques that your audience will enjoy. What times do they consume them? Where is the most likely location for that to take place? Do they watch alone or in groups? You need to think broadly about the topics you will cover. Try to avoid open-ended questions that will give your responses too many variables. It will be an important part of your planning to reflect on your findings and show how you acted upon them in production.

Task: Representations of teenagers

Idea: Opening sequence to a teen horror film, introducing four characters

Sample survey questions

	Questions	Response
1	How old are you?	**a** 14–19 **b** 20–25 **c** 26–30
2	What technology do you use normally to watch horror films?	**a** my home TV **b** a laptop **c** my phone **d** a cinema
3	Who do you watch horror movies with?	**a** I watch them alone **b** with friends **c** with my parents **d** with my partner
4	What is your favourite element of horror films?	**a** being scared **b** gore and violence **c** the comedic parts **d** guessing who will survive
5	What horror movie settings frighten you the most?	**a** a haunted house **b** a dark forest **c** an abandoned hospital **d** a VCE Media classroom



What can you do with your data once you've surveyed a wide range of possible audience members?

- Look for similar interests from each age range.
- Understand how the majority of people will view your product (this could help you understand if they will consume your media product in one go, or if they be pausing every few minutes).
- Understand with whom your audience will watch your future product.
- Each audience member wants something unique from a film or episode. Knowing what story elements are most popular may assist you in the writing phase later.
- Horror movies tend to have the same settings with minor tweaks. How can you use the school spaces and other buildings you have complete control of to your advantage by dressing them up and creating the eeriest atmosphere possible?

ACTIVITY 2.2

Research task: Create a model audience member

To determine who you want to make your media product for, you could also create a model audience member. This will help you identify a more specific idea about who your audience will be and how this information will help you plan and produce it.

Your aim is to create a written profile of a character, generally of the age group you intend to target. It might help to go back to Chapter 1 and examine the stereotypes of gender and select one. Once you do this, you can expand on their interests in fashion, music and film, for example. Explain their outlook on the world, where they live, their social and cultural background, what they do for a living and how this influences the way in which they consume different media forms.

Audience profile example:

> Greta is 24 and lives in a share house in the northern suburbs of Melbourne, Australia. She wears black and only drinks ethically sourced, single-origin coffee from the charity-run coffee store at the end of her street. Greta rides to her work as a graphic designer each day as she believes in sustainable forms of transportation. She has tried the paleo diet and she still prefers all her almonds to be activated. While Greta dislikes the negative elements of social media, she still maintains an active Instagram account to record breakfast, lunch and dinner meals. She uses Snapchat although she knows it's a waste of her time; however, it is the only way she is in contact with friends as she never uses text or email functions. Greta would like to get back into the dating scene but can't decide if Hinge, Bumble, Tinder or OkCupid is the best source for that special someone. Rarely, if ever, would Greta watch commercial television as she prefers to source her entertainment via her laptop; however, she is partial to strong female leads in Nordic noir television serials found on independent media outlets. She shuns popular cinema as she feels one superhero film was enough.



FIGURE 2.4 Greta

Using your prior knowledge from Chapter 1, consider three shows you would tell Greta to check out. Is there one media product that is trending now that you would recommend? Why?

ACTIVITY 2.3

Research task: Find out what is trending

What are they watching?

What's trending right now? To gain a real insight into how and where your product is going to be received by audiences, you should really examine what they are watching, what they are reading and how they are obtaining their information. There is no easier way to examine trends on social media platforms than exploring sites such as Reddit. On video platforms like YouTube, you can examine how many people liked and commented on videos that are related to your idea. You can then connect that kind of information to the audience you have intended your own product for.

Fan sites and fan fiction are crucial for getting to know your audience as they give fans a special way to interact with each other and the object of their passion. Through these mediums, followers can voice their admiration or critique, allowing you to gain insight into their likes and dislikes, as well as what they expect. Additionally, they can aid in creating a strong emotional bond between fans and the subject, which is essential for successful marketing and outreach.

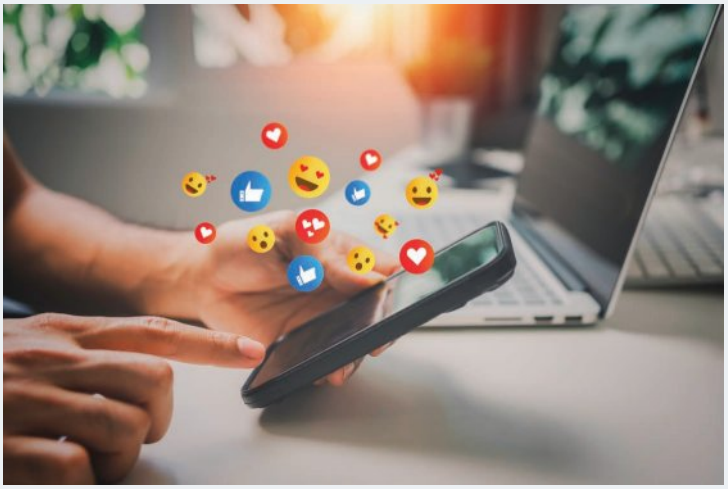


FIGURE 2.5 Social media platforms provide information about what people are watching and what is trending.

What are they saying?

You want your media product to be appealing and engaging to your audience, so you want to know what your audience are talking about. Search for trending **hashtags**. Hashtags are used to group similar conversations and ideas on platforms like Twitter and Instagram. While both serve very different purposes, searching for popular hashtags on both platforms can tell you a lot about how your audience verbalise and visually represent these ideas. This can be done via social media apps or via an online search. News services routinely report on what is trending online. Using this type of research allows you to gain an insight into the common conversations and ideas that centre on your topic. You should also look at related hashtags to create a more informed idea of who your audience is and what they are talking about. You could try creating a diagram like the one in Figure 2.6 that you can include within your planning documents.

hashtag the symbol on a telephone keypad (#) used on social media platforms like Twitter and Instagram to group comments and contributions to common online conversations

What are they listening to?

Is there a style of music that you intend to link your idea with? You can examine online streaming services to see what other people who are listening to that music are interested in, what kind of playlists it exists in, and how often it is commented upon and reviewed. This kind of research is invaluable as it gives you a much broader view of who your audience are listening to and what kind of audio and visual





FIGURE 2.6 An example of a mind map showing the results of online research of what's trending

styles you can incorporate into your own product. Some musical styles address a specific theme, be it love, loss or politics. By conducting some research over a range of music platforms, you can gain a more rounded understanding of what draws audiences to specific music. With a style as specific as short-form content, this can be crucial as your own knowledge of the finer cultural details attached to your idea is vital to gain the engagement of your audience.

What are they searching for?

If you really want to get into your audience's mind, you should try analysing what they have been searching for online. Major web browsers like Google have analytics tools that allow you to examine search trends on a global scale. If your interest is in creating a media product that has a number of horror film elements, you enter some of these details to see where such searches are taking place around the world and what other related ideas these people are searching for too. These tools are invaluable when you are looking to identify the wants, needs and interests of your target audience. Create a detailed list of the key findings from using one of these tools and see if you can link some of the top and related searches to the audience you intend to target.

What are they arguing about?

Discussion forums can be a gold mine for identifying your audience. Almost any niche topic has a discussion forum that allows like-minded individuals to share their ideas and passion for topics. First, start by examining the breadth of topics available. It can tell you a lot about what the audience interested in this topic see as important. Choose one topic and skim through some of the comments (be sure not to lose too much time). Record some key comments that provide insight into what your audience love about particular media styles.

ACTIVITY 2.4

Research task: Competition analysis

What are your competitors doing? Most contemporary art borrows from other art from time to time. All media products, as you have learnt, are based on codes and conventions that are shared and copied to establish a common understanding among the audience. So why shouldn't you? Take your idea and compare it to other similar examples that have already been created. Create a detailed list of the media codes and conventions that you wish to recreate. For example, if it is your wish to create representations of heroic and villainous characters, it would pay to closely examine clips from the media products mentioned in Chapter 1 and analyse how each of these characters were constructed by their authors. Don't forget, there is a fine line between using others' ideas and outright plagiarism! Your audience will know if you have simply stolen an entire idea, so you should look to provide them with a new interpretation of what already exists. Next to the list of techniques used by your inspiration/s, you should make another that explains how you are going to alter or improve them.



FIGURE 2.7 A fan cosplaying as Freddy Krueger with his razor-sharp glove

Example of horror villain weapons:

Character	Weapon of choice	Your next idea!
Freddy Krueger from the *Nightmare on Elm Street* series	Glove with razor knives on fingertips	The glove is part of Freddy's costume; think about what your villain may wear and how you could add something dangerous to it. E.g. cowboy boots with sharp spurs, American football shoulder pads with spikes.
Jason from the *Friday the 13th* series	Machete knife	So simple, but over time this weapon became synonymous with the character through repetitious use.
Leatherface from the *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* series	Chainsaw	It's loud, it's got moving parts, it's pretty scary!
Carrie from *Carrie* (1976, dir. Brian De Palma)	Telekinesis	Supernatural powers are such a vibe these days. Could you implement a type of power that wasn't cheesy and made your teenage audience frightened rather than falling on the floor laughing?



2.3 Pre-production process

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- stages in the media production process, including pre-production, production and post-production
- media pre-production, production and post-production techniques to represent ideas and achieve particular effects.

Once you have settled on what you want to make, and who to make it for, you need to work with your group to prepare the production. If you have made any kind of media production before, you would understand time can be lost to a lack of organisation and so it will help to carefully plan all elements of your production from the outset.

Pre-production: Writing a Statement of Intention

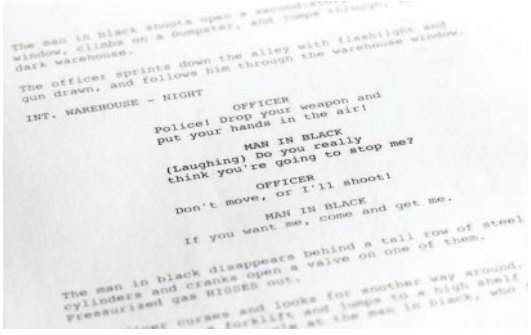
A Statement of Intention helps your group articulate your project. Once complete, it can be shared among the group and with your teacher so everyone can collaborate on the same task. Once each task is complete, it acts as a blueprint to follow through production and post-production. If you are looking to plan larger and more detailed video production projects, you should turn to Chapter 9 in this book; however, the guide below will help you to quickly and efficiently prepare for shorter production activities.

DIGITAL LINK

See the Interactive Textbook for a basic drama script template, plus five quick tips on writing a fictional screenplay.

WRITE A CLEAR INTENTION

What are you making and why? While this may seem like a simple question to answer, a detailed response will help you and your team to complete a better-quality product. Think carefully about the reaction you want from your audience. Do you want to inform, educate or entertain? Do you want your audience to act, share or comment on your work? How do you want them to think and feel afterwards? Should they be frightened or amused? Once you can clearly articulate your intention in a couple of sentences, your whole team must read, share and collaborate on what the intention of the whole group is. If everyone in your team is trying to make the same thing, it will lead to a better functioning team and end product.



The man in black shoots open a second door, and jumps through the window, climbs on a Dumpster, and jumps through the warehouse window. The officer sprints down the alley with flashlight and gun drawn, and follows him through the warehouse window.

INT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

OFFICER
Police! Drop your weapon and put your hands in the air!

MAN IN BLACK
(Laughing) Do you really think you're going to stop me?

OFFICER
Don't move, or I'll shoot!

MAN IN BLACK
If you want me, come and get me.

The man in black disappears behind a tall row of steel cylinders and cranks open a valve on one of them. Pressurised gas HISSES out.

The officer curses and looks for another way around. A forklift and jumps to a high shelf. He looks at the man in black, who

FIGURE 2.8 When creating a media product, writing a script everyone can refer to is very important.

IDENTIFY THE AUDIENCE

Using some of the research tasks on the previous pages, create a small profile of who you are targeting and explain why they would be interested in your product. Explain what elements from that audience's interests you intend to use and how you may look to challenge them and present them with new ideas or interpretations of their interests.

CREATE A SYNOPSIS

In a brief paragraph, explain what will happen at the beginning, middle and end of your project. Deciding on a conclusion to an idea can be difficult, but without it, you won't be able to

complete your entire planning process. While you may change the ending later in post-production, it is important to have a plan to fall back on.



DIGITAL LINK

See the Interactive Textbook for a storyboard template, plus five quick tips on storyboarding your ideas.

SCRIPT

Developing a basic script for video tasks, even if there is no dialogue, will be an essential element of your production work. The storyboard artists will need this, along with the intention, to craft out the look and feel of the whole project.

STORYBOARD

Not everyone is an artist, but a detailed storyboard that includes annotations along with the illustrated action will assist in shooting the right scenes. When attempting to use specific codes and conventions of camera, lighting, mise en scene and editing, a storyboard can help ensure you're using the right technique at the right time. Once the script and storyboard are complete, the group needs to meet again and compare it all with the intention and synopsis. Once everyone has a clear understanding, you can look to complete the last elements of your planning.

STORYBOARD VIEWING

Print your storyboards for your team and tack them to a wall in your working space. There is so much more to discuss if everyone is viewing your shared ideas constantly. You may get a comment from a passer-by that helps you along the process too. Don't hide your ideas away in a folder, but make your steps visible to each crew member.

LOCATIONS LIST

If you're shooting in or out of your school, you will probably need to get permission. Schools are busy places so it never hurts to seek permission for a specific location that you want to use. This allows you to use that location for the time you really need it and to plan the whole production from the outset, rather than as you go. One group member should be tasked with seeking permission and getting signatures from the individuals responsible for the locations you need. Take a photo of each location so the group can prepare how to shoot within it. A sample permission sheet can be seen in the Digital link.



STUDY TIP

See Chapter 5 for examples of how to set out a script and storyboarding.

COSTUMES/PROPS

Well-constructed representations and short-form content are heavily dependent on the right costumes and props appearing within shots. A detailed list of what you need, when you need it and where it will come from will ensure you are ready to work all the time.



DIGITAL LINK

See the Interactive Textbook for a Permission to Film template.

FAKE BLOOD

Chocolate syrup works really well as a base for fake blood, especially if you plan to finalise your product in black and white or have darker scenes with gory action!



FIGURE 2.9 It is important to list all the costumes and props you might need for a production.

EQUIPMENT

What are you shooting? When do you need it? Will you need lighting? How long does it take to set up and prepare this equipment? Look carefully over the storyboard and locations list and make a detailed list of the gear you intend to use. Once you know what you need, you can start preparing a shot list.

SHOT LIST

The shot list is the final piece of the puzzle. Make a list of every shot you need. They do not necessarily have to be in the order they appear on the storyboard. Rather, they should follow the availability of your team, the locations, props and equipment. At the start and end of each class, your team should look over this list to see what needs to be done.

2.4 Practical tasks

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- media codes and conventions used to construct meaning in media products
- media technologies used to produce representations in a range of media forms.

Whatever task you choose to undertake, your primary goal is to adapt the understanding and knowledge you have gained over this unit into two different forms of production. The challenge will be to take one idea and attempt the same thing in a variety of formats to not only understand the specific requirements of creating a representation, but also understand how that can be completed.

For your practical task, you should revise the following.

Selection and omission

All elements of your images, be they still or moving, require careful thought. Do you want to provide obvious and readable elements in your production or would you prefer to hide these and force your audience to look and examine in more detail? The role of selection and omission is essential in your pre-production planning.

Codes and conventions

This is a major element. Revise the written and practical work you may have undertaken using technical, written and symbolic codes. No one code works in isolation, so it would be valuable to apply two or more together whenever possible.

Stereotypes

This can be a great place to search for ideas, no matter the production you wish to create. While simplistic, stereotypes provide great starting points for developing clear characters and ideas that target a specific audience.

Realism

To directly appeal to your audience, you need to carefully consider how the realism within your media products will affect your audience. A carefully constructed audience profile will help you determine the product best suited to them.



FIGURE 2.10 The elements that are omitted are just as important as what is selected.

Audiovisual sequences of representations

The purpose of this task is to incorporate the codes and conventions of representations to create a series of short sequences that reflect a sound understanding of how representations create meaning for an audience. Choose one of the following.

ACTIVITY 2.5

Creative task: Advertising sequences

Advertise one product to three different audiences. Your task is to create three 30-second television advertisements that cater one product to three distinctly different audiences.

For example: meat and protein-flavoured sports drinks to teenagers, busy professional adults and retired pensioners.



FIGURE 2.11 Television advertisements can feature a sequence of images.



The clip must include:

- at least two actors
- dialogue
- audio – both music and sound effects
- written text on screen.

Discuss your product with your teacher and group and complete the following pre-production tasks in your Statement of Intention.

1. Research: Identify the key elements of television advertising. Define how and when a product is introduced, what elements are used to highlight its selling features and how the 30-second clip is structured.
2. Audience research and identification: Complete one or more of the research tasks listed above to create detailed profiles of the three audiences to whom you are pitching your idea.
3. A complete synopsis of each advertisement: script, storyboard, location and shot list.
4. Present your complete Statement of Intention to your teacher for approval.
5. Shoot, edit and reflect on your finished product (see 'Submission and Statement of Outcome' in Section 2.5).

Contemporary extension task

Complete three 15-second ads for YouTube. Using your original vision that you shot for the 30-second ads, create one 15-second clip that your viewers *won't* skip when browsing on YouTube. You will need to carefully examine how you can restructure your ad to grab attention and engage the audience within the first five seconds (before they are able to skip it!). This clip must include audio, vision and text.

ACTIVITY 2.6

Creative task: Retro TV opening credit sequences

In the 20th century, televised situation comedies and dramas often stuck to simplified scripts and representations to communicate ideas and engage audiences. Most would employ a short 30-second to one-minute opening credits sequence where each character would be introduced to the audience. Depending on the nature of the story, each character would be introduced in order of importance to the audience in a manner that simplified their character even further. The clip would be shot in a small number of locations that were specific to the feeling and mood of the show.

For example: A gritty police drama might involve a close-up of the charming but determined police officer after they have chased down and cuffed some hapless criminals. Or, an exasperated father shrugs his shoulders as his family of unique, hilarious and unpredictable teenage children tear the house apart around him …



FIGURE 2.12 The opening credit sequence of a TV show introduces the characters, such as those in *The Addams Family* (1964–66).

RETRO SHOWS TO RESEARCH

For further research, see the opening sequences of *Full House* (1987–95), *Family Ties* (1982–89), *The A-Team* (1983–87), *Magnum PI* (1980–88), *Friends* (1994–2004) and *The Addams Family*.

The clip must include:

- no dialogue
- the introduction of at least four characters
- two locations
- audio soundtrack
- text credits introducing each character
- text credits naming the program.

Discuss your product with your teacher and group and complete the following pre-production tasks in your Statement of Intention.

1. Research: Identify the key elements of these opening credit sequences. Define how and when each one of the characters is introduced and what mise en scene elements are used to define and differentiate each character. The role of each character should be clearly defined. For example, the sequence could introduce the father figure or loving mother, or lovable fool and his best friend the academic. Consider the archetypes and stereotypes that are used in the clips you review.
2. Audience research and identification: Complete one or more of the research tasks listed above to create detailed profiles of the audience for one of the television programs you researched. While these shows attempted to reach as broad an audience as possible, you should detail how each individual character would appeal to different audiences. Choose and define three characters and the audiences they may appeal to.
3. Create a complete synopsis of your opening sequence: script, storyboard, location and shot list.
4. Present your complete Statement of Intention to your teacher for approval.
5. Shoot, edit and reflect on your finished product (see 'Submission and Statement of Outcome' in Section 2.5).

Contemporary extension task

Complete three 10-second teasers for distribution on social media. Cut up your clips to introduce three of the characters you have identified in your original sequences. These can be presented as short video or animated gifs that include vision, audio and text.



FIGURE 2.13 The original cast of the TV program *Friends*



AMAZING FACT

The gaffer is the person in charge of the lighting in each shot of a film or TV production. It is up to them to plan, equip, set up and maintain the lighting for the shoot.



FIGURE 2.14 Photographs remain a strong and influential method of selling products.

Photographic and print advertising

The purpose of these tasks is to incorporate your understanding of representation, stereotypes and digital media to advertise using still imagery. The power of photographs remains a strong and influential method of selling products and engaging audiences despite the advance of digital and mobile media. Successful print advertising places a product with its audience that can either reflect their interests and identity or place it just out of their reach to make them 'aspire' to it.

For example, a teenager selling hair care products won't be featured with messy dirty hair. They will usually be represented with perfect hair and be surrounded by equally perfect and attractive people. Your job is to sell an idea as much as a product.

ACTIVITY 2.7

Creative task: Photographic and print advertising

Advertise one product to one audience. Your task is to create three advertisements for the same product. One for a print magazine, one for a bus stop or train station poster, and one for a highway billboard. You will need to carefully consider the size, format and detail each one will require.

For example: a deodorant, hair or beauty products, shoes, food or drink.

The advertisements must include:

- no more than two actors
- a product logo
- written text including product 'tagline'
- digitally manipulated elements.

Discuss your product with your teacher and group and complete the following pre-production tasks in your Statement of Intention:

1 Research: Identify the key elements of print advertising. Each format you are working in engages the audience for varying periods of time. The detail you could include in a print advertisement, for example, may not work on a billboard for obvious reasons. Print advertising has its own set of rules and you should research how the 'Golden Ratio' will assist your preparation, layout and design.



FIGURE 2.15 Advertisers need to find new ways to showcase their products using social media, such as paying social influencers to spruik on Instagram or the like.

2 Audience research and identification: Complete one or more of the research tasks listed on the previous page to create detailed profiles of the audience to whom you are pitching your idea. Pay careful attention to the three formats you are producing in, as the way your audience will engage with each format will need consideration.
3 Create a complete outline of each advertisement: mock-ups, location and shot list.
4 Present your complete Statement of Intention to your teacher for approval.
5 Shoot, edit and reflect on your finished product (see 'Submission and Statement of Outcome' in Section 2.5).

Contemporary extension task: Advertising on social media

Take your three adverts for print above and apply them to two social media platforms. As you know already from this chapter, more and more attention is being drawn to online formats. As such, you will need to put your product in this space. You could represent your production online in two ways:

1 Create a *carousel ad* using up to 10 images and logos from your print ads. Carousel ads work as a slideshow with video or still images to promote a product. This gives the consumer options and allows the advertiser the chance to make each single image its own clickable selling point. You could use the Ken Burns Technique to make one of these adverts. The technique, popularised by the documentary filmmaker Ken Burns, involves panning and zooming across still images with narration, music and text to give them a feeling of movement and life.
2 A series of five 'paid-for' Instagram posts that present the products in the hands of an Instagram user. The images must attempt to avoid obvious constructed reality and appear natural. Research some of your favourite celebrity Instagram accounts to examine how products are presented and 'sold' to their followers. While looking at a specific Instagram account, are there a certain number of posts an influencer uses before advertising the same product?



DIGITAL LINK

See the Interactive Textbook for tips on how to create a print advertisement, as well as a template for your mock-ups.

Online production sequences

As you are probably aware, the scope and audience for online media is extremely broad and caters to an almost infinite number of interests. As you will learn in Chapter 6, 'Media and change', common styles across these new media formats are beginning to emerge and new storytelling techniques are being incorporated with old ones.

ACTIVITY 2.8

Creative task: Create a podcast

Create a three-part podcast on a specific topic. As your podcast will need to address a key area of interest for your audience, be it gaming, fashion, sport or music, you will need to create an engaging series of soundbites that will interest your audience and maximise your followers and subscribers.

Discuss your idea with your teacher and group and complete the following pre-production tasks in your Statement of Intention:

1. Research: Identify the key elements of a podcast that is similar to the topic you have chosen. What media codes and conventions have they included within each episode to ensure the audience remains engaged? Pay close attention to sound and production techniques and make a list of those you intend to employ in your own task.
2. Audience research and identification: Complete one or more of the research tasks listed above to create detailed profiles of the audience to whom you are pitching your idea. Pay careful attention to the three topics and subculture you are producing it for, as this will influence the way your audience will engage with each soundbite.
3. Create a complete synopsis of your opening sequence: script, location and shot list.
4. Present your complete Statement of Intention to your teacher for approval.
5. Record, edit and reflect on your finished product (see 'Submission and Statement of Outcome' in Section 2.5).

ACTIVITY 2.9

Creative task: Tabloid news journalism

Report on a sensational news story in a video format. Using the tabloid style of news journalism, identify an issue facing your school community and create three 30-second video clips that summarise the issue for audiences. Tabloid journalism is usually dramatised and can be fictitious in its narrative. Some stories are outright lies! Be sure to use specific conventions to boost the importance of your story. Have a look at some episodes of *A Current Affair* and *Hard Copy* and pay close attention to the use of mediated imagery (blacked out or pixelated faces and edited voices of those interviewed) and textual effects on-screen during a story. Don't forget that a journalist must establish the 'what, when, where, why and how' in the first half of the story. Your story is to be shared and viewed on social media formats like Instagram and TikTok, which need to grab attention within a few seconds.



FIGURE 2.16 Tabloid news journalism is everywhere in Australia, the UK and the USA.

NEWS MEDIA RESEARCH

See the pages/programs of major online tabloid news distributors: *A Current Affair*, *The Sun*, *National Enquirer*, *Daily Mail*, *Sky After Dark*.

Discuss your idea with your teacher and group and complete the following pre-production tasks in your Statement of Intention.

1. Research: Identify the key elements of an online tabloid news broadcast. Identify how text, colour and visual imagery are employed to establish attention, engage and then inform an audience.
2. Audience research and identification: Complete one or more of the research tasks listed above to create detailed profiles of the audience to whom you are pitching your idea. Tabloid news has a unique viewership. Its audiences will want to see and hear something different related to your school community, so think outside the box to help you identify the specific audience for your story.
3. Create a complete synopsis of your opening sequence: script, storyboard, location and shot list.
4. Present your complete Statement of Intention to your teacher for approval.
5. Shoot, edit and reflect on your finished product (see 'Submission and Statement of Outcome' in Section 2.5).



2.5 Submission and Statement of Outcome

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- media production language appropriate to the design, production and evaluation of media representations in a range of media forms.

Individual statement

Each individual involved in the production must complete an individual Statement of Outcome that reflects on their experiences. These answers should be confidential and act as an honest reflection on what you learnt in your roles during the production phase. The following questions need to be answered:

- How do you feel about the film you made?
- How did your group work productively together?
- How did you contribute to the pre-production process?
- Did you have any problems within the group? Explain what they were and how you resolved them.
- Did you fulfil all requirements of your roles? Explain with specific references.
- Were you satisfied with your contribution? Explain.
- What individual problems did you encounter in your specific role?
- If you were to undertake your roles again, what would you do differently?

Production statement

Reflecting on what you have learnt in Chapter 1 on representation, how have you applied your theoretical understanding into a physical media product? Answer the questions below:

- In the creation of your product, explain how the process of selection and omission influenced the construction of your representations.
- Explain how your product accurately reflects your understanding of:
  - technical codes
  - written codes
  - symbolic codes.
- Did you use stereotypes to create meaning? Explain how, where and why they appear.
- Are you able to identify where your position as an author has influenced the potential reading of your product?



CHAPTER REVIEW

Summing it all up

With your complete project, you can now see the work, time, energy and enthusiasm required for a successful media production. In this chapter, you will have learnt the value of audience research to guide your idea into production. By utilising more than one form of audience research, you can reach the individual as well as the crowd when designing an idea. Your pre-production process will have demonstrated the value of effective planning and preparing for an effective production process. You will have learnt the value of a variety of media codes and the power of each one in delivering an effective message to an audience. In post-production, you will have experienced the magic of 'fixing it in post' as you employed all available technologies to present engaging ideas that reflect the initial intention.

As you examine your own Statement of Outcome on the process, consider your contribution to what you have just participated in. If you look over all that you have learnt about representation and the construction of media messages, you have just become an active participant in the construction of meaning in not only your life, but the lives of others!

Digital content

- Access the Interactive Textbook via Cambridge GO to access a downloadable Success Criteria checklist, digital quizzes and additional digital content for this chapter.

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CHAPTER 3 AREA OF STUDY 3

AUSTRALIAN STORIES

INQUIRY QUESTION

How are Australian stories structured in fictional and non-fictional media narratives?

— VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, p. 19, used with permission

OVERVIEW

The media plays a significant role in helping us understand who we are. Around the world, in every country and region, there are stories that help define people's collective identity. In this chapter, you will examine how the media has been used to construct the very idea of Australia. As a nation with both a longstanding, rich First Nations and more recent European history, you will learn about the use of media codes and conventions in Australian stories and examine the important role they play in shaping how Australians have defined themselves at each stage of their journey.

OUTCOME 3

On completion of this unit the student should be able to analyse how the structural features of Australian fictional and non-fictional narratives in two or more media forms engage, and are consumed and read by, audiences.

FIGURE 3.1 (above) Pictured is Aaron Pedersen as Detective Jay Swan in the Australian film *Goldstone* (2016, dir. Ivan Sen).

To achieve this outcome, the student will draw on key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 3.

KEY KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING INTENTIONS

Key knowledge	Learning intentions – at the end of the chapter I will be able to:
• the structure and viewpoint (or position) of Australian fictional and non-fictional media stories arising from cultural histories and institutions	• analyse structures and viewpoints (or positions) in Australian fictional and non-fictional media stories arising from cultural histories and institutions
• media codes and conventions used to engage audiences and communicate meaning	• analyse media codes and conventions used to engage audiences and communicate meaning
• the influence of the style of media creators and producers in the construction of fictional and non-fictional narratives	• analyse the construction of narratives through the fictional and non-fictional style of media creators and producers
• the place and impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices and perspectives have on Australia's shared national identity and story	• analyse and understand the place and impact that Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander voices and perspectives have on Australia's shared national identity and story
• the impact of institutional, economic, social and political constraints on the production and distribution of fictional and non-fictional narratives	• analyse and understand the place and impact of institutional, economic, social and political constraints on the production and distribution of fictional and non-fictional narratives
• how audience engagement and reception of narratives is affected by their viewpoint (or position), expectation, consumption and prior reading of a range of fictional and non-fictional narratives in a range of contexts	• discuss factors which impact on audience engagement and reception, such as viewpoint (or position), consumption and prior reading of narratives in a range of contexts
• media language	• use media language

(**Source:** Adapted from VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, p. 18, used with permission)

WHAT'S AHEAD

SECTION 3.1	SECTION 3.2	SECTION 3.3	SECTION 3.4	SECTION 3.5	SECTION 3.6
Introduction: What are Australian stories?	A short history of the Australian story	The Australian story	First Nations voices	Making Australian stories	Evolving Australian audiences

WARNING

Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that this chapter contains images of people who may be or are deceased.



3.1 Introduction: What are Australian stories?

What makes an 'Australian' story? No one idea, narrative or representation can define the development of the nation we call Australia, with its long and rich Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and more recent colonial and migrant history. Since the advent of popular media technologies, Australian stories have been pored over, cringed at and lauded in the search for some sort of defining identity that we can call 'Australian'. In the early days of cinema and television, Australian stories reflected a mostly British culture grappling with a brutal and unforgiving landscape and story. However, as the nation evolved throughout the past century, what was and is 'Australian' became broader and more complex as more voices came forward, along with a growing recognition that our stories are much, much older than a mere century or two.

Today, we can explore voices from the city and country, across cultural, gender and socioeconomic perspectives to attempt to understand who we are. No longer do we rely on 20th-century definitions of a monocultural nation. Today, Australian stories are constantly evolving, complex and built on the foundation of the oldest living culture in the world, whose stories stretch back over 60 000 years.

Nevertheless, the telling of Australian stories is essential to a collective Australian identity. These stories help us understand the society around us and can provide a vision for what an 'Australian' story is in the future.

In this chapter, you will examine the role various media creators have had in the telling and sharing of Australian stories. You will examine the relationship between Australia's Indigenous and colonial histories in creating the stereotypes and conventions that are uniquely Australian. You will also examine the challenging environment in which so many of these stories are made and told, how we as an audience engage with them, and consider the impact these stereotypes will have on the future of media production in Australia itself.

3.2 A short history of the Australian story

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- the structure and viewpoint (or position) of Australian fictional and non-fictional media stories arising from cultural histories and institutions
- media codes and conventions used to engage audiences and communicate meaning.

Australian stories can be understood when we consider a simple mantra of 'it matters who makes it'. Prior to the introduction of digital media technologies, traditional media sources were controlled and told by a small group of wealthy individuals and institutions that often excluded, mocked and marginalised competing voices. Since colonisation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices have consistently been marginalised. Today, with almost universal access to the technological means to tell the world who we are, our voices are loud and our stories are vast. We can all play a role in reflecting and redefining what an Australian story is.

Australian cinema hit the world stage before Hollywood itself. In 1906, *The Story of the Kelly Gang* (dir. Charles Tait) was the first of many audacious attempts to tell the story of one of Australia's most notorious bushrangers, Ned Kelly. The film was significant as it was not only widely popular and helped to immortalise Kelly within the Australian story, it was also the first film banned by the Victoria Police for glorifying crime.

Thought to be the world's first feature length film, *The Story of the Kelly Gang* brought Australian identity to the screen and began a long process of representing and reflecting an image of a young nation of European migrants in an ancient and unforgiving land. The film set in motion the development of an anti-authoritarian identity that heroically fought against the odds and the landscape regardless of the cost. What arose, perhaps due to Australia's geographic isolation and small population, was the sense that Australia was an 'underdog' and that this was to be celebrated.

ACTIVITY 3.1

The Kelly Gang

What do you know about the Kelly Gang? How is it ingrained in our culture?

The landscape

The Australian landscape is undeniably harsh. From deadly snakes to crocodiles, brutal climates to disgruntled koalas, the Australian landscape has an element of fear that has long struck city-dwelling audiences at home and across the globe. If the Australian hero was to be a plucky underdog, it was the landscape that played the antagonist in many Australian stories in the years to come.

Despite its largely urban population, Australia's landscape is mostly hot, dry and inhospitable to the inexperienced traveller. Despite First Nations people living successfully and practicing culture on their Country for tens of thousands of years prior to the arrival of Europeans, many Australian stories have used the landscape as the brutal antagonist, ignoring the role it played as carer and lifegiver for over 250 Indigenous language groups over the millennia. On screen, in novels, radio plays and news reports, the Australian outback played the role of an insurmountable challenge for protagonists to tame or, in most cases, merely survive.

In 1975's *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (dir. Peter Weir), a group of boarding schoolgirls disappear into the volcanic formations of Hanging Rock, never to be seen again. In 2005's terrifying *Wolf Creek* (dir. Greg McLean), a backpacker must not only escape a killer, but the never-ending outback itself. In the 2005 film *The Proposition* (dir. John Hillcoat), the wild and untamed characters of the story are only matched by the danger the landscape poses to their collective survival.

Perhaps the most recognisable evolution of this battle can be found in the enduring Australian story of *Mad Max* (1979, dir. George Miller). Australians first met Max as a brave policeman battling hordes of motorised villains racing across the desolate outback roads of a crumbling dystopian society. The production of the film itself was a triumph for the underdog.



FIGURE 3.2 A storm brewing over a wide open road, Flinders Ranges, South Australia

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The film was made on a shoestring budget by now-celebrated director and producer George Miller and many of its extras were genuine 'bikies' who were paid in beer!

As Max's journey continued, he evolved into an enigmatic rogue who brought order to chaos in a landscape of dust and danger. As in *Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior* (1981, dir. George Miller) and 2015's global hit *Mad Max: Fury Road* (dir. George Miller), the hero played the role of an underdog willing to battle the elements and risk his own life to save the downtrodden from the menace of authority, much in the same way as the myth of Ned Kelly has long claimed.

ACTIVITY 3.2

Analysing representations



FIGURE 3.3 *Mad Max* (1979)



FIGURE 3.4 *Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior* (1981)



FIGURE 3.5 *Mad Max 3: Beyond Thunderdome* (1984)



FIGURE 3.6 *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015)

1. Carefully examine each representation of Mad Max. Note down everything you can see.
2. Compare the use of costume in each image. What does it explain about the character?
3. Compare the representation of the landscape in each image. What information does it add to your understanding of the character of Max?

The larrikin

One of Australia's most enduring character types is 'the larrikin'. Born in part from the mischievous nature of the Kelly Gang, a larrikin was an English slang term for a rude, offensive yet good-natured young man with a healthy distrust of authority. While the term had existed in the context of England since the 1870s to describe inner-city youth who hung around street corners, it became a popular term in Australia after World War II to describe a growing youth culture of young, working-class men who snubbed their nose at authority,[1] listened to rock and roll, surfed and danced.



FIGURE 3.7 Actors Mel Gibson and Mark Lee on the set of *Gallipoli*

Married to an emerging identity of the underdog, the larrikin was frequently represented in film as a witty, young, white male who was also handy in the harsh Australian landscape. Despite conflicting with its origins, this stereotype was defined through films such as Peter Weir's *Gallipoli* (1981), which followed the youthful enthusiasm of Frank (Mel Gibson) and Archy (Mark Lee) as they crossed the harsh Australian desert to sign up for World War I.

In an early scene from the film, two British officers – one wearing a monocle – demand that Frank and his friends salute as they pass on horseback. The Australians' giggling effort to pay respect to the officers was met with derision. In the following scene, Frank 'borrows' a donkey from an Egyptian market and rides around the stalls impersonating the officers. The use of humour is central to this idea that authority could easily be dismantled by mockery and satire; a theme that was to permeate through countless Australian representations.

The most famous of these was Paul Hogan's *Crocodile Dundee* (1986, dir. Peter Faiman). An American and Australian co-production, *Crocodile Dundee* remains one of Australia's most successful film exports of all time. It had all the ingredients to captivate an Australian audience: a larrikin from the untamed Australian bush, who caught crocodiles with dry wit and a smile. However, the movie's success overseas played a huge role in stereotyping Australia to foreign audiences too.

ACTIVITY 3.3

Define the construction of the larrikin

1. Examine the image in Figure 3.7.
2. Deconstruct the technical and symbolic codes used within this image.
3. Assess whether it fits into the social and historical perception of the Australian larrikin.





FIGURE 3.8 Gina Riley and Jane Turner dressed as *Kath and Kim* at the 2005 British Comedy Awards



FIGURE 3.9 Celeste Barber walks the runway at Melbourne Fashion Week 2020



FIGURE 3.10 Jordan Shanks-Markovina, or 'FriendlyJordies'

The changing face of the larrikin

Much has changed since the heady days of *Crocodile Dundee*. As Australian society evolves and the roles of men and women change, immigration from Europe, Asia, the Middle East and Africa has created a version of Australian identity that is much more diverse than the white bushman. What has remained, however, is the constant challenge to authority and social norms.

A new wave of fictional and non-fictional characters has brought anti-authoritarianism into the 21st century and ensured it remains central to the Australian story. The larrikin is no longer male, white and from the bush, but rather any individual who embodies the spirit of a larrikin. Consider the following examples.

KATH AND KIM

The long-running TV show *Kath and Kim* (2002–07) takes the role of larrikin away from men and positions it in the hands of two working-class women from the suburbs. 'Kath and Kim' revelled in the simplicity and affectionate mockery of the Australian working class and, more importantly, the wealthy.

PAUL FENECH

Continuing a tradition of migrant comedy that began with Nick Giannopolis and Mary Coustas that poked fun at the Greek and Italian experience in Australia, Paul Fenech's *Fat Pizza* (2000–05) and *Housos* (2011) sought to shock, offend and mock mainstream Australian society. Based in the outer Sydney suburbs, *Fat Pizza* followed the madness of suburban life for the lower class of all identities, and their continuous brushes with the authorities revealed a larrikin that was, in many ways, more in line with its original definition from the 1870s.

CELESTE BARBER

What began as simple images and videos to mock the world of fashion and social media influencers has become a worldwide sensation and the perfect contemporary representation of the larrikin. Barber, a stand-up comedian, began the hashtag #celestechallengeaccepted, where she recreated the Instagram posts of famous celebrities to challenge the unrealistic expectations of the fashion industry. Barber's work became the perfect antidote to the carefully cultivated representations of perfection we see daily through social media.

FRIENDLYJORDIES

Jordan Shanks-Markovina, otherwise known by his YouTube persona 'FriendlyJordies', runs a YouTube, Twitter and on-stage persona that consistently and thoroughly attacks Australian politicians and the upper class. Boasting over 173 million views in 2022, FriendlyJordies takes a humorous, but meticulously researched approach to challenging the systems of power in Australia. Such has been the channel's attacks that the Australian Federal Police and Sydney politicians have all attempted to have it taken down from the internet.

ACTIVITY 3.4

Research task

1. Find examples of each of the above characters online via YouTube and/or social media.
2. For each example, explain how the characters represent themselves using media codes and conventions.
3. Consider how each one compares to the traditional representation of Ned Kelly, Mad Max and the white, male larrikin – what qualities do they share?
4. What does the enduring popularity of this character in Australian media narratives say about Australian identity today?

'The other'

As you have read, the larrikin was once only represented as a battle between white Australian men and the authorities and landscapes they fought. However, the true history of Australia and the false claim by English colonisers of '*Terra Nullius*' and continued violence towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia does not always combine well with the happy-go-lucky image of the larrikin. The difficult reality of Australia's history of murder, genocide, forced removal and discrimination was rarely tackled by early representations of First Nations peoples in Australian stories, and they were usually relegated to the position of 'the other'.

As discussed in Chapter 1, 'the other' is a common representation in media narratives that represents one group, usually a minority, that do not fit, or have been excluded by, with the majority. The way each society represents 'the other' at any point in time can tell us a great deal about the various stages of history and can explain even more about attitudes and public debates we see today. Over the past century of media, the uneasy relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and broader Australian society has led to First Nations peoples wrongly being represented as exotic, different and at odds with mainstream Australia. So, while we saw a celebration of the larrikin on our screens, we saw the marginalisation of another at the same time.

ACTIVITY 3.5

Analysing representations

The image here is similar to many made at the time of European arrival to Australia and set the stage for the representation of First Australians as 'the other'.

1. Carefully examine the image and note down all that you can see.
2. Explain how the First Nations people are represented within the image.
3. How does this contrast with the representation of the British?
4. What does this tell you about the intentions of the author of this image?
5. Explain how this contributed to later representations of First Nations people as 'the other' in Australian media narratives.



FIGURE 3.11 Painting by E Phillips Fox depicting the landing of Lieutenant James Cook, RN, at Botany Bay, 1770



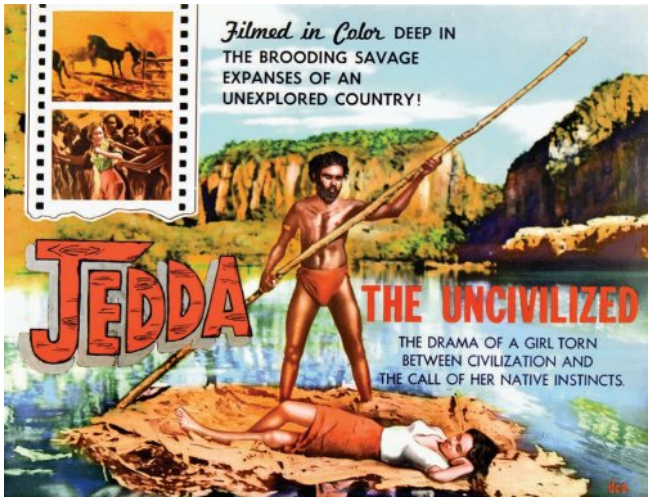


FIGURE 3.12 The promotional poster for the 1955 film *Jedda*

In 20th-century Australian stories, the treatment of First Nations peoples as 'the other' meant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities were considered separate from that of mainstream Australia. Often represented in a stereotyped form, the First Nations person was wrongly simplified into a single image of a hunter-gatherer wandering the Australian landscape and unable to communicate or fit in with civilised white society. First Nations people were rarely seen outside of this stereotype in news broadcasts, film and television between 1920 and the 1990s.

In fictional narratives, First Nations people were, at best, represented in specialist outback roles of 'the tracker' who knew their land and would willingly help Europeans to survive. At worst, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were wrongly depicted as a product of a hostile and uncivilised, stone age culture.

In the 1955 film *Jedda* (dir. Charles Chauvel), a young Aboriginal girl (Rosalie Kunoth-Monks) is lured away from her life on a white cattle station by the tall, dark and mysterious Marbuck (Robert Tudawali). While the story was credited for its political stance against the treatment of Aboriginal people in that era, it reinforced a negative stereotype of First Nations peoples as Jedda is seduced by the more 'primitive' Marbuck, which leads to their rejection from his tribe for breaking marriage customs and, ultimately, their death.

ACTIVITY 3.6

Analysing representations

1. What are some of the stereotypical ways Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were represented in past Australian stories?
2. Why can stereotypes be harmful?
3. How does mainstream privilege and racism harm Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?
4. How does whiteness and racism towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people hurt all Australians?

ACTIVITY 3.7

Analysing representations

Examine this image from the 1971 film *Walkabout* (1971, dir. Nicolas Roeg).

1. Analyse the construction of the image using codes and conventions.
2. Does it reinforce past/older/previous stereotypes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples? Explain your response using the codes and conventions of the image.



FIGURE 3.13 A still image from the Australian film *Walkabout* starring legendary First Nations actor David Dalaithngu Gulpilil as 'Black Boy', the exotic native leading lost children out of the outback.

CASE STUDY 3.1

Crocodile Dundee: The larrikin and 'the other'

An American and Australian co-production, *Crocodile Dundee* remains one of Australia's most successful film exports of all time. It was the film that introduced the Australian larrikin and, more importantly, Australian stories to a global audience.

The film followed the adventures of Mick 'Crocodile' Dundee, a larrikin from the untamed Australian landscape. A skilled, hilarious hunter of crocodiles with a heart of gold, Dundee is discovered by American journalist Sue Charlton (Linda Kozlowski) and is taken out of the bush and toured across America, where he handles the city life in predictable comedic fashion.

Despite its international success, and the questionable impact it had on the international understanding of modern Australia, the film is an interesting study in the representation of 'the other'.

In one early scene within the film, we can examine the way 'the other' was represented. While deep in the bush with the journalist, Dundee stumbles across his old friend 'Neville Bell' (David Dalaithngu Gulpilil), a city-dwelling Aboriginal person on his way to a 'corroboree'. Clad in dirty jeans, no shoes and traditional body painting, Neville represents the same stereotype of the outsider seen in early Australian stories. However, the scene challenges these older representations by making fun of a non-Indigenous understanding of complex Indigenous cultures.

As Sue Charlton raises her camera to take his photo, Neville stops her, stating: 'You can't take my photograph' – playing on the stereotype of First Nations ideas that camera images would steal their spirit. When Sue replies as such, Neville corrects her: 'Nah, you got the lens cap on'. Then, as Neville leaves the camp and wanders into the night, Dundee tells Sue that Neville will be able to see in the dark and 'some people think they're telepathic'. In the background the audience hears Neville tripping over a branch stating: 'Ohh! God, I hate the bush!'

Neville's character challenged these old representations; however, Australia's most famous narrative of the era undoes its good work in the next scene. Sue discovers the 'secret ceremony' that Neville was heading to: a men's-only gathering of dancing. The voyeuristic style in which the scene was shot leans again on the old stereotype of an ancient culture that is separate to mainstream Australian society.



FIGURE 3.14 A scene from the film *Crocodile Dundee*

Analysis

Examine the image from the scene between Dundee, Sue and Neville in Figure 3.14.

1. Carefully examine how each character is placed within the image. What does this do to support the notion of 'the other' in Australian media narratives?
2. Based on what you have read about this scene, how did the dialogue between the characters challenge traditional Australian understandings of First Nations people?
3. Do you think the scene that follows the dialogue undermines this challenge? Explain your response with an example from the film.



'Stories as old as time'

Dreaming stories the First Nations oral tradition of passing down cultural knowledge and beliefs through storytelling, including creation, social rules and regulations, ethics and morality

Dreaming stories are told within the oral history of First Nations peoples. They are the stories that explain the creation and living force of the landscape and have been passed down from generation to generation and connect First Nations peoples to their land, culture and language. While Australian stories in the media have a relatively short history, the land's original inhabitants have stories to explain the life and laws of the world's longest surviving living culture. Covering all topics from creation, consequences, ethics and morality, Dreaming stories act as a guide to respect the land in order to honour its power to take care of us and how to behave in a community. Dreaming stories are often misunderstood to be stories that explain creation itself; however, unlike traditional Western storytelling, they are non-linear and exist in the past, the present and future.[2]



FIGURE 3.15 *Cleverman* (2016–17) creator Ryan Griffen

Traditionally, these perspectives have not often appeared within Australian media narratives. This is changing. Dreamings are common in children's books, animations and short films; however, as more and more First Nations creators begin sharing their perspective in modern Australian media, we are beginning to see a more rounded view of the Australian experience. While some Dreaming stories are well known and shared, others remain sacred and tightly held secrets from group to group.

In the 2016 production of *Cleverman*, a dystopian superhero TV series, First Nations director Ryan Griffen combined the popular superhero genre with Dreaming stories. A Cleverman (a central character of the series) is an important part of the Australian Aboriginal cultures; it is often a man of power in the clan and there are many types of Cleverman, which vary.

> 'The Cleverman is a very culturally sensitive thing. There's some people who just do not want to talk about it,' Griffen said. 'For most of the places we spoke to, it's men's business and only the men can talk about it, so the question was how we can adapt that?'
>
> 'The one thing that stays true between the two is that a Cleverman is a conduit between reality and the Dreaming. He is someone who is spiritually connected to both worlds and that's something we stay true to with the show. The major gift of our superhero is that he can see things others can't.'

FIGURE 3.16 Ryan Griffen interviewed in Caris Bizzaca, 'The World of Cleverman', *Screen Australia* website, 1 June 2016

Griffen's *Cleverman* is an excellent example of blending contemporary culture with popular media trends and a great starting point to discover where we can see Australian stories evolving into the future.

3.3 The Australian story

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- the influence of the style of media creators and producers in the construction of fictional and non-fictional narratives.

Australian cinema comes of age

An Australian story is a relatively new phenomenon. While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural stories have the deepest roots within Australia's past, and the European and migrant experience is just over 200 years old, it is not until the last century or so that we began to see ourselves in the media.

Broadcast media, like television, popular film and radio, only emerged on a large scale after World War II. In the two decades that followed, it was rare to see an Australian on screen. As a young community, Australians and the small industries that produced media were often reluctant to see and hear Australian voices. Known as 'cultural cringe', Australian audiences often saw anything produced locally as inferior to those in England, Europe and the United States. Mainstream Australian society still saw itself as very much a British colony and was not comfortable with its own identity.

As a result, it was not uncommon to hear a newsreader with an English accent on Australian television. America's exploding Hollywood film industry dominated Australian screens and youth culture, in particular, as rock and roll from the United Kingdom dominated the airwaves.

Throughout the 1960s, there was very little in the way of Australian stories. In 1970, however, fresh air blew into the Australian film industry. A new determination to express an Australian identity in popular film saw a huge number of local productions, about local ideas, which finally brought Australians to see their stories on the big screen. To support this, the government of Harold Holt established the Australian Council for the Arts in 1967, and 158 films were made in Australia in the 1970s, nine times more than the previous decade.[3] Australians had finally begun to form their own stories.

ACTIVITY 3.8

Research task

Over the two decades that followed 1967, uniquely Australian stories began to appear on screen.

In groups, research examples or trailers from the following films and complete the tasks below.

Wake in Fright **(1971, dir. Ted Kotcheff)** A teacher is trapped in a dangerous outback town.	***Puberty Blues*** **(1981, dir. Bruce Beresford)** Two friends attempt to navigate school and acceptance in Sydney's surf culture.	***Gallipoli*** **(1981, dir. Peter Weir)** Two young men cross the landscape to sign up for World War I.



***Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975, dir. Peter Weir)** Mystery surrounds the disappearance of schoolgirls in country Victoria.	***The Adventures of Barry McKenzie* (1972, dir. Bruce Beresford)** A die-hard Aussie larrikin is sent to England and immediately is at odds with 'mother country' society.	***Crocodile Dundee* (1986, dir. Peter Faiman)** An outback Aussie crocodile hunter tackles crocodiles and buffaloes before travelling to America.
***Storm Boy* (1976, dir. Henri Safran)** A young boy befriends a pelican and an Ngarrindjeri man on the remote Coorong coast of South Australia.	***BMX Bandits* (1983, dir. Brian Trenchard-Smith)** Three BMX-riding teens tackle a gang of bank robbers marauding Sydney.	***Dogs in Space* (1986, dir. Richard Lowenstein)** The adventures of a group of students and unemployed youth in a Richmond share house in the 1970s.

1. From what you are able to gather from the examples you have found, what do you notice about the use of the landscape, the larrikin and 'the other'? Do they appear consistently? Or at all?
2. How would you explain each example to have uniquely 'Australian' qualities or themes?
3. How does each example treat Australia's relationship with authority?
4. How does each example suggest Australian audiences had finally gotten over 'cultural cringe'? Use examples from your research to suggest why this might be the case.

DIGITAL LINK

Note that all clips mentioned in the following case studies are available to view at the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia (NFSA) website.

The boom in Australian stories over the 1970s and 1980s began the development of a distinctive style for a number of Australian storytellers.

Examine the following case studies and use your understanding of codes and conventions to explore the way a unique Australian style has been constructed and told.

CASE STUDY 3.2

The underdogs: *Muriel's Wedding* (1994, dir. PJ Hogan)

An awkward suburban misfit, Muriel is desperate to find the love of her life and get married. Along the way she meets Rhonda, who rescues her from her bullying friends and the claustrophobic atmosphere of her small town, Porpoise Spit. *Muriel's Wedding* represents a specific time and place within the Australian suburban experience and the film was a huge success not only in Australia, but overseas as well. When creating the story, producer Lynda House was adamant that the target audience of



FIGURE 3.17 A still from the film *Muriel's Wedding*

the film would be younger as the characters seek to challenge the established traditions of Australian life, where success for Muriel was to be defined by marriage.[4] Throughout the narrative, Muriel the underdog, assisted by her larrikin mentor Rhonda, takes control of her own destiny to define it for herself.

Analysis

Explore *Muriel's Wedding* and complete the following tasks.

1. Examine, define and compare the construction of the characters Muriel, Rhonda and Tania. What drives and motivates each character throughout the narrative?
2. Explain the construction of each character using the mise en scene elements of costume, make-up and props.
3. Explore and explain the setting of Porpoise Spit. How does it support the development of the narrative?
4. Is *Muriel's Wedding* an 'Australian story'? What elements does it have in common with other Australian stories you have learnt about so far?

CASE STUDY 3.3

The underdogs: *The Big Steal* (1994, dir. Nadia Tass)

Melbourne teenager Danny is hoping to combine his dream of buying a Jaguar car with winning the affections of his dream girl, Johanna Johnson. Danny, just turned 18, is from the inner suburb of Footscray. A naive Danny is scammed by used-car dealer Gordan Farkas and sold a 'Jag' with a broken engine. Humiliated when his car breaks down on his first date with Johanna, Danny hatches a devious plan to get revenge on Farkas. With his streetwise and courageous friends, Danny is embroiled in a battle with Farkas and his used-car cronies after he steals Farkas' own Jaguar and switches the engines. *The Big Steal*, directed by Nadia Tass, was among a number of low-budget Australian films that told the experience of Australia's youth in the 1990s in the inner city. Danny's character shares similar traits with so many Australian stories of a plucky underdog who was willing to challenge the corruption of the adult world with humour and a little bit of ingenuity.

The Big Steal borrows heavily from the long Australian tradition of triumph against adversity. Danny is shy, introverted and a product of extremely eccentric, working-class parents. While his friends Mark and Van represent the confidence he so sorely craves through the ownership of material objects like a Jaguar and the affections of Johanna, Danny learns that there is more to happiness than material objects, as mateship and love win over the corruption and authority of the adults who stand in his way.



FIGURE 3.18 Gordon Farkas (Steve Bisley), the villainous used-car dealer in *The Big Steal*



Analysis

Examine the image of Gordon Farkas and decode the use of technical, written and symbolic codes.

1 Explain the use of written codes on the cars behind Farkas. What do they tell you about the style of his business?
2 Explain the use of costume, hair and make-up in this shot. What do they tell you about his character?
3 How do these written and technical codes work together to define a symbolic understanding of his character?
4 How has Tass positioned the audience to feel about Farkas?
5 How does this character fit with other representations of authority in Australian stories?

CASE STUDY 3.4

The underdogs: *The Castle* (1997, dir. Rob Sitch)

The Castle is one of the most celebrated Australian stories of the past few decades. Made on an extraordinarily low budget by director Rob Sitch and the famed Working Dog production team (known for a string of television and film productions in Australia), *The Castle* remains a film that many Australians use to educate foreign guests about Australian life. Littered with local references, *The Castle* details the struggle of patriarch Darryl Kerrigan to save his family home from being demolished by Melbourne Airport, his next-door neighbour. Kerrigan is a family-first father who takes great pride in his 'castle' and takes his fight to the High Court of Australia to save his home from wealthy developers.



FIGURE 3.19 The Kerrigan family in *The Castle*

The opening sequence of the film sets the tone for a classic battle between the underdog and authority. Narrated by Darryl's son Dale, a jumbo jet roars over their roof as Dale explains the pride his father has in his work, his countless unfinished DIY projects and the huge powerlines that loom over the house 'as a sign of man's ability to generate electricity'. Darryl has unending love for his wife, his children and the simple life that he has helped build for them.

Analysis

Examine the opening sequence of *The Castle* and answer the following:

1 Explain the acting of Dale Kerrigan (Stephen Curry) and his vocal tone. How does it help establish the setting and the Kerrigan family themselves?
2 Explain the use of mise en scene elements to establish the Kerrigan home. How does it contrast with Dale's narration?
3 How do these two codes of acting and mise en scene combine to establish the narrative?

Mabo native title decision was the first in an Australian court that recognised the traditional ownership of native land, after a constitutional challenge to the High Court brought by Eddie Mabo. It was a landmark decision that legally recognised the ownership of land by Indigenous groups.

When a compulsory acquisition order comes from the airport, Darryl must fight with whatever small means he has to save his home and employs the services of fledgling criminal lawyer Dennis Denuto, who meekly claims in court that the defence of Darryl's home is based on the freshly minted **Mabo native title decision** of 1993 stating: 'It's Mabo, it's justice, it's the law … it's the vibe'.

The Castle is a David vs Goliath battle of the underdog against big business. However, this iconic line in the film (of which there are many) led to another quote from Kerrigan that reflected on, albeit in a comedic way, the history of dispossession in Australia:

> I'm really starting to understand how the Aborigines feel … this house is like their land, it holds their memories, the land is their story, it's everything. You just can't just pick it up and plonk it down somewhere else. This country's gotta stop stealing other people's land!

FIGURE 3.20 Darryl Kerrigan in *The Castle*

Actor Tiriel Mora, who played Dennis Denuto, claims that the film resonated (and continues to do so) for the way it helped bring discussions about First Nations issues into a common language for the rest of Australia to understand:

> The very powerful underlying theme of the film is about justice, and that's justice for all, not just for some people.

FIGURE 3.21 *The Castle* actor Tiriel Mora quoted in Kieran Pender, '"It's the vibe": 25 years on, how The Castle became an Australian classic', *The Guardian*, 19 March 2022

Research task

1. What did *The Castle* cost to produce?
2. How long was the shooting period of the film?
3. How did the Working Dog team get the film into cinemas in Australia?
4. How does this production process reflect the content of the story itself?
5. In 2010, an Australia Day Council survey found that 37% of Australians (over a third) felt that *The Castle* was the best on-screen representation of the 'real Australia'. Why do you think so many would say this?
6. Using your previous answer, use one code or convention to explain the construction of Darryl Kerrigan to explain the popularity of his character and the narrative itself.

CASE STUDY 3.5

Australian styles: George Miller and *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015)

As you have learnt already, George Miller's Mad Max film franchise has always leant on the traditions of the landscape and the fight against authority so typical of Australian films. Miller has come a long way from the first-time director of the first *Mad Max* film in 1979. As director and producer, he has amassed a body of work in film and television as diverse as it is successful. Not only the main driver of the Mad Max franchise, Miller has also produced and directed films like the animal comedy *Babe: Pig in the City* (1995) and the children's animated film *Happy Feet* (2006). However, it is the Mad Max series that defined his style as a director. Using the vehicle of Max, the antihero outsider who is constantly drawn to help the vulnerable fight against the odds, his visual style has long been one of a 'montage' of action sequences.

Mad Max: Fury Road was the 2015 big budget rebirth of a character Australian (and global) audiences had seen three times between 1979 and 1985. *Fury Road* appeared 30 years later and utilised a globally recognised cast of Charlize Theron as Furiosa and Tom Hardy as Max. True to the changing nature of representation in film, and global social politics, *Fury Road* put the character of Max in a secondary role behind Theron's Furiosa, who, unlike the Max of previous films, has a noble cause to fight for: the lives of five women held captive by the evil warlord Immortan Joe. Furiosa breaks the captive women free from a rotten patriarchal society and goes in search of hope in the far-away 'Green Place' where they can restore the world to a more peaceful existence.



Despite the contemporary narrative themes of *Fury Road*, Miller stayed true to his style of visual storytelling through the use of centred action montages seen in the previous three films. A face-value viewing of *Fury Road* shows us a series of high-octane car chases patched together with limited dialogue and dramatic music. Yet these action sequences are what makes the narrative so engaging. The majority of the camerawork presents the action in the centre of the frame. For contrast, the original Mad Max films contained between 1200 and 1300 shots, whereas *Fury Road* contained over 2750.[5]

The pace of the editing in *Fury Road* was such that almost every frame saw the action in the centre so the audience's eyes were forced to do less and focus on the significance of each shot. Through this, Miller uses the tried and trusted technique of 'show, don't tell' that is the bedrock of many great film narratives.



FIGURE 3.22 Immortan Joe (Hugh Keays-Byrne) from *Mad Max: Fury Road*



FIGURE 3.23 Nux (Nicholas Hoult) from *Mad Max: Fury Road*



FIGURE 3.24 Furiosa (Charlize Theron) and Max (Tom Hardy) from *Mad Max: Fury Road*



FIGURE 3.25 Max (Tom Hardy) from *Mad Max: Fury Road*

Analysis: Centre framing of *Mad Max: Fury Road*

1. Examine each image carefully and define what you can see in the centre of the frame. Use codes and conventions in your responses.
2. Explain what the image communicates about each character.
3. Examine the image of Max and Furiosa in Figure 3.24. How does the arrangement of Furiosa's arm at the centre of the frame support the notion that *Fury Road* had adopted more contemporary ideas in comparison to the older, male-dominated films?
4. Explain how each film image follows the mantra of 'show, don't tell'? It may help by defining what you can see in the background to explain the foreground.
5. Research and view the 'Bikers attack the rig' action sequence from *Mad Max: Fury Road*, and explain the way editing, dialogue and central framing are used to engage the audience. In your response, name the code, describe how it was used and explain why Miller used each code and the effect it has on the audience.

CASE STUDY 3.6

Australian styles: Adam Elliot, *Mary and Max* (2009)

Adam Elliot is a stop-motion animator who has had his films screened all over the world and won an Oscar for Best Animated Short for his 2003 film *Harvie Krumpet*. While many of his stories focus on the trials of living with disabilities, he tells them through the prism of life in Australia. His first full length feature, *Mary and Max*, tells the story of Mary, a lonely suburban schoolgirl from Glen Waverley who makes a pen pal with Max, a fellow loner who lives in New York City.

Through a lifetime of letters, they navigate their way through their own individual battles: Max is on the autism spectrum, and Mary's kleptomaniac, alcoholic mother holds her back from a happy childhood. While the entire film is shot in the black and white of Max's life and the drab, sepia tone of Mary's sunburned Australian life, small pops of colour and intricate detail are the hallmarks of Elliot's meticulous claymation style.

Despite the painstaking effort required to make a claymation film, Elliot's focus of character and deep discussion of depression, loneliness and the imperfections of everyday life are the hallmarks of his storytelling style. As Mary writes to Max over the course of her journey from schoolgirl to adulthood without the guidance of her absent parents, she shares her lessons in life with Max as he unpacks his own confusion in a world that does not work the way he thinks it should. The melancholic optimism of Mary and Max is defined by Elliot's limited use of colour and attention to the small details of cracks in the pavement, and during the opening sequence, in particular, the small details of a football on a roof, a Ned Kelly letterbox and a neglected sausage on a barbeque that all make Australia unique and, in many ways, great.

Analysis

1. Research and view the opening sequence of *Mary and Max*. How is setting established? Use the code of mise en scene to explain what Elliot used in this sequence.
2. Examine the following stills from the film:



FIGURE 3.26 Mary (voiced by Toni Collette) addresses another letter to her pen friend Max in *Mary and Max*



FIGURE 3.27 Max (voiced by Philip Seymour Hoffman) types another letter to Mary in the film *Mary and Max*



FIGURE 3.28 Mary's alcoholic mother Vera (voiced by Renée Geyer) in the film *Mary and Max*



FIGURE 3.29 The different realities of Mary and Max meet within the film *Mary and Max*.

3 Carefully examine each image and define what you see using codes and conventions.
4 Explain how and where you see colour used in each image. Why do you think Elliot chose to add colour where he did?
5 Analyse the use of colour in image four (Figure 3.29). Why do you think the two settings (Max's and Mary's) have been represented in this way? What was Elliot trying to communicate about each character?

Australian styles: The golden age of television

Similar to film, mainstream Australian stories exploded on the small screen during the 1970s. Long-standing censorship bans on content were lifted and television producers were free to explore all corners of the Australian experience.

Before he was Crocodile Dundee, Paul Hogan developed his larrikin image in the *The Paul Hogan Show* (1973–84) where he played a range of characters that poked fun at Australian culture. His famed characters included Leo Wanker and Super Dag, a zinc-cream wearing superhero who used a beer-filled esky to save the day. Hogan's characters did much to not only make fun of Australian culture, but celebrate it too. Australian comedy moved into new territory with *The Aunty Jack Show* (1972–73), which tore into every element of popular culture. The gruff, tough-talking, moustachioed 'Aunty Jack' would threaten audiences to 'rip your bloody arms off' if they did not watch the show. Aunty Jack was the first to introduce colour to Australian television screens in 1975, literally transferring from black and white to colour in the middle of a sketch.

Across the 1980s and 90s, Australian stories became globally successful with the soap operas *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*, which detailed the suburban life of ordinary Australians. *Neighbours* lasted 37 years on Australian screens and finally ended in 2022. It was then announced in December of that year that the show would be revived via Amazon Studios, with new episodes being released from late 2023. *Home and Away* still airs and both gave life to some of Australia's greatest entertainment exports, including Kylie Minogue, Margot Robbie, Chris Hemsworth, Guy Pierce, Naomi Watts and Russell Crowe.



FIGURE 3.30 *The Aunty Jack Show* featuring: Grahame Bond (Aunty Jack), Rory O'Donoghue (Thin Arthur), Sandra McGregor (Flange Desire) and Garry McDonald (Kid Eager). (ABC Archives)

In recent years, the introduction of streaming services to Australia has led to an explosion of Australian TV production that targets a range of audiences. While reality TV has dominated commercial networks, streaming services have provided a wealth of Australian stories that cover all aspects of the Australian experience.

ACTIVITY 3.9

Research task

Work in groups to find examples of the following Australian TV shows from recent years and explain what element of Australian life they explore:

- What location is it set in?
- Define the central characters.
- Explain how it includes some elements that are familiar to you as an Australian.

***Bump* (2021–)** A high-achieving student has to deal with the challenge of school and an unexpected pregnancy.	***Wentworth* (2013–21)** The trials of Bea Smith who is sent to Wentworth women's prison.	***Please Like Me* (2013–16)** The life and ordinary struggles of comedian Josh Thomas as he battles sexuality and adulthood.
***Heartbreak High* (2022–)** A 90s classic and modern remake follows the struggles of high school students in inner Sydney.	***Upper Middle Bogan* (2013–16)** A clash of cultures between a successful white-collar mother and her real parents, car-racing bogans.	***Utopia* (2014–)** The mundane and ridiculous trials of working in Australia's National Building Authority office.
***Kath and Kim* (2002–07)** The suburban queens of comedy, Kath and Kim are the mother and daughter duo of their Fountain Lakes suburb.	***Bluey* (2018–)** The international animated hit follows the adventures of Bluey and her Blue Heeler family, sister Bingo and parents Chilli and Bandit.	***Mystery Road* (2018–)** The television offshoot of the popular 2013 film. Outback detective Jay Swan is on the trail of a mysterious disappearance on a cattle station.
***Seachange* (1998–99)** A big-city lawyer undergoes a 'seachange' and becomes the magistrate of a small and eccentric Victorian coastal town.	***The Family Law* (2016–19)** Based on the memoirs of writer and comedian Benjamin Law, the series chronicles the challenges of growing up as a Chinese migrant in Brisbane.	***Shaun Micallef's Mad as Hell* (2012–22)** A news and current affairs satire hosted by comedian Shaun Micallef that wanders into the strange and absurd.
***The Secret Life of Us* (2001–06)** A mid 2000s classic that follows the life, love and drama of a groups of friends living in sharehouses in St Kilda.	***Little J & Big Cuz* (2017-21)** A series of short animated episodes featuring the lives of five-year-old Little J and nine-year-old Big Cuz. Set in outback Australia the show sheds light on First Nations cultures in an accessible format.	***Glitch* (2015–19)** A country town police officer is baffled by the return of seven people into the town who had all previously died and have no memory of who they are.
***The Kettering Incident* (2016)** A doctor returns to her remote Tasmanian island to find herself embroiled in the disappearance of two young girls, 15 years apart.	***Rosehaven* (2016–21)** Returning from the mainland to his country Tasmanian town, Daniel must learn to work with his mother and unpredictable friends who follow him around.	***Redfern Now* (2012–13)** A series of short stories that follow the lives of First Nations people and families living in the Sydney suburb of Redfern.



ACTIVITY 3.10

Creative task

Working in groups, you are to create a 30-second opening sequence introduction to one of the shows on the previous page. Contemporary television shows are now known for their high-end production on title sequences.

Traditionally, Australian television shows began each episode with an older formula of introducing a stereotyped image of each character and the location of the series. (Research the different versions of the *Neighbours* opening credits to get an idea of what they looked like.)

Using the tools, locations and props at your disposal, you are to choose ONE of the contemporary shows on the previous page and recreate the opening sequence. It should include:

- appropriate theme music
- appropriate titles and fonts that match the genre
- an introduction to each character as they appear in the narrative.

Australian styles: Documentary

Documentary filmmaking has the power to look under the rug of the mainstream Australian experience and expose a world we may never have known to exist. Australia has a long tradition of using documentary to explain the good, bad and ugly of Australia. Ever since the early nature documentaries showed the wilds of the Australian outback to urban audiences (as well as false and negative representations of First Nations people), documentary producers have used this media form to make sense of the Australian experience. Australia has a long tradition of using documentary to challenge authority, especially seen when we examine the work of ABC television's *Four Corners* (1961–), which has single-handedly exposed the corruption of state governments, big business and social injustice across Australia. No program has had the influence of *Four Corners* in its 60-year history on Australian screens.

ACTIVITY 3.11

Research task

Four Corners stories:

1. Research the top stories from the 60-plus-year history of *Four Corners*.
2. Choose three stories that examine a topic of importance to Australia.
3. Critically evaluate how the story challenges authority.
4. Evaluate for what purpose the story does this.
5. Outline how technical codes and conventions have been used within the story to create a sense of good versus evil.

CASE STUDY 3.7

Australian styles: *Gayby Baby* (2015, dir. Maya Newell)

Maya Newell's *Gayby Baby* follows the lives of four children from different families whose parents are gay. The style of Newell's filmmaking, seen later in 2019's *In My Blood It Runs* that chronicled the life of Dujuan, a 10-year-old Arrernte boy growing up in Alice Springs, relies on soft-focus camera shots and dreamlike sequences to represent everyday life. In *Gayby Baby*, she utilised an observational style, allowing the audience to act as a 'fly on the wall' to step inside the lives of her subjects. This style allows Newell to draw the audience into the everyday of people who live with challenging circumstances and humanise difficult social topics.



FIGURE 3.31 *Gayby Baby* film director Maya Newell speaks at a screening of her film in New York in 2016.

Two years prior to the same-sex marriage plebiscite in Australia, where over 60% of Australians voted to legalise same sex marriage, Newell's documentary decided to tell the story of Australian same-sex families from the perspective of their children. At the time of its release, the film had a significant impact. The divided public debate over same-sex marriage meant that the film courted controversy as New South Wales government ministers called for it to be banned from being screened in schools, despite its 'PG' rating.

The documentary was a heartfelt insight into the daily challenges of children growing up with same-sex parents, and despite this, some politicians and commentators claimed it was promoting 'homosexual propaganda'. What *Gayby Baby* was able to achieve, however, was a representation of the Australian experience that had been rarely seen previously. As Newell stated after its release, 'Being a child from a gay family myself … I felt that the voice of the children was really missing in the marriage equality debate.'[6]

Analysis

1. Examine some scenes of *Gayby Baby*. How does Newell's camera work and personal style help you as an audience member relate to the subjects of the documentary?
2. Why was the timing of *Gayby Baby*'s release significant?
3. Research some of the reactions from political leaders to the film. How do their opinions differ?
4. What does the release and success of the film tell you about the changing nature of what an 'Australian story' had become by 2015? It may help to compare this to the nature of Australian stories already discussed in this chapter.

Australian styles: Photography

Australia has a strong tradition of photographers who record and re-imagine the Australian experience and tell our story to us in a still image. The early work of Frank Hurley brought the Australian story to life as he followed Sir Douglas Mawson on his 1911 Antarctic expedition and captured the experiences of Australian soldiers in both world wars. Max Duplain (1911–92) was well known for his photography of the Australian landscape and later for his modernist focus on architecture and geometric shapes that defined our cities. More recently, the works of Trent Parke, Bill Henson and Tracey Moffat have chronicled the Australian experience in diverse and often controversial ways.

ACTIVITY 3.12

Analysing images

Examine the following images:

1. Trent Parke – *Magpie and Baby Bird*
2. Trent Parke – *Antz on a Jatz Cracker*
3. Tracey Moffat – *The Movie Star*
4. Tracey Moffatt – *Selling Aluminium Siding*



FIGURE 3.32 Courtesy National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne Purchased, Victorian Foundation for Living Australian Artists, 2015 © Trent Parke

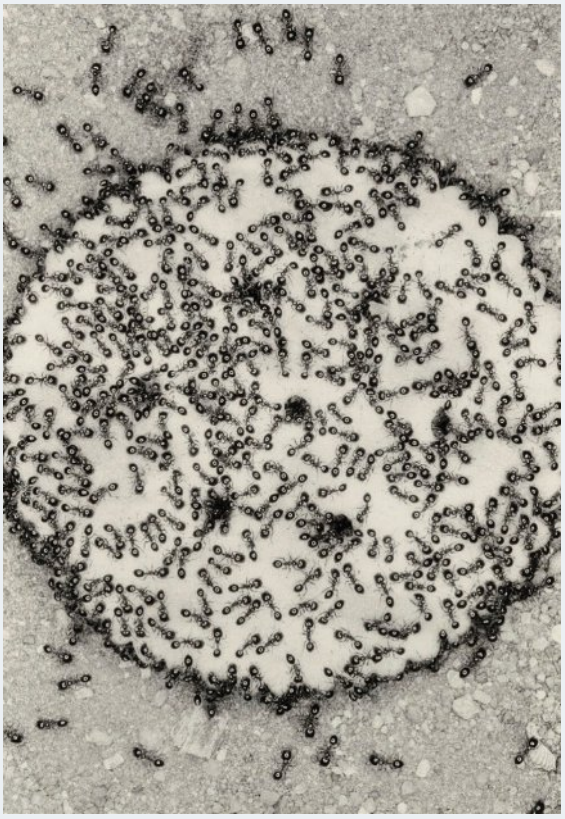


FIGURE 3.33 Courtesy National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne Purchased, Victorian Foundation for Living Australian Artists, 2015 © Trent Parke



FIGURE 3.34 Courtesy National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne Purchased from Admission Funds, 1987 © Tracey Moffatt, courtesy Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery



FIGURE 3.35 © Tracey Moffatt, courtesy Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery

1. Carefully deconstruct the composition of each image. How has it been framed and what has been selected to appear in each image?
2. What does each image represent about the Australian experience?
3. How does photography, as a separate media form to film and television, contribute to the Australian story?

CASE STUDY 3.8

Australian styles: Rennie Ellis

Rennie Ellis (1940–2003) was an Australian photographer known for capturing the weird, dark and wonderful underbelly of Australian life. Often risque, often uncomfortable, Ellis was famous for documenting nightlife and wild youth culture of Australia throughout the 1960s, 70s and 80s. Ellis saw his work as an encounter with somebody else's life and captured daily life in locations all over the world, but in particular in Australia. As Ellis stated:

> 'my main interest in photography is social realism. I see the camera as the universal tool of communication'.

FIGURE 3.36 Rennie Ellis, 'About', *rennieellis.com.au*

Carefully examine Ellis' image *Yobbos* from the legendary Sunbury Pop Festival of 1974.



FIGURE 3.37 *Yobbos*, Courtesy National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne Purchased NGV Foundation, 2006 © Rennie Ellis Photographic Archive

Analysis

1. Research the definition of the term 'yobbos'. What does this mean and how is it unique to Australia?
2. Deconstruct all the elements of the image. What can you see?
3. What elements of this image connect to the Australian experience?
4. How does Ellis' focus on 'social realism' conflict with an often 'romantic' view of Australian life that we see in other media forms?
5. Research the story behind the Sunbury Pop Festival. Why was that event, and this image, a significant moment in Australia's cultural history?

ACTIVITY 3.13

Creative task

What is *your* Australian story? How we see and reflect upon our lives as Australians is defined by where we were born, where live, our school, work, family and friends. How do you define it? Working individually, take five photos that define what is Australia *to you*. In your task, you should consider how your life is defined by where you live.

1. Plan and compose five photographs.
2. Compare those with your classmates – how does your interpretation differ?
3. Do your photos share similarities with your classmates? What common ground can you find?
4. Examine the work of the class and explain how an Australian story can be defined through the form of photography.



Australian styles: Podcasting

No longer a new phenomenon, podcasting has grown into one of the most popular and evolving media forms. Living in the ears of their audience, podcasters can tell stories from any angle that can reflect almost any aspect of life. From cooking, wellness, true crime, comedy and storytelling, there is a podcast for almost any audience.

Owing to the simplicity of production, Australian podcasts have grown rapidly to reflect the modern Australian experience. The wildly popular Australian comedians Hamish and Andy have consistently held the number one spot in Australian podcasting. However, the true crime genre has taken root for local audiences. The *Casefile* podcast works through Australia's more grisly crimes, as have *Liar Liar* and *Naked City*, all of which suggest there is a huge appetite for looking under the rug of Australia's dark side and, once again, challenging a romanticised view of Australia.



FIGURE 3.38 The *Aunty Donna* team performing on stage

Australian comedy has found its home in podcasting too. The hugely popular *Aunty Donna* podcast has an audience of thousands that supports their television and stage performances, as does the Melbourne-based *Little Dum Dum Club* that took its wildly inappropriate content all the way to Thailand for the Ko Samui International Podcast Festival.

CASE STUDY 3.9

Australian styles: The *Daily Aus* podcast

Politics in Australia can often be difficult to interpret, boring or too chaotic and many young people are understandably disengaged with local politics. Former law students Sam Koslowski and Zara Seidler decided in 2018 that Australia's young audiences were not properly communicated to through traditional news media. To combat this, they started an Instagram account to re-interpret and summarise significant news stories for an audience more accustomed to consuming media in shorter bites. In 2022, they have 400 000 subscribers across their social media and podcasting channels. The podcast appears five times a week, breaking down complex and important issues for Australia's young people, and as founder Zara Seidler stated, it started with a simple request from friends:



FIGURE 3.39 The way in which podcasts are consumed can create intimate relationships between listeners and audiences.

> I'm about to go on a date and I want to know about the news so I don't sound dumb, can you help me understand the three key stories today?

FIGURE 3.40 Co-host and co-founder Zara Seidler on starting the *Daily Aus* podcast, quoted in Laura Schofield, 'Startup Delivering News that Matters to Young People', *Newsworthy*, 10 November 2021

Analysis

Find and follow the *Daily Aus* on your favourite podcasting app.

1. Listen to a week's worth of episodes. Each episode only goes for five minutes!
2. Explain how each news story is explained. What do the hosts emphasise?
3. Compare this to a nightly news broadcast on television or radio. How does the use of language differ?
4. Why do you think explaining Australian and international news to a youth audience is significant?

Australian styles: Gaming

Australia has a small but robust gaming industry that is one of the fastest-growing media occupations in the country. In a global market that is worth hundreds of billions of dollars and reaches audiences that dwarf television and film, Australian stories are being told through gaming to an increasing local and global audience. Few of us can forget the mania created around *Crossy Road*,[7] which was an Australian production that featured many unique Australian characters like a Drop Bear, Wombats and Echidnas. Created by two developers, one living on his parent's sheep farm, the free-to-play game has reached a global audience and hundreds of millions of users worldwide.

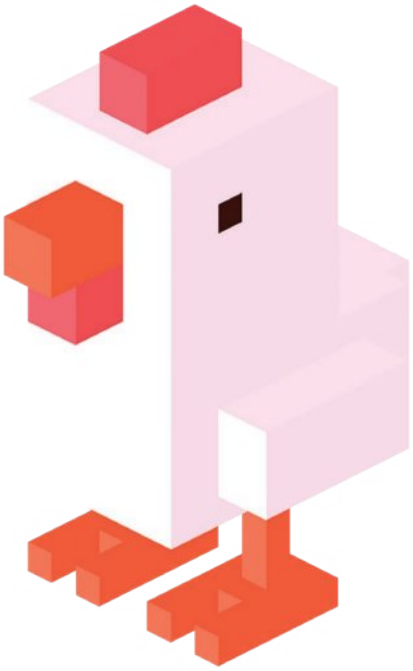


FIGURE 3.41 Icon of the mobile app *Crossy Road* from Hipster Whale

More recently, Australian game developers have been able to tell Australian stories in a variety of ways. In 2018, developers Paper House released the game *Paperbark – a Story of a Wombat*, which allows players to take the role of a wombat wandering the Australian bush hunting for food and shelter. Borrowing heavily from the aesthetic of Australian children's books like *Possum Magic* and the Australian landscape watercolours of Albert Namatjira,[8] the watercolour animation gives the game a unique Australian experience. The voiceover was recorded by Australian musician Georgia Maq and employed local ecologists to ensure that all the flora and fauna that appeared in the game were accurate, as was the backing soundtrack, all recorded in the Australian bush itself. The game's developers were determined to accurately represent an Australian story that avoided a long history of Australia being ignored in gaming, or reduced to an oversimplified representation of Australians 'getting drunk, and eating vegemite and all that kitsch nonsense'.[9]

ACTIVITY 3.14

Research task

1. Why did the makers of *Paperbark* want to make a game that reflected a true Australian experience?
2. Find some still shots and video grabs of the game. What does it remind you of?
3. Conduct some research on games developed by Australian studios. What are some of the ways in which Australian perspectives have been included?



3.4 First Nations voices

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- the place and impact that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander voices and perspectives have on Australia's shared national identity and story.

Please note: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students should be wary that this chapter section includes information which they may find distressing. Non-Indigenous students should reflect on their position in Australian society as they work through this content.

It matters who makes it

Over the decades in Australian media, First Nations peoples and voices have been unrepresented. As you have already learnt, First Nations people have often been portrayed as 'the other' in traditional media narratives. In news media, it has all too often been non-Indigenous voices writing and discussing First Nations issues on their behalf.

As far back as 1991, the National Inquiry into Racist Violence found that there was:

> considerable evidence to indicate that racism in media reporting can damage community relations and create a social climate which is tolerant of racist violence.

FIGURE 3.42 Quoted in Tristan Kennedy, 'Media inclusion of Inclusion of Indigenous Peoples Is Increasing but There Is Still Room for Improvement', *The Conversation*, 6 December 2021

Thirty years later, Muruwari journalist Allan Clarke wrote:

> rarely is our culture presented in context; rarely is our history presented in context.

FIGURE 1.43 Quoted in Tristan Kennedy, 'Media Inclusion of Indigenous Peoples Is Increasing but There Is Still Room for Improvement', *The Conversation*, 6 December 2021



FIGURE 3.44 Barranbinya news presenter Tony Armstrong at the 2022 Logies after winning the Graham Kennedy Award for Most Popular New Talent

Clarke's point was clear. First Nations cultures are vast and complex; and too often, without an First Nations voice behind media news and narratives, we are left with an oversimplified version of culture that, at best, gives a generic representation to audiences and, at worst, marginalises First Nations people themselves. As late as 2020, *The Age* had employed only one First Nations reporter in its 166-year history.[10]

Newsrooms are but one example. However, as we have seen earlier in the chapter, films like *Crocodile Dundee*, *Walkabout* and *Jedda* represented First Nations culture in a surface-level way that depicted an ancient culture rather than one that is contemporary and continuous. In popular Australian television soaps like *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*, First Nations characters were almost entirely absent.

Fortunately, over the last few years, this has begun to change and First Nations people are beginning to be given space and avenues to tell their stories and provide an authentic voice to the issues, past and present,

that matter to them, and are essential for all Australians to hear and understand. News presenters like Tony Armstrong and Brooke Boney now have prominent roles on the ever-present morning news programs, and a slew of films made by First Nations creators in the past two decades have changed that national conversation.



FIGURE 3.45 Gamilaroi news presenter Brooke Boney

Actor Deborah Mailman began appearing in film and television narratives in the 1990s and still maintains a long and distinguished career. Following the lead of David Dalaithngu Gulpilil, actors such as Nakkiah Lui, Miranda Tapsell, Wayne Blair and Hunter Page-Lochard have all created an established presence on Australian screens.

The 2021 national census, a record of all who live within Australia, revealed that what an 'Australian' actually is may be at odds with how we have represented ourselves over the years in the media. Australia's population has increased dramatically in the past 50 years and with that comes greater diversity among the population. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population has increased by more than 25% since 2016. Almost half of Australians have a parent born overseas, and more than one in four were born internationally.[11] This is at odds with the traditional media representations of a white, male larrikin character battling the outback landscape.

Clearly, Australia is more diverse than ever before. There has been a genuine growth in the recognition of the place of First Nations people, views and issues on our screens that have an increasingly authentic voice and change the perspective on what the Australian identity is.

Changing the conversation

Over the last two decades, a number of First Nations media narratives have changed the national conversation about First Nations issues. At the heart of these stories, First Nations creators use codes and conventions to challenge the notion of what is an Australian story.

CASE STUDY 3.10

First Nations voices: Warwick Thornton: *Samson and Delilah* (2009)

Warwick Thornton is a Kaytetye film director from central Australia. His 2009 film *Samson and Delilah* details the tragic struggles of teens Samson and Delilah who live in a remote community outside Alice Springs. The opening sequence is a jarring introduction to the life of both teens. The first shot after the title sequences reveals Samson waking up and immediately sniffing petrol, suggesting that substance abuse is part of his normal morning routine; all of this is contrasted by the cheerful non-diegetic music of Charley Pride's country music song 'Sunshiny Day'. Delilah, conversely, wakes up on the porch of her run-down home a short distance away and despite her more peaceful existence, still lives in the same desolate and neglected community. For almost the entire first act of the film, there is little to no dialogue as the audience are invited to take stock of the very modern and real issues facing youth in remote communities.



FIGURE 3.46 Warwick Thornton



Analysis

Head to the National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA) website to view the opening sequence.

1 Describe the way Thornton has used mise en scene and camera to establish Samson's bedroom.
2 Describe the way Thornton has used sound to engage the audience in the opening shot.
3 Why do you think Thornton chose to combine Samson's substance abuse with the Charley Pride song? What message was he trying to communicate to the audience?

CASE STUDY 3.11

First Nations voices: Warwick Thornton: *Sweet Country* (2017)

Thornton's follow-up to *Samson and Delilah* was the historical Western *Sweet Country*, which details the violent conflict, exploitation and abuse experienced by First Nations groups at the hands of white police and settlers in the early days of Australia's European settlement. In keeping with the style he set in *Samson and Delilah*, the opening shots establish an unnerving narrative to follow.

The opening shot reveals a steel pot boiling over a campfire. In the background, an argument between First Nations and white men appears to develop into a violent scuffle. While not breaking from the shot to reveal the detail of the argument, a black substance is added to the boiling pot that bubbles to the surface, and as the audio of the argument appears to descend into a violent fight, white salt is added to the pot, increasing the intensity of the boiling pot as the deafening sound of crickets increases in volume. It is clear from the first shot of the film that Thornton, and *Sweet Country*, is primarily concerned with the untold stories of violence from Australia's past.

Analysis

Carefully examine Figure 3.47, an image from the film *Sweet Country*.



FIGURE 3.47 A still from the film *Sweet Country*

In this scene, Aboriginal man Sam Kelly and his wife Lizzie sit facing the police station after having turned themselves in to police after Kelly shot and killed a white man in self-defence.

1 Deconstruct the still and note down everything you can see.
2 Why do you think Thornton chose to frame the shot in this way? What was he trying to communicate?
3 Explain the use of mise en scene and positioning of Kelly and Lizzie within it. How does Thornton borrow from past Australian stories to communicate a new one?
4 Research and view the opening sequence mentioned above. What does the scene of the boiling pot suggest about the perspective Thornton was trying to communicate?

CASE STUDY 3.12

First Nations voices: Ivan Sen: *Goldstone* (2016)

Written as the sequel to the 2013 hit film *Mystery Road*, Ivan Sen, whose mother is from Gamilaroi Country, opens *Goldstone* with a series of sepia-toned photographs of white settlers in the early years of the Australian colony. These photos contrast with other imagery of Chinese miners and First Nations families to establish the notion that Australia has a long and turbulent migrant past. Immediately after

the title sequence, he opens *Goldstone* with a wide shot of a lonely highway snaking through a dry and barren landscape. Sen's films rely heavily on the long tradition of the landscape as a central character in Australian stories, but he uses the perspective of his long-standing hero Jay Swan (Aaron Pedersen) to view the outback through a different lens.

As an Aboriginal detective, Swan is on the trail of a Chinese girl who has gone missing in a remote outback town that shares its land with a huge mining project. Swan must battle the competing challenges of racism, corrupt local officials and the town's lone police officer who does not trust outsiders.

A master of Australia's popular genre of 'Outback Noir', Sen uses Swan as a brooding detective with a cause and a desire for redemption. As director, writer and often the editor, Sen maintained great control over the voice and direction of *Goldstone*. While tackling the uneasy relationship between the connection Traditional Landowners have to Country and the profit-driven motives of mining corporations, Sen uses *Goldstone* to tackle the big picture of environmental destruction of traditional lands.

Analysis

Examine the following stills from the film *Goldstone*.



FIGURE 3.48 A still from the film *Goldstone*



FIGURE 3.49 Jimmy (David Dalaithngu Gulpilil) in *Goldstone*



FIGURE 3.50 Detective Jay Swan (Aaron Pedersen) in *Goldstone*



FIGURE 3.51 Josh Waters (Alex Russell) and Jay Swan (Aaron Pedersen) in *Goldstone*

1. Carefully examine each image and note down what you can see.
2. Explain the framing of each image. What has Sen decided to make the dominant feature of each shot?
3. What do you think Sen was attempting to communicate with each shot?
4. 'Outback Noir' borrows heavily from the tradition of Western films that follow an anti-hero in search of redemption. At the conclusion of the narrative, Swan not only achieves his goal as a detective but realises that, as a descendant from the Stolen Generations, he has been reunited with his long-lost traditional land and culture. Why do you think Sen would include this second element within the story arc of Jay Swan? It may help to think about Sen's desire to explore the bigger picture of environmental destruction of traditional lands in *Goldstone*.



CASE STUDY 3.13

First Nations voices: Dylan River: *Robbie Hood* (2019)

Dylan River is the son of director Warwick Thornton and is himself from Kaytetye country. A talented filmmaker and cinematographer in his own right, River directed the short comedic series *Robbie Hood* (2019), which follows the adventures of Robbie (Pedrea Jackson) and his friends in Alice Springs. Ambitious, cheeky and partial to a five-finger discount, Robbie loves his family and would do anything to keep his friends happy and fed, while earning the affections of the glamorous Mim. Robbie Hood does just as his namesake does. He takes from the rich and gives to the poor, while seeking out fun and adventure in their run-down Alice Springs town.

River uses Robbie as the narrator and driving force of the short, 10-minute episodes to demonstrate the line between rich and poor in remote Australia. In episode two, Robbie and his friends are denied entry to the local pool on a steaming-hot day by a sleazy and discriminatory pool guard named 'Pervin' Mervin'. Not to be discouraged, Robbie breaks into the pool overnight and steals the chlorine, taking it to a polluted local waterhole so he and his friends can swim freely. Despite burning everyone's eyes with the pool chemical, it feels like a triumph.



FIGURE 3.52 The cast and crew of *Robbie Hood*

Analysis

Seek out episodes of *Robbie Hood* online. It streams for free on SBS. Each episode of *Robbie Hood* begins with Robbie recounting the life lessons his deceased mother has left behind to guide him.

1. Why do you think River chooses to begin each episode in this way?
2. Why do you think River also chose to use Robbie as both narrator and lead protagonist? How does this position the audience to feel about him?
3. When compared to the darker narratives of *Samson and Delilah* and *Sweet Country* (directed by his father Warwick Thornton), how do the comedic adventures of *Robbie Hood* still deal with the serious challenges faced by First Nations youth in central Australia?
4. In episode 4 'The Kids are Gone', Robbie and his friends are temporarily sent to foster care with a well-meaning, but slightly misguided white woman. What do you think River was trying to express about racism towards First Nations people?

CASE STUDY 3.14

First Nations voices: Ryan Griffen: *Cleverman* (2016–17)

Cleverman provides us with an excellent opportunity to examine the changing nature of Australian stories and the significance of an First Nations voice in media narratives. This case study will focus on Season 1, from 2016.

Cleverman combines a number of features typical of Australian narratives, like rogue larrikins and feared outsiders; however, it imagines a future where the same challenges for First Nations peoples still exist.

First Nations director Ryan Griffen wanted to create a superhero narrative that melded superhero narratives with dystopian futures. However, he wanted to ground this in an honest interpretation of Aboriginal Dreaming stories and the experience of modern First Nations people.

The series focuses on an inner-city hipster, Koen West, whose Aboriginal identity initially appears incidental to the plot. He lives in a future version of a divided Sydney where the general population is separated from a species of humans called the 'Hairypeople'. Excluded by government propaganda and physical barriers in 'the Zone', the Hairypeople are feared for their physical differences and supernatural connection to the land. They are 'the other' in this future society, yet reminiscent of the forced removal of First Nations people from traditional lands in Australia's past.



FIGURE 3.53 Koen (Hunter Page-Lochard) in season 1 of *Cleverman*

A series of gruesome murders captivates the city and the 'Hairies' are blamed, justifying a forced closure of the Zone. As the tension increases, a distant relative emerges to hand Koen the mantle of Cleverman – a power that thrusts a reluctant hero into the limelight to save the Hairypeople.

Analysing representations in *Cleverman*

Deconstruct the representation of the Cleverman in Figure 3.53.

1. Discuss how technical codes like lighting and camera have been used to construct meaning within the image.
2. What symbolic codes have been used in the representation? Interpret how this helps add meaning to Koen's character.
3. Is the representation realistic? Consider your response and explain what contributes to the audience's understanding of the character.

Cleverman is a classic superhero narrative of an underdog using a unique power against authority. Koen is a complex character who lives a normal inner-city life. He works at a bar and has a diverse group of friends that identify him as anything but extraordinary. He is almost alienated from audiences in the first episode 'First Contact', when it is revealed he works as an informer for the government by identifying escapee Hairies.

Here is where the narrative strikes an excellent balance between past and present Australian stories. Koen has become disconnected from his identity and culture – the Hairypeople are outcast by mainstream society because they are connected and refuse to fit in. Koen is the classic representation of an anti-hero caught between two worlds.



To create the representation of the Hairies, *Cleverman* has turned the table on the feared other and made this a symbol of strength against authority.

Analysing representations in the fight scene: *Cleverman*, season 1, episode 1

Examine the construction of Figure 3.54.

1. Describe how the technical codes of camera, mise en scene and acting have been used to construct this image.
2. Explain the meaning created within the image. What kind of character does it represent?
3. Interpret why you think this shot was constructed in this way. What is Griffen attempting to communicate to the audience?
4. Explain how symbolic codes work within this image to make audiences think about the role of 'the other' in Australian media products.

In 2022, First Nations Australians made up 3.3% of the total Australian population; however, they make up 32%[12] of those in Australia's prisons. The reasons for this are diverse and complex; however, the image of First Nations Australians in conflict with authorities and the prison system has long lingered in the news media.

Here, Griffen attempts to bring meaning to First Nations incarceration and the way it has been represented in Australian news media in the past.

Analysing meaning in images

Examine Figure 3.55 and respond to the following questions:

1. Describe how mise en scene has been used to create meaning.
2. Describe how acting has contributed to the audience's understanding of this character.
3. Symbolism is a central element of the representation of 'the other' in *Cleverman*; explain how these codes help position the audience to consider their own understanding of First Nations representations in past Australian stories and the news media.



FIGURE 3.54 The use of camera and symbolism within scenes involving the Hairies and police draw on ideas of power and weakness. Pictured is Maliyan (Adam Briggs) in season 1, episode 1.



FIGURE 3.55 Australians in conflict with authorities and the prison system has long lingered in the news media. Pictured is Djukara (Tysan Towney) in season 1, episode 1.



FIGURE 3.56 Pictured is Djukara (Tysan Towney) being shaved by the brutal prison guards in season 1, episode 2.

The representation of 'civilised society' has been used in countless stories to create strong and identifiable contrasts with 'the other'. In the same way, the heroic and noble actions of a superhero help highlight

the real evil of the villain, while the use of civilisation and 'normal' society helps create a visible barrier for audiences between those included and those excluded from society and to whom racism is targeted or not.

Analysing meaning in images

Examine Figure 3.56 and respond to the following questions:

1. Describe how mise en scene has been used to create meaning.
2. Describe how acting has contributed to the audience's understanding of this character.
3. Symbolism is a central element of the representation of 'the other' in *Cleverman*; explain how these codes help position the audience to consider how their own position in Australian society influences their own understanding of the high level of racism evident in First Nations representations in past Australian stories.

In combining Dreaming stories with superhero narratives, the influence of Dreaming stories holds equal weight with modern and engaging narratives of a superhero fighting against the odds. Consider the representations of David Dalaithngu Gulpilil in *Crocodile Dundee*. Dundee claimed Gulpilil's character had 'telepathic' powers that were instantly mocked when he stumbled into a tree – in *Cleverman*, Griffen empowers Dreaming stories with the modern audience expectations of the superhero narrative.

Analysis: Assessment of *Cleverman*

Contemporary Australian stories have shifted long-held ideas of who is the hero and who should be feared within fictional and non-fictional narratives. *Cleverman* works to combine the traditional Australian story ideas of fighting against authority with formerly misrepresented ideas of First Nations culture.

As a class, you should examine the first episode of *Cleverman*, 'First Contact', and answer the following questions:

1. Discuss the use of media codes in the construction of one of the following *Cleverman* characters. For each character, you should explain how the codes help position the audience to understand the role each character plays in the story:
   - **a** Koen
   - **b** Djukara
   - **c** Jarrod Slade
   - **d** Uncle Jimmy
   - **e** McIntyre.
2. Consider the use of symbolic codes in the construction of the various settings of *Cleverman*, the city and the Zone. Explain:
   - **a** What symbols have been used to separate the two groups in the media product?
   - **b** How realistic do you feel the settings are? What influence does this have on your understanding of and engagement in the narrative? You can draw on your own understanding and experience to respond.
   - **c** How does the setting reference other Australian stories (fictional and non-fictional) that include First Nations Australians?
3. Explain the common elements of Australian stories that would be familiar and engaging within *Cleverman*.
4. Identify and explain how two elements of Australian stories (identified above) work with contemporary engagement techniques common to superhero and action narratives to engage the audience.
5. Explain, using codes and conventions, how Griffen has positioned the audience to change the traditional perception of First Nations peoples as 'the other'. You should use more than one character in your response.



CASE STUDY 3.15

First Nations voices: Tracey Moffatt: *Scarred for Life* (1994)

Tracey Moffatt is an Indigenous photographer, artist and filmmaker who is one of Australia's most recognised artists. Known around the world for her narrative photography, she has showcased her childhood fascination of the media through her work in over 50 solo exhibitions. Her photographs are precisely staged and make vibrant use of colour and symbolism.

Her 1987 short film *Nice Coloured Girls* chronicled a night out on the town for three Indigenous girls, who encounter an older, drunk white man. Moffatt was attempting to draw attention to the often unspoken role of sexuality in the colonisation of Australia. In a challenge to this often-taboo subject in Australia's history, the three girls take advantage of the old white man and simply play the role of 'nice coloured girls'.

Her 1989 film *Night Cries: A rural tragedy* focused on the complicated relationship between an adult Indigenous woman and her dying white foster mother, drawing attention to the generational trauma created by Australia's Stolen Generations.

Moffatt's work is feminist in nature and speaks to broader issues of identity in the Australian and global experience, often told through the lens of First Nations perspectives.

Moffatt's photography is the most recognised of her work. Her famous 1994 series, *Scarred For Life*, continued her tradition of focusing on feminism, class, race and social issues. Each image is a carefully staged photograph with a small caption, detailing the small moments we experience as children that have an enormous impact on the rest of our lives. Using Indigenous and non-Indigenous subjects, Moffatt's series was based on the visual style of *Life* magazine photographs, but employed a more negative and dispiriting tone.

Analysis

Examine the photograph to the left titled *Job Hunt, 1976*.

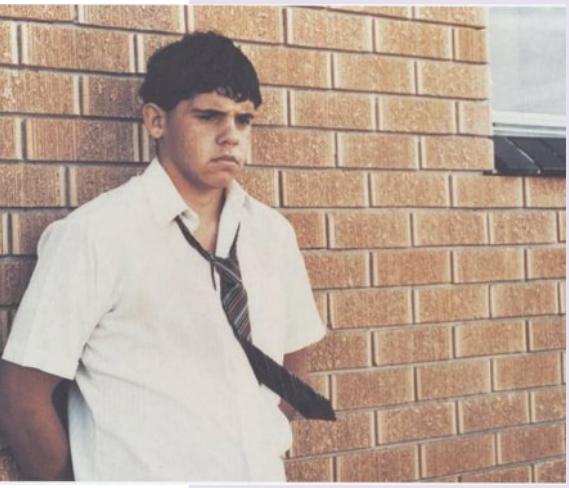


FIGURE 3.57 Tracey Moffat, *Job Hunt, 1976*, from the series *Scarred For Life*. © Tracey Moffatt, courtesy Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery

A dispirited Indigenous boy is slumped against a wall, his shirt and tie look dishevelled as the caption reads: 'After three weeks he couldn't find a job. His mother said to him, *'maybe your'e [sic] not good enough'*.

1. Carefully examine all elements of the image. Note down what you see.
2. What is the relationship between the text and the image?
3. How has Moffatt positioned the audience to identify with the subject of the image?
4. How does this image suggest that there is not just an individual, but a broader sense of trauma at play in the subject's life?
5. Research and explore the other images in the *Scarred For Life* series. How does the range of subjects suggest that intergenerational trauma as a result of invasion and continued racist ideologies and actions has varied impacts on Indigenous youth?
6. How is the inclusion of Indigenous subjects within Moffatt's series significant? Explain your response with evidence from what you have learnt across this chapter.

CASE STUDY 3.16

First Nations voices: Nakkiah Lui: *Preppers* (2021)

Already a talented actor, Nakkiah Lui, a Gamilaroi/Torres Strait Islander woman, is credited as a co-writer, co-producer and co-star of the First Nations comedy *Preppers*, which aired in 2021.



FIGURE 3.58 Nakkiah Lui at the 2021 AACTA awards

Boasting an all-star cast of First Nations talent, *Preppers* follows the personal breakdown of Charlie (played by Lui), a young, successful Indigenous woman who finds herself with a small community of First Nations 'doomsday preppers'. Written in the midst of lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic, Lui (and co-creator Gabriel Dowrick) conceived the idea when she considered that First Nations people had already survived their own catastrophic apocalypse of European colonisation. Lui stated:

> That was like the end of the world for so many Aboriginal people. It was a complete change of life and complete decimation of so many communities and families, so I think for me, Aboriginal people are kind of like, the original doomsday preppers or apocalypse survivors.

FIGURE 3.59 Nakkiah Lui interviewed in Caris Bizzaca, 'Podcast: Nakkiah Lui: Creating TV Comedy *Preppers*', *Screen Australia* website, 5 November 2021

While *Preppers* tackles the challenging topics of colonial violence, frontier wars and intergenerational trauma, it does so in a rich Australian tradition of making fun of systems of authority.

Lui used *Preppers* for the audience to consider the complex relationship between the First Nations community and white 'allies'. In one episode, the group are locked in a bunker with their white friend Kirby, and debate whether she should be sacrificed to save oxygen as it would be 'the ultimate display of white allyship'. While Kirby suggests she should survive to tell their story, this is quickly dismissed by Jayden who states, 'We don't need another white person to tell a Black story'.

Analysis

1. What is the main storyline of *Preppers* and who does Nakkiah Lui portray in the series?
2. When did *Preppers* air, and what inspired Nakkiah Lui and co-creator Gabriel Dowrick to come up with the idea for the show?
3. According to Nakkiah Lui, why does she consider Aboriginal people to be 'the original doomsday preppers or apocalypse survivors'?
4. In one episode, the characters in the show debate whether their white friend Kirby should be sacrificed to save oxygen. How does Kirby feel about surviving, and how does Jayden respond to the idea of another white person telling a Black story?

CASE STUDY 3.17

First Nations voices: Cienan Muir: *Broken Roads* (2023)

Set for release in 2023, *Broken Roads* is a role-playing game developed by Yorta Yorta and Ngarrindjeri game writer Cienan Muir. Set in Western Australia at the end of the world, players must navigate the environment and survive, while making ethical and moral choices. Muir is the founder of Indignerd,



an Indigenous pop culture events company that was hired by the developers to provide an accurate First Nations perspective on the characters and landscape that feature in the game. Muir's input was employed to ensure the game's narratives and characters avoided simplistic and racist stereotypes and demonstrated genuine First Nations stories and perspectives. The game is narrated by the late legendary actor Uncle Jack Charles, and the game developers, Drop Bear Bytes, wanted to ensure players got an authentic and all-inclusive experience of the Australian landscape and identity that included First Nations cultures on an equal footing. As Muir states regarding the portrayal of First Nations peoples in media:

> A lot of the reputation on our mob were very much based on stereotypes, based on myths of our people, and frankly just weren't relevant to our culture anymore.

FIGURE 3.60 Game designer Cienan Muir quoted in Ryan Liddle, 'Video Game to Have First Nations Input', *SBS/NITV news*, 18 June 2021

Analysis

1. Research more of Muir's comments online. Why do you think the decision of Drop Bear Bytes to include Muir's input will improve the game experience?
2. Research the demographics of modern gamers. What do you notice about the gamer community?
3. Why do you think it is important to have accurate representations of First Nations cultures in video games?



FIGURE 3.61 The late celebrated Aboriginal actor Uncle Jack Charles

3.5 Making Australian stories

LEARNING INTENTION

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- the impact of institutional, economic, social and political constraints on the production and distribution of fictional and non-fictional narratives.

As you have seen in this chapter, the creation of the Australian identity and its stories has a long and evolving history that includes its colonial and Indigenous past. While technology and the global economy have begun to have significant effects on the impact and location of Australian content and the people that make it, the role of regulation, political influences and media ownership can all influence the production and creation of stories essential to the Australian public, especially those that relate to First Nations Australians.

The challenges and rewards of creating media in Australia can be examined through four specific forms: film, television, news and social media. The arrival of social media and broadband internet in the mid 2000s changed the media production landscape globally, and Australia is no exception. Making Australian stories has traditionally gone through periods of boom and bust where local audience appetite for Australian content often has a co-dependent relationship with government support, finance and the influence of foreign content.

As you have seen in this chapter already, government support for filmmaking in the 1970s had a monumental impact on the number of Australian stories being made and, in turn, an immeasurable impact on the

Australian identity itself. We understand more about ourselves when we see ourselves on screen and, in turn, ask questions about what is right and wrong about our lives.

Film

Audiences for Australian films have always been fickle. When competing for screens at major cinemas, Australian films tend not to fare as well if they are up against the giant Marvel and DC franchise films that draw millions around the globe to cinemas. Despite the undeniable quality of Australian films and filmmakers, their production budgets pale in comparison to the money put behind the production and promotion of Hollywood blockbusters and often find it difficult to capture the attention of the broader cinema-going public. Australia's small population means there is a limited audience for uniquely Australian productions.

To put this in perspective, in 2022 the Australian production of *The Drover's Wife: The Legend of Molly Johnson* (dir. Leah Purcell) earned $1.7 million at the Australian box office, whereas *Top Gun: Maverick* (2022, dir. Joseph Kosinski) earned $77 million. After two years of cinemas being all but closed, owners of small and large cinemas have welcomed audiences back, but with a focus on making up for two years of near-catastrophic losses and, as a result, they gravitated to showing foreign productions that are supported with huge publicity and will guarantee audiences. Smaller-budget Australian films rarely get enough time in cinemas to gather a big enough audience and often vanish before they are given a chance to build enough attention.[13]

What seems obvious is that Australian audiences have long proven that there is an appetite for Australian stories but getting them in front of audiences can be a huge challenge.

The COVID-19 pandemic meant that film production suffered globally. However, in Australia, this became a positive. Owing to the nation's relatively safe handling of the pandemic over 2020–21, a number of large foreign films were made in Australia as it was not only safer to do so than in America, but cheaper for Hollywood studios when hiring local crews and talent. *Thor: Love and Thunder* (2022, dir. Taika Waititi) was filmed in Sydney's Fox Studios and led to a number of jobs for Australian film professionals. While this can only be seen as a positive for the industry, it creates challenges for the future of Australian stories as smaller local productions can't attract the talent, crews and professionals that are being hired by bigger Hollywood productions.



FIGURE 3.62 Advertising for *The Drover's Wife: The Legend of Molly Johnson* outside a Sydney independent cinema



FIGURE 3.63 A street commercial poster for *Top Gun: Maverick* in Madrid, Spain

ACTIVITY 3.15

Reflection

Compare Figures 3.62 and 3.63. What does each image tell you about the power of Australian and foreign films to advertise and reach an audience?



CASE STUDY 3.18

Gold (2022, dir. Anthony Hayes)

The 2022 film *Gold*, by Australian director Anthony Hayes, is a fascinating case study for us to examine and understand the contemporary Australian film industry. A small production with limited actors, *Gold* follows the struggles of two men who discover a huge, life-changing gold nugget in a deserted wasteland. While set in the Australian outback and employing the traditional narrative vehicle of a lone protagonist battling the landscape to succeed, *Gold* is not an Australian story. The location is deliberately ambiguous and set in a time and place in the future that is difficult to determine. What set *Gold* apart from any other local productions like it in the past is the extraordinary star power it employed. The lead role was played by Zac Efron.

The film was released to only 10 screens in Australia; however, this was never the intention of the filmmakers. Supported by the Australian streaming service Stan, the film was widely promoted and launched on the service shortly after its cinema run, where it experienced significantly more success. The film was then sold into the international market and multiple streaming services around the world.

Gold was designed to not only have the star power of Efron, but to appeal to a global rather than just a local audience. Director, writer and co-star Anthony Hayes stated:

> It was engineered that way. The first thing I wanted to do was make an international film … There are so many people after content, but at the same time you need to be a little less parochial in some aspects. Hence the American accents and multilingual signs.

FIGURE 3.64 Anthony Hayes on *Gold*, quoted in Craig Mathieson, 'Sandstorms, a broken bone: the extreme lengths Zac Efron went to for new film', *The Age/Sydney Morning Herald* website, 24 January 2022



FIGURE 3.65 Efron and co-writer, director and co-star Anthony Hayes on the set of *Gold*

Analysis

1. Explore the trailer and key scenes from *Gold* online. What elements of an Australian story do they include?
2. Why do you think Hayes chose to make the location, time and actors ambiguous?
3. What does he mean when he says that they needed to be 'less parochial' when making *Gold*?
4. What are the challenges in getting Australian audiences to see Australian films in the cinema?
5. Why do you think the makers of *Gold* chose to partner with a streaming service to release the film to the wider public?
6. What does the path of the makers of *Gold*, and broader trends in the Australian film industry, tell you about the future of filmmaking in Australia?

DIGITAL LINK

See the Interactive Textbook for an interview with Polly Smyth, co-writer of *Gold*.

Television

Between 2020–22, millions across the globe were stuck at home due to lockdowns created by the COVID-19 pandemic. This led to an explosion of streaming TV consumption and, in turn, production.

Audiences in Australia were no different, especially in Victoria, which went through some of the longest periods of lockdowns in the world. Binge viewing of hours of streamed content meant there was an almost unsatisfiable demand for new and engaging content. In 2021 alone, spending on Australian TV production increased 50% above the previous five-year average.[14] A range of Australian television stories captured national attention, none more so than the children's animated series *Bluey*.

Bluey is a co-production between the Australian studio Ludo and the BBC in the UK. The series is so popular that the most recent series has been streamed at least three million times per episode, making it an outstanding leader in Australian content production. Any viewing of *Bluey* will confirm that it is an undeniably mainstream Australian story and a story of success for Australian stories at home and its growing global audience.



FIGURE 3.66 *Bluey* is a global phenomenon

One of the remaining challenges is for free-to-air television. The broadcast media outlets like Channels 7, 9 and 10 are still bound by the Australian content laws that mean they must produce:

- 55% Australian content between 6 am and midnight on primary channels
- 1460 hours of Australian content between 6 am and midnight on non-primary channels.

FIGURE 3.67 From Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) website, 'Australian Content on Commercial TV'

These same laws do not apply to streaming services like Netflix nor to the online streaming services provided by these free-to-air networks.

In 2020, the Australian government removed the law that stated there needed to be a specific amount of children's television produced and aired within that 55%. This means that free-to-air broadcasters are now able to decide how much children's television they produce. This is a negative outcome for the studios that produce these programs as the previous funding and guarantees meant that their industry was secure. Now, fewer and fewer Australian children's programs are being produced.[15]

It is extremely expensive to produce home-grown content in Australia when compared with the significantly smaller cost of buying a single episode of *The Big Bang Theory* (2007–19) that draws in audiences to free-to-air television.

With 58% of Australian viewers using a streaming service in 2021, this law makes it challenging for the traditional broadcast channels and the studios that create content for them to compete in an evolving marketplace for viewers.

These broadcasters are bound by the ACMA codes of self-regulatory practice that regulate accuracy, commercial interests, offensive or violent content, advertising restrictions, fair portrayal, emergency broadcasting and other safeguards.[16] Again, these codes do not apply to the international streaming services.



ACTIVITY 3.16

Research task

1 What have been the positive elements of the COVID-19 pandemic on Australian TV production?
2 How has the rising popularity of streaming services in Australia affected free-to-air broadcasters?
3 Research the success of the animated children's program *Bluey*. How could you explain why it has been so successful in Australia and overseas?
4 What have the changes to Australian content laws meant for the future of children's programming in Australia?
5 Discuss your answer to the previous question with a partner. What do you think would be the challenges created for Australian children's audiences if there is less and less Australian television available in the future?
6 How does *Bluey* represent family life, and how does this compare to other family-oriented shows in Australian television?
7 In your opinion, what are the key factors that contribute to *Bluey*'s successful portrayal of family dynamics?
8 *Bluey* has gained international popularity. What aspects of the show do you believe have contributed to this success and why do you think these elements resonate with audiences globally?
9 How does *Bluey* manage to cater to both children and adult audiences in its narrative and humour?
10 How do the animation style and visual aesthetics of *Bluey* contribute to its representation of family and its overall success?

News media: Polarisation

The role of news media is vital to a functioning democracy. Journalists, newspapers, radio and television news broadcasters exist to interpret the key issues facing Australia and report the facts as they see them. This news is, in theory, meant to be presented with **impartiality**. With this information, audiences are able to make informed and intelligent decisions about how they vote, where they spend their money and the many moral and ethical decisions they make each day. Australians are free to make these decisions based on their personal political and moral views; however, the news media's role is to ensure those decisions are informed ones.

impartiality the equal treatment of all sides of a debate or issue

ACTIVITY 3.17

Reflection

Consider when one of your friends tells you something that you don't believe to be true. What would you do to find out if they are telling the truth or not?

The introduction of the internet and social media has significantly impacted the financial viability of news media, as users no longer wait for daily news updates in the morning paper or nightly news bulletin, and people can seek out what they want to read and when.

While this may suggest positive news for democracy, many media analysts have argued that the opposite has happened. Social media sites like Facebook, YouTube and Instagram use **personalised algorithms** based on your clicks, views and likes to tailor the content you see.

personalised algorithms sets of code that observe your digital habits and predict your next choices

What this means is that we tend to see content and, in particular, news, that only affirms what we already believe and do not always see news which will challenge our views and provide us with a more balanced and impartial understanding of the issues of the day.

In an effort to chase the readers and consumers of news, this has led news producers to become more extreme in their viewpoints and coverage of news. This has led to a phenomenon in Australia and in democracies around the world called **polarisation**.

polarisation the shift of political attitudes away from the centre, towards ideological extremes of the right and left created, in part, by media outlets

In short, it has created societies where people are increasingly unable to agree or even engage in informed debate with others who access news from sources different to their own.

The extreme outcomes of this were evident in the USA on 6 January 2021, when thousands stormed the US Capitol Building in Washington, DC in an attempt to overturn the federal election result. Most of those present at the riots were under the belief, informed mostly by the news media and internet sources they accessed, that the 2020 US Presidential election had been rigged. To date, no evidence of this alleged crime has been presented.



FIGURE 3.68 Thousands of rioters descend on the US Capitol Building in an attempt to overturn the 2020 US Presidential election result

ACTIVITY 3.18

Reflection

1. Why is impartiality important in news production?
2. What are the circumstances that create polarisation?
3. Why do you think polarisation is a challenge for a functioning democracy like Australia? Provide examples from other countries in your response.
4. In Australia, news that informs the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians has always been polarised. Why do you think this is?



News media: Ownership

A 2018 Digital News Report found that Australian news audiences are among some of the most polarised in the world. Mixed in with every Australian's social media news feed (of which 60% of Australians now use to access news media articles) are the countless independent news outlets that vary from measured to the extreme to outright **misinformation** and **disinformation**. What we now face is a polarised audience that is not only unable to agree with the other side, but also is predominantly confused about what is news at all!

misinformation factually incorrect news

disinformation news that is deliberately incorrect in order to create confusion, often referred to as 'fake news'

FOCUS QUESTION

Before media ownership laws were relaxed, do you think all voices were represented equally in the Australian media?

For decades, Australia was governed by media ownership laws that meant no one voice could dominate the eyes and ears of the reading public. However, these laws have been relaxed in recent years and, as a result, Australia has some of the most concentrated media ownership in the Western world. In short, a small handful of news media organisations dominate what we see and read in newspapers, television and radio. Almost all media voices represent a particular view of Australia and the world. So, for those who still use traditional news sources in Australia, they are reading less and less balance and impartiality in their news.

More troublingly, the World Press Freedom Index for 2022, commissioned by the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) organisation found that Australia had slipped down the global ranking of world press freedom. In short, the quality of Australia's news media has declined significantly:

> Ultra-concentration of media ownership, combined with growing official pressure, endanger public-interest journalism.

FIGURE 3.69 World Press Freedom Index for 2022 on Australia's ranking, quoted in Max Walden, 'Australia lags behind New Zealand, Taiwan and Timor-Leste on World Press Freedom Index', *ABC News*, 4 May 2022



FIGURE 3.70 Victorian police clash with anti-lockdown protestors in Melbourne in 2021

The report also found that recent raids by the Australian Federal Police against journalists, as well as a string of defamation cases launched by politicians against journalists who were critical of them, have placed the quality of Australian journalism in peril. The misinformation and disinformation shared widely during the COVID-19 pandemic meant that almost one-quarter of Australian journalists were physically assaulted while reporting in public.[28]

ACTIVITY 3.19

World Press Freedom and Australia

Research the World Press Freedom Index for the most recent report and answer the following questions:

1. What does it say about Australia's global standing?
2. Which developed democracies is it currently behind?
3. What does this tell you about the improvement or decline of Australian news media?

ACTIVITY 3.20

Research task: Concentration of News Corp ownership

In 2020, former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd called for an **Australian Royal Commission** into the concentration of News Corp ownership in Australia, which controls two-thirds of the newspapers in Australia. Known for its support of conservative governments and politics, Rudd pointed to the coordinated efforts of News Corp news services to attack him while he was prime minister.

Australian Royal Commission a government-funded public inquiry. In Australia, royal commissions are the highest form of inquiry on matters of public importance.

1. Explore the petition created by former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd against News Corp. What is his primary justification for this?
2. What are the claims he has made against the news outlets?
3. Why do you think Rudd sees this as a danger to Australia's democracy?
4. Counter claims have been made against Australian news sources like the ABC and *The Guardian* about their own impartiality. How do you compare these claims to those levelled against News Corp?
5. What is your view? Discuss as a class if you think this Royal Commission should proceed. Give examples and informed responses in your debate.

3.6 Evolving Australian audiences

LEARNING INTENTION

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- how audience engagement and reception of narratives is affected by their viewpoint (or position), expectation, consumption and prior reading of a range of fictional and non-fictional narratives in a range of contexts.

How an Australian will engage with an Australian story today depends on a number of factors. In the years of broadcast media, audiences had little agency when choosing which texts to engage with. For decades, very few Australian films were made, news was broadcast and printed through a small number of organisations that owned the access to create it, and television was limited to five channels that programmed their broadcasts to as broad an audience as possible. Our understanding of what made an Australian story, as discussed earlier in this chapter, was the result of what a few creators believed reflected what Australia was at the time.

However, the introduction of digital technology has meant that Australian audiences can now access myriad styles of content from any corner of the globe that suits their interests, at the time and place and on the device of their choice. Depending on the way an individual Australian uses media today, they may not encounter Australian stories at all. So, what does this mean for the Australian story?

Australian audiences are changing

The 2021 Australian census revealed that Australia has become a vastly different place from what it has been in the past. Half of Australia's population now has a parent born overseas and one in four were born internationally themselves. The age group known as millennials (25–39) is fast becoming the largest in the country, overtaking baby boomers (55–74) years, arguably the group most familiar with traditional Australian stories and representations of the past. So, it is clear that what actually defines an 'Australian' has changed and as a result how *and where* we engage with Australian stories of years gone by will too.



ACTIVITY 3.21

Reflection

1 Why do you think the way Australian audiences engage with Australian stories has changed over time?
2 How would it be possible to not see Australian stories in a modern media landscape?
3 How would this impact creators of Australian stories in the modern media industry?
4 Consider the following texts discussed earlier in this chapter. How did your own reading of them differ to audiences at the time of their release?
   - **a** *The Castle* and its representation of migrants
   - **b** *Crocodile Dundee* and its representation of masculinity
   - **c** The different focus of the original three Mad Max films in comparison to 2015's *Mad Max: Fury Road*
   - **d** *Muriel's Wedding* and life in Australia's suburbs
   - **e** *Walkabout* and representations of First Nations Australians
5 Discuss your responses as a class. How have social, political and technological changes mentioned in this chapter meant that prior readings of Australian narratives differ from those we have today?

Social media

It should be no surprise that social media, and content creation by Australians on a wide variety of platforms, has taken a dominant space before our eyes and ears. Is this the future of the Australian story? The ubiquitous ability to create, publish and share content online has led to a brand-new avenue for Australians to create their own stories for broad and very specific audiences.

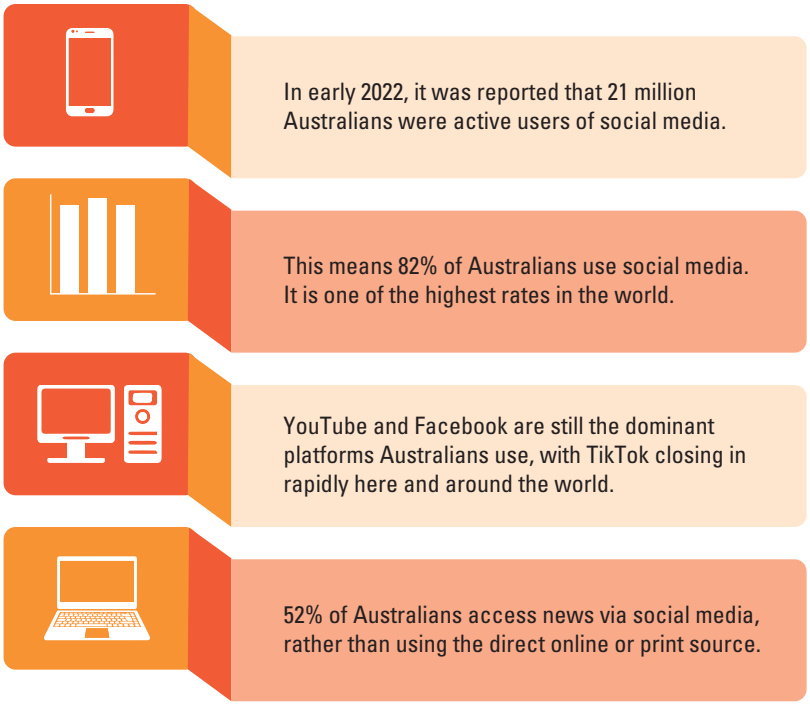


FIGURE 3.71 Social media use in Australia, quoted in Adam Ramshaw, 'Social Media Statistics for Australia' (updated January 2023), *https://www.genroe.com/blog/social-media-statistics-australia/13492*

What this tells us, at a glance, is that there is an enormous audience for Australian content and stories online through social media. Following global trends, Australia has an army of content creators that capture huge audiences.

The COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns meant we were online like never before and a surge in social media use led to an increase in screen time and creators who can reach a huge local audience. Social media personalities, known as 'influencers', dominate this space and reach huge audiences. These audiences are sometimes greater than most traditional Australian media producers could hope for.

CONTENT CREATORS: 'THE INSPIRED UNEMPLOYED'

In 2020, two former tradesmen, Jack Steele and Matt Ford, began an Instagram account called 'The Inspired Unemployed', which took a satirical view of life as a **Gen Z** and millennial Australian. In 2022, their Instagram account had 1.4 million followers, where the description reads as 'two battlers trying to find themselves'. While much of their content reflects uniquely Australian experiences and humour, it does not reflect the entire Australian experience, as our census data would suggest.

Gen Z short for Generation Z, this is the generation reaching adulthood in the second decade of the 21st century, perceived as being familiar with the internet from a very young age

ACTIVITY 3.22

Research task

1. Research some of the content created by 'The Inspired Unemployed' online. How does it reflect the elements of a traditional Australian story?
2. Now research the content created by 'Tedsthetics', another Australian social media personality. How does this reflect similar themes of the Australian experience?
3. As a class, create a list of as many Australian influencers, streamers and online content creators that you can think of.
4. For each one, explain how, if at all, these creators reflect an Australian identity or ideas that you have explored in this chapter. It could be in the theme of their posts, the focus of their streams or content that they create.

FIGURE 3.72 Australian social content creators capture large audiences. Perhaps you could be next?





CHAPTER REVIEW

Summing it all up

Australian stories have a rich and diverse history. As you have learnt across this chapter, what mainstream Australian audiences once understood to be theirs has evolved with a changing multicultural nation.

The telling and sharing of Australian stories began with stories told and shared by First Nations peoples, over thousands of generations, and has been accompanied by fictional and non-fictional narratives of daring individuals tackling the greatest adversary, the Australian landscape.

As you have seen, the nature of who Australian audiences value and engage with is intertwined with its history. A tough, witty, anti-authoritarian larrikin will always capture the imagination of Australian audiences. However, who and what that larrikin is has come a long way from the traditional representations of years past.

Significantly, the valuing of First Nations perspectives over the past decades has altered perceptions and helped spark national conversations about Australia's true history. More importantly, the voice of First Nations cultures is now being listened to by mainstream Australia.

Regardless of where and how we access Australian stories, be they online, in print or in television and film, their creators will themselves work within the social, political and economic confines of an industry that is constantly evolving.

Revision questions

1 **Define** the role Australia's colonial history had in shaping Australian stories.
2 **Explain** how *The Story of the Kelly Gang* influenced several decades of Australian stories.
3 **Describe** how these ideas have been translated into representations in modern Australian stories.
4 **Explain** the role the landscape has played in Australian stories.
5 **Outline** how 'the other' was traditionally represented in Australian stories.
6 **Define** the contrasting representations of traditional Australian characters in *Crocodile Dundee*.
7 How have new media forms allowed the evolution of new challenges to authority and larrikin characters? **Explain** your response with examples.
8 Choose three First Nations Australian media creators and **explain** how their use of codes and conventions helps create meaning.
9 How has the representation of First Nations people in Australian film and television evolved over the years? Can you **identify** any key turning points?
10 Name an Australian film or TV show that you believe positively represents First Nations culture and explain why.
11 What impact does the portrayal of First Nations people in Australian media have on broader societal perceptions and attitudes?
12 Discuss any stereotypical representations of First Nations people you have seen in Australian film or TV and explain why these are problematic.

13 How important is it to have First Nations writers, directors and actors involved in the production of Australian film and TV content, and what difference can this make to the portrayal of First Nations culture and people?

14 **Define** the challenges facing Australian news media and the impact they have had on storytelling within the industry.

15 **Outline** the economic and political factors that influence the production of Australian stories.

Practice assessment questions

1 **Explain** the role of varying media forms and how they have contributed to the telling and sharing of Australian stories.

2 **Analyse** the development of the larrikin in Australian stories. Using examples, **explain** how this representation has changed over time.

3 **Outline** the evolution of 'the other' in Australian stories. How have fictional and non-fictional media products altered this representation over time?

4 **Explain** how First Nations perspectives within narrative texts are essential to audience readings.

5 Australian stories are created in a challenging environment. **Outline** the positive and negative elements of the political and economic challenges facing media production in Australia.

6 **Define** the role *Cleverman* plays in challenging historical representations in Australian stories.

Digital content

- Access the Interactive Textbook via Cambridge GO to access a downloadable Success Criteria checklist, digital quizzes and additional digital content for this chapter.

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UNIT 2
NARRATIVE ACROSS MEDIA FORMS

Drama is life with the dull bits cut out.

— Alfred Hitchcock

OVERVIEW

As you pick up your smartphone to take an image for your social media feed, consider the role you are playing in creating and distributing your own narrative. Your participation in the construction of this story is spread across your profile, detailing the places you have been, the experiences you have participated in, or the important events you have obscured with your own image in a selfie! Telling stories and constructing narratives have been essential to the practices of filmmaking, television, journalism and many other media forms. In these traditional media forms the creation of fictional and non-fictional narratives can be deconstructed, replicated and challenged now that you, the media participant, have become a creator with access to new and engaging technologies and the means of publishing and distributing your work.

WHAT'S AHEAD

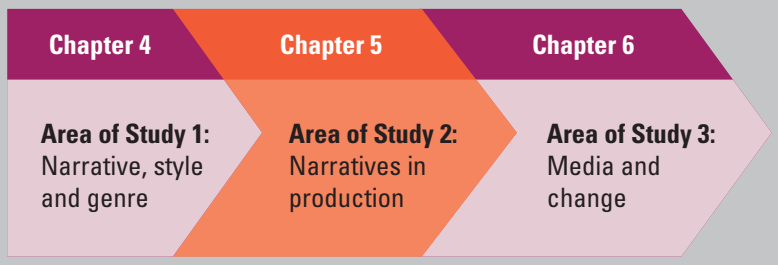


IMAGE ON OPPOSITE PAGE: Screen stories captivate people of all ages around the world.

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CHAPTER 4 AREA OF STUDY 1

NARRATIVE, STYLE AND GENRE

INQUIRY QUESTION

How do media creators develop their style?

— VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, p. 22, used with permission

OVERVIEW

When film director George Lucas set about making a science fiction film about an orphan living on a desert planet, surrounded by robots, dust and two moons, he had a vision for a great narrative. However, Lucas was so focused on developing *Star Wars: Episode IV: A New H ope* that the production process was strained, exhausting for cast and crew, and nearly didn't see the light of day.

In this chapter, you will examine the range of challenges facing modern media producers. Narrative takes many forms and you will need to examine how and where new and old technologies tell the stories you want to read, view and make for yourself. You will need to evaluate the range of challenges that stand in the way of storytelling and navigate, just as Lucas did, a way to balance the demands of modern media production with the need to see and hear great stories.

OUTCOME 1

On completion of this unit the student should be able to analyse the style of media creators and producers and the influences of narratives on the audience in different media forms.

FIGURE 4.1 (above) A still from the Wallace and Gromit mini-animation *A Jubilee Bunt-a-thon* (2012, dir. Nick Park)

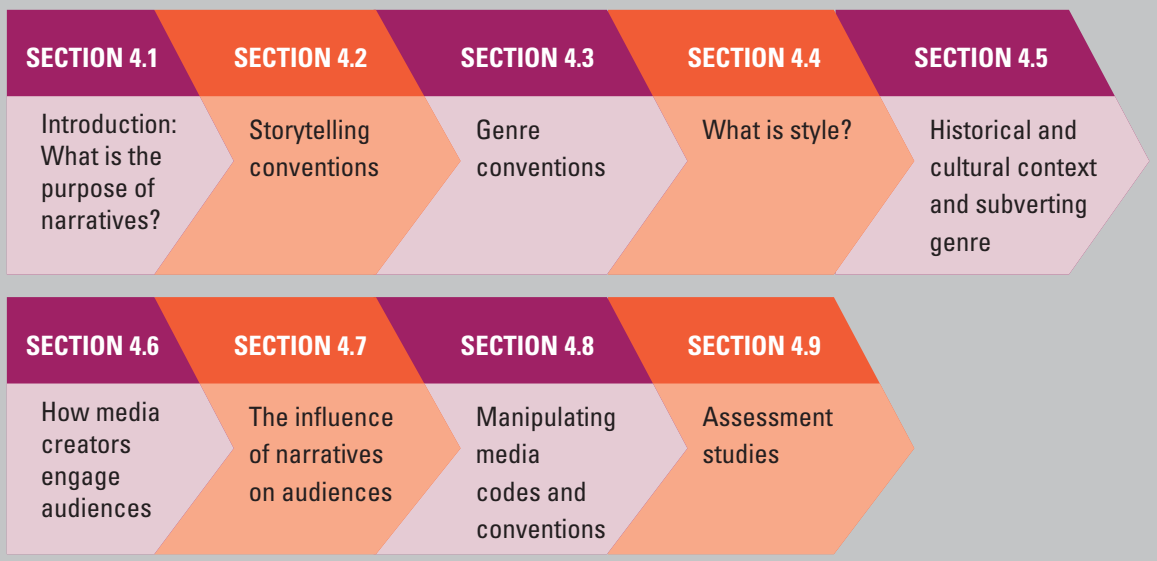
To achieve this outcome, the student will draw on key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 1.

KEY KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING INTENTIONS

Key knowledge	Learning intentions – at the end of the chapter I will be able to:
• the development and communication of a distinctive style by media creators and producers in the construction of narratives	• describe the distinctive style of media creators and producers
• the manipulation of media codes and conventions by media creators and producers in the construction of narratives in different media forms	• explain how media codes and conventions are manipulated by media creators and producers
• the influences of historical and cultural context on the construction of narratives	• investigate the influences of historical and cultural contexts on the construction of narratives
• the use or subversion of genres by media creators to engage audiences	• discuss how media creators use or subvert genre to engage audiences
• audiences and their engagement and how these understandings influence the construction, production, distribution, consumption and reception of narratives	• discuss the way personal values relate to individual interest and engagement in narratives
• the influence of narratives on audience engagement, consumption and reception	• analyse the influence of narratives on audience engagement, consumption and reception
• media language used to analyse and discuss the style and context of media narratives	• use media language to analyse and discuss the style and context of media narratives

(**Source:** Adapted from VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, p. 23, used with permission)

WHAT'S AHEAD



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4.1 Introduction: What is the purpose of narratives?

Narratives are a cornerstone of what it means to be human. Narratives help us make sense of the world around us and allow us to spend a little time escaping from it too. From the dawn of humanity, narratives were used to mark time, record great events and explore the wonderful corners of our imagination.

For many of us, it began with children's books. Maurice Sendak's classic book *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963) is, for 19 million readers around the world, an early memory of the world of stories and letting our minds wander.

The hero of the story, Max, is wild and disruptive at home, driving his family crazy. After being sent to his room, he lets his imagination take over and enters a world of monsters with gnashing teeth and wild adventures. In Max's story, he becomes the king of the monsters, staring them down and mastering his own emotions. Once his quest is complete, Max returns home for dinner.



FIGURE 4.2 Former US President Barak Obama and wife Michelle read *Where the Wild Things Are* to a group of school children

For most children, Sendak's bestselling book is fun. Yet, it has an underlying quest, a moral lesson and a satisfying end to the hero's journey. For many readers, seeing the world through the lens of a character they can identify with, they learn from Max the value of honesty and love.

As we get older, we gravitate towards stories that answer our questions, satisfy basic needs, and hold a mirror to our own thoughts and struggles. Narratives make us laugh, cry and sometimes scream out loud.

In the media, we have a long and rich tradition of stories. Since the inception of print media, we have been able to escape our own reality to explore another.

Narratives, or stories, can appear in a number of forms that provide different means for an audience to engage with them. They can be aural, visual or spoken. They can allow for a sedentary audience to absorb and form an understanding or can be participatory, allowing the audience to contribute and build their own. Regardless of the shape or form, they are made to be shared and enjoyed. Each narrative is generated from a shared or **mediated** understanding of the codes and conventions that are essential to the form in which it is created.



FIGURE 4.3 Roy Scheider and Robert Shaw in *Jaws*

Your Friday night may demand the shared experience of a horror film with friends, to see who will shriek the loudest. Or we may choose the action and adventure of *Jaws* (1975, dir. Steven Spielberg) to imagine ourselves as an ordinary, small-town policeman, faced with the extraordinary challenge of a killer shark. What would you do? How would you save the town from this beast?

From the revulsion we explore in the greed, jealousy and madness of each lead and ultimately doomed character in *Game of Thrones* (2011–19), to the eternal desire to see good triumph over evil in Batman's struggle against his never-ending list of villains, we use narratives to understand our own experiences of life. And from the mindless stunts of *Jackass* (2002–22), to YouTubers reacting to other YouTubers, to the complex levels of the Marvel multiverse, all stories serve a purpose: to bring us together, to explore emotion, reflect, bond and celebrate what it means to be human.

mediated a long process of audience and media interaction that determines what common codes and conventions are used to create meanings that are commonly understood

In this chapter, you will explore how different media produce narratives and develop their own unique styles to tell these narratives across a range of forms. You will explore how different audiences are drawn to these stories and how a shared understanding of genres, media codes and conventions, styles and emerging trends help audiences make sense of narratives and engage with them.

ACTIVITY 4.1

Reflection

Make a list of your favourite stories.

- What forms do they take? Are they films, comics, games or even YouTube videos?
- What do you find entertaining about each one?
- Explain how you may have shared these stories with friends and family. How do these stories bring you together?

4.2 Storytelling conventions

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- the development and communication of a distinctive style by media creators and producers in the construction of narratives
- media language used to analyse and discuss the style and context of media narratives.

Classic narrative structure

Media creators can rely on using tried and trusted storytelling structures. The telling of a good story has changed little across history. While the exact nature of a story can vary depending on the location from which it is told, what binds all stories together is structure. Without a logical structure, an audience can have difficulty following the sequence of events and becomes disengaged. Regardless of the direction, theme or ending of your own stories, you must adhere to a recognisable structure.

A classic narrative structure you would easily recognise includes a 'beginning', 'middle' and 'end', where a character is challenged with a crisis and finds a resolution. How that resolution is met depends heavily on the nature of the media product and where it was created and for which audience.

The Hollywood **three-act structure** is one of the most common storytelling techniques used in modern media. It involves three simple stages or '**acts**' that tell a compelling narrative.

three-act structure the traditional dramatic structure of most fictional narrative films

acts the traditional dramatic segments in films and stage plays



FIGURE 4.4 The typical three-act structure



ACT 1: THE SET-UP

In this stage, we learn about the main characters and the setting we find them in. The context is often established here too. It could be in the known past, the distant future or the present day. Ideas must be established here for the audience to create a frame of reference to understand the direction of the story and set up their own expectations. For example, if a film introduces a teenage girl who does not 'fit in' at her high school, the audience can expect her to face a number of social challenges and hopefully triumph against adversity.

In this act, there is usually some kind of 'inciting incident' that propels the story forward into the next act. For example, in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (2001, dir. Chris Columbus), Harry is introduced as an unwanted orphan, living in squalid conditions with his relatives. On his 11th birthday, he is introduced to the outrageous Hagrid, who not only brings Harry a cake but lights a fire with his umbrella. From this point on, Harry's life changes forever as he is about to learn that he is to become a wizard and embark on an adventure.

In Denis Villeneuve's *Dune* (2021), an adaptation of Frank Herbert's science fiction novel, Villeneuve plays with the audience in the first act by hinting at inciting incidents in the opening sequence.

However, the purpose of the narrative is revealed when the galactic emperor proclaims that the valuable planet of Arrakis will now be overseen by the feudal House Atreides, a powerful and noble family that makes up part of an intergalactic empire. Even for audiences unfamiliar with the popular book series, they are immediately engaged by Villeneuve's creative use of sound and camera codes to emphasise the gravity of this proclamation. From there, we meet the key protagonist Paul Atreides, a son of House Atreides, and the purpose of his adventure.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

1 What is a narrative?
2 What is narrative structure?

ACTIVITY 4.2

Scene analysis

Use the still image and the opening sequence of *Dune*.

1 Explain how the inciting incident of *Dune* allows the audience to understand the purpose of the narrative.
2 What expectations are established for the audience?
3 How does Villeneuve use the codes of sound and camera to alert the audience to the significance of this moment?



FIGURE 4.5 Gurney Halleck (Josh Brolin) and Duke Leto Atreides (Oscar Isaac) in the 2021 film *Dune: Part One* as Atreides accepts the stewardship of the planet Arrakis

ACT 2: THE CONFRONTATION

This act usually takes up the bulk of the story and is where most of the challenges are faced by the main characters. Now that they have a reason or purpose, which was established in the first act (in the case of Paul Atreides in *Dune*, to survive their betrayal after arriving on Arrakis), they must attempt and meet a range of challenges that build in significance as the act moves on.

The goal of the second act is to slowly build the drama to a big climax. In the second act of *Jaws*, the main character, Sheriff Brody (Roy Scheider), encounters an increasingly deadly series of shark attacks on the people of his small town. He determines that they will not cease until he confronts the shark himself. This places Brody on a boat, away from the safety of land, and in the environment of the shark with a shark expert and an unpredictable boat captain. The confrontation is soon to follow.

ACT 2: Sub-plots

Another way to engage audiences within Act 2 is to employ **sub-plots** or secondary storylines that contribute to the main narrative. In most superhero narratives, we see friends of the hero complete smaller quests that help the hero achieve their goal. The animated series *The Simpsons* was famous in its early years for its use of sub-plots to support the main storyline. They were either there to weave back into the final act of an episode, or to simply provide comedic relief from the main storyline.

sub-plots secondary storylines that exist within narratives to add to, and sometimes are involved, in the main storyline

SUB-PLOTS

Sub-plots can serve the following purposes in a second act:

1. A romantic development where the main character finds love or friendship in their quest.
2. A comedic sub-plot that provides relief from the otherwise serious tone of the narrative.
3. Thematic sub-plots that show two characters facing similar challenges in different circumstances.
4. A character background sub-plot that slowly unravels the origin story of a character in the main plot.
5. A narrative sub-plot that, at first, has nothing to do with the main plot, but eventually develops into a major part of the story.



ACTIVITY 4.3

Reflection

1. Consider your favourite films and stories that you created in the previous activity. Choose one to focus on and explore its plot. Chart this as a three-act narrative up to the second act.
2. Does it employ a 'second act'? Explain your answer.
3. Does it employ sub-plots? Explain how these contribute to a story.
4. What kind of sub-plots does it employ?



ACT 3: THE RESOLUTION

By the beginning of Act 3, it must be clear to the audience that for the main character there is only one way forward. A final confrontation or effort must be undertaken to ensure that the goals of the main character are met.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. What is an act?
2. Define the three-act structure.
3. Explain each act's role.
4. What is the purpose of the 'inciting incident' in the narrative?

In a number of stories, this involves a clash between good and evil or the hero and the villain. In this final act, the creator of the story usually attempts to meet the expectations created for the audience in the first act. For example, the beginning of Act 3 in *Jaws* arrives when Brody first encounters the killer shark and utters the line 'we're gonna need a bigger boat'; the audience is thus propelled into the final confrontation with the shark.

During the sequence on the open water, the crew battles the shark as it attempts to sink the boat. The conflict is resolved when Brody successfully kills the shark and is seen floating back to land on the debris of the destroyed boat. In *Dune*, the hero Paul Atreides has lost his father, best friend and powerful status, and is all alone on the harsh planet of Arrakis. His discovery of the mysterious Fremen people means he is not only safe, but on the path to a new adventure … and the inevitable film sequel.

ACTIVITY 4.4

Research task

Investigate the story structure of these popular films:

- *Psycho* (1960, dir. Alfred Hitchcock)
- *Wonder Woman 1984* (2020, dir. Patty Jenkins)
- *Whiplash* (2014, dir. Damien Chazelle)
- *500 Days of Summer* (2009, dir. Marc Webb)
- *The Thin Red Line* (1998, dir. Terrence Malick)

1. Work in groups to deduce if each film can be broken into three acts.
2. Briefly explain what happens to the main character in each act.
3. Explain how the character's 'normal' is disrupted.
4. Explain how the character finds a resolution to the crisis.
5. Does the film challenge the normal three-act narrative structure? If so, explain how it does this.

Elements of a good narrative

The structure of the Hollywood three-act narrative is not fixed. There are no hard and fast rules. It is flexible and can involve a happy, sad or ambiguous ending. Regardless of how the narrative is teased out, there are some essential elements that ensure the audience can recognise and follow the action.

THE DISRUPTION OF NORMAL

Step 1: Establish normal

When introducing a character and narrative, the audience needs to meet them in a normal environment. This helps the audience gather the visual and sound cues to establish who their character is and how to identify with them. A good story follows a course of events to a conclusion. Often these stories challenge what the audience understands as safe and normal in order to take them on the journey towards the resolution.



FIGURE 4.6 Ordinary suburban kids rush to save E.T. – an alien stranded on Earth.

Step 2: Disrupt normal

Usually occurring towards the end of Act 1 in a Hollywood narrative, the disruption of the main character's life places them in an extraordinary situation. This is where the audience can see the character develop in the face of adversity. Director Steven Spielberg is famous for placing ordinary people in extraordinary situations. In *E.T.* (1982) he placed a friendly alien creature in the home of ordinary suburban kids. The use of the ordinary character in the extraordinary situation is a useful technique to engage audiences, because it allows them to identify with the character in a more meaningful way as they can imagine their own responses to the challenges the character is about to face.

Step 3: Create turning points

For the narrative to move forward and generate more engagement for the audience, the author needs to create a series of challenging turning points that change the direction of the story. If the main character can solve one problem, that must create an even bigger one that also needs resolving. In a Hollywood three-act narrative there are generally three major turning points that drive a story forward. In Edgar Wright's 2004 zombie comedy *Shaun of the Dead*, the main character Shaun (Simon Pegg) first escapes his zombie housemate with his sidekick Ed (Nick Frost), then finds them out on the streets, which are infested with a nation of zombies. In his quest to find safety and rescue his ex-girlfriend, the pair constantly escalates the level of danger through their efforts to survive. By gradually escalating the tension and creating multiple turning points, Wright was able to place more and more challenges in front of Shaun's character and thus keep the audience engaged in the story and in their own expectations for the resolution of Shaun's journey.

Step 4: Develop the characters

Narratives that resonate with audiences often involve characters who learn and change throughout the story. It is a popular element for audiences who are attempting to identify with the main character. This development may take the character through a series of difficult events, or it may come through realisations or relationships with other characters. The 'coming of age' story is a classic story, structure that places a naive and inexperienced character against adversity. By the end of the story, the character has 'come of age' and is now stronger, wiser and more experienced. Character development shows the progression of weak to strong; or for an antagonist,



FIGURE 4.7 Ally Sheedy and Molly Ringwald in *The Breakfast Club*

it can often chart the transition from good to evil. In *The Breakfast Club* (1985, dir. John Hughes) a group of teens stuck in Saturday school detention reveal their flaws, fears and anxieties to each other across the course of the day. Despite their differences as teen stereotypes, a Nerd, Princess, Rebel, Jock and Outcast, they realise that they have more in common than they thought. Banding together against their common enemy, Principal Vernon, the new friends emerge from detention stronger and more confident in themselves than ever before.

Step 5: Restore normal

Once a story has introduced a character, and disrupted their 'normal' through a series of turning points that developed the character, a return to normal or the introduction of a 'new normal' will resolve the story. Regardless of the state of normal, it is an important element of a story to conclude and leave the audience where they began. While this can always be challenged and the audience can be left without a resolution, it should attempt to leave the audience with the ability to create their own interpretation of the ending. A classic restoration of 'normal' in romantic comedies sees the protagonist living happily with the love interest. A 'happy ending' leaves the audience satisfied that the challenges of the main character were met. In superhero films, the villain may be defeated, or lives to fight another day. However, what is essential is that the superhero has used their power to save society from evil and returned it to normality and safety.

In Barry Jenkins' film *Moonlight* (2016), audiences follow the troubled life of Chiron as he navigates poverty and sexuality into adulthood. His 'normal' childhood of fear, bullying and a drug-addicted mother throws challenges in front of him. However, as he reaches adulthood and reconnects with his first love Kevin, Chiron finds the peace and 'new normal' he has craved all his life.

ACTIVITY 4.5

Analysing film openings

Explore the plot lines and opening sequence of the following narratives:

- *Moonlight* (2016, dir. Jenkins)
- *The Breakfast Club* (1985, dir. Hughes)
- *Shaun of the Dead* (2004, dir. Wright)
- *E.T. the Extra Terrestrial* (1982, dir. Spielberg)

1. Find and view the opening sequence of each film. How do they establish 'normal' for the protagonist in each narrative?
2. In groups of four choose one film each to research. Chart the plot line on a piece of paper. How does each protagonist face challenges that disrupt normal?
3. How is normal re-established? Is it a 'new normal'? Is the ending ambiguous?

THE HERO'S JOURNEY

A common use of the disruption of normal is the 'hero's journey'.

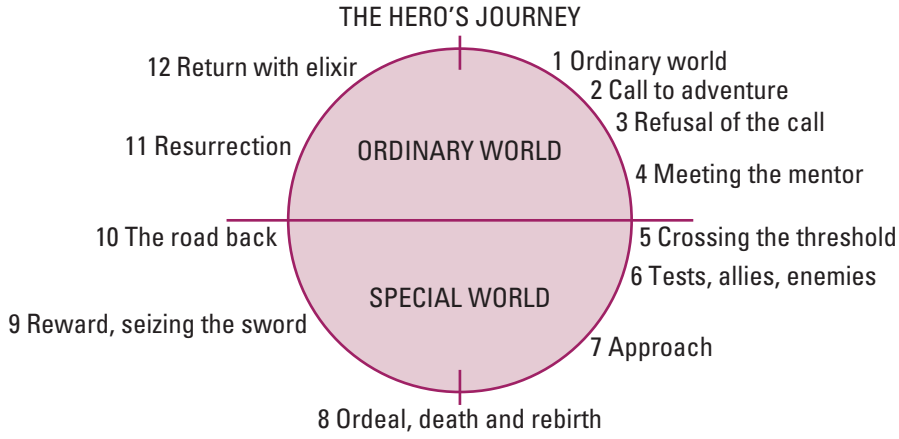


FIGURE 4.8 Diagram of the hero's journey

Born from centuries of myths and legends in popular narratives, the Hero's Journey engages the audience with the quest of a protagonist to move from normal, to the disruption of normal, or in this case, the ordinary to extraordinary. What sets the hero's journey apart is a call to adventure for the protagonist, usually from a mentor figure. Despite the hero's reluctance, they must cross a point of no return where the adventure begins. Through a series of ordeals, doubt, dangers and near-death experiences, the hero eventually returns home changed and ready for a new life.

The Star Wars franchise of films is built on the hero's journey. What began with Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill) leaving his desolate planet to become a Jedi Knight in *Star Wars: Episode IV: A New Hope* (1977, dir. George Lucas) was continued with Rey, played by Daisy Ridley, in *Star Wars: Episode VII: The Force Awakens* (2015, dir. JJ Abrams). An orphan living on a desolate planet, Rey is called to adventure by two strangers from other worlds. Forced to flee danger, Rey encounters her mentor, the famous Han Solo, who takes her into the extraordinary world of space travel. Through a series of ordeals, Rey must confront her own emerging skills as a Jedi and battle the evil Kylo Ren (Adam Driver). However, unlike many heroes' journeys, rather than taking 'the road back' Rey takes the road forward and seeks her ultimate mentor, Luke Skywalker.

ACTIVITY 4.6

Research task

The hero's journey has been adapted into a similar structure by a range of media producers. Research the following methods of storytelling and compare them to the hero's journey structure:

- Blake Snyder's 'Save the Cat!' story beats
- Dan Harmon's 'Story Cycle' from *Rick and Morty*.

1 Explain how 'Save the Cat!' compares to the hero's journey structure. What similarities and differences can you see?

2 Explain how Dan Harmon's 'Story Cycle' compares to the hero's journey. What similarities and differences can you see?

3 How does each adaptation allow for variations on the popular and often predictable theme of the hero's journey?



THE CIRCULAR NARRATIVE

The circular narrative brings audiences back to where they began. Popular with shorter stories, the circular narrative takes the audience on an engaging ride from point A to point B and back to A again. A circular narrative can include elements of the three-act structure, a disruption of normal and a hero; however, it is essential that the audience arrives back in familiar territory at its conclusion.

In Spike Jonze's short film *How They Get There* (1997), the opening shot of a lone shoe in a gutter leads the audience to question the origin story of this *one* shoe. Through the circle, we meet a protagonist (played by artist and skateboarder Mark Gonzales), who becomes distracted by a woman walking on the opposite side of the street. As the two make eye contact and begin imitating each other in playful and entertaining ways, the story appears to be descending into romance. However, the protagonist becomes so engrossed in the game he does not see a car racing up behind him. A spectacular crash ensues and as the protagonist is hit, his shoe flies into the air, landing in the gutter, completing the circle.

4.3 Genre conventions

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- how media creators use or subvert genre to engage audiences
- media language used to analyse and discuss the style and context of media narratives.

Genres are categories for different types of narratives. Across all media forms, genre is a way to differentiate stories that use specific codes and conventions. Over time, different genres became distinguishable for their use of certain storylines, characters and settings. Additionally, visual stories like film and television developed a language of production techniques that grouped certain stories together. For example, the horror genre often employs vulnerable characters in isolated settings: just imagine a group of teenagers at an isolated camp site at night who hear something move around.

You could probably guess what's going to happen next because, as an audience member with a developing understanding and expectation of specific genres, you recognise many of these techniques already. Within the fantasy genre, key characters are often magical and employ supernatural elements that depart significantly from reality, while action films often involve fast editing, pounding non-diegetic audio and bold and aggressive characters.

Genre is itself a literary term, but it made for an important application to the film industry. In the early days of Hollywood, it was an extremely useful way to categorise films for audiences. What the big Hollywood studios like MGM and Universal found was that there were specific audiences who were drawn to specific genres of film. Westerns, musicals, horror and gangster films all drew their own specific fans. It also made it easier for the studios to produce films for these audiences as the recurring use of codes and conventions meant films were, to some degree, predictable and suited specific actors and directors.

When a story uses codes and conventions that are specific to the genre, it becomes easier for the audience to recognise the potential characters, settings and story arcs.

ACTIVITY 4.7

Analysing genre

Genres are not fixed and can be mixed to create new stories. In each genre, there are sub-genres that often bring in techniques used in other genres to create new stories. Think horror comedy or science fiction thriller. Genres are always evolving, and yet, there are three key ways we can identify genre:

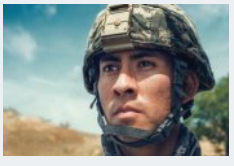
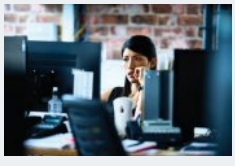
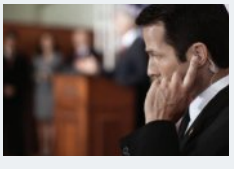
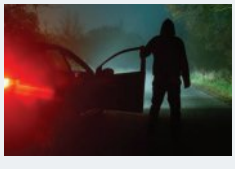
1 **Setting:** The location of a narrative is key to identifying genre. If it is set in space, it may include elements of drama and even horror, but it will primarily fit into the science fiction genre, where audiences expect a futuristic world where space travel is just the beginning of the possibilities.

- Examine the following images of potential film locations. For each image, explain what kind of genre it may suit. Justify your reasons with examples of narratives you have already seen.

a	b	c	d
			
e	**f**	**g**	**h**
			

2 **Character:** Specific characters show up in specific genres. Audiences are drawn to unlikely heroes in adventure narratives, or to a capable spy who is the only one capable of stopping the 'doomsday device'. Whether we identify with them or use characters for escapism, we can pick our characters by genre. A rogue cop who plays by their own rules will often drive the crime genre, while an unlucky in love office worker will find 'the one' in a romance narrative. Characters can cross genres; however, they are often written to suit the typical outcomes of a genre.

- Examine the following images of potential genre characters. For each image, explain what kind of genre it may suit.

a	b	c	d
			
e	**f**	**g**	**h**
			



3 **Plot:** Specific genres are recognised by their specific plots. While there are common narrative structures, genres are defined by the way that they use them. Genre is identified in the way that the director and producers use a range of codes and conventions that match a plot to a genre. An outsider Sherriff in a dusty old town will have to face a series of obstacles and outlaws to bring law and order to the town in a Western. A plucky journalist will have to risk her job, reputation and shady informants to expose corruption in a gripping drama.

- Using the images from the previous two activities get into groups to create your own plot for your own genre film. Choose one setting from the first activity and one character from the second.
- Name the genre of your film.
- Give your film a name.
- Use one of the narrative structures you have already learnt about and on a piece of paper, plot a basic narrative.
- Use the setting and image as inspiration to design a poster for your film.
- Present your film to the class and explain your choices.

CASE STUDY 4.1

Genre case studies

Genre: Science fiction **Description:** 'Sci-fi' deals with futuristic worlds where imagination guides the possibilities. The fear of the unknown in outer space demands that only the brave can tackle the cosmos and the alien life that exists beyond.	***Aliens*** (1986, dir. James Cameron)
Setting: A remote planet in a dark corner of the galaxy has lost contact with Earth. The atmosphere is totally inhospitable to humans, so the action takes place in the dark, claustrophobic tunnels of an abandoned space station. **Characters:** A former crew member of a mining spaceship, **Ripley**, accompanies a team of soldiers to investigate the planet. Ripley is aware of the power of aliens and hardened from a previous encounter. She will do anything to survive and protect a young orphan called Newt. Supporting her quest is the loyal **Corporal Hicks**. Against the insurmountable odds, **Ripley** must learn to trust an android named **Bishop** and learn the motives of crew member **Burke**, willing to let everyone die for profit. **Plot:** Enticed to investigate the planet due to her knowledge of alien life, Ripley and the soldiers soon come under attack and half of the squad is killed by the end of the first act. Surrounded and fighting for their lives, the second act is dominated by **Ripley** and **Hicks** fending off waves of alien attacks and betrayal at the hands of **Burke**, who leaves her alone with an alien in a locked room. However, the third act drives the narrative to its conclusion when it is discovered that the space station is timed to self-destruct. In a race against time, **Ripley** must destroy the queen alien and hope that **Bishop** can secure their escape in time. **Additional genres:** Action	 **FIGURE 4.9** Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) and Newt (Carrie Henn) in *Aliens*

Genre: Adventure **Description:** The adventure genre is just that. The protagonist must embark on an epic quest or journey and tackle antagonists, obstacles and geography to complete their quest.	***Raiders of the Lost Ark*** (1981, dir. Steven Spielberg)
Setting: Set in 1936, just a few years before World War II in North Africa, competing archaeologists are in a desperate race to find a holy relic, believed to hold unlimited power. In the dusty and inhospitable desert, the dangers of the sun, snakes and mystical powers create challenges for the protagonist. **Characters:** Equipped with a dry wit, a sense of adventure, leather jacket and whip, **Indiana Jones** is the respected adventurer and archaeologist tasked with finding the religious relic before his nemesis, the Nazi-aligned **Belloq** does. With one eye on the task at hand and another on winning back the affections of former love **Marion**, Indiana must fight and outmanoeuvre all before him to stop the relic falling into the wrong hands. **Plot:** In the context of a looming war with Nazi Germany, Indiana is tasked with finding the 'Ark of the Covenant' that is rumoured to be in the North African desert. Racing across the globe to piece together its location, the hero must use his wits, allies and bravado to sneak into the Nazi dig and steal the relic for himself. In Act 3, Indiana is thwarted by **Belloq** and his Nazi henchmen and, thus, tracks the Ark to a secret Nazi base and must endure one final showdown to save the relic, and the world. **Additional genres:** Action	 **FIGURE 4.10** Indiana Jones (Harrison Ford) in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*

Genre: Horror **Description:** Focused on the dark, terrifying and macabre, the horror genre asks audiences to test their limits of fear, anxiety and terror that continue throughout the narrative.	***Get Out*** (2017, dir. Jordan Peele)
Setting: Set in contemporary America, in the era of the Obama administration, the main players appear in a wealthy and progressive community where all is not what it seems. The protagonist becomes trapped in the peaceful atmosphere of a wealthy family's home, which contrasts with the horror that ensues. **Characters: Chris** is a successful photographer but painfully aware of the racial politics that dominate American life and is cautious of meeting **Rose's** parents, when he learns she did not tell them he was African American. His natural suspicions prove correct when it is revealed that his identity is the line that determines his own fate in a terrifying house of horrors, owned by **Rose's** parents and their like-minded friends.	 **FIGURE 4.11** Director Jordan Peele at a Q&A for *Get Out*



Plot: The inciting incident of Act One comes when **Rose** reveals she hasn't told her family that **Chris** is African American. Despite his doubts, he travels to the family home and is immediately struck by the family's odd behaviour. In Act Two, despite the frightening warnings of the family's African American servants to 'get out', **Chris** sticks with his desire to survive the weekend and falls under the hypnotic charm of **Rose's** mother. However, it descends into horror as the family is revealed to be part of a community that harvest the bodies of African Americans for their own perverse ends. In the final act, **Rose** dares **Chris** to kill himself as he desperately tries to escape the house. **Additional genres:** Drama, thriller	

Genre: Action **Description:** A protagonist faced with high-risk and dangerous situations must restore peace from disorder. Action is typified by fights, death-defying stunts and high-adrenaline action.	***Hanna*** (2011, dir. Joe Wright)
Setting: Across frozen landscapes, cities of Europe and the Moroccan desert, an assassin, trained from childhood to be the perfect killer, has learnt to survive in any location. **Characters: Hanna** is a 15-year-old girl who has been trained by her father **Erik** in the wilderness to kill and survive as an assassin. However, it is revealed that **Erik** is a former CIA agent who has gone rogue and it will be **Hanna's** ultimate mission to kill the leader of the team who will come after her father. **Plot:** The audience meet Hanna as she learns to hunt, kill, fight and survive in the wilderness with her father. The inciting incident occurs when **Hanna**, the hero, must make her decision to leave home and seek her destiny. Her decision to cross the threshold is taken from her hands when she is kidnapped from her frozen home. Forced into an unfamiliar world, she must use her training to race across Europe and battle a tangled web of her father's past and the agents sent to kill her. **Additional genres:** Thriller	 **FIGURE 4.12** *Hanna* (Saoirse Ronan)

Genre: Drama **Description:** The drama genre focuses on the conflict and tension in the everyday world. Perhaps the broadest of genres, drama focuses on the intricate nature of the human experience.	***Moonlight*** (2016, dir. Barry Jenkins)
Setting: Set across three decades of one character's life in the poor suburbs of Florida. The buildings are worn, grass overgrown and all around are signs of neglect. Rife with crime, drugs and hardship, the setting defines the life of the characters who are either victims or perpetrators.	

Characters: The protagonist **Chiron** is a young African American boy who lives alone with his mother. Scared and insecure, Chiron battles with his own confidence, sexuality and a lack of a father figure. Across the narrative, **Chiron** takes three names that define his life. As a child he is the innocent **'Little'**, as a teen he is the insecure **'Chiron'** and as an adult, he becomes the feared **'Black'**.
Plot: Chiron lives in poverty with a single mother and is the constant target of bullies. Left to his own devices, he watches his overworked mother descend into drug addiction. At the end of the first act, there is hope when **Chiron** is taken in by a caring father figure and full-time drug dealer **Juan**, who teaches him to swim and provides him with the life his mother can't. In the second act, **Chiron** is a teenager, his mother has disappeared into drug addiction and **Juan** is gone. Wrestling with desperate poverty and realisations of his sexuality, he is brutally beaten by bullies and in retaliation, beats a fellow student in class. In the third act, **Chiron** has a tough exterior as a former felon and is now, like **Juan**, a drug dealer. Faced with a reconnection with a teenage love, **Chiron** must wrestle with his own identity and past to find happiness.
Additional genres: Romance



FIGURE 4.13 A Q&A after the screening of the film *Moonlight*

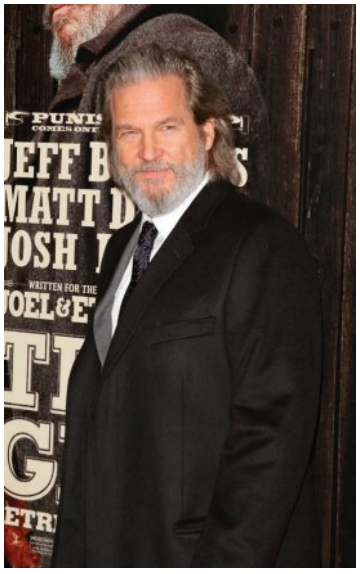
Genre: Comedy
Description: No matter the scenario, the audience must laugh. Comedy can involve situations that make us laugh at ourselves, others or question what is not appropriate to laugh at! Comedy is known for its multiple sub-genres.

Wayne's World (1992, dir. Penelope Spheeris)

Setting: Based in suburban Chicago in the mid 1990s, the protagonists live a simple life of watching live music, hanging out with friends and making a live TV show from their parents' basement.
Characters: Wayne is a minor celebrity in his small town of Aurora. A huge fan of heavy metal music, he broadcasts small-time cable TV shows with his best friend **Garth**. Discovered and invited to be on national TV, **Wayne** is thrust into the world of show business and love when he meets rock singer **Cassandra**, who also has caught the eye of the evil TV executive **Benjamin**.
Plot: Wayne is happy with his simple life in Aurora. He has fun with his friends and sees no need to step out of his comfort zone. However, when his TV show is brought into the big time, he must learn to navigate the unfamiliar world of corporate television. Angered with the new world of endorsements and greed, **Wayne** quits his own show, leaving **Garth** in the lurch and losing the love of **Cassandra** in the process. Desperate, **Wayne's** 'seizing the sword' moment comes with a plan to expose **Benjamin**, win **Cassandra's** love again by declaring his love in public and embarking on a bold plan to return his world to normal.
Additional genres: Romance



FIGURE 4.14 Mike Myers as Wayne and Dana Carvey as Garth on *Saturday Night Live*, 1991

Genre: Western **Description:** The Western was a popular Hollywood genre from the early days of cinema, and a staple of studio filmmaking in the golden age of 'classical Hollywood cinema' (roughly 1930–60). Westerns could be made cheaply and quickly and many studios and their directors and stars specialised in these films. For example, the 2010 version of *True Grit* was a remake of a 1967 film of the same name directed by Henry Hathaway and starring John Wayne – both famous for working in the genre. Most Westerns were set in a typical place and time – around the turn of the 20th century, with the coming of civilisation to the 'wild west', and the tensions that modernisation caused for a traditional way of life. Usually, a protagonist must battle the environment, violent outlaws and time and progress itself to bring order to a chaotic situation.	***True Grit*** (2010, dirs Ethan & Joel Coen)
Setting: In the late 1800s in America, in the new frontier towns of the West. The dusty, vast expanses are only connected by train and horseback. In between are outlaws, violence and danger. **Characters: Mattie Ross** is a teenage girl on the trail of her dead father's murderer. Sharp, tenacious and brave, **Mattie** hires the mean-spirited **Rooster Cogburn** to help her track down the killer. An unwanted companion joins their search, the flashy Texas Ranger **La Boeuf**. **Plot:** The inciting incident arrives in the first scene with the death of **Mattie's** father. Despite her persistence, no-one will take on **Mattie's** quest to hunt her father's killer. A reluctant **Rooster** sets out, as does **La Boeuf**, and when **Mattie** decides to follow, her bravery is rewarded when she crosses a dangerous river on horseback. Act Two sees the three face a series of challenges and despite their bitter personal differences, decide to work together to catch the killer. A violent confrontation at the end of the act see's **Mattie** almost shoot her father's killer but is in turn bitten by a snake. This sets up an exciting third act as **Rooster** finds redemption in his race to save the life of **Mattie.** **Additional genres:** Comedy	 **FIGURE 4.15** Jeff Bridges (who plays Rooster Cogburn) at the New York premiere of *True Grit*

Genre: Romance **Description:** The romance genre tells stories about the age-old pursuit of love and companionship. Through the highs and lows of courtship and relationships, the protagonists must navigate their path to happiness.	***10 Things I Hate About You*** (1999, dir. Gil Junger)
Setting: Set in a slightly more than ordinary American high school, the main players are awkward high school teens trying to navigate social politics and dating. Despite their incredible surroundings, they are so caught up in the pursuit of love that comedic and public humiliation is inevitable.	

Characters: Awkward nerd **Cameron** is desperate to catch the attention of popular teen **Bianca**. He lacks the confidence to approach her and concocts a devious plan that involves tricking **Bianca's** older sister **Kat** to fall in love with the mysterious **Pat** in order to allow **Bianca's** father to date him. However, **Kat** is a hard nut to crack and refuses all invitations to follow along with conventional high school behaviours. That is, until **Pat** falls for **Kat**.
Plot: The plot of *10 Things I Hate About You* was based on William Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*. **Cameron** and his new friend **Michael** are hopeless high school outcasts incapable of not embarrassing themselves. In the first act, **Cameron** is warned off speaking to **Bianca** by **Michael**, who warns him of the delicate social order of their high school, shortly before riding his motorbike off a cliff. In the second act, it is revealed by **Bianca's** father that she can only date boys when her older sister, **Kat** – the shrew – decides to date someone herself. What follows is a cunning plan to convince the school outcast **Pat** to woo **Kat**. In Act Three, all goes well until it is clear that **Bianca** is interested in the school 'model' **Joey** and **Pat**, despite the deception, and that he is being paid for his efforts, is falling for **Kat**. In a complex web of love and deception, in Act Four this ends with both **Bianca** and **Kat** falling for their respective love interests, despite the deception. Act Five reaches the film's climax with the plan unravelling in a public event and the truth is revealed. Angered, **Kat** storms out on **Pat**. The final act, Act Six, sees **Pat** remedy his errors and confess his love.
Additional genres: Comedy, drama



FIGURE 4.16 Heath Ledger and Julia Stiles in *10 Things I Hate About You*

Genre: Crime
Description: In the dark underbelly of society, the world of crime, criminals and law enforcement exists. As do their stories. The crime genre can glorify and demonise crime, telling stories from the view of masterful criminals or the police and lawyers who arrest and try them. Suspense, mystery and action are often included.

Fargo (1996, dir. Joel Coen)

Setting: Fargo takes place in the frozen winter of a rural American town called Brainerd. People live simple uncomplicated lives that are almost totally dominated by the harsh and inhospitable conditions.
Characters: Desperate and broke, struggling salesman **Jerry** plots to have his wife kidnapped in order to claim her ransom. After hiring two incompetent criminals to carry out the plot, **Jerry's** crime is closely followed by the heavily pregnant but calm and determined small-town cop **Marge Gunderson**.



FIGURE 4.17 Frances McDormand in *Fargo*

Plot: The inciting incident occurs early as **Jerry** meets two criminals, **Carl** and **Gaear**, and asks them to participate in the kidnapping of his wife. **Jerry** wants to extort money from his father-in-law to fix his money troubles, but is hesitant. He goes through with it anyway and for **Jerry**, it is the point of no return. In Act Two, the 'antagonist' **Marge** is introduced as she is following the chaotic trail of blood left by **Carl** and **Gaear**, who still have **Jerry's** wife in the boot of their car. The stakes are raised when **Carl** and **Gaear** demand the whole ransom and shoot **Jerry's** father-in-law in a bungled pay-off. In Act Three, **Marge** must pull apart the lies and mystery to uncover **Jerry's** crime and find the kidnappers before it is too late. **Additional genres:** Comedy	

Genre: Mystery **Description:** Often included as a sub-genre of crime or thriller, the mystery genre often follows a crime from the moment it is committed to when it's solved. Often labelled a 'whodunnit', the audience work alongside the creators to attempt to solve the narrative by following its twists and turns.	***Knives Out*** (2019, dir. Rian Johnson)
Setting: In the wealthy home of a famous crime author, a family must dissect the mysterious death of their father and battle for his inheritance. The cramped confines of the home bring the main players together as a skilled detective must pull apart the mystery. **Characters:** Skilled detective **Benoit Blanc** is calm and calculated as he must navigate the motives and character of the author's family: the erratic **Joni**, bitter brother **Walt**, 'the black sheep' **Ransom** and the seemingly innocent carer to the old man, **Marta**. **Plot:** Normal is established in the palatial home of author Harlan Thromby, who has just passed away, and his family is gathering. **Marta** is seen living in a smaller apartment with her mother. Normal is soon disrupted when **Marta** arrives at the home and **Benoit Blanc** is there to investigate the death. **Additional genres:** Drama, comedy	 **FIGURE 4.18** Director Rian Johnson at a screening of *Knives Out*

Genre: Thriller **Description:** Thrillers are designed to generate anxiety in the audience and, in many respects, play a game with them. While audiences battle the psychological challenges of the narrative, they are attempting to solve the puzzle for the protagonist. Themes often include mystery, crime and the dark corners of the human mind.	***Silence of the Lambs*** (1991, dir. Jonathan Demme)

Setting: Set between a prison for the criminally insane and a wild chase across the United States, an FBI agent must track down a serial killer in abandoned houses using the help of a convicted criminal locked in prison.
Characters: Rookie FBI Agent **Clarice Starling** is desperate to prove herself in the hunt for the serial killer **Buffalo Bill**. To get inside the mind of her suspect, she uses the help of criminal genius and cannibal **Hannibal Lector**.
Plot: Normal is established in the first act as **Agent Starling** is training to earn her place as an FBI Agent. Tasked with interviewing **Hannibal Lector**, she learns that her work is connected to the hunt for the killer **Buffalo Bill**. Normal is disrupted when **Starling** and **Lector's** relationship develops and shocking discoveries are made in the case. **Starling** tentatively grows in confidence and creates turning points as she offers **Lector** a deal to gain more information. However, further turning points arise when **Lector** manipulates **Starling's** obsession with the case and escapes.
A new normal must be restored with **Starling** hot on the trail of **Buffalo Bill** and **Lector** on the loose.
Additional genres: Action



FIGURE 4.19 A still of *Silence of the Lambs* at Spike TV's 2008 Scream Awards Show

Genre: Fantasy
Description: The fantasy genre is famous for transporting audiences into narratives that take place in worlds built of pure imagination. The normal laws of everyday life do not apply and magic, supernatural creatures and mythical worlds drive endless possibilities for audiences.

Pan's Labyrinth (2006, dir. Guillermo del Toro)

Setting: Among the chaos of the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s, a young girl travels to a country house where she encounters a world of magical fairies, enchanted trees and subterranean worlds.
Characters: Ofelia, a young girl traumatised by the death of her father in war, travels with her mother **Carmen** to live with the sadistic military commander **Vidal**. To escape reality, **Ofelia** dives into fairy-tale books where she becomes a princess with three great quests to complete.
Plot: In Act One, **Ofelia** travels to the compound where she will live with **Vidal** and his soldiers. The inciting incident arrives early when she discovers a magical creature known as **The Faun** who tasks her with three quests to prove she is the princess.
In the midst of **Vidal's** conflict with nearby rebels, **Ofelia** embarks on her first and second quest in Act Two, retrieving a key from an enchanted toad and using it to unlock the lair of the terrifying 'Pale Man'. The act ends when her mother dies in childbirth.
In a race against time, **Ofelia** must complete her final quest to rejoin her mother and father in the underworld as a princess.
Additional genres: Action, thriller, horror



FIGURE 4.20 Ivana Baquero, who plays Ofelia in *Pan's Labyrinth*



ANALYSIS: WRITING ABOUT NARRATIVE

In order to effectively write about a story, it is important to always refer to the technique used, how it operates, why it was done and what effect it had on the audience. This way, you can present a clear understanding of not only how a story operates, but how media producers create them.

When discussing codes and conventions, use the following format:

- **Name:** Identify the story you are discussing and the element involved.
- **Describe:** In as much detail as possible, using the correct terminology, explain how the element works.
- **Why:** Explain why the media producer did this. What were they trying to communicate to the audience?
- **Effect:** Explain the impact of this element and the producer's decision to employ it.

STUDY TIP

How do I analyse how media creators use codes and conventions to convey meaning, and how do I write about this?

Read the content in Section 7.4 of Chapter 7 – 'How to write about media codes and conventions'. It can be used for revision or as a crash course in writing about codes and conventions in VCE Media.

ACTIVITY 4.8

Analysing genre

1. Look through each genre example in Case study 4.1. Identify the narrative structure used in each one.
2. Choose two genre examples and explain the motivation of each character. What other narratives in a similar genre do you know of that share this character?
3. Are there genre types that are more suited to the 'hero's journey'?. Explain your response.
4. Carefully consider the additional genres that appear in each example. Which genres can you see that are often used together?
5. Pick three genres and focus on the motivation and arc of the characters. What similarities can you see between them?
6. Watch at least three trailers from the examples in Case Study 4.1. How does each trailer indicate the genre for the audience and create expectations that will be familiar to the audience?
7. How do these trailers use the codes of sound, camera and acting to engage the audience in the genre?

ACTIVITY 4.9

Creative task: Genre

Work in groups to shoot a 30-second film trailer from a genre of your choosing. Carefully consider what you have learnt about each genre and include the following:

1. It must be mixed with at least ONE other genre (i.e. horror, comedy or crime thriller).
2. A character with a motivation typical of the genre.
3. A setting that matches the genre.
4. An indication of the potential plot with an inciting incident.

4.4 What is style?

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- the development and communication of a distinctive style by media creators and producers in the construction of narratives
- media language used to analyse and discuss the style and context of media narratives.

Style defines a media producer. Style can be seen in the way different media producers approach the construction of their narratives. If media producers use the same story structures to arrange their narratives, style defines the way in which they put their own stamp on these structures. Producers can be known for working with specific genres and, within them, defining their own niche.

Style can also be applied by a collective. In the case of film or photography, there is usually a single director imparting their vision in a narrative. However, in television, gaming and longer forms of storytelling, it can be an agreed approach by several directors and a whole team of collaborative and creative people.

Style can be seen in the type of characters, locations, actors, codes and conventions employed by different media producers. It can be seen in themes, symbolism and interpretations of audience expectations across a number of media products by a single director or team.

One way to consider this is to compare a single narrative that has been interpreted by two different media producers working in the same genre.

David, Denis and *Dune*

Frank Herbert's science fiction novel *Dune*, as you have learnt, has been interpreted by two different directors over time. The 1984 version of *Dune*, directed by David Lynch, was typical of the **surrealist** director's unique style, which is defined as 'Lynchian'. Bordering on B-Movie special effects and costumes, Lynch applied his own offbeat style to condense the original books into a single narrative. This led to a crammed **exposition** of a complex narrative allied with Lynch's style, which has often been described as the audience being dropped into the middle of someone else's dream. The performances are exaggerated and much of the action

surrealist a 20th-century avant-garde movement in art and literature which sought to release the creative potential of the unconscious mind

exposition a scriptwriter's method of giving background information to the audience about the characters and setting of the story



takes place in elaborately staged sets bathed in vibrant colour and distorted representations of reality. The 1984 version can best be described as 'over the top' in its interpretation of Herbert's novels, which, when examining Lynch's other work, such as *Blue Velvet* (1986) and the television series *Twin Peaks* (1989–91, 2017), bears many hallmarks of his style.

However, when Denis Villeneuve remade the film in 2021, he applied his own style to the project. Rather than condensing the story, he split the narrative across two films, allowing for greater characterisation in vast cinematic landscapes. Villeneuve's version had the advantage of modern **CGI** and filming techniques to create the film in his own style, which blurs the line between reality and unreality. Known for the science fiction films *Blade Runner 2049* (2017) and *Arrival* (2016), Villeneuve employs a consistent use of light and shadow, vibrant cinematography and vast landscapes to reveal engaging characters on an enormous scale. The use of sound, a common thread in many of his films, stands out and guides the audience between the moments of tension and high action.

CGI Computer Generated Image created by software or special effects for film



FIGURE 4.21 A still from David Lynch's 1984 film *Dune*, demonstrating his use of elaborate and offbeat settings



FIGURE 4.22 A still from the 2021 version of *Dune*, demonstrating Villeneuve's use of light and shadow

ACTIVITY 4.10

Comparing opening scenes

Compare the opening scenes from the 1984 and 2021 versions of *Dune*.

1. How does each director apply their own directorial style?
2. What sets them apart from one another? Choose one code to describe your response.
3. How does each opening sequence reflect the genre of science fiction?

Auteur Theory

Another way to understand style is to consider **Auteur Theory**. Developed in the 1950s by French journal *Cahiers du Cinéma*, Auteur Theory suggests that the director, or author, of a film can be identified by the style they apply consistently across their work. The theory is a controversial one, as filmmaking is a collaborative process and not always down to the decisions and actions of one person. In many other media forms, such as photography, where there is a single 'author', it's perhaps easier to apply. However, we don't need to look far to see consistent themes and techniques from film directors.

Auteur Theory theory of filmmaking in which the director is viewed as the major creative force in a motion picture

ACTIVITY 4.11

Research task

Copy and complete the table, or use the downloadable worksheet in the Interactive Textbook. Research the following directors and films to see if you can detect a clear style:

Director	Films	Consistent techniques, themes, ideas.
Kathryn Bigelow	*Point Break* (1991) *The Hurt Locker* (2008) *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012)	High-action, emotional stories that delve into the psyche of characters. She often uses wide landscape shots as a break between scenes and locations.
Edgar Wright	*Shaun of the Dead* (2004) *Hot Fuzz* (2007) *Scott Pilgrim vs the World* (2010) *Baby Driver* (2017)	
Wes Anderson		Vibrant use of colour in character-driven narratives about flawed families. Famous for using tracking shots across elaborate sets.
Patty Jenkins	*Monster* (2003) *Wonder Woman* (2017) *Wonder Woman 1984* (2020)	
Quentin Tarantino		

DISTINCTIVE INDIVIDUAL STYLE: HIRO MURAI

Hiro Murai is an American-Japanese director known for music videos and television. His unique approach to storytelling is most obvious in the TV series *Atlanta* (2016–22) where he worked with his long-time collaborator Donald Glover. What makes Murai's work in *Atlanta* unique is his ability to wander from reality to fantasy in and out of an episode. *Atlanta* follows the trials of struggling Earnest (Glover) as he attempts to manage the career of his up-and-coming rap star cousin 'Paper Boi'.

With its searing reflections on race relations in America disguised in offbeat comedy and surrealism, *Atlanta* is known for Murai's stunning visual style and Glover's unique approach to writing. Having made his start in music videos, Murai was used to telling stories with a limited budget and developed a distinct use of natural light (as film lighting was often too expensive for his music video projects) to create a sense of '**heightened naturalism**', where the everyday becomes extraordinary through prioritising visible and available light.

Murai's style is to expose the extraordinary in the everyday, and Earnest's struggles in *Atlanta* are just that. From arguing with a fast-food restaurant for not

heightened naturalism to exaggerate natural features in order to create a dramatic (or comedic) effect



FIGURE 4.23 TV and music video director Hiro Murai



being able to afford anything more than a kid's meal, to seeing a friend run over by a mysterious invisible car, Murai is able to use light and camera to position the audience in the middle ground between reality and fantasy. To push this theme further, *Atlanta* often includes episodes within its four seasons that are standalone narratives that have no relationship to the story arc of the series.

In one episode of season 2, Earnest's friend Darius travels to a mysterious mansion to buy a piano from a deceased musician, Benny. Darius is soon locked into the terrifying world of a recluse, Teddy Perkins, the brother and custodian of Benny's legacy (played by Glover in 'white face' make-up) who slowly draws Darius into a haunted house of horrors.

ACTIVITY 4.12

Visual analysis

Search online for a clip or still image of Donald Glover from 'Teddy Perkins' (season 2, episode 6, *Atlanta*). How has Murai used natural light and mise en scene elements of costume and make-up to communicate meaning for the audience?

Activity: Hiro Murai: Visual style

Childish Gambino's music video clip *This Is America* is arguably his best-known work. With over 850 million views on YouTube, Murai's style is evident in the use of natural light and enhanced colours to accompany the borderline reality of Gambino's searing lyrics and political commentary on contemporary life in America.

1 Watch the video clip *This Is America* and explain the use of the following codes to create meaning:
   - lighting
   - camera
   - acting
   - mise en scene.

2 In small groups, choose one video clip from Murai's back catalogue of work below and compare the use of the same codes as above. Prepare a presentation for the class:
   - What consistent themes and uses of codes can you see in Murai's work?
   - How does it compare to *This Is America*?



FIGURE 4.24 Childish Gambino in the music video clip *This Is America*

How does your chosen clip represent Murai's 'heightened naturalism' style?

Childish Gambino – *Sober*	Childish Gambino – *3005*	Chet Faker – *Gold*
Massive Attack – *Take It There*	Earl Sweatshirt – *Chum*	St Vincent – *Cheerleader*
Michael Kiwanuka – *Black Man in a White World*	Flying Lotus – *Never Catch Me* ft Kendrick Lamar	Spoon – *Do You*

Collaborative style

Critics of Auteur Theory argue that storytelling in film and media is a collaborative process and there is more than one creative hand guiding a style. In recent years, the explosion of television production for streaming services has seen several distinct styles and narratives engage audiences. In most cases, an 8–10-episode season will require more than one director, and yet the overarching style of the series remains intact. In past years of television sitcoms and dramas, a static use of sets, character development and locations meant that a range of directors could work in predictable conditions. However, in a highly competitive and arguably disposable streaming television environment, directors, **showrunners** and production teams must work together to maintain a distinct and consistent style across a series. Even Hiro Murai only directed 20 of the 30 episodes in *Atlanta*'s four seasons and is quoted as stating that storytelling is a 'team sport'.[1]

showrunner the person who has overall creative authority and management responsibility for a television program

ACTIVITY 4.13

Collaborative styles in streamed TV

Work in groups and choose **two** TV series to research. Examine clips and stills to explore the style of the production and compare this with the number of showrunners and directors across a series.

Series	**Premise: What is the show about and where is it set?**	**Lead director**	**Additional directors and number of episodes directed**	**Description of the style** (hint: focus on the use of codes and conventions)
Severance		Ben Stiller		
Euphoria		Sam Levinson		
Bojack Horseman		Amy Winfrey		
Stranger Things		Duffer Brothers		
What We Do In The Shadows		Yana Gorskaya		
Our Flag Means Death		Nacho Vigalondo		
Dear White People		Justin Simien		
Killing Eve		Damon Thomas		



4.5 Historical and cultural context, the construction of narratives and using and subverting genre

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- the influences of historical and cultural context on the construction of narratives
- how media creators use or subvert genre to engage audiences
- media language used to analyse and discuss the style and context of media narratives.

historical and cultural context the historical context refers to the time and place in which the artist created the artwork. The cultural context refers to the artistic, environmental, economic, social, technological, political or religious climate of the time that may have influenced the artist.

All narratives reflect the time and place in which they were produced. While science fiction films like *Alien* (1979, dir. Ridley Scott) may deal with a futuristic setting in outer space, the use of a female hero (one of the first in the science fiction genre) and its sharp critique of corporate greed were the director's commentary on the growing feminist movement and impact of capitalism on the United States in the late 1970s. Media producers can use narratives to make comment on the **historical and cultural context** of the society in which they are produced.

Genre itself can be a vehicle for media producers to reflect how these contexts and genres can change and evolve over time through the participation of the audience, their expectations and demands.

The media industry, the companies that produce film, television, radio and print (and, more recently, online services like YouTube) produce genre narratives based on the demand of their audiences.

Take, for example, the American action sub-genre of a war film. In the post-World War II era, where America emerged victorious, many war films of the 1940s and 50s reflected heroic characters who defeated America's enemies at the time. There was a predictable structure of a noble hero, of good triumphing over evil.

However, throughout the 1960s and 70s, America was engaged in a brutal and ultimately fruitless conflict in Vietnam, despite the efforts of films like *The Green Berets* (1968, dir. John Wayne). A famed hero of Western films and 'All-American' values, John Wayne wanted to make a film that would inspire support for the conflict, which by 1968 was failing dramatically. Wayne even sought and employed the support of the US government to access military equipment and props. However, he was too late, and the film was at odds with America's changing attitudes, as many began to question if the American soldier really was 'the good guy'.

The common understanding of war had changed, and many began to question the value of war as a means of changing the world. America's failure to secure victory in the conflict coincided with some of the most turbulent social events in its history.

As a result, a number of films within the genre emerged like *Apocalypse Now* (1979, dir. Francis Ford Coppola) and *Platoon* (1986, dir. Oliver Stone) that focused on the negative impacts of war on the combatants and victims alike. As American society, its media and government grappled with the fallout of the war, so did the audience expectations of the war movie genre.

dominant ideologies the attitudes, beliefs, values and morals shared by the majority of the people in a given society

Genres can shift and change to reflect the **dominant ideologies** of society at the time.

ACTIVITY 4.14

Comparative analysis

Compare the posters for *The Green Berets* and *Platoon*. Explain how each poster represents different attitudes and beliefs about the same genre. Use codes and conventions in your response.

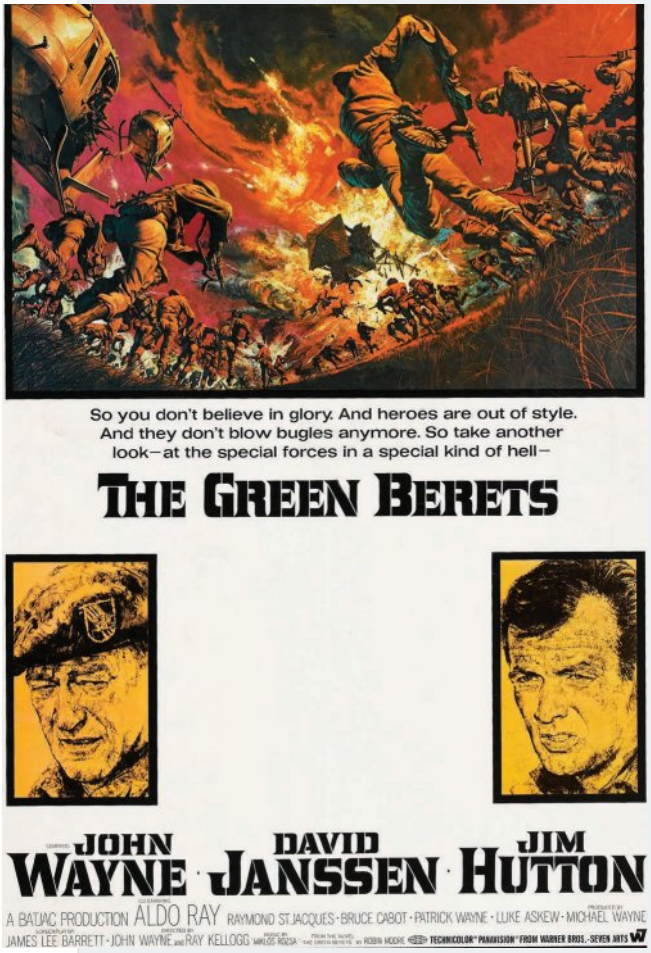


FIGURE 4.25 The poster for *The Green Berets*



FIGURE 4.26 The poster for *Platoon*

Evolution of the horror genre

Horror has a long history as a genre. What began as a literary tradition was taken up by media industries around the world and, over time, evolved with it. Contemporary audiences may watch horror films from the 1940s and 50s and not engage in the same way as they would today, as horror, like any genre, reflects the time and place it was constructed and what society viewed as important at the time.

In the early years, horror cinema was often a recreation of famous novels like *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and *Frankenstein*. The advent of 'talking' and sound in cinema in the 1930s saw the explosion of the genre for audiences who flocked to cinemas to be shocked and terrified. Between the 1920s and 1950s, Universal Studios defined the horror genre by depicting modern understandings of characters like Dracula and Frankenstein's monster.[2]



FIGURE 4.27 A still from the film *Godzilla*

However, in the years that followed World War II, a fear of nuclear war gripped the globe as the United States and the Soviet Union (Russia) were locked in a 'Cold War' of ideas and threats. In the Western world, the dominant ideology promoted democracy and used Soviet Communism and nuclear war as its source of horror. As such, radioactively charged evil dominated the screen in films like *Godzilla* (1954, dir. Honda Ishirō) and *Them!* (1954, dir. Gordon Douglas), a film about radioactive ants that terrorise civilisation.

Fast forward to the 1970s and the tone of the horror genre changed again. Moving away from the nuclear threat, horror began to reflect a fear of the occult and the supernatural. In the wake of the wild 1960s, the failure of the Vietnam War and the rise of the hippie movement, Western society had swung back to worrying about family values and the previously safe fabric of society. The rejection of the **counterculture movement** of the 1960s meant that audiences were drawn to horrors that dealt with more supernatural themes of the devil and possession. Films like *The Exorcist* (1973, dir. William Friedkin) and *The Shining* (1980, dir. Stanley Kubrick) paved the way for blood, gore and the slasher genre of the 1980s.

counterculture movement a social movement of the late 1960s which sought to challenge traditional norms and create a new, more inclusive and progressive society

The 1980s produced some of the most memorable films and TV shows of the horror genre. High- and low-budget films reached huge audiences that seemed in competition with each other to up the stakes in blood, gore and terror. The *Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984–2010) series, *Friday the 13th* (1980, dir. Sean S Cunningham) along with *Child's Play* (1988, dir. Tom Holland) and *Pet Sematary* (1988, dir. Mary Lambert)



FIGURE 4.28 A still from the film *The Exorcist*



FIGURE 4.29 The demonic doll 'Chucky' from the film *Child's Play*

brought horror villains that became household names. The 1980s were a golden age for slasher horror where the gore became more about entertainment than scaring the audience. The level of blood and gore was as much a reflection of the decadent and materialistic culture that dominated Western society at the time. Gone was the fear of the dark as evil was now in the pure light of day for audiences.

The 1990s saw a decline in the popularity of horror. All genres go in and out of fashion for audiences. Any study of 1990s music will tell you that the decade of excess that had preceded it was being rejected by audiences. Bands like Nirvana typified this.

The 2000s saw the rebirth of a common horror trope: zombies and vampires! Following a trend in both cinema and television, the undead moved into popular culture, which coincided with a huge growth in video games like 'Resident Evil', which began back in 1996.

The 'rebirth of the undead' came from some of the most dramatic events of the last 20 years. The 9/11 terrorist attacks in America, followed by those in Bali, England and France, created a fear for the future of the world. For the first time in a very long time in the Western world, people did not feel safe in their own streets. The threat of a new type of lone terrorists and warfare, be it chemical or biological, stoked fears of a zombie apocalypse and was represented in films like Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* (2002), *I Am Legend* (2007, dir. Francis Lawrence), *Zombieland* (2009, dir. Ruben Fleischer), and the long-running television program *The Walking Dead* (2010–22).



FIGURE 4.30 A collection of newspapers and headlines responding to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, DC.



FIGURE 4.31 A still from the film *Nope*

The rise of the internet spread horror and zombies around the world. Japanese film *The Ring* (originally made in 1998 by Hideo Nakata) and South Korea's *Train to Busan* (2016, dir. Sang-ho Yeon) brought a new and more frightening perspective to horror.

In recent years, the horror genre has taken a more political turn. Despite the rash of reboots and remakes, torture horror took the genre to new depths with the *Saw* franchise (2004–10) and the highly controversial *Human Centipede* series (2009–14). However, three films in recent years from one director have worked to redefine the genre for a modern age.

Jordan Peele's three films *Get Out* (2017), *Us* (2019) and *Nope* (2022) are classic horror films that act as commentary on racial and social politics of recent years in the Western world. With his use of age-old horror techniques in each film, Peele's commentary of the current state of racism around the world is as equally unnerving for audiences. Peele's most celebrated work, *Get Out*, was frightening less for its use of horror than for its connection to the time and place in which it was made.



ACTIVITY 4.15

Video essay

Work with a partner to chart the influence of historical events on the horror genre.

- On paper, create a timeline of the key events and match that to the changes that occurred in the horror genre.
- Collect images, movie posters and clips of films mentioned in the section 'Evolution of the horror genre'.
- Conduct further research into the trends of horror films created in each decade of the 20th and 21st centuries.
- Work as a pair to create a presentation on the relationship between historical events and the horror genre.
- In your presentation, explain the significance of particular texts at the time of their production and the role of the media industry in their production.
- You can edit this as a video essay or as a slide presentation.

Subverting genre

The popularity of certain genres and styles has led to a sense of predictability in media narratives. As such, media creators often toy with genre expectations to ensure their stories stand out and engage audiences. The decision to subvert the genre can be influenced by the historical and cultural context of when the narrative is made.

LA HAINE (1995)

The 1995 film *La haine* (dir. Mattieu Kassovitz) not only toyed with the thriller genre, but narrative structure itself. It is a film primarily born from a historical and cultural context. Kassovitz, a 25-year-old director, was inspired by the deaths of two young migrants in police custody in 1990s France. He wanted to explore 'how a guy could get up in the morning and die the same evening in this way'.[3] Prior to constructing the film, France had experienced an economic downturn where millions of migrant jobs had been lost and unemployment was at an all-time high. Youth unemployment in migrant areas had hit 70%. In the decade prior to the film's creation, there had been over 300 deaths in police custody. The film follows the fate of three young migrants in the wake of a riot and the brutal beating of a close friend.



FIGURE 4.32 The protagonist Vinz (Vincent Cassel) in the 1995 film *La haine*

Kassovitz challenged the traditional structure of narrative film and the thriller genre. *La haine* alludes to tension, but almost never escalates it. Initial audience reactions to the narrative might claim that nothing happens until the tragic final scene. However, in the eyes of Kassovitz, that was entirely the point. Rather than use a traditional three-act structure, it uses two. There are very few discernible turning points. Kassovitz chose to focus on the grinding boredom, frustration and alienation experienced by migrant youth in France in the 1990s, using the tragic final scene to drive home the cultural message of the text. So significant was the film upon release that it sparked public debate in the French parliament and is still referred to when migrant frustrations evolve into public protest in modern-day France.

THE HURT LOCKER (2008)

Kathryn Bigelow's 2008 film *The Hurt Locker* may appear as a classic action film based on the Iraq war, but it borrows heavily from the Western genre. Based around the dangerous work of a bomb disposal unit in the Iraq war (2003–11), Bigelow charts the addiction that some participants must have to war and conflict, while it chews the weakest out. While it bears all the hallmarks of an action thriller narrative, it is in many ways a Western. As Westerns tend to concern themselves with the wild frontier (in this case, Iraq) that created an 'us vs them' narrative quest for the protagonist, *The Hurt Locker* does the same with the protagonist, Sergeant James, who grapples with his own mission, his addiction to conflict and the honour associated with his work. The typical moral conflict of any Western hero is portrayed: conflicted but dedicated to the cause.

The musical score of *The Hurt Locker*, created by Marco Belltrami, was based on the work of Ennio Morricone, a veteran of the '**Spaghetti Western**' sub-genre, which made immediate connections for audiences familiar with the genre. Belltrami's score ties together a narrative that, despite its setting and surface level genre, draws deeper connections to the themes of justice, corruption, betrayal and redemption, all hallmarks of the Western.

Spaghetti Western a Western film made cheaply in Europe by an Italian director

500 DAYS OF SUMMER (2009)

In the 2009 movie *500 Days of Summer* (dir. Marc Webb), the story **remixes** the resolution in the traditional 'boy meets girl' romance narrative when it tells of the 500 days the main character Tom spends with his girlfriend, Summer. Told in a non-chronological order (the film opens on day 488) the story dips in and out of various stages in the relationship between Tom and Summer. Early in the film the audience sees Tom in the depths of despair as the relationship has come to an end. This would normally appear somewhere towards the end of Act 2!

remixing the process of combining, editing and altering existing media forms and texts

However, the resolution of the film is not in the reunification of Tom and Summer, but rather in Tom leaving his job and pursuing his dream of architecture. The audience learns that the story is not so much about the relationship Tom has with Summer, but what the character learns throughout the process.

RICK AND MORTY (2013–)

Dan Harmon's science fiction animation show bends genre in almost every direction and makes a habit of pulling apart the tropes of other genres. Based on the exploits of dimension-travelling scientist Rick and his grandson Morty, Harmon has created two characters with such questionable morality that hedonism and ultra-violence is the norm within each episode, and it is near impossible to find a 'hero' in each episode.



breaking the fourth wall a performance convention in which an invisible, imaginary wall separates actors from the audience and is broken when the actor converses directly with the audience

Harmon uses Rick's family as the vehicle for interdimensional travel, as they grapple with other versions of themselves, their world and outrageous manifestations of their worst thoughts and behaviours. Yet Harmon uses each adventure to pull apart the horror, fantasy and action genres by pointing out their worst and most predictable characters and story structures. It would not be uncommon for Rick or Morty to speak directly to the audience (known as **breaking the fourth wall**) in reference to the enormous fan culture the show has generated.

In the season 3 episode 'The Ricklantis Mixup', the audience, rather than the main characters, take a back seat to the sordid lives of rich and poor Ricks in the 'Citadel', a planet in the centre of the universe. Rather than explore its science fiction roots, 'The Ricklantis Mixup' borrows from gritty urban drama films like *Crash* (2006) and *Training Day* (2001) and unpacks the inequality, corruption and drama that lies under the surface of society. In this alternate society, populated by millions of Mortys who hold a dominant role over the millions of Ricks, Harmon uses the techniques of drama to explain a society crumbling from the inside. In typical Dan Harmon style, the original Rick and Morty return from their own adventure totally unaware of the devastating drama that has unfolded at the Citadel.

ACTIVITY 4.16

Research task

Watch the film trailer for *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986, dir. John Hughes). Explain how the protagonist breaks the fourth wall and helps drive the potential narrative.



FIGURE 4.33 Sloane (Mia Sara), Ferris Bueller (Matthew Broderick) and Cameron (Alan Ruck) in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*

4.6 How media creators engage audiences

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- notions of audience and engagement and how these influence the construction, production, distribution, consumption and reception of narratives
- media language used to analyse and discuss the style and context of media narratives.

Audiences are central to narratives, yet the concept of audience is complex. A media audience can be considered a single person or a group of like-minded people. Audiences can be local or regional within a country or area of the world. How we define audiences is important to understanding how they behave and can influence the construction of narratives.

When we as individuals engage with a media product, be it in a cinema, on our laptops or through our headphones, we bring a lifetime of preferences, experiences and perspectives that makes our understanding and engagement with media products different. Our past and present dictate the way we engage with media narratives, be it religious, cultural, family dynamics or geographic; *who* we are defines *how* we find different media texts engaging.

And, yet, consider the members of your family; you all have shared experiences, however you probably prefer different media products to each other. What you want to watch or think is engaging may vary from your parents and siblings.

When you are engaged in a media product, it means that the producer has created an emotional response that resonated with you. It could be as simple as enjoyment and laughter, or it could lead to more thought and introspection. This means that you are considered the '**intended audience**' of the media creator. If you are this audience, it means that there are people who have similar shared experiences and interests.

intended audience the group of people for which a media product is designed

Audiences, in turn, use media narratives for a range of reasons. We gravitate to different texts for different reasons. Think of it this way: we make decisions based on *why* we want to engage with media at that time:

1. **Personal interest** – we engage with texts that resonate with our own interests, values and ideas.
2. **Social connection** – we want to watch what everyone else is watching and share that experience to feel connected to friends and family.
3. **Entertainment and escapism** – perhaps the greatest gift of media narratives is to escape reality for a short period of time and live in someone else's shoes.

How an audience reacts to a media narrative refers to the concept of reception and consumption.

Consumption refers to the way audiences react to and read media narratives based on their personal and cultural experiences. Take the film *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008, dir. Danny Boyle), a film about a young boy who grows up in abject poverty in India. This may not be your experience. While the film was celebrated around the world for its incredible tale of triumph in the name of romance, it was poorly received in India itself. While non-Indian audiences were engaged in the themes of love and triumph, Indian audiences saw the film (directed by the Englishman Danny Boyle) as a negative and disparaging view of life in India.

consumption the way audiences react to and read media narratives based on their personal and cultural experiences



FIGURE 4.34 Director Danny Boyle at the 2008 AFI Fest for *Slumdog Millionaire*

In more simple terms, consumption refers to what we bring to media texts as individuals; what we have seen before and any prior knowledge that we may employ. Readers of popular fiction books that are translated into film often complain that the 'book was better' as they are watching a text they have already interpreted for themselves. Or, as in the case of *Slumdog Millionaire*, we may have lived experience that confirms, challenges or even denies what we have lived ourselves. Our personal interests, gender, sexuality and cultural background all impact the way we engage with a media narrative and can influence the styles and genres we are naturally drawn to.

Reception refers to the physical way we engage with media texts. In the modern world, we have multiple ways to watch, listen and engage with media narratives.

Watching a movie in a cinema with a big picture and loud audio is quite a different experience from watching the same film on a mobile phone while travelling on a bus. Since media codes communicate media conventions, interference with media codes could mean that audiences miss out on media conventions. Missing out on important details could potentially reduce the audience enjoyment and engagement of films as they may miss out on key pieces of information. This experience is referred to as the **reception context**.

reception the physical way we engage with media texts

reception context the place and context where and how an audience engages with a text

For instance, if you were watching a movie in the classroom and people commentate on the action, making you miss dialogue that explains the protagonist's past, then you would not completely understand the motivations driving the character. This, in turn, may contribute to you not enjoying the film as it wouldn't make sense to you.



FIGURE 4.35 The world premiere of a staged reading by Quentin Tarantino: *The Hateful Eight*

In addition to this, the time and place where an audience watches a media product is also critical to their understanding and interpretation of it. As seen earlier in this chapter, historical events and societal changes play a significant role in how producers create media stories and how audiences interpret them.

Media producers must be aware of the individual and cultural contexts within which audiences view, listen to and interact with their work to ensure the audience engages with their product.

When Quentin Tarantino shot the film *The Hateful Eight* (2008), his intention was for audiences to experience it in cinemas and so he shot the film in the unique aspect ratio of 2.35:1. Such a screen size would be lost on a small mobile phone screen or even a laptop.

Tarantino was so set on influencing the reception of the film that it was shot exclusively on film and a special 70-millimetre film version was screened at a number of independent cinemas around America and Australia (for example, at Melbourne's Astor, Sun and Village Rivoli cinemas).

Conversely, digital media content, such as Instagram Reels or TikToks that you will read about later in this book, are made with this reception context in mind. Most of this content is watched online via laptops, phones or tablets; they avoid the subtle and meticulous codes and conventions of cinema to attract the distracted audience!

ACTIVITY 4.17

Research task

Construct a diary of your media use over the last week. Explain how often you have engaged with narratives in the following settings:

1. Via your phone
2. Via your laptop or tablet device
3. On a television at home
4. In a cinema.

Which experience did you find the most engaging? What was it about the physical reception context that suggests this?



FIGURE 4.36 Robert Downey Jr at a Q&A for the first Marvel film, *Iron Man* (dir. Jon Favreau)

Marvel and the multiverse

In recent years, cinema screens have been dominated by the superhero action genre. A rich and complex web of comic books, films and television all link to an audience's understanding of parallel worlds and an infinite universe. Newcomers to a standalone Marvel film like *Thor: Ragnarok* (2008, dir. Taika Waititi) may find the film entertaining in the cinema for its loud and visual action sequences and comedic moments; however, this will differ significantly from someone who understands the complexities of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) of over 32 films and counting, 15 TV shows and countless comic books.

Debate over who likes the MCU rages to this day. For those who dislike the series, like film director David Lynch who stated that superhero films were more like 'theme park rides'[4] than actual pieces of cinematic art, are bringing their own consumption experience to each of the different MCU narratives. Another famed director, Martin Scorsese, was deeply critical of the films that he saw as too formulaic in their **construction**, too similar and unremarkable contributions to the history of film.

construction the process by which a media text is shaped

However, this may deny the complexity of the universe that these texts inhabit, and the prior knowledge required to appreciate them. The sheer number of hours required to understand the MCU takes effort and



FIGURE 4.37 Francis Ford Coppolla, director of *The Godfather*

many audiences feel rewarded for their prior knowledge by the predictable nature of the narratives.

Francis Ford Coppola, director of one of the most celebrated films of all time, *The Godfather* (1972), claimed that in the modern era of the MCU, a film like *The Godfather* would never make it to **production**.

Coppola argued that such a film would never be made today as Hollywood is only giving a 'green light' to movies where 'they can have a whole series of them ... pretty much a Marvel Comics-type of thing.'

Coppola's argument lies in the **distribution** of the MCU to audiences. In simple terms, the MCU is a dominant force in modern media. The MCU appears across cinema, streaming platforms and, in some cases, DVD. The MCU has proven itself to be successful financially and can reach audiences in a range of platforms that means other narratives may not see the light of day, as the MCU is a proven formula for a return on Marvel Studios' investment. As the MCU on screen is more than a decade old, it has created a rich history of consumption for audiences who have invested time and effort in the series.

production the process of producing a media product on set, using media technologies and specified roles

distribution the process of releasing a media product to audiences, either via a cinema, television broadcast or streaming release

Crucial to the success of the MCU is the reception context. To fully appreciate the scale of the films, they need to be seen in cinemas. While the MCU has been supported by a range of television series that are mostly viewed at home on televisions and laptops, the films have long been credited with keeping audiences in cinemas as the experience is so much greater. Each new film, which appears with almost clockwork regularity, is a significant highpoint in the development of the universe.

ACTIVITY 4.18

The Marvel Cinematic Universe

Conduct research on how to begin watching the MCU from the beginning.

1. How many hours would it take to watch and understand the entire MCU?
2. How much of that time would be spent watching feature-length films vs streamed TV series?
3. Consider your response to the first question above and compare that to the historical and personal experiences audiences bring to narrative consumption. Why do you think the MCU has such a dedicated and sophisticated following among audiences?
4. Carefully examine the entire MCU catalogue of films and television – how does it appear to cater for a range of different audiences?

Class debate

As a class, conduct a short debate. Divide yourselves into equal halves of affirmative and negative in response to this statement:

'The MCU is little more than an elaborate theme park ride' – discuss.

4.7 The influence of narratives on audiences

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- the influence of narratives on audience engagement, consumption and reception
- media language used to analyse and discuss the style and context of media narratives.

At a very basic level, narratives have an influence on audience engagement. As discussed earlier in this chapter, audiences are engaged for a variety of reasons, be it laughter, to feel emotions like anxiety, fear or to raise adrenaline levels. In the case of news narratives, documentaries or podcasts, it can be to gain information and learn. Whatever our needs are at the time, media narratives of all forms can provide this for audiences.

At a deeper level, countless researchers and theorists have tried to explain how audiences are influenced by media narratives (more on that later in this book). However, a basic theory like Stuart Hall's Media Reception Theory suggests that when audiences read texts, they do one or all of three things:

1. They participate in the *Dominant/Preferred Reading* – The audience accept and agree with the messages and reading put forward in the media text.
2. They have a *Negotiated Reading* – The audience agree with some parts but reject or are opposed to other parts.
3. Or they have an *Oppositional Reading* – The audience reject the messages that are trying to be conveyed and do not accept/agree with them.

Take the example of *Slumdog Millionaire* discussed earlier. The reading of the text will depend heavily on the audience member. If you are non-Indian, you may approach the text differently to a wealthy Indian, or a poorer Indian who may have experienced the hardship of the protagonist. The latter may disagree with some of the representations made by Danny Boyle as inaccurate or misleading and focus on other elements of the story and come away with a negotiated or even oppositional reading of the text.

Another theory of media and audiences is the Uses and Gratification Theory. This suggests that the audience use the media for just that, their own uses, and the gratifications of learning, entertainment, escapism, social connection and the ability to relate to a text. While this theory has been heavily criticised, we can all agree that we identify with characters that we can relate to. It's more likely that you will gravitate to narratives about teenagers than *This is 40* (2012, dir. Judd Apatow), which may be preferred by some of your teachers!

Fandom

As we have seen with the MCU, the need for social interaction and a sense of belonging can be created by media narratives. If we can identify or enjoy the same things as others, it can create social connections that we may not otherwise have been able to have. Thanks to the internet, these connections can spread across the entire globe via **fandom**. Forums, chats, fan fiction and conventions bring people together around a narrative. Whole communities gather at stadium-sized venues to dress up, meet their heroes and share a love of specific narratives. Perhaps the only narrative series that can rival the MCU for its scale and dedication is that of Star Wars.

fandom the fans of a particular person, team or fictional series that can be regarded collectively as a community or subculture



STAR WARS FANDOM

Star Wars: Episode IV: A New Hope (1977, dir. George Lucas) was a cultural phenomenon upon its release and grew into a Disney-owned empire of 12 movies, nine TV series and countless spin-offs, cartoons, comic books, podcasts and graphic novels. It includes a vast and somewhat linear universe of characters, planets and storylines that travel across galaxies and are bound together by a magical energy field known as 'the force'. Given the longevity of the Star Wars narrative, many fans have deep and emotional connections to the characters and stories that, for many, stretch back to their childhood.

The original three films were released between 1977 and 1983 and are part of folklore for *Star Wars* fans. However, a prequel series drew the ire of fans as it did not meet the expectations of audiences who had grown up with the original series. The initial three films had a specific style that had helped define the science fiction genre and the prequels did not match the look and feel of the originals. Fast forward a decade and the three sequels to the original series were made, and despite a poor critical reception, they had returned to the original story structures, style, look and feel of the original series, placating many long-time fans *and* creating a generation of new ones.



FIGURE 4.38 Star Wars fans at the SOFA 2022 Geek Fair in Bogota, Colombia

internet piracy the practice of downloading and distributing copyrighted works digitally without permission

binge watching the practice of watching multiple episodes of a television program in rapid succession

appointment television programming that audiences are obliged to watch at the time of its original broadcast

STREAMING

The introduction of streaming services has altered the way in which audiences engage with narratives. Born from the prevalence of **internet piracy**, streaming services made narrative TV series available all at once, building a culture of **binge watching**. Prior to the introduction of streaming services, TV and, to the same extent, cinema audiences, had to wait for the scheduled broadcast of their preferred media narratives. Called **appointment television**, audiences would gather around the television with families and friends at a scheduled time each week for their favourite programs. This created subcultures around TV shows for audiences that would, in the pre-internet era, create social connections between fans.

At school and work, the discussion would surround the events of last night's episode.



FIGURE 4.39 Modern-day 'appointment television' on a laptop

In the streaming era, audiences are able to watch and consume as much as they want, when and how they want. Netflix was the first streaming service to pioneer this practice of dropping a whole series at once. With the landmark series of *House of Cards* (2013–18) and *Orange Is the New Black* (2013–19), Netflix totally altered the habits of media audiences. No longer did people sit at scheduled times to view narratives, but they did so on a variety of devices like televisions, laptop and phones. While this led to an explosion in the production and distribution of high-quality television narratives, it fundamentally changed the way media audiences interacted with narratives. Audiences no longer have a collective and scheduled connection to popular TV narratives but share their understanding through the streaming services that individuals subscribe to and the timeline at which they connect with and watch the series. Today, so many of our conversations surround a conversation that starts with 'Have you watched _____ ?'

ACTIVITY 4.19

Streaming

1. Make a list of the most recent television series that you have binge watched.
2. On average, how long do you spend bingeing them? Do you watch them in one go or spread them out to coincide with the habits of families and friends?
3. Explain how you were encouraged to engage with new shows. Was it through word of mouth? Social media? Or advertising?

Film greats on streaming

The dominance of streaming platforms in recent years has seen a huge shift in the way audiences engage with film narratives. Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, audiences were shunning the cinema experience to watch at home. As a result, some of cinema's greatest directors had begun creating direct to streaming narratives.

In years gone by, major studios would release films in cinemas exclusively, relying on reviews and word of mouth to build momentum and audiences. However, as so many of us were at home between 2020 and 2022, audiences began demanding more new release content on the wide variety of streaming services now available to them.

It began in 2019, when Martin Scorsese's *The Irishman* was released directly to Netflix. Scorsese is renowned for his gangster narratives like *Goodfellas* (1990), *Casino* (1995), *The Departed* (2006) and the true story of a financial scammer in *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013). His style is a cornerstone of cinema history and is the vision behind some of the most popular films of all time, and yet *The Irishman* was released directly to a streaming platform when the original major studio behind the film became reluctant to take a chance on it.



ACTIVITY 4.20

Direct to streaming narratives

1 Conduct research in pairs to explore the recent film narratives that have gone directly to streaming platforms. What does this tell you about the way audiences engage with film narratives today?
2 Explore the most recent statistics on cinema audiences. Have these changed in recent years?
3 How does the reception context of a streaming film change when audiences engage at home in comparison to a cinema? What are audiences missing in this experience?

A return to scheduled television

After almost a decade of binge-watching narratives at home, audiences have begun to wait for scheduled releases again. After almost a decade of streaming services like Netflix releasing popular TV series all at once, many have begun to ration their releases to a weekly basis again. The reason is strangely simple: audiences engage with these narratives on a deeper level if they are forced to wait.

By the beginning of the 2020s, binge culture had begun to have an effect on the construction of TV narratives. Episodes no longer had specific run times as they had in the years of broadcast television (due to the constraints of TV scheduling and commercial breaks) and episode structures were often of secondary importance to the overall narrative arc of the series. Audiences were encouraged to watch the entire series as quickly as possible, and, as a result, many great moments of storytelling were consumed, disposed of and forgotten by audiences who went in search of the next great story. Streaming services realised in 2021 that audiences would not engage with their platforms in the long term, as many would 'borrow' passwords or cancel subscriptions once their favourite show had been watched in a matter of days or even hours. To build audience engagement in their platforms and generate greater investment in their narratives, streaming services began to revert to weekly releases.

As a result of the weekly release schedule, just as it had been in the broadcast era, 'word of mouth' began to build bigger audiences. You may notice that a new streamed series will release two or three episodes at once, that allow the audience to build interest, and then reverts to a weekly schedule, which provides the audience time to share their interest in person or online, drawing even more viewers in and, in turn, keeping subscribers on the platform. HBO's *Game of Thrones* (2011–19) famously never dropped an entire series and the viewing culture that built around the *GoT* universe set the model that would follow, as audiences would engage in fan forums, memes and other types of online discussions which built a greater cultural impact.

ACTIVITY 4.21

Research task

Make a list of the top five recent TV series you have watched on streaming platforms:

1 How many platforms did you need to subscribe to in order to watch them?
2 How many were dropped all at once or on a weekly schedule?
3 For those you binge watched, how long did it take you to get through the whole series?
4 How many did you watch on a week-to-week basis?
5 Considering the previous responses, how did you engage with each text? What difference do binge watching and the weekly schedule make on the way you engaged with the text as an audience member?

4.8 Manipulating media codes and conventions in the construction of narratives

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- the manipulation of media codes and conventions by media creators and producers in the construction of narratives in different media forms
- media language used to analyse and discuss the style and context of media narratives.

Narratives are, of course, not restricted to film or television. Fictional and non-fictional narratives employ a range of codes and conventions to engage audiences that borrow from the tradition and utilise their own. Documentary, podcasting, print and online, and digital storytelling all utilise and adapt traditional codes and conventions to create engaging narratives.

Documentary

Documentary stories tell non-fiction stories that attempt to reveal an aspect of the world in intrinsic detail. In essence, the storyteller is attempting to document reality and weave it together to tell a story.

Documentary stories provide an excellent opportunity to examine the very nature of narrative as each represents an author's personal, cultural and historical context. The countless hours of David Attenborough's nature documentaries have told the story of the natural world. The 2004 documentary *Metallica: Some Kind of Monster* (dir. Joe Berlinger) took the audience behind the curtain to view the life of rock metal group Metallica, which provided insight into the unknown troubles brought by fame, wealth and artistic expression.

CONSUMPTION AND RECEPTION OF DOCUMENTARIES

Depending on the form they take, documentaries allow audiences to develop their own interpretation and expectations of the narrative, and consumption is often dependent on the style in which they are presented. Be it a biased interpretation of a topic or a fly-on-the-wall observation, the audience is required to concentrate on all details of the experience. As such, documentaries that are viewed outside of a cinema or television would lose some of the vital elements essential to remain engaged in the narrative.

Documentary can be broken into six categories that best explain the varying uses of codes and conventions.



Style	Examples
Poetic These stories use images and production techniques to reveal inner truths to the story subject, which avoid traditional story structures. Short, carefully selected imagery and production techniques tell a very subjective story from the point of view of the author. Dialogue and direct storytelling are often avoided as the imagery, sound and editing present the author's view of reality and story.	*Fata Morgana* (2011, dir. Werner Herzog) *Microcosmos* (1996, dirs Claude Nuridsany and Marie Périnou) *Life in a Day* (2011, dir. Kevin Macdonald) *Koyaanisqatsi* (1982, dir. Godfrey Reggio)
Expository Perhaps one of the more easily recognisable documentary forms, expository documentaries tell a story from a specific point of view, using the 'voice of god' narrator who drives the story forward. The purpose of expository documentaries is often educational and thus fictional elements of story are deemed to be a distraction from the version of reality created by the author. These stories combine narration, sound and imagery in a logical story structure.	*Hoop Dreams* (1996, dir. Steve James) *Planet Earth* (2006, dir. David Attenborough) *What Happened, Miss Simone?* (2015, dir. Liz Garbus) *13th* (2016, dir. Ava DuVerney)
Participatory These stories recognise that the act of documentary making is subjective and attempt to include the audience within the story. Usually involving pieces to camera and interviews with subjects as well as audience members, participatory documentaries aim to include the audience within the production of the story.	*Kurt and Courtney* (1998, dir. Nick Bloomfield) *Bowling for Columbine* (2002, dir. Michael Moore) *My Scientology Movie* (2016, dir. Louis Theroux) *Icarus* (2016, dir. Bryan Fogel)  **FIGURE 4.40** Louis Theroux
Observational Often known as ***cinéma vérité*** ('truthful cinema') or a 'fly-on-the-wall' story, these documentaries take a step back and allow the action and vision to tell the story. Observational documentaries are among the most created as they attempt to provide an unbiased view of a story and allow the audience more active participation in the creation of meaning. The author of these stories is involved only in the recording of vision and sound and there are no interviews, narration or addresses to camera. Called 'fly on the wall' for the sensation that the audience experiences observing a story without the subject's knowledge, observational documentaries tell a more candid version of events that sometimes avoids traditional three-act story structures. ***cinema vérité*** a style of filmmaking characterised by realistic, typically documentary films, which avoid artificiality and artistic effect and are generally made with simple equipment	*Children Underground* (2001, dir. Edet Belzberg) *Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait* (2006, dir. Douglas Gordon)

TABLE 4.1 Documentary categories

Style	Examples
Performative In the direct opposite to the observational documentary, the author of the performative documentary looks to directly intervene in the story. These stories include the author as an active member of the storytelling process. The author wants to take the audience into the situation with them and act as a personal guide, allowing them a direct point of reference from which to understand the action. Using a combination of production techniques, including handheld and staged camera interviews, these stories allow the author to participate in the telling and understanding of the story with the audience.	*Super Size Me* (2004, dir. Morgan Spurlock) *Catfish* (2010, dirs Ariel Schulman and Henry Joost)  **FIGURE 4.41** Morgan Spurlock
Reflexive Reflexive stories tend not to focus on story, but on the creation of the story itself and pass comment on the way documentary can be subjective and present a limited version of reality. Documentaries made in this style attempt to guide the audience to question the authenticity of the story they are viewing. A common creation from the reflexive style is the '**mockumentary**', which attempts to present a true story, using classic documentary techniques of interviews, observational footage and candid actions. However, the story is performed entirely by actors in a fictional scenario. **mockumentary** a television program or film which takes the form of a serious documentary in order to satirise its subject	*Weird Weekends* (1998–2000, dir. Louis Theroux) *This Is Spinal Tap* (1984, dir. Rob Reiner) *Exit Through the Gift Shop* (2010, dir. Banksy) *A Sense of History* (1992, dir. Mike Leigh)  **FIGURE 4.42** *Spinal Tap* members David St Hubbins (Michael McKean), Derek Smalls (Harry Shearer) and Nigel Tufnel (Christopher Guest)

TABLE 4.1 *(Continued)*

ACTIVITY 4.22

Scene analysis

Choose clips and examples from each style of documentary and complete the following tasks:

1. Explain the role of the camera. How is the camera used in each style to engage the audience?
2. How is sound utilised? How does that help differentiate between styles?
3. How are characters introduced in the performative, observational and reflexive styles?
4. How does each style utilise the convention of point of view? How does this help the audience engage with the story?



Photography

Photography uses narrative in far more adventurous ways. Every image is a representation of a time and place, be it constructed by the photographer for narrative purposes or to record a moment. What makes the narrative element of photography unique is the engagement of the audience in determining the meaning for themselves. As audiences rest upon an image, rather than the non-stop stimulation of the moving image, they can analyse the construction of the image to determine meaning for themselves. While some photographers may aim for ambiguity, allowing the audience to determine meaning in an implicit narrative, other photographers may aim for a more explicit reading, especially in the case of new photographers who are attempting to represent reality.

A photographer can tell a story within a single frame or across a series of images that can show narrative progression. As you have already learnt, audiences bring a lifetime of experiences, personal preferences and knowledge to every narrative and photography allows us to explore them on our own terms.

ANDREW QUILTY: PHOTOJOURNALIST

Andrew Quilty is an Australian photojournalist who lived in Kabul, Afghanistan for nine years between the fall and the return of the Taliban government. While much of his day-to-day work provided images for news services all over the world, his record of his time in Afghanistan was dedicated to recording the experiences of ordinary Afghans who have spent their lives navigating the presence of Western occupation and the looming threat of the returning Taliban, a deeply conservative Islamic group. Prior to the occupation of Afghanistan in 2001 by Western forces, the Taliban ruled with harsh restrictions on everyday life, especially that of girls, who were not allowed to attend high school. Most forms of entertainment, such as music, film and television, were banned, and fear of brutal punishment kept most women from venturing out of their homes for work or study.

Many of Quilty's images record a moment in time when there seemed to be hope for a new life without the Taliban, yet speak to a much larger narrative of global politics.

ACTIVITY 4.23

Image analysis

Examine the images below:

1 Image One (Figure 4.43):
- Carefully examine all elements of the image. What has Quilty chosen to include within the frame?
- What does the image tell you about the subject?
- What questions might you have about the life of the subject?
- How does this suggest a deeper narrative outside the image?



FIGURE 4.43 In 2019, an Afghan interpreter poses for a portrait, but must hide his identity for fear of reprisal from the Taliban and his own disapproving village as he worked with the American forces during the occupation.

2 Image Two (Figure 4.44):
- Carefully examine all elements of the image. What has Quilty chosen to include within the frame?
- What does the image tell you about the subjects within it?
- What questions might you have about the life of the subjects?
- How does this suggest a deeper narrative outside the image?

3 Image Three (Figure 4.45):
- Carefully examine all elements of the image. What has Quilty chosen to include within the frame?
- What does the image tell you about the subject?
- What questions might you have about the life of the subject?
- How does this suggest a deeper narrative outside the image?

4 Reflect on each of the images. While they are not part of a specific series, but from a much larger body of work that stretches over nine years, they record the details of people and lives that are attempting to navigate a dangerous life. What 'story' do you think Quilty was attempting to tell with these images?



FIGURE 4.44 A family of Afghan refugees rest on top of a truck in Kabul that had carried them overnight after they had been evicted from neighbouring Pakistan.



FIGURE 4.45 A young girl plays in a playground in an area of Kabul that is inhabited by students and intellectuals.

NARRATIVE PHOTOGRAPHY

While photojournalists seize the opportunity to tell stories, others take their time to craft mise en scene, lighting, framing and composition to engage audiences in compelling narratives. Still images allow photographers to explore single moments in the human experience, ranging from the mundane to the absurd. They capture the ordinary world and can tell stories that audiences can connect with their own experience to tell their own narratives.

Consider the work of French photographer Bénédicte Desrus. Based in Mexico during the COVID-19 pandemic, she began to document the life of her son Thiago as they endured COVID-19 isolation. This is an experience everyone the world over can relate to; documentation of the isolation of a small child allows us to consider our own experience and apply our own meaning to the imagery.

Desrus wanted to explore the impact of the pandemic on her child, separated from friends and the outside world at a time when he was just preparing to join it; she wanted to explore the psychological impact of isolation on her young child.

Carefully examine the images and answer the questions that follow:



FIGURE 4.46 Bénédicte Desrus' images of her son Thiago during the COVID-19 pandemic in Mexico

- The overall theme of the work – what is the purpose of the narrative?
- The use of lighting – what elements of the frame have been illuminated and why?
- The use of framing and composition – what has been included and why?
- The use of mise en scene. Have the images been arranged in a specific way? What does this contribute to the overall narrative of the series?
- Explain how your own personal experience of isolation and the pandemic contributes to your understanding of this series.
- Choose one image, and using the three-act structure, write a brief act one and three, using the image as the second act. How does this image define your narrative?

ACTIVITY 4.24

Narrative photography

Explore the work of one of the following photographers. For each image in the series suggested, explore the following:

- The overall theme of the work – what is the purpose of the narrative?
- The use of lighting – what elements of the frame have been illuminated – or hidden – and why?
- The use of framing and composition – what has been included and why?
- The use of mise en scene. Has the image been arranged in a specific way? What does this contribute to the overall narrative of the series?

1. Ai Weiwei – *A Study of Perspective*
2. Ian Pool – *Superheroes*
3. Dorothea Lange – *Migrant Mothers*
4. Markku Lahdesmaki – *Havana Taxi Company*
5. Ben Capp – *Unscene Sets*
6. Gregory Crewdson – *An Eclipse of Moths*

Animated narratives

Animation is as diverse, if not more, than film. Animation has the capacity to consider possibilities too difficult to explore on the big screen, the small screen and even photography. There are unlimited possibilities for the way in which a director or animator can tell a compelling narrative. From the endless adventures of the most celebrated cartoon family, *The Simpsons*, to the legendary creations of major studios like Pixar and Disney and the handcrafted **claymation** work of Aardman studios and *Wallace and Gromit*, animation can explore the length of any imagination to tell a compelling story.

claymation a method of film animation using adjustable clay figures and stop-motion photography

The Simpsons has existed as a phenomenon of animated storytelling for well over 30 seasons. Using cultural events and issues to drive its stories, *The Simpsons* has survived through its vast cast of characters beyond its central family protagonists, but also through its animation techniques.

Framing each animated cell as though it were shot as a live action television comedy, the characters and episodes are relatable as they appear as they would in any other non-animated narrative, with realistic family scenarios. The magic of *The Simpsons* arguably lies in the 'Treehouse of Horrors' episodes that occur every season, which allow the animators and story writers to stretch the boundaries of what is possible. Timed to mark the anniversary of Halloween, each episode takes the show's recurring characters and places them in remarkable situations that mirror the classic narrative structures of the horror genre.



FIGURE 4.47 A still from *The Simpsons Movie* (2007, dir. David Silverman) that illustrates the use of live action framing



CASE STUDY 4.2

BoJack Horseman

BoJack Horseman (2014–20) is an animated series about an **anthropomorphic** horse … with the body of a human … who is a fading Hollywood star, desperate for relevance in the modern world. Surrounded by part-animal and part-human characters, the tragic journey of BoJack details the trappings of fame, mental illness and love through the journeys of humans and half-humans alike.

anthropomorphic a literary device that assigns human characteristics to non-human entities like animals or inanimate objects

The protagonist BoJack is a failed actor from a family situation comedy that has been off air for decades. Struggling for relevance, attention and a career, BoJack battles with his vices, demons and toxic friendships to find the happiness that has eluded him for most of his life.



FIGURE 4.48 A still from the *BoJack Horseman* season 3 episode 'Fish Out of Water'

'Fish Out of Water'

In the third season of *BoJack Horseman*, the protagonist is travelling to a film festival to further his fledgling career, the only difference being, this festival is in an underwater world where nobody can talk. While 'Fish Out of Water' is an episode that departs from the normal sharp dialogue that drives the narrative, it borrows heavily from the silent film era and uses camera, acting, mise en scene and sound (minus the dialogue) to drive one of the most engaging episodes in the series' six-season history.

ACTIVITY 4.25

Watch the episode 'Fish Out of Water', season 3: *BoJack Horseman*

1. Define the animation style of *BoJack Horseman*.
2. How does the opening title sequence establish the narrative style of *BoJack Horseman*?
3. How is sound used to engage the audience?
4. How is the camera used to engage the audience?
5. How have the animators drawn each character to engage the audience?
6. Carefully examine each character; how does each anthropomorphic animal represent their character traits?
7. Describe the narrative structure of the episode. How does it resolve the narrative?

Podcasts

Podcasts are a unique form of storytelling. With headphones or in the solitude of a car, train or treadmill, a podcast creator can tell a story to a single audience member in an intimate and personal way that is rivalled only by literature. Since the development of digital technologies in the early 2000s, the ability for storytellers to craft a podcast has grown so rapidly that they can cater to almost any audience.

CONSUMPTION AND RECEPTION OF PODCASTS

A podcast is an audio broadcast, on demand. A listener can choose to download the audio story and listen when and where it suits. The popularity of podcasting as a storytelling form has grown due its flexibility in reaching audiences. Long commutes to school or awkward family gatherings can be blanked out with the stories specific to the listener's interests. The personal experience of podcasts influences their reception like few other narrative forms, as it creates a close relationship between the creator and audience.

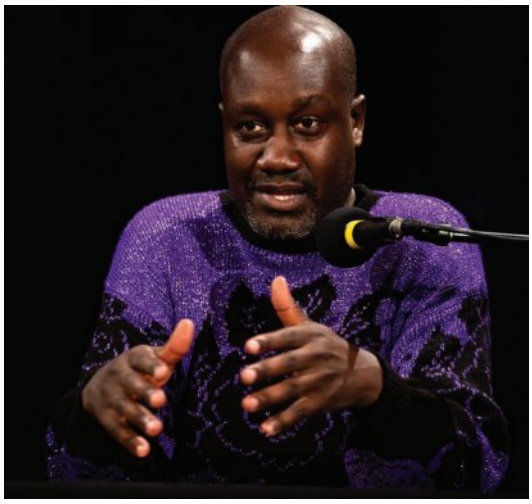


FIGURE 4.49 *Stadio* host Musa Okwonga

While radio remains a popular medium, podcasting has allowed audiences a departure from a long tradition of radio formulas for audience engagement. Commercial and public radio rely on small, scripted segments of dialogue, commercial and musical breaks to engage audiences and maintain the revenue provided by sponsors and advertisers. While radio stations in Australia vary greatly and the audience for each remains specific, the nature of radio listening (in the car or in the background at home or at work) means that few can listen at length and so content is produced to create immediate but short-lived engagement. Podcasts allow audiences to dive into dense topics, niche interests or more candid versions of their favourite media identities and, as such, have narrative structures built to suit almost any style.

Style	Description	Examples
Interview	Usually led by regular hosts who invite guests each week to tell their own story.	***The Nine Club*** – an audio and YouTube podcast hosted by professional skateboarders Chris Roberts and Kelly Hart. Each week they chart the history of skateboarding by interviewing anyone from Tony Hawk to Steve-O from *Jackass*.
Co-host conversation	Led by regular hosts who discuss key interest topics.	***Stadio*** – A football podcast that looks at the men's and women's game in Europe from the point of view of two Englishmen living in Berlin. Everything from recent matches to the impact clothing choices of club managers have on games is up for discussion.
Monologue	Led by a single host who speaks almost exclusively on key interest topics.	***This American Life*** – writer, editor and producer Ira Glass tells fiction and non-fiction stories using the voices of real-life people and actors to support the host.
Storytelling	A host or series of hosts who tell fiction or non-fiction stories using high production values of sound and narrative structure.	***Casefile*** – true crime is arguably one of the most popular podcast formats. Each week a new, grisly crime is dissected and unpacked in intricate detail using a haunting monologue style.
Hybrid	A combination of all the above and can include games, quizzes and segments that break up the length of the podcast.	***The Little Dum Dum Club*** – Melbourne comedians Karl Chandler and Tommy Dassalo bring in popular Australian comedians each week to tell stories, call back to old jokes and repeat narratives like 'Rad Dad' in a 'not safe for work' format.

TABLE 4.2 Podcast styles



CASE STUDY 4.3

The Dollop podcast

The Dollop (2014–) is a weekly comedy podcast where host Dave Anthony tells stories from American history to his co-host Gareth Reynolds. With both hosts holding backgrounds in stand-up and improvisational comedy, each podcast blends traditional storytelling with improvised interpretations and re-enactments of the events.

The topics can be diverse. Some stories focus on political or business leaders, like the graphic death of former American president George Washington or the staggering tale of survival of Hugh Glass in the face of a horrific bear attack in the 1700s (the background for the 2016 film *The Revenant*, dir. Alejandro González Iñárritu). Their attention also turns to bizarre events, like the night a 1970s baseball team offered 10 cent beers to the entire crowd or the time an army of Irish Americans attempted to invade Canada in 1870. No topic is taboo. However, their storytelling technique allows access to complex and bizarre topics that provide an alternative insight into American history as the audience is listening to one friend tell a story to another.

The storytelling reflects the style adopted by observational documentaries as the audience feels privy to a personal conversation. As Dave reads each new story and attempts to explain more complicated ideas, Gareth will often interpret the events and act them out. The audience is thus provided with two experiences as each episode is as much about a new story as it is experiencing the reaction of Gareth to the developing events.

ACTIVITY 4.26

The Dollop podcast: 10 cent beer night

Use a podcast app to find *The Dollop* episode '10 Cent Beer Night'.

1. Define the story structure. How is it introduced, explained and concluded?
2. Explain the way the two hosts tell the story. How does it engage the audience?
3. Explain the storytelling techniques used in each one.
4. What codes and conventions do they emphasise?
5. Explain how you 'engaged' with this text – what are the strengths and limitations of the form in helping you understand the narrative?

ACTIVITY 4.27

Analysing your own podcast

Choose a topic that interests you: sport, comedy, music, politics, gaming, art, etc.

1. Find two podcasts that relate to your topic of interest and listen to two or three episodes.
2. How would you define the storytelling style? Provide examples.
3. Research the background of the hosts. Explain how this influences the way the audience engages with the podcast. Do audiences have expectations?
4. Examine the frequency of the podcast. Is it daily, weekly or monthly? Consider and explain how this influences the nature of the content.

5 Is each episode self-contained or are there links between each episode? Explain with specific examples.
6 Explain how you think this influences the way the audience engages with the form of storytelling.
7 Consider the way people would normally listen to this podcast. Explain how the reception context (the location and format it is listened to) could affect the audience's engagement with the media product.

Video game narratives

Gaming is one of the world's most popular narrative forms. From role-playing, first-person shooters or survival games, the video game industry is equal in size to that of film and beginning to overtake it! While not all video games require a narrative, the player must have a purpose in order to meet the challenges the game sets. Unlike a linear narrative in film or television, gaming narratives allow the player to interact with the story and determine the outcome themselves. In early games like *Super Mario Brothers* (1985) the purpose of the game was to save the princess by battling through a series of challenges. These **embedded narratives** did not necessarily change the gaming experience; it was merely a reason to play. So, while the outcome may be preordained, the player must navigate their way through a traditional three-act narrative of challenges and a final test (aka the final boss).

embedded narratives scripted narrative elements that are embedded throughout a game to form the background story

emergent narratives the story is not designed by developers. It is constructed by the player, through their (inter)actions and explorations, while often influenced by any number of (game-specific) random factors that each game features.

However, in recent years, games have included **emergent narratives** where the gameplay and story are one and the same. Games like *Red Dead Redemption 2* (2018) and *The Witcher 3* (2015) allow the players to determine their own path, which can distort the paths of the narrative and even the ending itself. *Red Dead Redemption* was a particular example of an emergent narrative as decisions made during gameplay (i.e. whether to kill that NPC or let them live) changed the course of events within the game.

Consider the 2015 horror survival game *Until Dawn* (Supermassive Games). The game focuses on the survival of eight teenagers in a ski lodge who are being hunted by evil spirits and cannibals. Utilising seasoned Hollywood film writers to develop the narrative of the game, almost 10 000 pages of scripts had to be created in order to cater for the narrative 'branches' of each decision made by the player.



FIGURE 4.50 *The Witcher 3* is an example of a video game with an emergent narrative style – here fans flock to pick up a copy on the day of release in May 2015.



Head writer Graham Reznick stated that creating *Until Dawn* allowed them to include the audience when structuring the narrative itself:

> the designers and writers of the game are curating a narrative environment for the player, but the player becomes a complicit collaborator.

FIGURE 4.51 *Until Dawn* head writer Graham Reznick quoted in Dean Takahashi, 'In Sony's Until Dawn Interactive Horror Game, the Player Becomes Part of the Narrative', *VentureBeat*, 25 August 2015

agency the capacity to interact with media messages and make free choices

A key component of audience engagement with video game narratives is player **agency**. When taking on the role of a character within a video game narrative, unlike a film narrative where they can only view a character make decisions, players can actively include their own values, backgrounds and experiences in determining the course of a narrative.

CASE STUDY 4.4

Inside (2016, Playdead)

Inside is one of the more perplexing narrative-based games in recent years. On face value, the player controls a young boy, trapped in a world surrounded by mindless zombies in a dark and terrifying facility with the single goal of reaching the end and escaping. However, along the way, the hero must solve a series of puzzles and challenges with absolutely no help at all. What makes *Inside* unique is that there are two possible endings that all depend on the player's interaction with the game. The most obvious ending is one where the boy becomes enmeshed in a creature known as 'the Huddle' that appears to be a collection of human limbs that have been experimented on by unknown scientists. Using the power of the Huddle, the boy can escape the facility. The obvious ending is open to audience interpretation. What becomes of the boy after his escape is for the audience to determine. However, a 'secret ending' exists if a series of tasks (unknown to the player) are completed in sequence during the game, where the boy loses his free will and becomes one of the mindless zombies he has tried so hard to escape.

ACTIVITY 4.28

Inside video game

Download and play the game *Inside*. Alternatively, you can watch gameplay clips online.

1. What genre would you apply to *Inside*?
2. Explain how camera, mise en scene and sound support your response to the previous question.
3. Research the narrative structure of the game. What takes place in the second act that changes the course of the narrative?
4. At what part of the narrative structure does 'the Huddle' appear?
5. A key element of the ending of *Inside* is its ambiguity. Research the audience theories about the meaning of the ending. What have players said?
6. What influence does player agency have on readings of the game?

4.9 The development and communication of a distinctive style: Assessment studies

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- the development and communication of a distinctive style by media creators and producers in the construction of narratives
- the influences of historical and cultural context on the construction of narratives
- the influence of narratives on audience engagement, consumption and reception
- media language used to analyse and discuss the style and context of media narratives.

Assessment study: *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006, dir. Guillermo del Toro)

Media narratives are a reflection of the context in which they were created. To examine the role of external influences on the construction of a narrative, we need to look no further than Guillermo del Toro's 2006 film *Pan's Labyrinth*. The film is fertile ground to not only examine the unique style of a director working within the fantasy genre, but the historical, social and political structures that heavily influenced the construction of the story itself.



FIGURE 4.52 Guillermo del Toro

Set in Spain after the conclusion of the Spanish Civil War in the late 1930s, a young girl, Ofelia (Ivana Baquero), travels to the countryside to meet her pregnant mother's new husband, fascist army officer Captain Vidal (Sergi López). Introverted and afraid of her new surroundings, the girl retreats into a world of fantasy where a mythical creature, 'the Faun' (Doug Jones), sets her a series of challenges that will help her escape her violent new environment and reunite her with her deceased father. The narrative cuts between Ofelia's quest and the ongoing battle between Vidal and a group of rebels in the hills. The audience is engaged not only by del Toro's richly imagined and realised fantasy world of Ofelia and the Faun, but the impending doom created by the vicious Captain Vidal.

RECEPTION AND CONSUMPTION

The Spanish Civil War (1936–39) serves as the backdrop for *Pan's Labyrinth*. A sensitive wound in the collective history of Spain, the war was fought between left-wing Marxists and anarchists, and nationalist fascist forces, known as Falangists. The war was brutal. Atrocities and executions were carried out by both sides and the eventual winner, the Falangists, went on to rule Spain under the dictatorship of Francisco Franco until democratic elections were held in 1977.

The total number of deaths in the war through conflict, execution and starvation is estimated to be near 500 000. Politically and socially, the war is a sensitive topic for Spain even today. In 1977, both sides of a democratically elected government signed a 'Pact of Forgetting', which meant no one from either side would be prosecuted for previous war crimes.

Guillermo del Toro is a Mexican director who made a Spanish film, for Spanish audiences. Historically, Spanish influence in Mexico imparted its language and some traditional connections between the two nations.

Using Ofelia and her retreat into her imagination as the focus of the story, del Toro surrounded her fantasy world with a reality that reflected the horrors of the war and the vengeance of the eventual victors that would hold special resonance for Spanish audiences. Discussion of the war was heavily censored during the Franco dictatorship and the nation chose to forget it afterwards and, as such, it did not make as significant a cultural and artistic impact outside Spain as the events of World War II or the Cold War.

For such an idea as *Pan's Labyrinth* to take root, del Toro sacrificed his own salary to ensure the development phase of the film was allowed to begin. He was also offered a much larger production budget to produce the film in English rather than Spanish, which was also refused. The decision to persevere with the original vision of the film had clear implications.

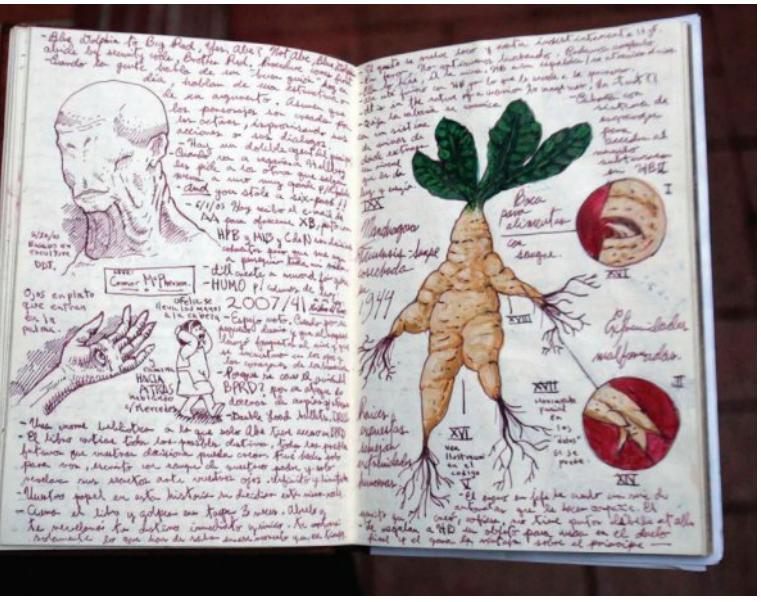


FIGURE 4.53 Pages from del Toro's notebook, where he developed his ideas for *Pan's Labyrinth*



FIGURE 4.54 Sergi López as Captain Vidal in *Pan's Labyrinth*

In an early scene, the fearsome Captain Vidal greets his pregnant wife and Ofelia with the masculine plural 'Bienvenidos', a term for welcome that assumes the unborn child is male. While this may seem an obscure detail to English-speaking audiences, it has significant meaning for a Spanish audience and is crucial in the introduction and development of Vidal's character. Without this level of control, del Toro would not have been able to make the film as he intended, and thus it was made under significant financial stress.

CONSUMPTION CONTEXT

Del Toro carefully chose his cast from the Spanish film and television industry and used them to challenge even their own expectations. Ivana Baquero, who played Ofelia, was a newcomer to screens and as such the audience, either in or outside of Spain, had few expectations. To counter this, del Toro carefully chose his supporting cast to build and disrupt the expectations for Spanish viewers. Maribel Verdú was known for playing strong and dependable women and her role as Mercedes, the matron of the country house Ofelia has been sent to, meant local audiences could have reliable expectations of her character's role in the narrative.

However, the choice to employ Sergi López, who plays the dark and sadistic Captain Vidal, challenged the audience's expectations. López was best known for his work in comedy and melodrama and it was a shock for audiences to see him in such a different role. López's representation as a fascist army officer created a deep unease in an audience who had come to expect lighter and less challenging characters from him.

THE STYLE OF DEL TORO

Del Toro is known for exploring the fantasy genre before and after the construction of *Pan's Labyrinth*. He is known for his use of colour, specifically dark and muted tones that contrast with vivid uses of blue, green and red. His sets are intricately detailed where props and objects play a key role in the narrative. A key element of his work in the fantasy/horror genre is his use of trauma to guide the actions of his characters. His more recent work, *Crimson Peak* (2015) and *The Shape of Water* (2016), combines his love of fantasy and horror and blurring the lines between the real and imagined world.



FIGURE 4.55 A still from del Toro's 2016 film *The Shape of Water*, where a mute woman falls in love with an amphibian monster

DEL TORO'S STYLE IN *PAN'S LABYRINTH*

In the creation of *Pan's Labyrinth*, del Toro employed his own unique style to manipulate media codes and conventions to tell a narrative.

Let's examine the opening sequence of *Pan's Labyrinth* to see how he connects a fantasy to reality in a single narrative.

Opening sequence

The film begins with a black screen where the only sound is the light breathing of a character we cannot see. Titles come onto the screen that establish the time and place of the narrative. It is 1944 and guerrillas (revolutionary fighters) are hiding out in the Spanish forest against the triumphant forces of Francisco Franco. The black screen cuts to a close-up of the ashen face of Ofelia, lying next to a stone well with a steady trickle of blood coming from her nose. Del Toro spirals the shot into Ofelia's eye as the audience is taken into the 'underworld' and is told, by an unseen narrator, the story of a princess who yearns to be reunited with her father.

As the camera descends into the dark, dimly lit well, it transforms into a wide shot of a cavernous structure that resembles a palace of royalty. It is, however, deserted, bar the glimpses of Ofelia running through the scene. Instantly, del Toro creates a vivid and engaging contrast between fantasy and reality as he establishes the expectation that the narrative will occur in two worlds, that of war and that of imagination.

Suddenly, the scene flashes white and cuts to a warmer light as the camera pans across scenes of destruction. Before the camera rises above a stone wall from inside a bombed-out church, the audience sees a scene of skulls and barbed wire: objects of war and conflict. A fade to a rising establishing shot of a convoy of cars reveals a dry Spanish landscape surrounding a devastated small town. Here del Toro uses two clear devices to engage two audiences. The scene was shot in the Spanish town of Belchite, which was destroyed during the Civil War. After the conflict was over, Franco ordered that the town remain untouched and it exists today as a monument to the conflict. For a Spanish audience, the use of this town holds specific significance as almost 5000 people died in the battle. While this knowledge may not be readily known by an international audience, the consequences of war are perfectly represented by the crumbling ghost town.

The opening sequence introduces Ofelia and Captain Vidal, the two driving forces of the narrative. The audience is taken inside the car where Ofelia sits with her heavily pregnant and unwell mother, cradling a small pile of fairy-tale books. As her mother tells her she is too old to be reading such nonsense, Ofelia turns away from her mother in a slight protest; however, as her mother is suddenly about to be sick, Ofelia lurches forward to alert the car's drivers. In this scene, acting was employed to demonstrate Ofelia's character. Without dialogue, Ofelia is established as one who not only cherishes, but defends her world of fantasy. However, in the same breath, she is protective of her mother and very much aware of her condition in the real world.

Del Toro provides further opportunity for the audience to engage with Ofelia when she exits the car. Bathing a forest scene with warm, naturalistic sunlight, del Toro demonstrates the mixed world of fantasy and reality that Ofelia experiences. Surrounded by floating insects, she wanders away from her mother and stumbles across a stone with strange markings. Instinctively, it seems, she is drawn into the scrub towards a stone statue with almost prehistoric carvings. Clearly, the statue does not fit in the established setting and yet the stone with the strange markings seems to have found its home as Ofelia places it in a hole in the statue, like putting a key into a lock. Throughout this scene, del Toro uses sound to make the suggestion of a descent into fantasy as the faint sound of strings, coupled with an unexpected breeze, creates an unsettling but curious emotion for the audience. The significance of this is emphasised with a close-up into the statue's face. A faint, low rumbling sound accompanies the audience's focus on the mouth of the statue as a large, unrecognisable insect bursts from the mouth to surprise Ofelia. Through this subtle use of technical codes, del Toro has established the possibility that Ofelia's character can travel seamlessly between both worlds.



FIGURE 4.56 Ofelia finds a mysterious stone in the forest



FIGURE 4.57 Captain Vidal crushes Ofelia's hand to establish his dominance and character in the opening sequence

Shortly after, the audience is introduced to the film's antagonist, Captain Vidal. His scene opens with a close-up of a leather gloved hand holding a ticking pocket watch. While this watch plays a significant role in the narrative later, it establishes a clear understanding of Vidal. The watch signifies an obsession with time and order, something typical of an army officer. The following low-angle close-up of Vidal emphasises this point as he looks into the distance and states '15 minutes late'. Del Toro's introduction of Vidal invites the audience to examine his character in a sequence that establishes his personality. Represented in perfectly polished boots and a neatly pressed uniform, Vidal is an instant vision of authority. Del Toro supports this notion by filling the space behind him with supporting officers, the house staff and soldiers standing at attention. Much in the same way del Toro used the town of Belchite to capture a Spanish audience's attention, the vision of the fascist uniform holds symbolic as well as literal meaning for the Spanish reading of the narrative.

However, Del Toro connects the mise en scene elements of costume and arrangement within a frame with acting to establish Vidal as the greatest threat to Ofelia's quest to reunite with her father. As Ofelia is invited to meet Vidal, the creaking of his leather boots can be heard as he turns to greet her. A low-angle shot, over Ofelia's shoulder, sees Vidal step into the frame and dominate the space above her. His dominance is established further when Ofelia meekly offers her left hand to greet him. Her right hand was protectively clutching her fairy-tale books to her chest. Rather than meet her hand, Vidal aggressively grips it, crushing her fingers together. Del Toro again uses a close-up of both Ofelia and Vidal as the Captain moves into her space; leaning into the grimacing Ofelia he states, 'It's the wrong hand' and tosses her hand aside. Through a combination of acting and camera, del Toro establishes not only the character of Vidal, but the aggressive and possibly violent future of their relationship.

Scene analysis

Now it's your turn. Examine two more key scenes of your choice from *Pan's Labyrinth* and explain how del Toro uses media codes and conventions to create meaning for the audience.

The Pale Man scene

Here, Ofelia meets a frightening monster that devours children. She must try to resist temptation in order to complete her second task, which is to retrieve a dagger from the lair of a frightening monster: the Pale Man.

The Pale Man reveals the dark facets of this fantasy world. The colours within this scene again contrast heavily with those from the world Ofelia has travelled from. What appears to be a place of splendour and beauty quickly turns sinister, causing issues for both the fairies and Ofelia later in the narrative.

Worth noting is the way that del Toro creates tension by providing the audience with a perspective that exceeds Ofelia's awareness. Javier Navarrete's score plays a special part in this scene.

ACTIVITY 4.29

Analysis: The Pale Man scene

Remember to use the Name/Describe/Why/Effect technique you read about earlier in this chapter on page 168.

1. Del Toro uses the convention of cause and effect to drive the story forward here. Explain how this has been used to engage the audience in the narrative.
2. Explain how the setting and acting have been used to establish the character of the Pale Man.
3. Describe how mise en scene has been used to engage the audience in the narrative.
4. Time is structured in this scene to engage the audience. Explain how the codes of sound, editing and camera work together to expand time within the scene.



FIGURE 4.58 The Pale Man (played by Doug Jones) reveals dark facets of this fantasy world.



FIGURE 4.59 Ofelia completes her final quest for the Faun

Closing sequence

In this scene, each character reaches the end of their quest. Under attack from the rebels, Vidal reveals the nature of his evil as he attempts to kill Ofelia after she steals her newborn brother from the house.

With the guerrillas in pursuit, Vidal chases Ofelia into the Labyrinth where the final confrontation takes place.

Here del Toro employs the common theme of light and dark to signify the fate of each character's journey. Thick shadow surrounds Ofelia as she rushes her baby brother to the faun to complete her final quest; however, once Vidal meets his own fate, the warm light of safety (seen in the opening sequences) is seen behind the victorious rebels as Vidal's house burns.

ACTIVITY 4.30

Analysis: Closing scene

1. Interpret how lighting has been used to resolve the narrative in this scene.
2. Describe how mise en scene has been used to signify Ofelia's success in her quest.
3. Explain how the relationship between sound and camera in the closing sequence serves to engage the audience.
4. With reference to two technical codes and one story convention, explain how a storyline has been resolved or unresolved by the closing sequence of a media product you studied this year.



FIGURE 4.60 Promotional poster for *Dune: Part One*

Assessment study: *Dune: Part One* (2021, dir. Denis Villeneuve)

Villeneuve, a French-Canadian director, began his career with French-language, character-driven, surreal or psychological dramas, and followed up with Hollywood box office hits, including *Sicario* (2015). As a result of his success, Villeneuve was able to indulge in his love of science fiction with *Arrival* (2016) and *Blade Runner 2049* (2017). By the time he wrote *Dune*, Villeneuve was viewed as an auteur in the era of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, who could guarantee a return on finance for a big budget epic. Villeneuve was able to combine his love of science fiction with psychological drama, political intrigue and the quest for power, and imbue it with ancient rites and mysticism.

Dune is the story of an intergalactic feudal empire going through an epic power struggle. The protagonist, Paul Atreides (Timothée Chalamet), is a teenager who stands to inherit a dukedom with total control over armies, planets and vast economic resources. The narrative takes this medieval framework and thrusts it into a distant future, where control over the universe is exercised by the Emperor, whose vassals, aristocratic families like Paul's, vie for favour, succession and imperial rewards.

House Atreides has been awarded mining rights on the planet Arrakis over House Harkonnen, vicious and cruel colonial rulers who violently suppress the Fremen. House Atreides takes a kinder, more conciliatory approach to the Fremen in the hope of creating an alliance against the potential Harkonnen betrayal. The Harkonnens are the antagonists who plot the downfall of the Atreides, led by the truly evil Baron Vladimir Harkonnen (Stellan Skarsgård) and his vile henchman Rabban (Dave Bautista).

In true medieval fashion, betrayal comes soon enough through a conspiracy between Baron Harkonnen, the Emperor and the Bene Gesserit. This powerful mystical cult is an order of nuns who work behind the scenes in the Empire, preparing the way for a 'saviour'. The saviour, as it turns out, is Paul Atreides, who has repeated dreams and visions of his future on Arrakis.

THE RECEPTION AND CONSUMPTION CONTEXT OF THE NARRATIVE

While the power relationships in *Dune* borrow from the Middle Ages, they are representations of geopolitics and ideologies of today. Principal among these is Indigenous land rights. The issue of mining rights is one that has always pitted large corporations against native titleholders. Mining companies have long been accused of exploitation all over the world, profiting from coal, oil, minerals and precious metals. Rival entities competing for rare resources using might and power is a familiar tale in the film's production period, for example in the Crimea, Alaska and Arctic, Sub-Saharan Africa, and here in Australian Aboriginal territories.

On Arrakis, however, it is 'spice' that is mined, not gold or oil. Spice is a magical narcotic substance used by the Empire's Spacing Guild to navigate the universe. For the Fremen, the planet's Indigenous inhabitants, spice's value is spiritual as it is used in their religious rites. Paul's visions are affected when he comes into contact with spice – he sees more clearly into the future. For the Empire, though, it is another resource to be plundered.

The fact that spice is a hallucinogen cannot be ignored when assessing the film's values. The use of natural psychotropics in some Indigenous cultures is an accepted traditional medicine practice. *Dune* was written in the era of peace, love and, of course, drugs. In the 1960s, serious thought was given to the benefits of hallucinogens like LSD by academics and writers including Timothy Leary (*The Psychedelic Experience*) and Aldous Huxley (*The Doors of Perception*). As substance abuse became more prevalent, hard drugs were criminalised. In the 21st century, recreational use of psychotropics is outlawed. The film implicitly treats the Fremens' use of spice as a purely sacred activity.

Towards the end of the narrative, Paul Atreides is assimilated into Fremen society. The ideology of assimilation, however, is usually applied in reverse; that is, Indigenous societies throughout history have been forced to assimilate into the colonialists' society. In *Dune: Part One*, the young idealist who dreams of Arrakis intuitively adopts Fremen ways (including gliding across the sand to avoid disturbing the giant sandworm-god, Shai-Halud) and is adopted by them as part of the tribe. In the final scene, he walks with them into his future, more accepting of his fate.



FIGURE 4.61 Paul Atreides (Timothée Chalamet) and his mother, Lady Jessica (Rebecca Ferguson) in the desert towards the end of *Dune: Part One*

In the 50 or more years since the novel *Dune* was written, the story's moral questions about conflict between nations, colonial abuse of ethnic minorities, the exploitation of natural resources and hope for spiritual redemption remain. However, the role of women (at least in the West) has dramatically changed. Denis Villeneuve wanted to represent the ascendancy of powerful women in society. He did this by focusing on the influence of the Bene Gesserit matriarchy and its leading figures Reverend Mother Gaius Helen Mohiam (Charlotte Rampling), and Paul's own mother, Lady Jessica Atreides (Rebecca Ferguson).

Dune's characters do include male role models who train Paul and look after his material (or temporal) needs, but it is the women in the text who manage his spiritual needs and ultimately influence his fate. Paul is a typical teenager, who longs for adventure, like going into battle, and is sceptical of religion and the duties that come with it. Unknowingly, Paul has been the subject of a long Bene Gesserit breeding program to produce a messiah. When he learns of his fate after undergoing a life-or-death trial, he is still cynical about the role. His 'call to action' comes with the death of his male mentors – his father Duke Leto Atreides (Oscar Isaac), and Duncan Idaho (Jason Momoa), his sword master and protector. Since conventional warfare has failed, Paul must rely on assistance from his mother and his Bene Gesserit training in mystical arts to survive.

VILLENEUVE'S STYLE

Dune was adapted by Denis Villeneuve from the immensely popular 1965 novel by Frank Herbert. Similar 'Space Opera (or Empire)' narratives based on novels include *Starship Troopers* (1997, dir. Paul Verhoeven), *The Expanse* (2015–22) and *Foundation* (2021–). *Star Wars* (1977) differs slightly in that it is based on an original screenplay. A 'Space Opera' is a type of 'fantastic future' sub-genre that is often melodramatic, depicts family dynasties or imperial governments in wars of succession, rebellion or survival, with fantastic spaceships traversing galaxies.



FIGURE 4.62 Director Denis Villeneuve adapted Frank Herbert's 1965 novel *Dune* for the big screen.

Villeneuve won an Academy Award for his earlier science fiction film *Arrival*. He followed up with the sequel *Blade Runner 2049*. Villeneuve is renowned for creating atmospheric settings and using light and colour in a highly selective palette. *Dune*'s palatial interiors – designs that combine Islamic, Mayan and Brutalist architecture – create a sense of immense wealth and power. To recreate the harsh desert sands of Arrakis, scenes were shot on location in Jordan.

Dune: Part One is a coming-of-age story about a young protagonist. While it does provide a resolution in Act 3 – Paul walking into the desert to fulfil his destiny – this 'ending' is the midpoint of the *Dune* story as a whole. For the purpose of Outcome 1, *Dune: Part One* may be analysed as a complete narrative, but it also serves as the set-up for *Dune Part: Two*. The production context for first films in a sequel requires them to succeed and establish an audience for the subsequent productions. Such a risk can only be taken on by large production companies and established directors. *Dune: Part One*'s success in 2022 ensured *Dune: Part Two* was fully funded and given wide release.

Scene analysis: Paul's trial by ordeal

Early in the film, Paul is woken in the night by his mother, Jessica, and told to dress quickly for an 'audience' with Bene Gesserit leader, Reverend Mother Gaius Helen Mohiam. Paul is unaware that the meeting will be a life-or-death test. Suspense and a sense of threat is developed through the scene's codes and conventions. Everything about the scene is calculated to disturb the viewer. The soundscape is quiet, but the characters' low voices echo off the walls. The non-diegetic soundtrack mixes a disquieting high-pitched white noise with a low chant and orchestral sounds that rise in pitch as Paul approaches the audience chamber.

Jessica is clearly anxious when she tries to reassure Paul he is just being 'interviewed' about his dreams. Paul is given a whispered warning by Dr Yueh (Chang Chen) not to trust the Bene Gesserit. Yueh in turn is warned by Jessica, in sign language, to 'tell no-one' of the meeting. The characters are dressed in black. The palace corridor is dimly lit and in deep shadow. Amid the darkness, a **chiaroscuro** effect from a floating 'glowglobe' is cast onto their faces in close-up. The scene is set when, just outside the door, Jessica signals to Paul to 'remember your training' and puts on her nun's hood.

chiaroscuro in art this means the contrast between areas of light and darkness in an image

Paul is lead into the chamber by Jessica with her hands clasped and head bowed in a submissive attitude. The floorboards creak as they enter. With an expression of curiosity and concern, Paul steps forward into a mid-shot with his mother, which then cuts to a wide shot point of view of the Reverend Mother. She is seated in darkness in the centre in a very large circular reading room. Her ritual headdress masks her face. A deep voice seems to emanate from the space itself in a reverberating sound mix of chant, whisper and breath, asking, 'Who. Are. You?' The temporal flow is interrupted, and time is expanded through an editing trope. We are then given an alternative point of view – a cropped mid-shot is inserted into the scene with Paul slowly walking forward. The sequence is dreamlike and hints at the magical nature of the impending interview.



FIGURE 4.63 Reverend Mother Gaius Helen Mohiam (Charlotte Rampling) – a powerful mystic of the Bene Gesserit order – with the mysterious black box that will be used in the trial of Paul Atreides

Reverend Mother Mohiam then addresses them in a haughty but human tone, dismissing Jessica, and chastising Paul for his apparent defiance. When he demands an explanation, she uses the 'Voice' (a mystical Bene Gesserit form of mind control) to compel him to kneel at her feet. Paul objects but in a close-up, Mohiam stares him down from behind her thick, mesh face-covering, and reminds him he is required to obey her on Jessica's orders.

Paul's 'trial' begins when Mohiam instructs him to place his hand in the opening of a plain-looking box. As he does so, Mohiam quickly puts her hand to his neck. The camera tracks behind his head to focus on a close-up of her holding a long decorative needle millimetres from his skin. This is the 'Gom Jabbar' that will kill him instantly if he removes his hand from the box. She also warns him that his mother will stop any help from arriving, and we are shown a wide shot outside the room of Jessica standing guard in the corridor shadowed by other Bene Gesserit nuns.



With the stakes thus raised the trial begins. The tension is amplified through a fast sequence of close-ups of Paul, the box and Mohiam holding the Gom Jabbar at his neck, intercut with Jessica trembling in fear outside the room. The box contains 'pain', which is clearly evident in Paul's anguished expressions. He shudders, groans and grimaces as he suffers unbearable pain, but does not withdraw his hand. In the midst of his agony, a series of inserts –Paul's visions of fire, the desert, a burned hand and cropped image of a woman holding a knife – are cut into the sequence. Paul's expression changes to one of determination and he now stares down Mohiam. The trial then stops abruptly. Paul removes his hand which is undamaged and backs away. Mohiam explains the purpose of the test. Given Paul's potential power, he could not be allowed to live unless he was fit to serve the Bene Gesserit. Jessica re-enters and the tension is resolved. Mohiam terminates the interview.

To end the scene, we cut to an exterior shot of Jessica escorting Mohiam to her spaceship. It is dark and misty. Mohiam scolds Jessica for raising a male child instead of a female, thus interfering with the Bene Gesserit's long-term plans. A powerful staccato chant of women's voices plays as the spaceship leaves and Jessica stands alone on the tarmac. She is in apparent ecstasy that her plans for Paul have come to fruition. Paul, however, is watching her, shrouded in mist. Having overheard their conversation, he is now fully appraised of his planned destiny, to become the 'Kwisatz Haderach' – the chosen one whose mind can bridge space and time.

Paul's trial scene is the catalyst, or inciting incident, that 'propels the story forward'. While Paul is angry that his life has been manipulated and rejects the Bene Gesserit's political interference as 'superstitions', the story's arc is set up. The narrative point of view in *Dune* is Paul's. The main storyline is Paul becoming a leader. It is his coming-of-age story.

ACTIVITY 4.31

Analysis: Acting

In the scene described above three famous actors (Timothée Chalamet, Charlotte Rampling and Rebecca Ferguson) build suspense and tension. Discuss the acting techniques and how they make their characters' roles convincing. Consider:

- expression
- intensity
- casting (how their past roles have made them suitable to this character).

Costume: Research the costumes in *Dune*. How do the costumes of the following characters act as a symbolic code to give the characters their identity?

- Paul Atreides
- Bene Gesserit Reverend Mother Gaius Helen Mohiam
- Baron Vladimir Harkonnen

ACTIVITY 4.32

Analysis: Opening and closing images

Examine the opening and closure of *Dune: Part One*. Compare the first and final images. How are they related?

Assessment study: *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* (1966, dir. Sergio Leone)

> *When you have to shoot, shoot. Don't talk.*
>
> — Tuco (Eli Wallach, *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*)

In an empty graveyard, three men stand against one another, their guns ready. The figures stretch the very corners of the massive 2.35:1 frame. In the centre rests a rock with the location of a hidden cache of gold written on its base. The scene is all but silent besides the growing swell of cinema's most identifiable score. Long shots seem to stretch time as intercut close-ups of the unshaven trio relay the desperation of each of their faces. As the operatic melody rises, the editing becomes faster and faster. As the scene continues, the juxtaposition between music and image is almost too quick for the mind to register; a downpour of close-ups is propelled by the percussion of a marching band's drum and Alessandro Alessandroni's iconic whistle. After nearly six minutes of silence, the tension is palpable, until in a moment the orchestra abruptly stops and a single gunshot fills the soundscape. Its echo lingers as one of the figures falls to the ground, dead.

So ends the final scene of Sergio Leone's *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*, a hyper-immersive moment in one of cinema's most enthralling epics.

At the time of release, the film was a tremendous financial success, grossing $38 million at the worldwide box office from its $1.2 million budget.[5] Initially, critics were split on their views of the revisionist Western, which painted a far dirtier and violent portrayal of the frontier than had been seen before. By some, it was dismissed as a bawdy and over-the-top genre film. In the years subsequent, however, the film has gone on to infamy and is now celebrated as one of the most definitive of its genre, and Leone is considered as one of cinema's greats.

To a modern audience used to the tropes of the Western, the simple plot of three gunslingers competing to find a hidden fortune of Confederate gold may seem like an uncomplicated storyline. However, it is not the plot of the film that makes it so memorable, but rather the way in which the narrative is relayed by its expert director.



FIGURE 4.64 A 1966 poster for the film

RECEPTION AND CONSUMPTION

A new kind of Western

The Westerns of the 1950s typically featured stories set in the American frontier. The films themselves were more often than not characterised by a romantic view of the West. Marquee name actors like John Wayne, James Stewart and Gary Cooper regularly played fiercely independent men who were guided by a strict morality code, and who were always willing to defend their principles in a gunfight. By contrast, the villains of the classical era were often cast in binary opposition to this, being portrayed as corrupt businessmen and merciless outlaws driven by greed. For the most part, the films demonstrate a clear line of morality and it



FIGURE 4.65 The lines of hero and villain were often blurred in Sergio Leone's work. Pictured left is the mischievous Tuco, played by Eli Wallach with his co-antihero Blondie (Clint Eastwood) in *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* (1966).

is easy to identify the heroes from the villains. One of the more disruptive elements of Leone's work was to muddy this division between good and evil.

In all of Leone's Westerns, the protagonist is often a character of dubious motivations, serving his own needs rather than a higher code of principles. Clint Eastwood plays the titular 'Good' in *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*, but his motivations are far from chivalrous and he could easily have been seen as an antagonist next to the cleanly shaven chin of a righteous Joel McCrea. Indeed, what makes the anti-heroes of Leone's West so compelling is their ability to vacillate between good and evil depending on the scene at hand. In a Leone film, searching for a wholly good or evil character is no easy feat, as the director seems to propose that the men of the old West had the capability for both.[6]

Leone's pictures are scattered with characters we might not ordinarily see in the classical era. In addition to amputees and non-actors, his principal characters are often base and unkempt and, as we've stated already, float between right and wrong. For Leone, the West was populated by good men who do bad things and vice versa. Indeed, one of the most iconic villains of the 1960s can be seen when Leone cast Henry Fonda as the cold-blooded killer Frank in his masterpiece *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968). An actor who up until that time had been primarily known for his characters of indisputable morals, like Wyatt Earp in *My Darling Clementine* (1946, dir. John Ford) and Gil Carter in *The Ox-Bow Incident* (1943, dir. William A Wellman). By casting Fonda against type, Leone subverted both the Western and the expectations of a knowing audience and, in turn, changed the genre forever.

LEONE'S STYLE IN *THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY*



FIGURE 4.66 Clint Eastwood as Blondie in *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*

When one watches a Sergio Leone film, they are most likely to be struck by the downpour of style. The director was renowned for his distinct use of camerawork and ability to switch between long, drawn-out takes with rapid moments of intensity, where he would edit between close-ups, wide shots and extreme close-ups with the proficiency of a conductor. Complementing his visual style was the director's use of music. Leone's collaboration with composer Ennio Morricone is one of the most fruitful and semiotic relationships in cinema history, as the tension and sense of grandeur in his films were unquestionably amplified by the use of Morricone's scores. Interestingly, where most filmmakers usually start recording the soundtrack to their films after production has finished, Leone would often have pieces of Morricone's music recorded ahead of time and played on-set during the filming process.[7] When watching a Leone film, the technical elements of sound design and camera seem to have a symbiotic relationship, existing in perfect harmony with one another.

ACTIVITY 4.33

Reflection

After watching *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* consider the following questions:

1. Make a list of all the characteristics you would normally associate with heroes and villains.
2. Note which of the characteristics each of the principal characters from the film demonstrates – there should be a cross-section from both lists.
3. Discuss how each of the characters perform both virtuous and malicious actions in the film.
4. Explain how the characters of *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* subvert the traditional roles of heroes and villains.

Scene analysis: The opening sequence

The opening sequence of *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* showcases Leone's distinctive visual style to introduce the film's three main characters.

The first image of the narrative is that of a vast and barren landscape, to which the scarred face of a bounty hunter rotates into close-up. The camera then follows the figure in a variety of classic Western camera set-ups, using low angles and over-the-shoulder shots to suggest the stalking of a prey. Soon, two more gunfighters enter the field of view and, as an audience, we assume a shootout will soon occur. However, as the trio unite outside of a broken-down saloon, we infer that they are working together to capture whoever is inside. Seconds after the three charge the doors we hear three successive gunshots, three thuds and then the figure of Tuco (Eli Wallach) crashes the window of the saloon, chicken drumstick in hand. The camera freeze-frames on Wallach's snarl and a title card scrawls across the screen the words 'The Ugly'. The sequence subverts our expectations, especially if we are familiar with the Westerns of the classic era, by first introducing the apparent protagonists in the film, only to kill them seconds later and then start the film proper with a comically chaotic figure who throughout the film will constantly scheme and outwit those around him, hardly the virtuous hero audiences were traditionally conditioned to see in a Western.

From here, Leone creates two more vignettes to introduce the 'Good', Blondie (Clint Eastwood) and Angel Eyes, the 'Bad', played by Lee Van Cleef. Eastwood is presented as a calculating gunslinger who is confident and in control, even in dangerous situations. Equally calm and collected is the menacing Angel Eyes, who is introduced as a ruthless mercenary who intimidates and then murders a Confederate soldier for information.

ACTIVITY 4.34

Reflection

After watching the introduction, consider the following questions:

1. How does the camera and lack of sound in the introduction contribute to create an atmosphere of suspense?
2. How do the costumes of Blondie, Tuco and Angel Eyes reflect deeper concerns about their character?
3. Discuss how the vignettes at the start of the film develop three main characters and foreshadow the events to come.
4. Using the Name/Describe/Why/Effect technique, explain how mise en scene and camera have been used to establish character in *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*.

Angel Eyes is depicted as a threatening figure who will stop at nothing to get what he wants. These small sequences provide a glimpse into the personalities and motivations of the three main characters and set the stage for the film's central story of their journey to find a hidden fortune.

Scene analysis: Shootout at the graveyard

As has been previously stated, the climax of *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* is one of the most tightly constructed showdowns in all of cinema. The camera angles chosen by Leone present a medley of guns, faces and unblinking eyes, while Morricone's rising score amplifies a sense of impending doom. Interestingly, without Morricone's score, the scene is literally five minutes of people staring at each other, yet the symphony of camera, music and editing all fuel the on-screen tension while raising the heartrate of the viewer.

Each of the characters has a different motivation for killing the other and, like a game of Cluedo, each has information the other is unaware of: Tuco is likely to shoot Angel Eyes out of revenge, but his partnership with Blondie is strained and he may look to yet again betray his partner; Blondie knows that Tuco's gun is empty and will probably shoot Angel Eyes; while Van Cleef's character must choose which of the two is likely to shoot him. The stakes are high and the way in which Leone rapidly cuts between the three suggests that only one will make it out alive.[8]

ACTIVITY 4.35

Analysing the power of music

After watching the scene with the music both on and in silence, consider the following questions:

1. How does editing contribute to the pacing and tension in the final shootout at Sad Hill cemetery?
2. Discuss the role that the setting of the Sad Hill cemetery plays in this scene.
3. Explain how the relationship between non-diegetic sound and camera in the final shootout work together to engage the audience.

Assessment study: *The Departed* (2006, dir. Martin Scorsese)



FIGURE 4.67 Actor Matt Damon and director Martin Scorsese on the set of *The Departed*

Your job is to get your audience to care about your obsessions.

— Martin Scorsese

The mobster film genre has captivated us for decades, offering a glimpse into a world that most of us will never experience in our own lives. From tales of love, beauty and romance to stories of betrayal, murder and the dark side of the human condition, these films have kept us riveted in the movie theatre. *Scarface* (1932, dir. Howard Hawks) set the tone for the organised crime genre, but no one has done it better than Martin Scorsese, whose films are widely considered to be among the best in the genre.

I'm in a New York state of mind.

— Billy Joel

From *Mean Streets* (1973) to *Taxi Driver* (1976) to *Bringing Out the Dead* (1999) to *Gangs of New York* (2002), Scorsese brings the grittiness of the Big Apple to life in so many of his classic stories. The sets he uses reflect the real world because, for the most part, Scorsese is shooting in real locations, in friends' and family member's houses. Scorsese utilises improvised dialogue with his actors. Most directors would throw a fit if their story is not being told exactly the way they designed it; however, this works stylistically with Scorsese's vision. His 'let's sit down to dinner and have a chat' demeanour is friendly, it's family, making us think of the oxymoron *act naturally*. It's no surprise that Catherine Scorsese, the director's mother, has acted in many of his films – she plays Tommy's mother in *Goodfellas* (1990).



FIGURE 4.68 Robert De Niro in Martin Scorsese's famous film *Taxi Driver* (1976)

Scorsese uses many of the same actors for his films. As an auteur, directors grow accustomed to not only the same locations, and types of stories, but they learn who they enjoy working with on and off screen. Films take years to produce, so it's no mystery that Scorsese would choose a lot of his friends he grew up with in New York. In *Goodfellas*, the gangsters sit in one of their mother's kitchens right after killing a man and have breakfast. The dialogue doesn't feel rehearsed because Scorsese is literally sitting with his mates (and his mum!) creating the dialogue. Leonardo DiCaprio has made the top billing in several of Scorsese's blockbusters over the years and both have enjoyed the successes from their working relationship.

Martin Scorsese's films are a unique blend of the real and the fantastical. His works span generations and explore the human experience, from real-life events to imaginative creations. His films are filled with memorable moments that will shock, surprise and move you. Whether you're looking for a reflection of history or a glimpse into the everyday moments that take place in our own homes, there is something special in every one of Scorsese's films. From the gritty crime dramas to the stunningly beautiful visual masterpieces, Scorsese has created an impressive portfolio of films that will appeal to audiences of all kinds. He has an eye for detail and a distinct style that can be seen in each of his films, making his work an unparalleled piece of cinematic artistry.

The use of the anti-hero in many Scorsese films allows the director to exhibit the grey areas of society. Character traits are less distinguishable from good to evil, and flaws can be accentuated to show a more humanistic approach to the storytelling. From *Raging Bull* (1980) to *Casino* (1995) to *The Departed* (2006), we often find ourselves cheering for characters that aren't the nicest, but it's their imperfections that Scorsese homes in on that makes them great! Take, for instance, Jordan Belfort, the money-hungry, drug-crazed maniac in *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013) – why do we care for this character so much? Of course, it's Leonardo DiCaprio playing the role, but what makes us take on the screen persona of such a societal scallywag? He cons people out of money, and cheats on his wife. He's not a nice guy to a lot of people. But what is it about this type of person that drives an audience's engagement? And by the way, 'sell me this pen!'

Martin Scorsese is a master of the **freeze frame**. Coupled with a voice-over narration or background music, or even simple title card, this single and simple visual effect transcends how viewers watch a motion picture. It allows time to stand still for that red-hot moment and yet the story continues to unfold. As an avid armchair critic in the darkened theatre, these are the moments you live for when a character takes you deeper into their motives, their desires and even their fears.

freeze frame a single frame forming a motionless image from a film or videotape



voice-over narration non-diegetic production technique where the voice of a character or narrator is used off screen to inform the audience

Along with visual elements, Scorsese's use of **voice-over narration** provides the audience with audio cues and character insights that not only help develop the story, but also add to building the identity of main and minor characters. In the opening sequence of *Goodfellas*, based on Nicolas Pileggi's 1985 biographical novel *Wiseguy: Life in a Mafia Family* on the life and times of crime figure Henry Hill, the main character Henry slams the boot of a car shut and exclaims in voice-over, 'As far back as I can remember, I always wanted to be a gangster'. The next few minutes of screen time shows the streets and people of Brooklyn, New York, while Henry narrates what life is like in the New York City boroughs. Scorsese utilises this element of sound to reveal to his audience how his characters chronicle their growth and understanding of the world around them. It's a truly dynamic element to storytelling.

You could argue that Scorsese is a musical genius as well. Not for playing, but for choosing the right music to set his imagery to in order to build themes, the emotional pull of characters and narrative intrigue. One could also argue that Scorsese is a huge Rolling Stones fan, with his use of 'Gimme Shelter' and 'Jumpin' Jack Flash' playing in a number of his best works. He chooses music of the time periods, the soundtrack of the characters' lives and it feels that much more real. For instance, in *Goodfellas* when the character of Jimmy Conway truly shows his deviant, greedy nature, Scorsese holds Robert De Niro's smoking character in a tight medium shot with Cream's 'Sunshine of Your Love'. The audience is provoked by Jimmy's sinister smile – do we like this bad guy? Yeah, we love him! But we know more people are going to die at the hands of this unruly criminal. When Sharon Stone's character in *Casino* is throwing poker chips into the air, Mickey & Sylvia's 'Love Is Strange' tells us exactly how Ginger and Ace, the two main characters, feel about each other. The attraction that Scorsese sets up with this music and a *slow-motion* saunter across a Las Vegas casino floor is just flat-out memorable.

SCENE ANALYSIS

Now it's your turn. Examine several scenes from Scorsese films. Use media codes and conventions to discuss with your classmates how Scorsese's direction displays his personal style and builds on the genre of the narrative film.



FIGURE 4.69 Leonardo DiCaprio and Matt Damon at the premiere of *The Departed* at the Ziegfeld Theatre, New York City

THE DEPARTED (2006)

Opening sequence

After several production title cards, a narrative title card reads: 'Boston some years ago'. Fade from black to reveal a gritty, almost out-of-focus image in long shot of men fighting on the street. Frank Costello in voice-over speaks, 'I don't want to be a product of my environment. I want my environment to be a product of me.' More **archival footage** of years past plays showing demonstrations and protesting. 'Gimme Shelter' plays in the background while Costello continues to give the audience an outlay of life in Boston.

Costello walks across the frame in silhouette, smoking a cigarette and smiling. The scene cuts to a point of view camera shot entering a corner store. Children exit with goods and some sit at the counter having food and drinks. The manager/owner looks nervous as it is revealed by the camera that Costello has entered the store. After receiving a pay-off from the manager, and harassing the manager's daughter/worker, Costello spots a young boy, Colin. He has

archival footage stock footage that has been shot prior to a specific media product's production

the manager make up a takeaway bag of food goods and comic books. Costello speaks fondly to the boy, 'You do good in school?' Young Colin says, 'Yeah'. Costello smiles again and says, 'So did I, they call that a paradox!'

We see Colin and other boys being tutored in Costello's mechanic garage. Costello describes the diatribes of the game of survival in life. In a juxtaposition, Colin is seen as altar boy in his local church. Costello describes murder to the young boys and the scene jumps to Frank Costello and his second in charge, Mr French, executing a man and woman on the riverside. Costello asks young Colin, 'When you're facing a loaded gun, what's the difference?' Colin in a close-up shot cross dissolves on screen to an older Colin sitting in a classroom wearing a police uniform.

ACTIVITY 4.36

Scene analysis

1. How does the opening sequence set the narrative's time period? Use examples from the scene in your answer.
2. Discuss how sound and acting both develop the character of Colin in the first five minutes.
3. Name and describe two camera techniques that have been utilised in the opening sequence.

Billy tunes up some guys from Providence

Around the 28-minute mark of the film, two Italian mafiosos stand at the corner store from the opening sequence. They harass the manager by calling him stereotypical derogatory names. Billy (Leonardo DiCaprio) sits at the counter eating eggs and watches the events unfold until one of the men racially slurs Irish people. Billy gets up and moves to pay his bill but instead beats the two men savagely, breaking his wrist in the fight. He is yelled at by the shop worker to 'Get the hell outta here!'

ACTIVITY 4.37

Scene analysis

1. What does this scene tell the viewer about the change in the neighbourhood from the opening sequence? Use media language to describe Scorsese's visual composition of this scene versus the same location sequence from the opening sequence.
2. What do we learn about the motivations of Billy?
3. How do the mise en scene elements, such as accent, props and costume, and character actions combine to communicate the crime genre? Use Name/Describe/Why/Effect in your response.

Assessment study: *Lost in Translation* (2003, dir. Sofia Coppola)

INTRODUCTION

Sophia Coppola is known for an enduring style of colour, sound and acting to drive a narrative. Her films like *The Beguiled* (2017), *The Bling Ring* (2013) and *The Virgin Suicides* (1999) reveal a storytelling style that shows, rather than tells. Coppola relies on filling the screen with rich visuals and acting performances to allow a story to unfold. Her films are as much an experience within a narrative as they are a journey across its arc.

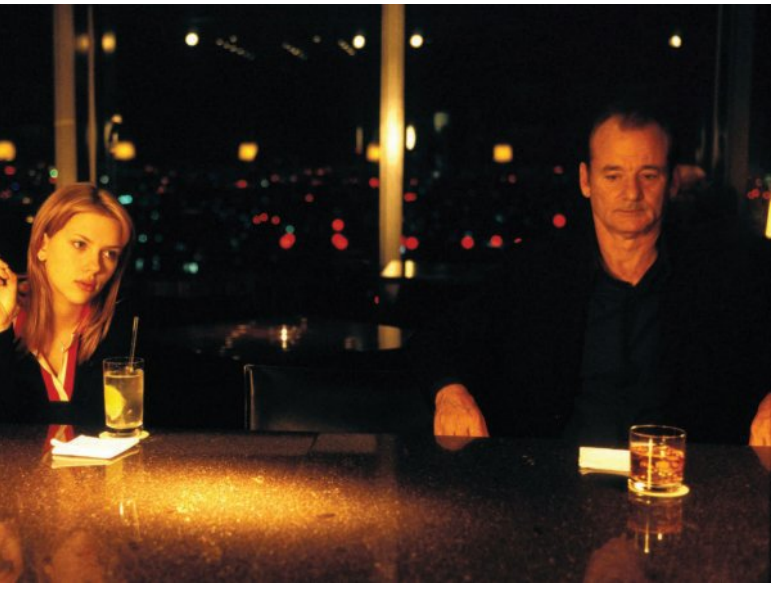


FIGURE 4.70 A still from the film *Lost in Translation*

Coppola's 2003 film *Lost in Translation* tells the story of two Americans stuck in a personal rut while visiting Japan, who are drawn together to forge an unlikely friendship. Scarlett Johansson plays Charlotte, the young wife of an American photographer who is always away for work, and who is trapped in the sterile confines of her hotel room. Fascinated by the art, culture and vibrant chaos of Tokyo, she is forced to explore a new world on her own. Her distant relationship means she begins to question her purpose, scouring self-help tapes for guidance when, by chance, she meets Bob Harris (played by Bill Murray), a fading film and television celebrity from America, who is shooting a whiskey commercial in Tokyo. Harris too is in a downward spiral. While he is escaping a failing marriage, he finds little joy in his temporary location as it only accentuates his mid-life crisis, as he is surrounded by a small army of Japanese staff tasked with shooting his commercial. He has no sense of connection to his experience, as the title suggests, so much is lost in translation. The two cross paths in the hotel bar and join forces to find joy in the outside world.

Lost in Translation defines Coppola's unique filmmaking style. In the opening sequence, Harris is being transported from the airport to his hotel. Bleary from the long flight, he peers out the window to see a world of neon lights and signs that climb high-rise buildings, overwhelming the senses. The congested streets, colour and movements suggest a sense of chaos; however, Coppola's use of sound, a soft 'dream pop' score, gives the sense of a character floating through space, time and illuminated confusion. As with her 2006 film *Marie Antoinette*, Coppola combines a minimalist approach to her actor's performance, while flooding the audience with rich visuals.

PRODUCTION CONTEXT

Coppola wrote *Lost in Translation* based on her own experience of visiting Japan in her 20s. At a personal crossroads at the time, she used the experience to place two characters, both searching for meaning, in a foreign and jarring environment. Johansson was 17 at the time of the role, and while she had acted professionally since childhood, was a relative newcomer to film screens. Even in 2003, Murray was already well known as one of the great comedic actors of American cinema. Coppola wrote the script with Murray as Harris and was determined to ditch the project if she could not have him in the role. Known for his exceptional ability to improvise on set, many of his scenes were '**ad-libbed**'. For audiences familiar with Murray, there was a clash between the expectation of his comedic talents, which are evident through the narrative, and his ability to perform the role of a character with great depth and sadness. Audiences were engaged by Murray's performance of a character who was, essentially, Murray in real life, but a life of pain and emptiness.

ad-lib an acting style where the performer delivers lines without any preparation or scripting

The entire film was shot in 27 days on set in Tokyo, Japan. Only eight of the film's crew travelled from the US and the rest were hired locally. Coppola did not want to make an American film in Japan, so the influence of a local crew helped her understand many of the nuances of Japanese culture, particularly the adherence to

formality and respect. In the Shabu Shabu restaurant scene, the crew were only allowed to shoot until 4 pm. They ran 10 minutes over time, so the owner of the restaurant cut the lights. Coppola immediately learnt that

> we were disrespecting the owner because we weren't done. The location manager felt he had dishonoured him too.

FIGURE 4.71 Director Sofia Coppola quoted in Sven Mikulec, '"Lost in Translation": Sofia Coppola's Poetic Exhibition of Love, Humor and Understanding', *Cinephilia & Beyond*

Much of the character's experience in the narrative was felt by the crew too, who were often translating to their non-English-speaking crew, while trying to navigate the complexities of shooting a film in Japan. They risked arrest shooting scenes in the Tokyo subway and at the famous Shibuya crossing.

COPPOLA'S STYLE IN *LOST IN TRANSLATION*

Coppola used the handheld camera technique to build the intimacy of the narrative. Just as Charlotte and Harris float through their environment, so does the camera. In the scene where Charlotte wanders through the video game arcade, the camera acts as the wandering eye, trying to make sense of Charlotte's environment. Using this technique, the audience are positioned as outsiders looking at an unfamiliar world.

Lighting plays a key role in Coppola's visual style. In her 1999 film *The Virgin Suicides*, much of the narrative was bathed in a warm naturalistic lighting, creating a dreamlike landscape where the characters float through a seemingly endless summer in American suburbia. *Lost in Translation* takes place in a totally different setting; however, Coppola avoids the use of artificial lighting, preferring to use the ambient light of the glowing Tokyo metropolis to illuminate the characters, creating a softer feel, which matched the film stock on which the narrative was shot.



FIGURE 4.72 A still from Coppola's 1999 film *The Virgin Suicides*

Soundtracks are a central driver of Coppola's narratives. Often employing soundtracks of existing music from artists and musicians that match the tone and mood of her narratives, she will often remix these styles to enhance audience engagement with the film. In *The Virgin Suicides*, the French synth pop band 'Air' composed the entire score for the narrative. When in pre-production for *Lost in Translation*, Coppola used a mix-tape, created by a friend, of Tokyo Dream-Pop to guide her writing, and much of it found its way into the narrative.

Key scene analysis: Karaoke scene

As Charlotte and Harris' connection is growing, while both are simultaneously drifting away from their normal lives, the two decide to escape the hotel and venture into the Tokyo nightlife. Meeting up with a friend at a bar, Charlotte and Harris are taken on a ride through the nightlife that had previously only been seen from the windows of their hotel. Bouncing from bars to house parties, the pair follow their new friends to a karaoke bar in the corner of a high-rise Tokyo building.



FIGURE 4.73 A warm blue glow shrouds the room in a scene from Sofia Coppola's *Lost in Translation.*

The handheld camera floats through the scene as the group, crammed together in a small and private karaoke lounge, gives the scene intimacy and places the audience not on the outside looking in, as it has for much of the narrative, but as one of the group, building the sense that Charlotte and Harris had not only found somewhere that they belong, but the audience has too.

The TV screen with the karaoke song lyrics bathes the room in warm blue light. There is a sense of ease and happiness that has overcome the protagonists and the relaxed atmosphere allows them to realise and express their own pain.

Harris takes the mic and belts out a rendition of Elvis Costello's 'Peace, Love and Understanding', which includes the lyrics:

> As I walk through this wicked world. Searchin' for light in the darkness of insanity, I ask myself, 'Is all hope lost? Is there only pain and hatred and misery?'

The audience realise a character who has finally able to let go and express his misery. Shortly afterwards, Charlotte takes the mic with a pink wig she has collected somewhere in the chaos of the evening. The wig itself is a representation of a new beginning. She struts the room to Chrissie Hynde's 'Brass in Pocket', proudly singing:

> I'm special. So special. I gotta have some of your attention. Give it to me!

As the handheld camera floats between the glassy-eyed protagonists, the lyrics connect Charlotte and Harris and a new bond has been forged in their relationship. The scene ends with both characters content in the quiet hallway of the karaoke bar, as Charlotte rests a tired head on Harris' shoulder.

ACTIVITY 4.38

Scene analysis: The closing sequence

Watch the scene where Charlotte and Harris say their final goodbyes in a crowded plaza.



FIGURE 4.74 A still from the film *Lost in Translation*

1. How has Coppola used lighting within the scene? How is this different to the opening sequence? What effect does this have on the audience understanding of each character's journey?
2. Describe the use of camera within the scene. Why did Coppola choose this technique for the closing scene of the narrative between these two characters?
3. As the characters part, Coppola has returned the narrative to where it began with the use of camera, yet it is different. Explain why Coppola chose to use the camera in this way.
4. What effect do the unheard words have on the resolution of the narrative? Why did Coppola choose to do this?
5. Listen to the song used in the closing sequence – The Jesus and Mary Chain's 'Just Like Honey'. Why did Coppola use this song? What connection is there between the lyrics, tone and mood of the song and the resolution of the narrative?



CHAPTER REVIEW

Summing it all up

Reading, making and engaging in narratives is a complex process. Our understanding and consumption of narratives is heavily influenced by our understanding of the codes and conventions that have been developed over time and across a variety of media forms. Who we are, where we are from, what we like and which technology we use to access narratives all play a role in the coding and decoding of these stories, as do our own personal preferences and expectations of genre and style. You now understand the role that various formats play in catering to their audiences' experiences and that the techniques developed by a range of professional media creators have developed audience expectations and responded to changing narrative forms.

Revision questions

1 **Explain** the three-act structure. How does it engage an audience?
2 **Describe** the role of genre in defining story structures.
3 **Explain** how different media creators employ their own style within a genre.
4 **Explain** how the horror genre has evolved alongside historical events.
5 **Define** the various formats of documentary. How do they differ in their approach?
6 **Explain** the role of podcasting in storytelling. How does this format create engaging stories for the audience?
7 **Describe** how technological changes have influenced the creation of online content.
8 **Propose** how the personal styles of media producers influence storytelling.
9 **Explain** the range of challenges modern media producers face.
10 **Explain** how reception and consumption can influence the meaning of a media product.

Practice assessment questions

1 **Define** the role of media codes in introducing a selected media story in its opening sequence.
2 **Explain** how one story idea could be told across these formats:
   a three-act structure
   b documentary
   c podcasting
   d online content.
3 **Explain** how the personal style of one media producer uses production and media conventions to tell stories.

Digital content

- Access the Interactive Textbook via Cambridge GO to access a downloadable Success Criteria checklist, digital quizzes and additional digital content for this chapter.

ISBN 978-1-009-36510-9 Hoban et al
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CHAPTER 5 AREA OF STUDY 2

NARRATIVES IN PRODUCTION

INQUIRY QUESTION

How can we use the production process to create our own media narratives?

— VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, p. 23, used with permission

OVERVIEW

Telling your own story sounds simple, doesn't it? Imagine that all you need to complete your high-energy action film is for the main character to survive a parachute jump out of a burning helicopter as they skilfully shoot the villain, while upside down and in slow motion. Now imagine that it is late in the day, all of the batteries in the cameras are flat and your teacher has objected to the helicopter scene on what appears, after a while, to be very reasonable safety concerns.

FIGURE 5.1 (above) Famous movie storyteller James Cameron directing a scene with Sigourney Weaver in *Aliens* (1986)

Creating your own narrative may not be held back by the same issues that some professionals face; however, you will need to strike a balance between what you want and what is possible.

OUTCOME 2

On completion of this unit the student should be able to apply the media production process to create, develop and construct narratives.

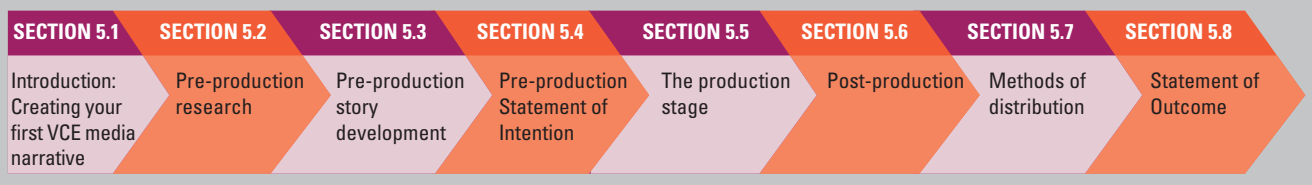
To achieve this outcome, the student will draw on key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 2.

KEY KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING INTENTIONS

Key knowledge	Learning intentions – at the end of the chapter I will be able to:
• media production processes and their relationship to specific media forms	• design and produce narratives using the stages of the media production process
• construction of narratives using the media production process	• undertake roles and responsibilities within the media production process
• the roles and responsibilities required within different stages of the media production process	• apply technical skills in the operation of media technologies
• technical skills used in the operation of media technologies	• develop and produce narratives within ethical, legal and community constraints
• ethical, legal and community constraints in the production and distribution of media products	• use media language appropriate to the design, construction, production and evaluation of media productions
• media language appropriate to the design, production and evaluation of media products	

(**Source:** Adapted from VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, pp. 23–4, used with permission.)

WHAT'S AHEAD



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5.1 Introduction: Creating your first VCE media narrative

In this chapter, you will work to create your own media narrative. In this process, you will incorporate the understanding you have developed since the beginning of your study in Unit 1 up to this point. The creation of meaning is your primary goal; the creation of a narrative in a modern context creates more challenges and obstacles than you perhaps realise. However, careful planning, thoughtful development and enthusiastic collaboration with your team can ensure your idea and reality meet somewhere in the middle.



FIGURE 5.2 Horror has conventions that are unique to the genre.

For your assessment task, you must produce a film that fits a specific genre. To make your five-minute masterpiece, you will need to navigate the creative, logistical, ethical, economic and technical constraints of making a film within your school's environment.

Working to your individual strengths within a group environment, your goal is to develop, plan, shoot, edit and distribute your film to an audience. In order to make your film engaging and suitable for a screening to the school community, you will need to carefully plan and consider how to best employ the popular conventions of a genre to elicit the same reactions from your target audience. Make sure to clarify what your school community and its leaders deem to be acceptable content with your media teacher, should you choose a genre such as horror or thriller. In addition to this, you will be required to incorporate three products into your script that are a mandatory element of the production.

Throughout the process, you will need to carefully reflect on all stages of production to examine not only the artistic and creative processes of media professionals, but also consider the environment within which skilled professionals must create a media product for a specific audience. The constraints facing your production will inevitably create challenges that you will need to anticipate in order to ensure you use your time effectively.

Once complete, you will be responsible for the distribution of your product. That will mean working with your teachers and school communities to not only screen the completed film, but to organise physical and online promotion of the event. As part of your reflection process, you will need to analyse the success or otherwise of your online distribution methods and seek feedback from your target audience.

The task

Your primary task is simple. You are required to construct a five-minute narrative that fits into a specific film genre.

The film must be shot on your school campus, using the various skills of your entire production team. The narrative must follow the story structures explained in Chapter 4. Your aim is to present a narrative that properly represents the key themes of your chosen genre. By researching key films of your genre, you will be able to draw out the emotions associated with this type of film. You want to create a world that your target audience feels comfortable in, a world where they can relate to the story so much that they lose themselves.

Your secondary task is to create a 30-second online trailer, two 10-second teaser clips for online social media platforms and a physical poster. The primary goal of creating the film is the core of your work, while the secondary goal will ensure your narrative meets the interests of your target audience and enable a successful distribution of your production.

Before you run off and start recording, you need to meet with your production team and identify the needs of the production process. If you plan together and carefully research a genre, you will be better equipped to formulate an idea that reflects the genre codes and conventions.

In summary

Working in a team you will submit:

- 1 × five-minute genre-based film
- 1 × 30-second promotional trailer
- 2 × 10-second social media teasers
- 1 × promotional poster.

Once complete you will:

- organise the screening of your film to a target audience
- gather feedback in data and written form
- formally examine your processes and product by submitting a written reflection.



FIGURE 5.3 Kim Darby and John Wayne in *True Grit* (1969), dir. Henry Hathaway



5.2 Pre-production research

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- media production processes and their relationship to specific media forms
- construction of narratives using the media production process.

STUDY TIP

Of course, you will have action, drama, even comedic moments within your film. You may need to discuss with your teacher how to work story and script ideas to stay within the one genre or sub-genre.

Genre development

Before you begin to plan your film, you will need to investigate the broad and diverse worlds of specific genres. Comedy films can take place almost anywhere, so you may want to look at high school comedy films, as you will have full access to shoot on your school campus. If you are keen to take on the Western genre, ask your production team what rooms or spaces you could modify to look more like the open plains of Arizona. Could you paint backgrounds of Monument Valley to have your actors stand in front of to cheat a wild west location shoot? Great directors think creatively and must break the rules from time to time, depending on their budget and access. This is your chance to think outside the box!

You need to research what makes your genre appeal to audiences and identify the emotional needs of your target audience.



FIGURE 5.4 Great horror films deny the audience scenes of graphic violence, keeping them in suspense.

HORROR FILM IDEA

Imagine this film: our main character is a senior student at your average secondary school. We meet this character as they stand outside the maths classroom, waiting for their teacher to arrive. Suddenly, the orchestral score of Carl Orff's 1935 classic *Carmina Burana* begins to creep into the ears of the audience (it will help to play this score as you read this!). Our character looks furtively around the hands and faces of their fellow classmates as they study pieces of paper. A close-up of our character reveals the strike of sheer terror as a cutaway reveals the title of the papers: 'Assessment Cheat Sheet'. As the orchestral score begins to build momentum, it is clear that our hero has forgotten all about the maths test. Frantic attempts are made to skip through the textbook as poorly organised notes crash to the floor in a dramatic slow-motion tracking shot. Yet, more terror awaits: as an extreme close-up reveals a bead of sweat rolling down the forehead of the main character, the eyes glance up, past the camera to a figure approaching in the distance.

It is the most feared maths teacher in the entire school, here to conduct the test. As Orff's masterpiece reaches its climactic crescendo, a long, drawn-out slow-motion march of the teacher is cross-cut with medium shots of the hero as the body language and wide eyes reflect an impending sense of sheer terror.

SPORTS FILM IDEA

Joe Schmo, the nerdy kid who always trips in PE class, has an operation to fix his wobbly ankles. Upon returning to school Joe is now able to kick a footy 80 metres. The coaches who used to laugh at Joe want him to play for the school team. Scouts are calling Joe at home. The boys who use to call Joe *water boy* are astounded by his freakish strength on the pitch.

Aside from the stadium and gym of your school, what other locations might your team scout for your film? The classroom is always an iconic scene for character development; however, it can be difficult to fill all the seats with students and control the room for a few lines of dialogue. Think about the alternatives for character growth – standing along the fence after practice, the parking lot, next to the water fountains. And finally, what music would you play as Joe trains for his big game in a montage sequence?

By employing the common techniques associated with a chosen genre, you make the diegesis that much more inviting for your captive audience.

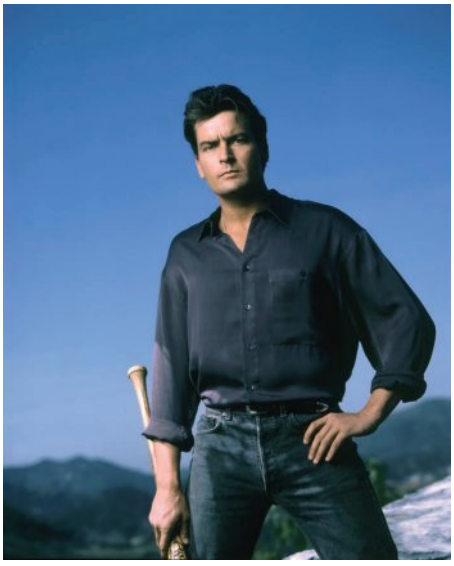


FIGURE 5.5 Charlie Sheen, star of *Major League* (1989, dir. David S Ward)

GENRE RESEARCH

If you don't know a lot about a certain genre, you have an opportunity to do some research and discover as a production team what makes up the world for each type of film. You will need to ensure you examine how the use of various technical and symbolic codes work with common genre conventions.

It may help to start, as a group, researching the broad themes of the narratives and common techniques associated with specific stories.

ACTIVITY 5.1

Research task: Genre research task one – conventions

Identify one example from the genre and explain how all of the codes listed below have been employed to communicate the genre.

1. What are the common storylines found in four iconic films of your genre?
2. What are the common characters found in the genre?
3. How is music used to enhance the genre?
4. How are editing, mise en scene and camera techniques employed to support the audience's understanding?

Collate your findings and meet together as a group to target some specific narrative creators.



ACTIVITY 5.2

Research task: Genre research task two – directors

Some great directors and storytellers have used different techniques to tell stories.

Divide a list of directors up among your group, then answer the questions that follow:

Directors:

- **Horror:** Alfred Hitchcock/Wes Craven/James Wan/John Carpenter/George A Romero/Guillermo del Toro/Jennifer Kent
- **Action adventure:** Tony Scott/James Cameron/Michael Bay/John Woo/John McTiernan/Michael Mann/Gore Verbinski/Ridley Scott/Steven Spielberg/Luc Besson/Peter Jackson/Kathryn Bigelow
- **Film noir:** Billy Wilder/Orson Welles/Robert Siodmak/Fritz Lang/John Huston/Ida Lupino



FIGURE 5.6 Director Alfred Hitchcock with clapperboard on the set of *Psycho* (1960)

Investigate:

1. What are the common storylines employed by this director?
2. What are the common characters employed by this director?
3. How is music used to enhance the power of the genre by this director?
4. How are editing, mise en scene and camera techniques employed by the director to support the audience's understanding of the genre?

ACTIVITY 5.3

Research task: Genre research task three – trailers

You will need to also develop an idea of how you will distribute your film and advertise it to audiences. The art of the film trailer lies in making a good impression with your audience. You don't want to give too much away, but you want to leave them with questions and reasons to find and view your complete film. Work as a group to research a series of film trailers to examine how they are constructed.

1. Outline what happens in each trailer.
2. Identify how many shots appear in the trailer.
3. Describe how music has been used. Explain all the sounds and instruments.
4. Explain what elements of the story have been given away by the trailer. What questions do the audience have?

Meet again and collate your understanding. Make a list of the key techniques and ideas you would like to attempt, recreate or adapt in your own film. Keep that list handy as you will need it again soon.

ACTIVITY 5.4

Research task: Genre research task four – poster research

Examine the use of codes and conventions in the following posters. Carefully examine the techniques that have been used to communicate the genre of horror.

For the following film posters, answer these questions for each one:

1. Identify and list all the technical codes employed. How does each communicate the ideas of the genre?
2. Explain what symbolic codes have been used. How have they been used within the poster?
3. Written codes are essential to advertising posters – how does the written text appear? What colours have been used? How does the font combine with colour to represent the ideas of the film and its world? Explain.

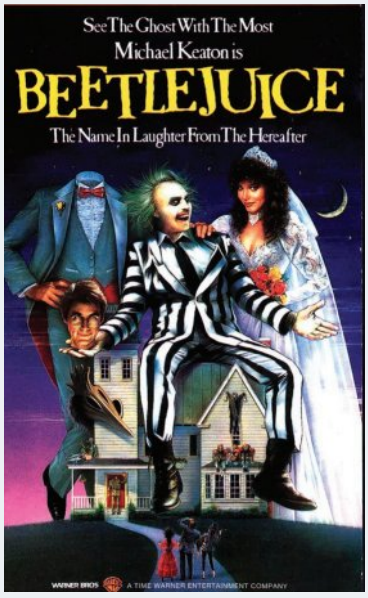








FIGURE 5.7 Film posters show what genre the film is by their choice of images and colours. Clockwise from top left: *Beetlejuice* (1988, dir. Tim Burton), *Ghostbusters* (1984, dir. Ivan Reitman), *Gremlins* (1984, dir. Joe Dante), *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993, dir. Henry Selick).



The sound of a film

As you are creating your film for a public audience, you will need to create your own soundtrack. Copyright laws dictate that you will not be able to use the work of others without authorisation, so you will need to investigate copyright-free opportunities to use sound in the form of music and sound effects to enhance the impact of your vision.

Film soundtracks play a vital role in the creation of excitement, fear and other emotional responses in the audience. Nothing moves an audience to the edge of their seats like a seemingly silent violin that creeps into the ear as the main character wanders into a dark basement, alone and frightened. It enhances the gravity of the danger the character is in.

You will need to capture the mood and ideas generated by some of the great film composers of your genre and highlight the techniques they use.

ACTIVITY 5.5

Research task: Genre research task five – sound

Research and listen to the work of the following soundtrack composers.

For each one, note down your responses to the following:

1. Identify which instruments are most commonly used.
2. Explain how the instruments reflect a variety of moods. In your explanation, consider the tone, pitch and tempo created by each composer.
3. What sound effects can you detect? How have they been created? Where are they used and what narrative moments do they enhance? Justify your answers.
4. What avenues do you have available to emulate these sounds? Investigate the technology and copyright-free options that could replicate these sound elements.

Composers:

- Ennio Morricone (*The Untouchables*, 1987, dir. Brian De Palma)
- James Horner (*Alien*, 1979, dir. Ridley Scott)
- Hans Zimmer (*Inception*, 2010, dir. Christopher Nolan)
- John Williams (*Star Wars*, 1977, dir. George Lucas)
- Hildur Guðnadóttir (*Joker*, 2019, dir. Todd Phillips)

Once you have completed all the genre research tasks, make a list of the five essential codes and conventions that you and your group want to employ. Explain your responses in detail and collate all this information in a document that you will include with your Statement of Intention, to be completed prior to beginning your production.

The production process: Audience development

You need to know what your audience wants. Chapter 2, 'Media forms in production', provides you with a range of techniques to find out what interests your audience. You can research their interests online, create profiles or examine media products that have been targeted at your audience.

However, depending on your setting, you should have ready access to your target audience. They are all around you! Depending on the conditions set out by your teacher, you will either be targeting a whole year

level or an age group. To broaden your audience research, you should break them up into two specific groups:

- Group One: 12-to 15-year-olds
- Group Two: 16-to 18-year-olds.

Each group will vary greatly in their interests and what they deem to be acceptable concepts and ideas that generate the emotions that each genre will elicit. You need to carefully investigate both groups and investigate what they want and expect while screening a specific film genre.



FIGURE 5.8 Do you know what interests your target audience?

ACTIVITY 5.6

Research task: Genre research task six – audience

You need to survey your target audience to determine how you can best engage them.

You can develop a physical or online survey, or you could develop a series of face-to-face interview questions. Both styles of questioning, quantitative and qualitative, will provide you with responses that will help you evaluate what you will keep and discard from your genre research.

Decide on the survey method you feel is best to gather the relevant information you need to craft your idea. You will need to investigate the following:

1. your audience's biggest desire according to genre
2. the type of characters they like to follow
3. their favourite types of setting and locations
4. the type of narratives that interest them
5. what they see as boring or overdone in their favourite films
6. what they are not allowed to watch at home (due to ratings and content).

You may want to develop more questions that are specific to the presentation requirements set out by your teacher.



FIGURE 5.9 What is your target audience's biggest expectation?

Collate your data. Sit together with your team and evaluate your findings. While your aim is to make a film that you want to make, you also need to appeal directly to your target audience. If it does not meet their interests, you may not be successful in engaging them. Compare the list you created about genre conventions with the audience research. What can you utilise that will meet their expectations? What do you need to discard? Write your findings from the research in the same document as your genre research.



The production process: Ethical development

What your audience wants and what you can show them within a school context can be two vastly different things! As you will be exhibiting your work to the school community and your target audience, you will need to investigate what constraints you will encounter when planning the nature of your content. For example, the horror genre is notorious for pushing the boundaries of blood, gore, terror and violence. This may not be appropriate in your setting, and according to the Australian Classification Board, it may be deemed inappropriate for the target age group set out by your teacher.

LEGAL AND ETHICAL RESEARCH

Investigate the standards for content set out by the Australian Classification Board.

For the two age groups you have available as potential audiences, examine the standards of acceptable content.

Work together as a group to determine what content from your genre and audience research does and does not meet these guidelines. Record your findings.

LOCAL CONCERNS

Depending on the context of your school, there may be restrictions on the content deemed acceptable by your school's leaders. As every school is different, there are different themes that may or may not be appropriate to the community. At the end of the day, you want a positive reception for your work, so you must adhere to the community's guidelines.

You will need to discuss your proposal with the relevant authority at your school. This could be the principal, an assistant principal, or a leader of a faculty or year level. Either way, this individual needs to have the authority to determine what is and is not appropriate content.

These individuals are invariably busy people and you will need to fit into their schedule, not the other way around! So, you need to nominate a member of your group who will seek out a time and location to interview this person to gather the information you require.

It may help to develop questions that identify the limits of themes referred to by the Classification Board. For example, you need to find out what is acceptable in terms of:

- violent content (Can you use blood and gore? Or not at all?)
- language (e.g. What constitutes a swear word?)
- adult themes (e.g. What are appropriate topics for the characters to discuss?)
- drug use (this includes the presence of drugs, alcohol and cigarettes/vaporisers).

COPYRIGHT CONCERNS

You need to be aware of copyright! If your plan is to screen your film within your school, you should not be concerned with the use of music or footage that is not your own. However, if you want to include this film in your folio or submit it to independent film festivals, you must be aware of copyright law. The general rule is: if you didn't make it, you need permission to use it. In some cases, the rights to popular songs can cost thousands of dollars to use, and just because it is on YouTube or another free streaming service is not an indication that it is free to use.

Work together as a team to decide on how you want to move forward. If you need assistance with sound and music, websites like Creative Commons can be a great place to start.

IMPACT

The Classification Board determines that certain levels of content have varying degrees of 'impact' on certain age groups. The content your school leaders determine as having a high or low level of impact may differ to that of the Classification Board.

Overall, it would be best to determine an outline of what you would like to include within your story and see what will be deemed acceptable by the school.

Once this information has been gathered, you and your team need to meet again and evaluate these concerns against the findings of your genre and audience research. What kind of film do you want to produce within the guidelines set by your school? How do the findings from the research in the Classification Board and your school alter this idea? Record your findings.

AMAZING FACT

Running for over 30 years, the annual Tropfest short film competition requires contestants to include a reference to a Tropfest Signature Item (TSI) – this is mandated each year by the festival, and could be an object like a pineapple, for example. This pushes filmmakers to think of creative ways to include the TSI in their production.

STUDY TIP

Local music artists are always looking for ways to expand their listenership. Contact up-and-coming bands and ask if they would be interested in giving you permissions to their music or, even better, creating an original song or score for your production. You can tell them that they will be given credits on all advertising and be given special mentions in any marketing for the film.

5.3 Pre-production story development

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- media production processes and their relationship to specific media forms
- construction of narratives using the media production process.

One of the most difficult stages of the entire production process is the development of your idea. It's never easy to come up with a creative and engaging idea on the spot. So, it is essential that every member of the group has input and brings one idea to the group. Take some time to complete one or more of the following tasks to develop an idea you can take to your team.

Learning task: Individual concept

Your task is not to develop the entire concept of your film, but to prepare a list of ideas and themes you would like to include. Choose one of the following tasks and take it back to your group.



ACTIVITY 5.7

Task one: Research

Researching online or in print, collect a page of images that relate in some way to what it is you want to create. For instance, it may be a page filled with the colours that you are hoping to create, it may be a page of shots that you are looking to replicate, or it may just be all the things that you are interested in at the moment and that you hope to draw on in some way.

Using a search engine on the internet or a trusty pair of scissors and a pile of magazines, create a page of images that communicate one of the following ideas:

- green
- anger
- happiness
- fear
- victory
- red
- isolation
- yellow
- blue
- excitement
- purple.

Try to use as many different images as possible from a range of locations. Now look for ideas that could be turned into a film. Identify three and write a sentence explaining each idea.

ACTIVITY 5.8

Task two: Brainstorming

Brainstorming is another great way to generate ideas.

1. What are you interested in at the moment? Write down or cut and paste as many things as you can. This type of collage has no rules. It is a way to make visible the artefacts that lie beneath the surface. (For example: topics, people, music, stories, TV shows, movies, directors, bands, photographers, books, comics, animations, radio, personalities, tastes, sounds, colours, styles and time periods.)
2. Describe what you already know about your chosen genre and your favourite memories from the media products you have already seen.
3. Choose five things you've written down and explain how they could be combined to form elements for a film. Remember, it does not need to be a complete story idea, but just a sample of a potential scene, character or location.

ACTIVITY

Take two characters out to dinner.

You've brainstormed a number of locations and the people that may indeed occupy these spaces. Put two of these potential characters at a table in a café and see what they would talk about. What sorts of problems or issues do they end up discussing? If you don't like where the conversation is headed, pull one character out and put a new character in their place. What new discussions is the character that was there earlier able to talk about with the new person? Do they feel comfortable chatting about more personal ideas? Is there a way to explore a further story from this scene?

Creating your story

When each group member has completed a story development research task, you need to meet again and take turns discussing your ideas. It's important that you take turns and everyone's notes and ideas are listened to. Each individual will have their own unique perspective to offer, and a richer, more developed idea will be the result.

You will need to develop your story from this meeting. Use one of the tasks in the next section to develop the story.

DEVELOPING THE STORY

Before you begin, it may help to return to the previous chapter and examine the Hollywood three-act structure and the elements of a good story. Use one of these as templates to develop your idea.

Option one: The three-act structure

Using a large piece of paper, a shared document or the classroom whiteboard, divide it up into three distinct acts.

Act one: The set-up

Working together as a team, develop your setting, main protagonist and antagonist/s. How will they be introduced? What motivates them? How will you draw the audience towards the first crisis within the story? At the end of Act One, your aim is to give the audience a reason to be engaged and a reason for the main character to act. For example, is their motivation to escape danger? To save a friend? Work together to define your first act.



FIGURE 5.10 Confrontation between characters is a vital part of the storytelling process – what will your protagonist be faced with?

Act two: The confrontation

Here, you will need to bring together some of your individual research and challenge the main characters and protagonists. Dot point all the potential scenes, locations and techniques you will use to draw the audience into the climactic crisis. In the horror genre, it is important that you escalate the level of danger for the audience. Your aim is to gradually increase the pressure on the main character to draw them to the final act. Write down all your ideas and place them in order.

Act three: The resolution

In this act, you want the audience to realise there is only one way for the main character to achieve their goal. However, some great films are known for their 'plot twists' that surprise the audience and challenge their expectations of a proper ending. Here you and your group need to carefully weigh up what you feel is most important to the story idea you want to pursue.

It may help to brainstorm several possible endings and decide as a group how you wish to conclude your narrative.

STUDY TIP

Knowing how it all ends is the hardest part of the storytelling process. As a group, creating the world and its characters is so fulfilling, but without a strong ending, one that satisfies your audience, you don't have a complete story.

Option two: Disrupt normal

Step 1: Establish 'normal'

With a clear idea of who your audience is, you can easily establish the beginning of the story. You want your target audience to be comfortable and familiar with the setting and character. Discuss your ideas and decide on an opening sequence.



FIGURE 5.11 Andrew Lincoln attends *The Walking Dead* screening and panel for SAG Nominating Committee at Pacific Design Center in West Hollywood, 2010

Step 2: Disrupt normal

Using the first step, work together to determine how you will take your audience out of their comfort zone. This is where your audience research will be of great benefit to you. How will you play on their greatest fears if you're making a believable zombie film or spy film? Create a list of elements that will help you do this:

- characters
- scenarios
- sound
- locations
- props
- colours
- camera and editing techniques.

In *The Walking Dead* (2010–22), season 1, episode 1 'Days Gone Bye', the character of Rick (Andrew Lincoln) wakes from a dream only to figure out he has been comatose for the last few weeks as zombies destroyed the world around him. The audience follows his movements and learns as he does on-screen the rules of his new environment. Rick must obey the new conditions set forth in this post-apocalyptic world or face a gruesome death by the hands of the undead.

Use this list of elements to construct a sequence that will take the audience away from 'normal' and into an imagined space your production team has decided upon.

Step 3: Create turning points

Here is where you and your team need to work on the really engaging scenes that take your audience in different directions. Your goal is to keep the audience on 'the edge of their seats' with unexpected and seemingly improbable events. Create a list of how the story will incorporate some of the following:

- the elements of the character's 'normal' that you could incorporate
- other characters and their potential influence
- if escape, survival or success could appear impossible
- the realisation of a possible solution.

Step 4: Develop the characters

DIGITAL LINK

See the Interactive Textbook for further tips on writing characters for a fictional screenplay.

How will your characters do something out of the ordinary to solve their crisis? Consider how you established the 'normal' of this character and situation. What elements of this could you use to show how the characters developed and rose to the challenge?

You could consider the following:

- The main character uses an 'ordinary' skill identified in the opening sequence to find a solution.
- A group of characters overcome difficulties or rivalries to solve a problem.
- The weakness of the antagonist is realised and conquered.
- A solution that was staring them all in the face is revealed and solved through teamwork.
- A romantic relationship develops in the face of adversity.
- A conflict between two characters is resolved.

Putting it all together

With all of your ideas now collated, work together to develop a complete outline or synopsis of the story you want to make.

5.4 Pre-production Statement of Intention

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- media production processes and their relationship to specific media forms
- the roles and responsibilities required in different stages of the media production process.

As a team, nominate someone to write down your 'intention', which is a statement of the film you would like to make. Answer the following questions:

1. What experience do you want your audience to have?
   Do you want to make them feel vulnerable? Do you want to scare them? Do you want to get their adrenaline pumping? Explain the basic experience of your film.
2. Who is your audience?
   Explain, using your audience research, how you will use your understanding of who they are and the interests they have in relation to your genre.
3. How will your story engage your audience?
   Use the synopsis to explain how your story will reflect the ideas and emotions you want to evoke from the audience.
4. What codes and conventions will you employ?
   Explain how you will employ, emulate and experiment with codes and conventions common to your genre.
5. How will you place the designated products?
   Explain how you will weave the products into the narrative to appeal to both the audience and the demands of the product owners.
6. Legal and ethical constraints
   Explain how the content of your narrative will adhere to the guidelines set out by both the school and government classification guidelines.
7. Do you need to get any permissions and how will you obtain these? E.g. musical rights, location access, filming young actors.



FIGURE 5.12 There are many different roles that need to be filled in creating a production.

Defining roles and responsibilities

For the duration of the production task, you will need to determine the roles and responsibilities of everyone in the group. For the production to run smoothly and meet the purpose you have outlined above, it is essential that you work together as a team.

Examine the list of roles in Table 5.1; there are specific roles at each stage of production and it is essential that each group member takes on at least one role at each of the three stages.



Pre-production	Production	Post-production
Producer	Producer	Producer
Director	Director	Director
Scriptwriter	Director of photography (DOP)	Editor/s
Storyboard artist	Gaffer (lighting)	Sound effects manager
Location manager	Costume, props and equipment manager	Soundtrack composer
Promotions director	Sound coordinator	Promotions director/s
Casting	Actor/s	Bloopers – Director

TABLE 5.1 List of production roles

You may choose someone to be the producer for the duration of the production or you could swap roles at determined dates throughout the process in order to give each team member a chance to practise specific duties.

THE ROLES EXPLAINED

The general roles of each person in the production are outlined below; their specific tasks are then included in more detail:

Production role	Responsibilities
Producer	Responsible for the organisation of the entire team and production at all stages
Director	Responsible for the artistic direction and production of the original idea
Scriptwriter	Detailed and written script for all actors
Storyboard artist/s	Complete and detailed storyboards of all visual elements
Promotions director	Mock-up design of print poster
Location manager	Locates, photographs and seeks permission for all required locations
Camera operator	Principal cinematographer on set
Sound coordinator	Principal sound recordist on set
Photographer	Principal photographer for print advertising
Location manager	Responsible for setting up locations prior to shooting
Gaffer (lighting)	Responsible for artificially lighting the set and monitoring naturalistic light sources
Costume, props and equipment manager	Responsible for charging cameras, SD cards, tripods and props and securing all costumes
Actor/s	May include some or all of the team
Editor/s	Responsible for editing multiple clips (can be more than one person)
Promotions director	Responsible for the production of the print and online promotional campaign
Sound effects manager	Responsible for the location and recording of specific sound effects required by the editor
Musical composer	Creates a unique musical score (copyright free) for each visual production

TABLE 5.2 Production roles and responsibilities

PRE-PRODUCTION TASKS

	1st task	2nd task	3rd task
Scriptwriter	Gain the outline from the group and complete a draft	Read through the draft with production team	Incorporate any changes needed to complete script
Storyboard artist	Meet with director and director of photography to discuss the style	Show the draft storyboards to the production team	Incorporate any changes to complete storyboards
Location scout	Meet with director, producer and scriptwriter to discuss the locations required	Find locations, take photos and have images and locations approved by production group	Find alternative locations if needed, and complete location specification of production plan
Casting director	Meet with director and scriptwriter to discuss ideas	Manage casting process, which includes actor availability	Cast the production and complete casting specification of production plan
Promotions director	Use the research to plan and prepare an advertising concept design	Design a mock-up poster that acts as a rough draft of the final product. Annotate the use of colour, written text and image positioning	Meet with the director and producer to discuss any potential changes that may be required to meet the intention document

TABLE 5.3 Pre-production tasks by role

Storyboarding

It is the storyboard artist's job to draw the storyboard for the production. Your job is to meet with the director and producer to discuss the style and direction of the narrative.

There are a couple of important factors for the storyboard artist to remember. First, be creative! Your production can be much more than a collection of medium shots. Second, your storyboards don't have to be masterpieces; some of the greatest directors have shocking drawing skills. Third, have fun!

Equipment needed:

- script
- storyboard sheets
- pencil
- eraser
- red pen
- blue pen
- lots of patience.



FIGURE 5.13 The director is the person responsible for the overall artistic direction of the film.

The diagram that follows is an example of how you might set up your storyboard. You will need to draw one of these cells for each shot you plan. You can fit between six to eight cells to an A4 page.



	SHOT
	TYPE
	C/U
	MED
	L/S
	XL/S
	SETTING
	Int
	Ext

	SHOT
	TYPE
	C/U
	MED
	L/S
	XL/S
	SETTING
	Int
	Ext

FIGURE 5.14 Storyboard layout example

Scriptwriting

It is the scriptwriter's job to complete the script of the production; however, what is less obvious is how they must communicate information. The main rule of scriptwriting is: don't say something that can be communicated with an image. This is why it is essential that you sit with the storyboard artist and work together. Having the main character say 'I'm tired' is unnecessary, particularly as you can have them yawn and stretch to communicate the same information. Similarly, if you want to show that a character is generous, rather than having them say 'I am going to be generous', you can have them donate to charity or help someone.

Conventional film scripts have standardised formatting. This is because:

- it keeps the start of each scene easy to see
- the dialogue is kept separate from the action
- it approximates a ratio of one page of script to one minute of finished film.

The features of a properly formatted film script can take some time to get used to. Luckily, free technology exists to help you out. StudioBinder is an easy-to-use program that organises the formatting for you. There are loads of tools for each stage of production on the free online application.

Likewise, WriterDuet is a web app that's basically the screenwriting equivalent of Google Docs. As technology continues to improve, there will surely be more to follow!

Location management and permissions

The location scout's role, as the name suggests, is to find the locations for the film. While this seems simple, it actually requires a lot more creativity than you might think. Given that it is likely you will be required to shoot your film on and around the campus of your school, you will need to carefully consider how you will use these locations to their best effect.

Not only does the location scout have to find the locations, but they also need to determine the suitability of each location for filming. Does it suit the desired setting? Will you be able to get permission to film? Is there enough light?

STUDY TIP

See the Digital link and Figure 9.11 in Chapter 9 for an example of how you might approach your storyboarding.

DIGITAL LINK

See the Interactive Textbook for a downloadable storyboard template, as well as tips on composing images for the screen and on writing a fictional screenplay.

DIGITAL LINK

See the Interactive Textbook for a downloadable 'permission to film' form template.

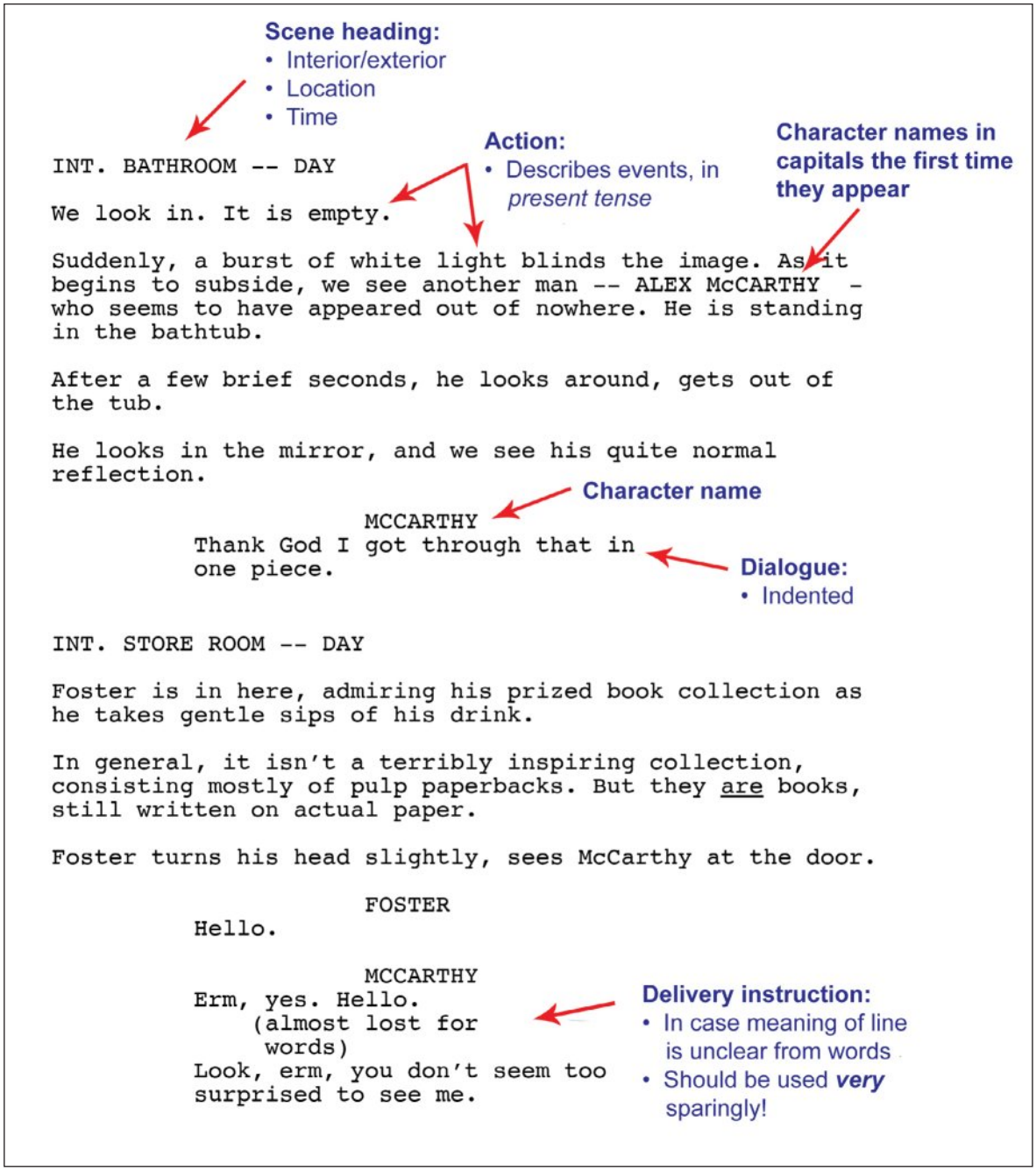


FIGURE 5.15 An example of screenplay formatting for a film production

Are there noise issues? Will people be using it at a particular time? All of these questions are essential to ask – and if there is an issue, the location scout will need to figure out if it can be resolved; otherwise, another location should be found.

Be creative! You've got access to the school basketball court, but you're not shooting a sports film. So what? Bring in a few fake walls and build the labyrinth for that final showdown scene or use the height of the space to capture all your drone shots free of gusty winds. Scouting calls for a bit of sweat to get to the top



of the mountain or just a bit of ingenuity to turn one space into another for a day and minimise travel with production gear.

Unless you are going to have all your productions set in a school, you will need to find locations around the school that you can use to simulate different environments. You will also need to consider the restrictions that might be placed upon the use of school locations.

Work with the producer to determine the locations that will be the most suitable for the director and then take photos of each location to assist the storyboard artists and scriptwriter in the construction of the narrative.

TECHNOLOGY CONSTRAINTS AND REQUIREMENTS

It will be important for the producer to make an assessment of the technology available to the production team. In order to best meet the demands of the director, the producer needs to ensure the best available equipment is in the hands of the production team. The producer will need to create a list that determines:

- the camera equipment required and available (this needs to be done for each location and scene if you want to be prepared)
- the lighting equipment required and available (this needs to be done for each location and scene if you want to be prepared)
- editing, sound production and special effects tools
- a shooting schedule that incorporates the availability of locations, equipment, actors and crew.

Date	Scene	Location	Actors required:	Crew required:	Equipment required:	Props and costumes required:	Description of scene:

TABLE 5.4 Shooting schedule layout example

DIGITAL LINK

See the Interactive Textbook for downloadable shooting schedule and shot list templates.

THE DISTRIBUTION PLAN

Working with your teacher and school, the producer will need to determine how the film will be screened and through what medium, and how the posters, teasers and trailers will be distributed to the target audience.

Your school might have an internal messaging system that will allow you to do this. You may need to upload them to a video sharing service and share the links via social media. Have your Promotions Director contact the IT department of your school and see if they will put your advertisements into the digital reel for school-wide announcements.

You will also need to investigate how and where the films will be screened. Does your school have a space where this can take place? If not, you will need to work with your teacher, the school and potentially other producers to find, access and prepare a suitable space. If you are working with other teams from your class, ask each other if the same old musty theatre is going to cut it this year or can your class plan and execute an outdoor cinema. Invite parents to bring a picnic blanket and nibbles for a night under the stars and transform a few posts and sheets into a screen for projection in the garden of your school campus. Bring in a student's Sonos system from home and transform the space into a surround sound amphitheatre!

Write a short paragraph explaining how you intend to distribute all the elements of your production. In short, how are you going to take your audience above and beyond?

SUBMITTING THE INTENTION

The producer must submit the entire Statement of Intention on an agreed deadline. Before this is to happen, the producer should call a group meeting that collects the following elements for submission:

Submission task	✔ / ✗	Notes
The written Statement of Intention with all questions answered		
Roles and responsibilities list		
Storyboard of all visual forms		
Intended locations (photographs) and permissions		
Shooting schedule		
A shot list		
Distribution plan		

TABLE 5.5 Statement of Intention checklist

5.5 The production stage

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- media production processes and their relationship to specific media forms
- the roles and responsibilities required in different stages of the media production process
- technical skills used in the operation of media technologies.

The production stage begins when the plan developed in the pre-production stage starts to be implemented. As the main focus of this stage is to complete the **principal photography**, the roles are focused around this being achieved.

principal photography the phase of film production in which the movie is filmed, with actors on set and cameras rolling

DIGITAL LINK

See the Interactive Textbook for some tips on acting.



Role	Prior to shooting	During the shoot	After the shoot
Producer	Uses the shooting schedule to prepare shooting tasks and crew	Ensures that the team is working effectively to remain on task and on schedule	Plans the next scene or shoot and ensures all footage and imagery is logged
Director	Must arrive on set early to plan and rehearse the shoot	Works with actors and DOP to capture all footage outlined in the storyboard and shooting schedule	Reviews the quality of the logged footage against the storyboard to consider possible reshoots of alternative angles
Director of photography (DOP)	Works with storyboard artist and location scout, director and producer to complete all tasks on the shooting schedule	Organises and takes responsibility for camera on set (which includes framing and recording each shot, white balancing, card and battery life)	Is present at all film shoots to record action; reviews and logs captured footage
Gaffer	Meets with director, camera operator and location scout to determine mood for each scene and writes a lighting plan	Organises lights and equipment needed for the shoot. Manages the light equipment and responds to director's requests	Safely stores equipment and checks for any damage incurred during the shoot
Costume, props and equipment manager	Meets with director, scriptwriter and actors to confirm all shoot requirements from the shooting schedule	Sources all costumes, props and equipment and arrives on set early to set up. Manages and sources all required items	Maintains and manages all props and costumes throughout filming
Sound coordinator	Meets with location scout and director to determine sound requirements for each scene	Works with the director, DOP and actors to test, record all sound, dialogue and potential sound effects	Logs footage and works with DOP and director to assess quality of the recorded sound and plans any necessary re-recording
Actors	Work with the director, scriptwriter and storyboard artist to determine the mood of the narrative and rehearse scenes	Arrive on set in costume and ready to shoot key scenes. Actors must work with the demands of the director	Review logged footage with the director and DOP to assess the quality of the logged footage and consider possible reshoots of scenes

TABLE 5.6 Schedule of production tasks by role

5.6 Post-production

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- media production processes and their relationship to specific media forms
- construction of narratives using the media production process
- the roles and responsibilities required in different stages of the media production process
- technical skills used in the operation of media technologies.

As demanding as the production stage can be, you should never underestimate the time you will need for post-production. Editing and digital manipulation of sound and imagery can be time-consuming, rewarding and infuriating all at once.

It is important to remember that in this stage you are piecing together the idea you developed in your Statement of Intention.

DIGITAL LINK

See the Interactive Textbook for some tips on editing your video.

If everything went to plan in the production stage, you should be all set to take on your new roles and complete your project!

The producer and director need to work together to motivate and organise your entire team to ensure you meet the deadline.



FIGURE 5.16 The post-production stage is time-consuming but rewarding.



Role	Prior to shooting	During the shoot	After the shoot
Editor/s	Meets with director, scriptwriter and storyboard artist to get an idea of where film is headed	Edits together **rough cut** of the film to then review with the director. Support editor's work with the primary editor and promotions manager to create teaser clips and the trailer	Completes **final cut** in the highest-quality format for the intended playback and distribution. See section 5.7.
Sound effects manager	Meets with scriptwriter and storyboard artist to determine the sound effects needed and writes specifications for production plan	Records all the sound effects for the film, trailer and teasers	Works with editor to incorporate sound effects into film, trailer and teasers
Soundtrack composer	Meets with director, scriptwriter and storyboard artist to determine the soundtrack requirements and writes specifications for production plan	Creates soundtrack for film, trailer and teasers	Works with editor to incorporate soundtrack into film, trailer and teasers
Promotions director	Meets with director to determine promotion for the film and writes promotions proposal for the production plan	Shoots required stills with the actors and works with support editors to match and complete the trailer and teasers	Completes and prints the movie poster and converts trailer and teasers in highest-quality format for playback

TABLE 5.7 Post-production tasks by role

rough cut the first version of a film after preliminary editing

final cut the final edited version of a film, approved by the director and producer

codec the format of a completed video project

The format of a completed video project is referred to as a **codec**. These come in a huge and ever-evolving variety of forms. A codec is the compressed sound and vision data of your project in a small and easily transferable file size. You may be required to convert your completed projects in a variety of codecs to determine the best and highest-quality playback.

5.7 Methods of distribution

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- media production processes and their relationship to specific media forms
- technical skills used in the operation of media technologies
- ethical, legal and community constraints in the production and distribution of media products.

It's time to present your work to your target audience. Working with other groups, your teacher and the school, you need to promote the premiere screening of your work.



FIGURE 5.17 Once the production is complete, screenings are arranged.

As outlined in your Statement of Intention, you will need to organise the screening of your work. This may require you to secure and prepare a space within your school or local community. It will be essential that the following tasks are completed:

1. The location of the screening is secured, the audience is invited and will be able to watch your film in a distraction-free context. You don't want them to miss any important details.
2. The promotional material is released. This may be online or through other audiovisual means around the school. You could even show the trailers at a year-level assembly of your target audience. The teasers should be released online, either through a school-based network or via social media. You want to generate some 'buzz' before the screening to enhance audience engagement.
3. Printing and distributing the posters. Where will your target audience be during a normal school day? How can you ensure you will reach their line of vision and hold their attention with your imagery? Place as many posters as you can around the school to promote the screening to your target audience.
4. Test-screen your film. The producer and director test the screening of your project before the premiere. If the video quality does not meet the standard required for the size of the screen you are using, you may need to review your original edit and try to convert your film again in a higher-quality format.



5 Prepare feedback surveys. After your test screening, you will want to source some feedback from your audience to help write your Statement of Outcome. Keep it simple as nobody wants to fill out anything too complicated after watching a film! The goal of the feedback is to determine if and how you have achieved what you set out to do in your Statement of Intention. Possible survey topics could include:
   - **a** what they liked about the story
   - **b** what they liked about the technical codes used
   - **c** what they liked about the conventions you employed
   - **d** what emotions they experienced.

6 Screen it! Work with the other groups in your class to gather your audience and screen your films. Try not to influence your audience's reading of the films in any way. At most, the director should introduce the film, its genre and thank their key team members and their teacher. Remember to thank your teacher! If you have met the legal and ethical demands of the school and Classification Board, you should not have any need to forewarn your audience about the nature of any filmic content.

7 Survey your audience to gather some feedback on your film.

5.8 Statement of Outcome

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- media production processes and their relationship to specific media forms.

Individual statement

Each person involved in the production must complete an individual Statement of Outcome that reflects on their experiences. These answers should be confidential and act as an honest reflection on what you have learnt in your roles. The following questions need to be answered:

- How do you feel about the film you made?
- How did your group work productively together?
- How did you contribute to the pre-production process?
- Did you have any problems within the group? Explain what they were and how you resolved them.
- Did you fulfil all the requirements of your roles? Explain with specific references.
- Were you satisfied with your contribution? Explain.
- What individual problems did you encounter in your specific role?
- If you were to undertake your roles again, what would you do differently?

Producer's statement

The producer's last task is to collate the audience feedback and compare the audience reaction to the Statement of Intention. Answer the following questions and submit them with your personal Statement of Outcome in your role as producer:

- What did the audience like about your film?
- What did the audience dislike or not understand about your film?
- What elements of the feedback reflect success in your Statement of Intention?
- What could you have changed in the production process to achieve more positive responses in your survey?

When answering each question, be sure to explain with examples from your production experience.



CHAPTER REVIEW

Summing it all up

By now the credits have rolled and the screen has long gone dark. Hopefully, you are sitting with your team analysing the feedback your audience gave you and celebrating a job well done. Creating your own media narratives, especially one as taxing as a school-friendly VCE Media film, can be a stressful but ultimately rewarding experience. If you made your audience feel something – laughing off their seat, darting their eyes around to fellow audience members, or gripping the edges of their seats just a little too tightly – then you have done your job. By now you are a veteran of at least two major production processes and can look to future projects with a wiser and more capable eye. You have navigated the legal and ethical constraints on great stories, and you have planned, shot and crafted your narrative into a complete idea that was screened to your target audience. You know the pitfalls and challenges of the whole production process, but you also know what it means to tell stories and have an audience enjoy what you have to say.

Digital content

- Access the Interactive Textbook via Cambridge GO to access a downloadable Success Criteria checklist, digital quizzes and additional digital content for this chapter.



CHAPTER 6 AREA OF STUDY 3

MEDIA AND CHANGE

INQUIRY QUESTION

What is the impact of new media technologies on us as individuals and as a society?

— VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, p. 24, used with permission

OVERVIEW

Do you have a smartphone in your pocket? Take it out and hold it in front of you. In your hand, you possess everything you may ever need to be a fully functioning, global media creator. Within that tiny device, over a hundred years of media communication technology has been shrunk, converged and digitised to give you, the user, the power to reach the eyes, ears and thoughts of millions of people around the world. You have a tool that has a capability that media industry owners formerly could only dream of. Throughout this chapter, you will examine the seismic shifts felt by media makers and users since the advent of digital technology. You will learn about the dramatic consequences of the moment when the audience became the dominant creator of media messages and the way you, as a consumer and producer, sit in the middle of this unstoppable force of digital media.

FIGURE 6.1 (above) In today's world, it can be hard to break our addiction to media products.

OUTCOME 3

On completion of this unit the student should be able to discuss the influence of new media technologies on society, audiences, the individual, media industries and institutions.

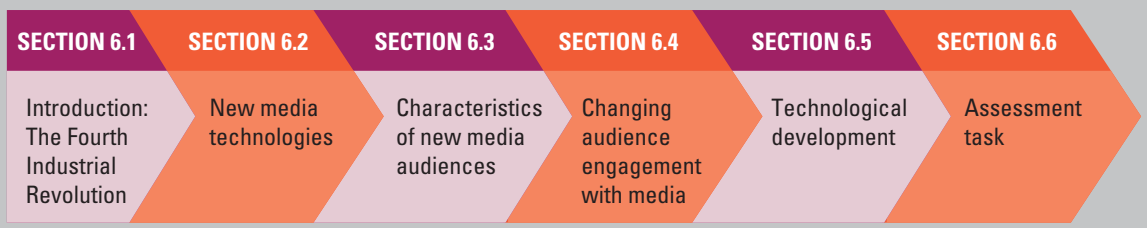
To achieve this outcome, the student will draw on key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 3.

KEY KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING INTENTIONS

Key knowledge	Learning intentions – at the end of the chapter I will be able to:
• the nature and forms of new media technologies	• identify the nature and forms of new media technologies
• characteristics of new media audiences	• discuss the characteristics of new media audiences
• the ways audiences interact and engage with the media as a result of the growth of technologies across media forms	• explain the ways audiences interact and engage with the media as a result of the growth of technologies across media forms
• the influence of technological development, audiences, the individual, media industries and institutions	• analyse the influence of technological development, the individual, media industries and institutions
• social, ethical and legal issues in the media industry in the last two years	• analyse social, ethical and legal issues in the media industry in the last two years

(**Source:** Adapted from VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, pp. 24–5, used with permission)

WHAT'S AHEAD



ISBN 978-1-009-36510-9 Hoban et al
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6.1 Introduction: The Fourth Industrial Revolution

Welcome to the revolution. You are living in the fourth great technological upheaval of human society, and it is happening on the internet, in the cloud and on your phone.

The First Industrial Revolution used water and steam power to mechanise production. The Second Industrial Revolution used electric power to create mass production. The Third Industrial Revolution used electronics and information technology to automate production. Now a Fourth Industrial Revolution is building on the third, and advances in technological change in the past three decades have been rapid. Human communication and participation in the media, in particular, are increasingly digital practices.

Behind the lock screen of your phone is the centre of all human knowledge, and the tools to be an active global citizen, capable of being a significant 'influencer' in the course of human evolution. Through a post, a photo or a sequence of video, you can reach a global audience in seconds. Spreading faster than a global pandemic, you have the power to reach audiences in ways the great players of history and the media could only have dreamed of.

machine learning the use and development of computer systems that are able to learn and adapt without following explicit instructions

In the same breath, your behaviours, thoughts, interests and activities are all being traced, tracked, predicted and guided by **machine learning**. The new opportunities provided by modern media come at a price. Large global media organisations are in competition for your attention and have developed methods to ensure it stays with them, until it knows you better than you know yourself.

In this chapter, you will explore the ways that new technologies have forever altered the media, human behaviour and society itself. You will explore the ways that audiences participate actively in the media they consume and create, and the vast global connections made between them. You will understand the peculiar relationship between large media institutions, and the millions of individual users that these companies and services rely on around the world, to sustain their business models. More critically, you will be armed with this knowledge to tackle the challenges that you will face today, tomorrow and into the future, which could be defined as media and change.

6.2 Characteristics of new media technologies

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- the nature and forms of new media technologies.

New media technologies are evolving all the time. New media forms can be anything from podcasts, videogames, interactive content, social media, virtual reality or streamed television. What binds all new media technologies together increasingly is the internet. Without it, many of these media forms cannot exist. It was not always this way. There was once a world without the internet, and the media, while limited to a few specific forms, was all powerful.

The broadcast era

The **broadcast era** of radio, film and television dominated the cultural lives of audiences worldwide. Beginning in the early 20th century, **mass communication** excited and enthralled audiences. For many years, individuals and families could sit in the comfort of their own homes and listen to the words of world leaders and follow along with thrilling radio plays.

This is largely because mass media like film, radio, television and print news was not as readily available and diverse as it is today. For the better part of the 20th century, the wealth required to produce a newspaper, and own and broadcast television programs or feature films meant that the media, and all the power it was thought to have, lay in the hands of a wealthy few.

Audiences had to accept what the television stations chose to broadcast as mass entertainment, when and how. The same could be said for film and news, which acted as the **gatekeepers** of information and entertainment. As such, audiences were conditioned to accept that they would engage with the media in the same way as everyone else. Hence the term *broad*casting.

broadcast era a period of time in the 20th century where media was owned by a small number of wealthy individuals and companies and had significant control over the media audiences consumed

mass communication sharing information on a large scale to a wide range of people

gatekeepers individuals or groups within media broadcast companies who shaped, crafted and decided which media messages and ideas would be available to media audiences

means of production the ability to afford, maintain and broadcast mass media

A by-product of the media having so much control over what we saw, talked about and engaged with was the fear that it could potentially influence our thoughts and behaviours according to the wishes of those gatekeepers. As early as the 1940s, studies were conducted to explore the way in which mass media could influence audiences to behave in ways they might otherwise not have before.

For the next six decades, film, television, print and radio dominated the media. With the **means of production** still in the hands of a wealthy few, the medium of television became dominant across the globe, a gradual improvement in media technologies leading to more diversity in filmmaking and news broadcasting.

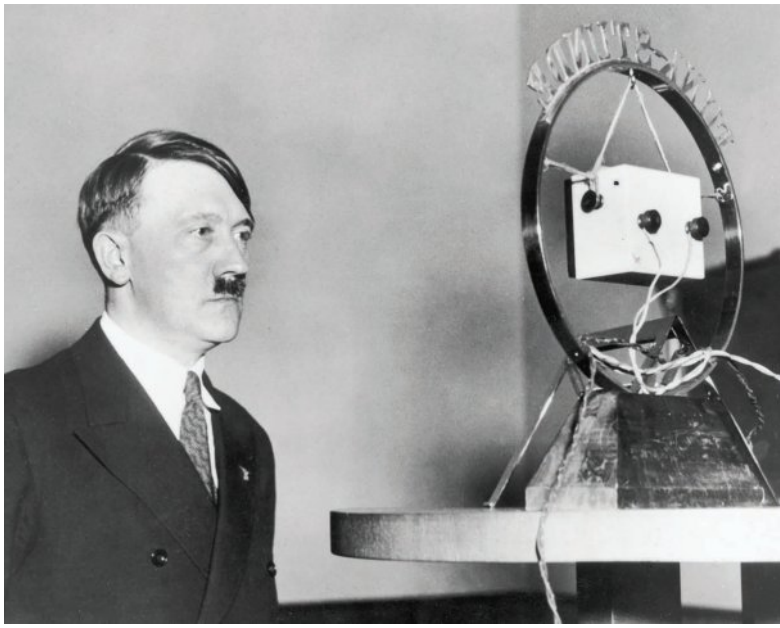


FIGURE 6.2 The Nazi regime (1933–45) controlled all aspects of the media in Germany, particularly the radio. Media analysts have long studied how media control allowed the Nazi regime to push a nation towards war and genocide. Pictured is Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler, a powerful user of the radio form.

Broadcast media forms

BROADCAST MEDIA FORMS: FILM

Cinema and the Hollywood studio system dominated media production in the 1930s. Five major film studios essentially controlled production and all work, fame and money made in the film industry was largely connected to these studios: MGM, Paramount, Warner Bros, RKO and Fox. These studios controlled so much of the system that they controlled many of the cinemas that showed their films to audiences. As such, these major studios, owned by a handful of wealthy individuals, controlled much of what audiences saw on cinema screens.



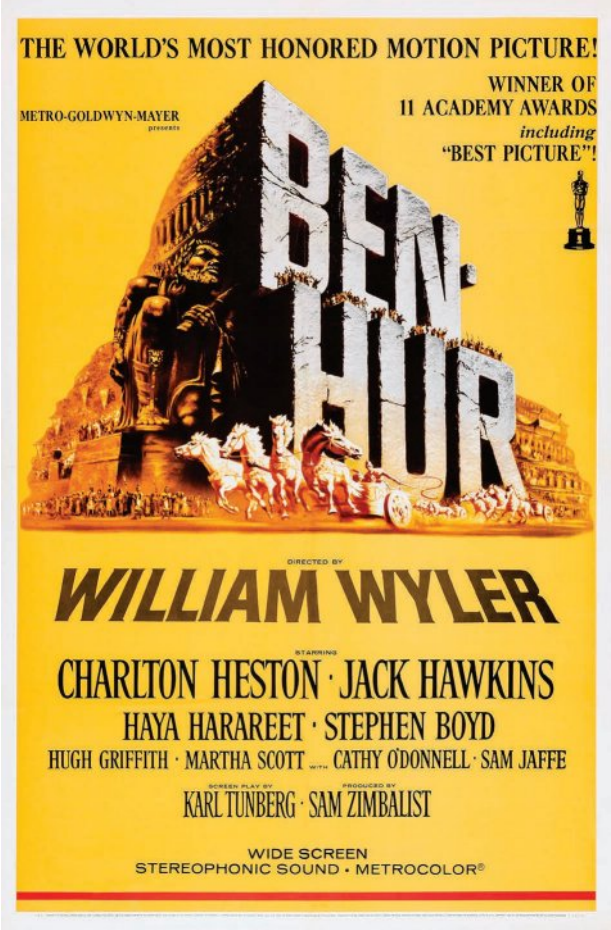


FIGURE 6.3 The poster for *Ben-Hur,* 1959. *Ben-Hur* was long considered the biggest film ever made.

The production of feature film has experienced several changes with new technologies. Many new roles have emerged thanks to digital technologies, and many have disappeared. However, the process has remained much the same.

Ben-Hur (1959, dir. William Wyler) was considered to be the biggest film ever made in its era. The magnitude of the biblical story is the stuff of filmmaking legend. There were over 360 speaking parts in the script. A true blockbuster film, it boasted over a million props, 2500 horses, 10 000 extras and a set built for a single scene that replicated an 18-hectare colosseum for a high-action chariot race.

ACTIVITY 6.1

Research task

1. Research the scale of production on the set of *Ben-Hur*. Explain the process of shooting the famous 'Chariot Race' scene.
2. Consider similar films and television shows made in the last five years. How have developments in digital technology changed the filmmaking process?

BROADCAST MEDIA FORMS: TELEVISION

Popularity drove the production and diversification of television production. Traditional drama and comedy were often produced over a long period of time and so had to remain somewhat ambiguous with their content to avoid looking out of date.

Live television broadcasts were consistently popular as they allowed for spontaneity, where anything could happen. Thousands of people built long careers in the production of television, as its revenue did not come from people buying tickets at the cinema box office, but from advertisers trying to reach an audience.

To meet the demands of the advertiser and audience, producing television was a complex art. Production required several roles that concentrated on the knowledge of specific technologies and trained individuals to turn knobs and press buttons in well-rehearsed, synchronised movements, creating seamless television.

In its early years, television was controlled by even fewer companies than cinema. To appeal to as broad an audience as possible, television producers often used the same sets, created simple storylines and uncomplicated characters. A strict number of advertising breaks meant that many half-hour productions were frozen in the same three-act structure of an opening sequence, a crisis and a resolution. Put simply, the limitations of the technology enforced limitations on the quality of its production.



FIGURE 6.4 From the 1960s onwards, the family television was the dominant form of media.

ACTIVITY 6.2

Research task

Explore examples of the following hit TV shows from the broadcast era:

- *The Brady Bunch* (1969–74)
- *Bewitched* (1964–72)
- *Married… with Children* (1987–97)
- *Friends* (1994–2004)
- *Everybody Loves Raymond* (1996–2005).

1. Explain how each of these TV shows shot and produced these programs.
2. In your own words, how would you define the 'formula' used to produce these programs?
3. What particular economic factors influenced the structure of these television shows?
4. A recent example of this formula was the long-running series *The Big Bang Theory*. Research online to find an example of a television show where the laugh track has been edited out. Explain how this contrasts with modern comedy television.

BROADCAST MEDIA FORMS: NEWS PRODUCTION

The role of the journalist and their employer, the news media, has experienced drastic change. In the broadcast era, the role of the news media was to report and explain world events for audiences. Initially owned, again, by a few wealthy individuals, the role of the news media was to relay the happenings of the day to inform audiences.



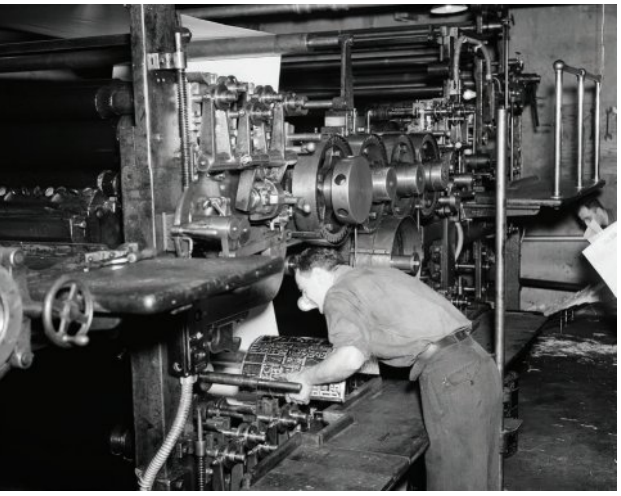


FIGURE 6.5 Printing physical newspapers was an expensive and highly complicated process that meant only the wealthy few could afford to produce them.

The news media played a vital role in reporting on elected leaders. It would investigate, critique and provide a form of 'checks and balances' to ensure that those in power did not abuse it.

The role of the journalist is simple: report the truth. If a reporter is investigating a scandal, it is their role to tell both sides of the story impartially and without bias. It is not the reporter's role to interpret and pass judgement on truth. That is the role of an informed audience.

Traditional news gathering has been critically challenged by the advent of new media and the demands of an increasingly connected audience. The role of the journalist was (and still is) to seek out a story, gather the facts, interview and speak to all parties concerned and then craft the story itself. For a broadcast-era print journalist, this would involve meetings with editors, typesetters, copywriters and the production of a complete story in a large printing press to be delivered and sold the following day.

Radio and television journalism evolved with the technology, yet still followed a similar process. The images and sound had to be carefully collected using rudimentary technologies and physical film that had to be processed and reviewed before it was considered fit for broadcast. That imagery or live audio was then matched to the scripted, rehearsed dialogue of the reporter into a neatly crafted story.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. Define the role of the reporter in traditional news production.
2. Define the role of the audience in traditional news consumption.

ACTIVITY 6.3

Research task

Working in pairs, briefly research the story of the two journalists who broke the 'Watergate' scandal (1972–74).

What does this example say about the power of traditional news gathering?

Carefully examine the online pages of mainstream media news sites in your area over a week.

1. Identify how long stories stay on the front page of the website.
2. Investigate how often they claim to have an 'exclusive'.
3. List stories that have come from 'leaks' or 'unnamed sources' – do any of these stories lead to real consequences? Explain.

analogue media that was produced on physical material like film which degraded over time

digital media that is transmitted through binary code of 1s and 0s that is transmitted through electric cables or wi-fi

New media forms

In the middle of the 1990s, media technologies began to transform from **analogue** to **digital**. As digital technologies lasted longer than physical analogue ones, film, television, radio and, significantly, music began to appear in digital formats.

At the same time, a revolutionary new technology, one which would turn the world of media on its head, began to enter homes via their slow and bulky personal computers: the **internet**.

internet a global computer network providing a variety of information and communication facilities that relies on interconnected networks

NEW MEDIA FORMS: THE INTERNET

The internet changed everything. What began as a method to safeguard government information in America and led to one single failed email between Californian universities in 1971 has become the single most dominant source of information, entertainment and communication today.

The introduction of the internet didn't enter ordinary people's lives until the end of the 20th century, when bulky home computers became available to households. Once connected to the home phone line, users could email, share digital data and pixelated photos that downloaded one slow line at a time.

While the internet was for everyone, using it required a reasonable level of knowledge; access to the technology and many places on the internet were created by the few who knew how to write code. **Peer to peer** file sharing opened the world to digital piracy, with the music industry the first to feel the impact as music began to be shared illegally all over the world.



FIGURE 6.6 The entrance of computers into homes brought the internet and a whole new world of media users.

However, as the internet evolved, it was still thought to be the greatest moment in human history. For the first time, a volume of information was freely available, it could be shared, and audiences could participate in that sharing. It was thought to be the great **democratisation** of knowledge. No longer would gatekeepers hold information back, or decide what audiences could and could not access; an individual could answer any question, big or small, important or obscure, whenever it arose.

Significantly, people in countries where the media was tightly controlled and even censored by governments and powerful corporations now had a way to and speak freely, and seek and share truth. In theory, the internet meant greater freedom for billions around the globe. In theory, it still does. In practice, it has become something else entirely.

peer to peer a means for individual users on the internet to share files across a network

democratisation the action of making something accessible to everyone

digital literacy the ability for users to skilfully and confidently use digital tools and navigate between them

crowd sourced enlisting the services of a large number of people, either paid or unpaid, typically via the internet

social media websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking

NEW MEDIA FORMS: WEB 2.0

In the mid 2000s, the internet changed our lives again. In the second version of the internet 'Web 2.0', *we* became the internet. The introduction of high-speed broadband internet opened a Pandora's box of communication and media. For the first time, ordinary users of the internet could upload to the internet quickly and required significantly less **digital literacy**, which led to an explosion of social media and **crowd-sourced** websites like Wikipedia, which sought to gather all the world's knowledge in a single, accessible place.

Social media sites like YouTube, Facebook, Wikipedia, Instagram, TikTok and Twitter represent the shift that placed much of the media and the means of production in the hands of the audience. By their very nature, social media sites and apps allowed audiences to share video, text, images and engage in interaction that is created solely by the users, not by a small group of wealthy individuals.



All these applications are used daily by millions and, in some cases, billions of ordinary people who generate the content that appears on each platform.

Suddenly, the audience had power. Suddenly, there were fewer gatekeepers. The voices of a powerful few were being drowned out by the sheer volume of competing messages.

converged technology technology that at one time was unrelated to others that appears integrated with those others on the same device

YouTube, Facebook, Wikipedia, Instagram, TikTok and Twitter were not the first (consider MySpace, Napster or ICQ, for example) and will not be the last social media giants. The speed at which social media can spread information is matched by the audience's demand for new and engaging content and the services themselves.



FIGURE 6.7 The smartphone has changed our lives forever.



FIGURE 6.8 A mural painted at the site of George Floyd's death in May 2020. His death was captured on a smartphone by a passer-by.

NEW MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES: THE SMARTPHONE

Shortly after the arrival of Web 2.0 came the smartphone. Prior to this world-changing, **converged technology** device, audiences needed access to a computer for the internet, a camera for photos, a television and newspaper for information. The invention of the smartphone put it all in the palm of their hands. Information is readily available at the tap of a finger. The means by which audiences can create, share and upload to Web 2.0 services has led to an explosion of media content, audience behaviours and new media institutions that collect the personal information and data of billions of people around the world.

What were once time-consuming tasks are now completed in an instant. Checking in with friends, sharing videos, memes, thoughts, likes and data can all be done at speeds that were unimaginable more than 20 years ago. And anyone with a phone can do it. In 2022, it is estimated that there are over five billion smartphone users worldwide.

Some of greatest events of the past decade have been captured and shared on a smartphone camera and, in turn, its very existence has been a catalyst in significant social and political events around the world. In May 2020, a 10-minute video, captured on a smartphone camera and shared online, showed the death of George Floyd at the hands of police in the USA. That video, as well as many others that exposed instances of police brutality in the USA, sparked global protests against racism.

Such has been the significance of the smartphone that many of us cannot live without it. It is so ingrained in our lives that we may struggle to get through a day without it.

ACTIVITY 6.4

Reflection

Consider the following task. You must spend a whole week without your smartphone and the internet. Consider the tasks you can complete with your phone in an instant, and add some of your own.

How would you complete the following tasks without your phone or the internet?

1. Send an email
2. Make a facetime call
3. Share a photo
4. Share a video
5. Invite a friend to go to the movies
6. Find out what is on at the movies
7. Find out how to get to the cinema
8. Check the weather to prepare for the journey

Consider how time consuming all of these tasks are and write a short paragraph that describes how essential your smartphone is to your everyday life.

CASE STUDY 6.1

The Arab Spring, 2010

In 2010, a number of popular uprisings (known as the Arab Spring) broke out across the Middle East in response to repressive governments that controlled media technologies like film, television and radio with strict authority. Any competing messages often meant jail. In Egypt in December 2010, protestors gathered in the streets by their thousands to bring down a government many saw as corrupt. In a country where the government controlled media messages, it was initially hard for the outside world to explain why so many were able to gather in protest with such speed and numbers. It was soon revealed that social media, and in particular Twitter, was being used to organise the protestor movement and allowed them to outwit and out-manoeuvre the authorities.



FIGURE 6.9 A shop in Tahrir Square spray painted with the word 'Twitter' after the government shut off internet access on 4 February 2011 in Cairo, Egypt

The Egyptian government responded months later by literally turning off access to the internet in Egypt. However, it was too late, and the government was toppled shortly after. Web 2.0 technologies had played a significant role in dismantling a long-standing government, as protestors could communicate and organise in real time via social media and smartphones.

Analysis

1. Conduct research into some recent protest movements like Black Lives Matter in the USA, France's Yellow Vest Movement, Hong Kong's democracy protests of 2020 or the Iranian women's movement of 2022.
2. Discuss the role of social media and Web 2.0 technologies in organising and inspiring these movements.
3. What do they tell you about the social change that has become possible due to these new media forms?



Consequences of new media technologies: Are the audience the new gatekeepers?

Web 2.0 and the smartphone gave the audience the power to communicate and organise against authorities, but it paradoxically also made them 'the star'.

With the ability to record, edit and upload video content, ordinary people can today reach audiences of a size and diversity that old media institutions could only dream of. Not only that, but these ordinary creators can interact with their audience and forge deeper connections than film studios and their stars could ever achieve.



FIGURE 6.10 The technology required to broadcast to millions is significantly cheaper and more available than ever before.

As discussed earlier, broadcast media, in some cases, dictated to the audience what they wanted. With access to services like social media and, in particular, YouTube, audiences now decide and dictate what they want, when and how they want to engage with it.

Using simple editing tools, digital cameras (in particular, the smartphone) and a cheap ring light, any individual can create content and speak to an audience of millions. And it is the audience who decides if that content is worthy, not the gatekeepers of old. These new media forms have turned traditional media on its head.

In the past, media created by corporate institutions was tightly controlled and owned by those with the means of production. Now, however, audiences can create their own media and, in some cases, nobody owns them at all, such as the trend of Nyan Cat.

CASE STUDY 6.2

Nyan Cat

What started as a joke between two students with a love of pixel art, Nyan Cat became a global symbol for audience agency and the internet itself. The original image was created by an anonymous university student who posted it on the photo-sharing site Tumblr. Here it was found by two friends, who shared it and not long after posted Nyan Cat on YouTube, animated to an obscure Japanese pop song. The video exploded worldwide, and new users made their own versions, remixing the content and even posted videos dressed as Nyan Cat singing the song. The original video was watched 11 million times in 2011. By 2017, there were more than 100 000 Nyan Cat-related videos on YouTube, which had amassed 1.2 billion views.

copyrighted the exclusive legal rights to a media product that protects it from being copied and shared without the permission of the original creator

Nyan Cat is either pure joy or total nonsense. Either way, it symbolises the internet, social media and the audience's capacity to create and communicate with the whole world. While the original creator of the video **copyrighted** the image and turned it into a small empire of t-shirts and merchandise, it is the YouTube video, with

music not owned by the creator, that reached a huge global audience. It does not resemble anything that traditional broadcast media would have classified as entertainment. You may not even be sure what it is. But billions of users accessed it, remixed it and decided *this* was entertainment.

Tens of thousands of people contributed to the popularity of Nyan Cat. Yet nobody really owns it. The original video creator did not own the image or the music, because the music itself was a remixed version of another original artist's song. Nor did the 100 000 others who made their own versions of Nyan Cat videos, memes and content.

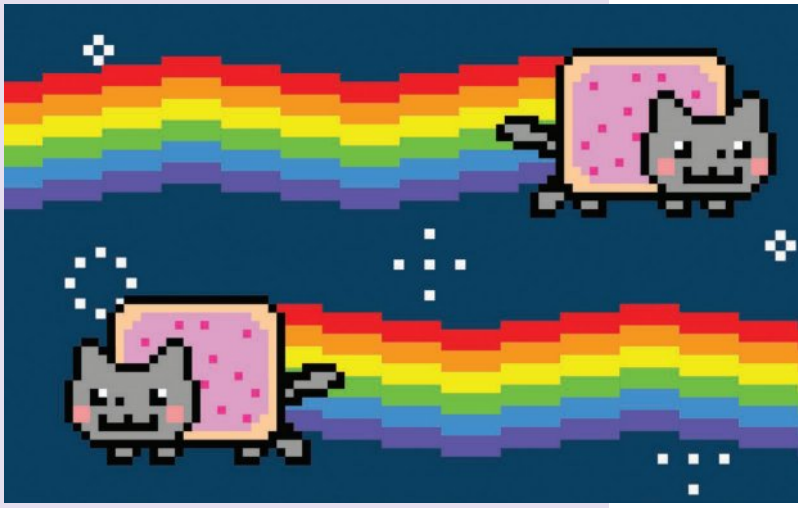


FIGURE 6.11 Nyan Cat – one of the first global internet sensations

Analysis

As a class, research the Nyan Cat phenomenon and answer the questions below:

1. Can you determine the creator of Nyan Cat?
2. Explain how many media forms were involved in the creation of the Nyan Cat video.
3. How many remixed versions of it can you find? Is it even possible to count them?
4. How have other users changed and altered the original message?
5. What does it tell you about the current nature of the internet and social media? Has it changed from its early days?

CASE STUDY 6.3

'Gangnam Style'

Another example of new audience agency can be found in the global hit song 'Gangnam Style' (2012). South Korean pop culture had taken hold throughout Asia well before 2012. Korean music, television, film and fashion were highly influential in the region; however, prior to the emergence of Web 2.0, it was rare for foreign-language content to find its way into the global English-speaking market on the level that K-Pop (Korean pop music) and 'Gangnam Style' eventually would. For example, the film *Parasite* (2019, dir. Bong Joon-ho) was the first foreign-language film to ever win the best picture Oscar in the near 100-year history of the Academy awards. *Parasite* was, unsurprisingly, a South Korean film.



FIGURE 6.12 Psy performing 'Gangnam Style' in 2022



In the broadcast era, it was rare to see foreign-language media content reach broad popularity in English-speaking countries. However, the internet and an artist little known outside of South Korea called 'Psy' changed all of that.

In the Web 2.0 era, the power of K-Pop was spreading beyond Korea into the English-speaking world. Known for its slick production, highly choreographed dances and cult-like fan bases, K-Pop was quietly reaching the consciousness of Western audiences. It was big for a reason: K-Pop is great escapist entertainment! When Psy released 'Gangnam Style' it was an instant hit in South Korea. However, thanks to YouTube it began to spread around the world.

At its height, 'Gangnam Style' was being viewed 10 million times a day. The song and, more importantly, the music video clip, was hilariously absurd. Written as a very South Korean 'in-joke' about the pretentious wealthy people from the Seoul suburb of Gangnam, the video clip was a mixture of wild outfits, wilder dance moves and pure comedy. While Western audiences may not have picked up on the meaning of the song itself, its dance moves were replicated in countless fan and parody videos across YouTube and other social media platforms.

The success of 'Gangnam Style' illustrates the power of the internet and social media itself. In years gone by, the gatekeepers of traditional media would have been extremely unlikely to promote this kind of content to an English-speaking audience. And yet, by simply placing the clip on YouTube, Psy became a global sensation. It was not the once all-powerful music industry that prompted this success story, it was the audience. 'Gangnam Style' was simple, funny and accessible and, for a wide global audience, *that* was entertainment. Through YouTube and social media, Psy was able use a single piece of work to reach an audience of millions around the world.

Analysis

1. In what year was the song 'Gangnam Style' released, and why was it significant in terms of audience reach?
2. Prior to the emergence of Web 2.0, why was it rare for foreign-language content, such as K-Pop, to gain popularity in English-speaking countries?
3. What made 'Gangnam Style' popular worldwide, and how did YouTube contribute to its global success?
4. Describe the content of the 'Gangnam Style' music video and explain why it appealed to a wide global audience.
5. How did the success of 'Gangnam Style' challenge the traditional role of media gatekeepers and demonstrate the power of social media and the internet?

ACTIVITY 6.5

Research task

1. Break into groups and research one of the following media celebrities each. Explain how they were able to use YouTube to build a public profile:
   - Justin Bieber
   - Shawn Mendes
   - Cody Simpson
   - Charlie Puth
   - Alessia Cara
   - Tori Kelly
   - 5 Seconds of Summer
   - Carly Rae Jepsen.
2. Choose one from the research the class has gathered and explain how it has demonstrated a shift away from the gatekeeping role of broadcast media.

K-POP TAKES OVER THE WORLD

K-Pop is a phenomenon well beyond the borders of Korea. It's part of a wider pop culture movement known as **'Hallyu'** or **'Korean Wave'** that saw film, television and music created in South Korea gain devoted audiences all over the world. While 'Gangnam Style' certainly helped, it was access to the internet that facilitated its growth. Unlike Japan and China, which have homegrown social media, K-Pop is predominantly shared through YouTube, fan sites and global streaming platforms like Spotify.

'Korean Wave' (Hallyu) the growing popularity of all things Korean, from fashion and film to music and cuisine that grew from the 1990s onwards

Most K-Pop fans are not South Korean, despite its wild popularity at home. Interestingly too, K-Pop groups mostly sing in Korean, with a smattering of English. However, its rich culture of symbolism in the live performances, music video clips and carefully manufactured narratives captivate fans worldwide. Even though all K-Pop is created by only four major studios, who hand-pick the groups (who undergo strict training to perfect their performances), their fan base pore over every move, outfit and release.

The website Soompi is one of the largest online K-Pop communities and has over 22 million users. What draws non-Korean fans in is the sense of belonging they share in these online communities. Soompi's users translate K-Pop songs and work together to decode the many layers of meaning behind each new music video clip. K-Pop has created a sense of belonging that has come to typify the internet's capacity to allow audiences to decide what entertainment is, and act as their own gatekeeper to entertainment.



FIGURE 6.13 Global K-Pop sensation BTS were invited to the White House press gallery in 2022.



FIGURE 6.14 K-Pop group BLACKPINK were the first K-Pop artists to perform at the 2019 Coachella music festival in the USA.

ACTIVITY 6.6

Research task: How did K-Pop become a global phenomenon?

1. Create a visual timeline of the rise of K-Pop from the late 1990s.
2. What role did the South Korean government play in promoting this movement?
3. Explain the range of media forms involved in the rise of K-Pop.
4. How did the internet, and in particular YouTube, help promote K-Pop to non-Korean audiences?
5. What other online communities can you think of that resemble the passion and devotion of K-Pop fans? What are the similarities and differences?



Consequences of new media technologies: Influencer culture

The rise of the internet proved that audiences could follow their own interests. But it also provided a platform for any individual with a smartphone to reach an audience of millions themselves. These individuals have the capacity to generate their own income and wield influence over their audiences, hence the term 'influencer'.

Some influencers are obvious to all of us through their talent in acting, art, sport or business. Others seem to be famous for no specific reason at all. The Kardashian family are one of the most powerful social media influencers in the world and can leverage their millions of followers to demand up to $500 000 for a **sponsored post** on their channels. Other 'micro influencers' reach smaller, much more specific audiences. No matter the topic, interest or individual, influencers have become a global media industry all of their own. According to *Forbes* magazine, in 2022 there were approximately 50 million influencers in the world, which sustain a $5 billion dollar industry.[1]

sponsored post any social media that includes the paid promotion of a product or service

So, who and what do they influence? Part of the magic of influencers is that they represent aspirational versions of ourselves. They are not part of the old Hollywood elite, which was sectioned off from mainstream society, but are relatable and accessible to us. Through our phones, social media follows and YouTube subscriptions, they speak directly to us. We live through them vicariously, experiencing their day to day, comparing it to our own. Depending on who you might follow and the interests that appeal to you, your own behaviour can be 'influenced' by these creators.

CASE STUDY 6.4

Francis Bourgeois: TikTok trainspotter

Francis Bourgeois is a trainspotter. He loves trains. He records himself, every day, spotting trains. Cataloguing them, talking about them and sharing his joy for them. What started as a boyhood passion was uploaded to TikTok and slowly, then quickly, he become one of the most recognisable faces on the internet. Unlike other internet celebrities who see social media as a pathway to wealth and influence, Bourgeois simply shared his passion, and it was *that* which audiences connected with: an authentic, albeit a bit obscure, love for the minute details of England's train services. Racing from station to station, waiting in fields just to capture a very specific train important to a very small community has, in a strange but quite understandable way, made him a global celebrity. In a world of bad news and the tensions that come with social media (and its inauthenticity at times), Bourgeois represents, like Nyan Cat, the pure joy that the new media forms can provide and the way in which ordinary people can share it.



FIGURE 6.15 Trainspotter Francis Bourgeois

Analysis

1. What is the main characteristic that distinguishes influencers from traditional Hollywood celebrities, and how does this impact their relationship with their audiences?
2. Describe the case study of Francis Bourgeois. What is he known for, and how did he gain recognition as an influencer on TikTok? What sets him apart from other internet celebrities?
3. How has the rise of influencer culture transformed the media landscape, and what role does social media play in their success and influence over audiences?

Consequences of new media technologies: Turning influence into profit

For many influencers, income is generated through commercial relationships with companies that look to sell products to customers. Advertising has always been an imperfect science; however, using an influencer with a devoted audience to promote a product is a very effective strategy since advertisers know the right customer will hear their message. For example, a beauty blogger will showcase make-up to an interested audience, rather than one unlikely to buy it.

An **unboxing** of a 'gift' from a company will showcase a new make-up product, stylish new headphones, shoes, jewellery and clothing. No matter the product to be sold, there is an influencer to promote it to a suitable audience.

On face value, it appears to be one of the most desirable jobs in the world and has increasingly been cited as a sought-after job for young people, rising past being a doctor, lawyer or even a teacher! Influencers, according to most of their feeds, lead glamorous lives that are not structured by traditional 9 to 5 limitations of paid work. They are given holidays, gifts, experiences and adventures that their audiences yearn for but can't quite reach. However, all is not as it seems.

In a competitive industry, individuals must work hard to represent a desirable reality and build an audience. For every post, video and vlog, there are countless others that don't make the cut. Building a following is critical and there exists an entire industry that allows would-be influencers to buy followers, likes and comments from fake accounts, or **bots**, that can artificially boost their profile. Every influencer is judged by their likes and followers. Who they are, and how they got them, is rarely examined in detail.

unboxing the social media trend of videoing the taking of new products out of their boxes

bots autonomous, non-human identity on the internet or another network that can interact with users

CASE STUDY 6.5

The Kardashians

The Kardashian family are arguably the best known and most successful influencers, and they are an excellent example of the power and agency that individuals can wield via social media. They are masters at strategically using social media channels to engage their massive audience and make them feel as though they are invested in their world.

Their posts are constructed to portray a lifestyle of glamour, wealth, family, beauty and aspiration. It is difficult to pinpoint their appeal, but over 500 million followers lap up each post and, within moments, the image or the tweet is liked, shared and commented upon millions of times over.

Such is the power of the family, Kylie Jenner tweeted once in 2018 that she didn't use the social media app Snapchat that much anymore. Overnight, $1.3 billion was wiped from Snapchat's value on the stock market.

Media institutions and governments can only dream about having the type of reach of the Kardashian family, who sit at the top of a pyramid of 50 million influencers. The family are a prime example of how anyone can harness new media technologies to reach an audience *and* profit from it in the process.



FIGURE 6.16 A fan poses next to a wax statue of influencer Kim Kardashian



Analysis

1. Who do you follow on your social media channels that could be categorised as an influencer? List as many as you can.
2. What topics and interests do they promote? How does this appeal to you?
3. How much do you actually know about them? What details of their lives are you aware of?
4. What products do they appear to promote? Is it obvious when this is happening?
5. Find a recent Kardashian/Jenner social media post and analyse the content, the construction and the comments from the audience. What is the message? What or how are the audience being sold/persuaded/influenced?

New media forms: Gaming

Video games challenge the audience to play against their peers or NPCs (non-playing characters). They can range from simple paddle and shooter games to deeply complex role-playing games that can take hundreds of hours to complete. Either way, gaming has become one of the most dominant and developed forms of media. From the days of playing standalone games in large machines in arcades, the pizza shop or the caravan park to massive online multiplayer universes, gaming has become a huge industry and has developed an audience culture all its own.

platform games two-dimensional video games where users work between levels and platforms across a screen and the goal is determined by the game

sandbox a video game that provides the player with creativity to interact with it, usually without any predetermined goal, or with a goal that the player sets for themselves

In the 1970s and 1980s, video games began appearing in social settings. While the games were simple, the challenges were great. As video game consoles began entering homes through Atari, Nintendo and early iterations of the PlayStation, audiences did not need to leave their houses and could play at home, either alone or with friends. Ultimately, gaming in its early years was an in-person social experience. Working as a team or against one another in *Street Fighter* or *NBA Jam*, the reflexes of an individual user determined their skills. The leaderboard on the local machine or home console determined who would claim the rights as the greatest player ever.



FIGURE 6.17 The 2018 release of *Red Dead Redemption 2* was a highpoint for gaming. The massive open world game allowed gamers to immerse themselves in a seemingly endless universe of adventure.

The accessibility of gaming consoles means that players can now access creative, complex and deep gaming experiences on any device. Recent role-playing games like *The Witcher* and the *Grand Theft Auto* series reward gamers for their time. The more you invest, the more you are rewarded. Unlike the early **platform games** that followed a linear structure, modern **sandbox** games allow the player to explore the world on their own terms. *Red Dead Redemption 2* (2018) takes players over 180 hours of playing time to complete every possible task. The game grossed over $700 million in the opening weekend of its release and its online version continues to generate income for its producer, Rockstar Games.

The introduction of sandbox or 'open world' games meant that players no longer had to follow a linear structure and could determine their own outcomes. So complex was *Red Dead Redemption* and others like *Grand Theft Auto* and *The Witcher* series, that an individual player's actions and choices could determine the end of the game itself. Sandbox games allow for the emotional choices of gamers to have a bearing on the overall narrative. Should a gamer choose to be a noble hero or a murderous villain, their choice can have a bearing on how the story ends. Open world games allow the audience to *be* the story, rather than simply observe it.



FIGURE 6.18 The *FIFA* football game series has been one of the most enduring and popular video games as it marries online gaming with an international passion for football.

With Web 2.0 and easy access to the internet on consoles, gaming expanded. Whether on PC, PlayStation or Xbox, players could not only play online, but also play with friends in different locations. Gaming is no longer a fixed activity. While players must be in front of a screen, and it is not always an in-person social experience, online gaming has paradoxically united the entire global community of gamers.

Playing online meant that gamers could test their skills against anyone, anywhere at any time. Huge online communities were built around games like *World of Warcraft* (2004), *Counterstrike* (2000) and recent online-only games like *Fortnite* (2017). A 14-year-old in Australia playing the football *FIFA* game could be attempting to defeat a 19-year-old in Poland. Audience engagement in these games has led to an ever-expanding world of fans dressing up in **cosplay** to emulate their favourite characters, attending and competing in global **e-sports** competitions and watching other gamers play on streaming services like **Twitch**.

cosplay the practice of dressing up as a character from a film, book or video game

e-sports large-scale competitions between individuals and groups of video game players

Twitch a social media platform popular among video game players and streamers

The COVID-19 pandemic saw a rise in online social gaming during lockdowns. Playing games online gave people much-needed social connection. For example, the 2020 Nintendo Switch game *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* was extremely popular.

CASE STUDY 6.6

Fortnite

Fortnite (2017) was one of the most revolutionary games of its era. Bucking the trend of the video game industry, the **battle royale game** was free to play. The game's producers made money from in-game purchases that netted billions for the owners, Epic Games. Pitted against friends and strangers, *Fortnite* allowed gamers to battle against a vast array of cartoon enemies from across the globe.

The more players achieved, the greater their rewards. However, Epic Games let players leapfrog this process by investing real-world money in tools, skills and '**skins**' to advance their standing and **level-up** in the game, improving

battle royale game an online multiplayer video game genre that blends last-one-standing gameplay with survival, exploration and scavenging elements

skins the appearance of a player's avatar within a game

level-up the process of upgrading the skills and capabilities of a player or character in a video game



their fortunes in future battles. *Fortnite* became so popular that it broke into the mainstream media consciousness. In March 2018, *Fortnite* streamer Ninja played the game alongside the rappers Drake and Travis Scott in what is now one of the most infamous Twitch streams of all time.[2]

pay to play video games that require users to pay a subscription to play or to level-up skills and abilities within a game

loot box a consumable item within a game which can be redeemed to receive a randomised selection of further items

Games like *Fortnite* have been criticised not only for their '**pay to play**' format, but also for their addictive nature. As *Fortnite* is free to play, it creates a low bar of entry. Anyone, of any age, can play. This meant that it was wildly popular with younger gamers at its peak. As the game constantly changes with updates and refreshed gaming maps, audiences are rewarded for playing more and more. The pay to play feature coupled its addictive **loot-box** system that resembles gambling 'poker machine' technology (since been abandoned by Epic Games after significant criticism) with the increased social rewards for advancing skills and levels in the game. The deepest criticism, therefore, rests on the game's popularity with younger gamers and their exposure to addictive behaviours and rewards.

So, in summary, what began as an individual challenge against the computer has developed into a billion-dollar industry that connects players from all over the world. It is, of course, not without its challenges to audiences.

Analysis

Research and explore the process of playing a massive multiplayer online game like *Call of Duty*, *PUBG: Battlegrounds*, *World of Warcraft* or *Roblox*.

1. What is required for new players to join?
2. Does it promote collaborative and social play?
3. What advantages can be gained through the pay to play system in the game?
4. How does this affect the playing experience?

New media forms: Interactive content

Interactive content is any kind of media that develops as a result of audience participation. This can include gaming, social media content, online quizzes and a desperate YouTuber begging for ideas for their next video. Web 2.0 by its nature is interactive. Memes and the development of the culture surrounding each one are all predicated on the interactive nature of users participating in the creation of the culture together. While some interactive experiences are created and naturally evolved by the audience, some are carefully designed by media professionals.

CASE STUDY 6.7

***Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* (2018)**

The 2018 Netflix special episode *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* provided audiences with a unique opportunity. They could determine the course of the narrative by making active choices within the story. Using a TV remote or laptop keyboard, audiences were able to make decisions for the protagonists and determine the ending of the story. While not a new phenomenon – gaming has provided this experience for audiences for some time – it was new to the world of television.

What lies behind the interactive one-off TV show is a complex algorithm of branches that can lead to a range of endings. There are some scenes within the series that are quite difficult to find. If an audience member does not choose the path of the story in time, the Netflix algorithm will decide for you – which can be based on the choices you have already made in an effort to predict the story you will be most likely to see.

While in its infancy as a form (developing the multiple story pathways is incredibly time consuming), it suggests a new future for audiences where they can determine the ending depending on their own reading of the narrative.

Analysis

Find a partner in your class. Go home and watch *Bandersnatch* independently of each other. Record the choices and ending that you experienced.

1. Compare your findings with your partner.
2. What choices did each of you make at critical moments?
3. How did this choice lead to a different or similar ending?
4. Explain how your personal agency has affected these results.

New media forms: Augmented reality

Augmented reality allows users to lay computer-generated images over the world we see around us, usually via our smartphone cameras or specifically designed glasses. Imagine being able to walk into a room and have real-time data on the names, social media identities and personalities of the people in front of your eyes, thanks to a sophisticated system of cameras, internet connections and facial recognition technology. This was the plan of the failed 'Google Glass' project that never quite caught the public's attention and its eyes.

While this technology is yet to take off for ordinary life, it has found a home where these ideas always do, in gaming. The ability to augment images through our phone cameras has allowed for an intoxicating blend of the real world with the imagined world of gaming. Augmented reality in gaming has combined outdoor exercise and gaming where runners can use animated zombie hordes to motivate their movement to escape audible threats of death. Perhaps the greatest example of augmented reality in popular media has come from the wildly popular Pokémon universe.



FIGURE 6.19 An attendee wears a Google Glass device during the Google I/O Developers Conference in Mountain View, California, USA, on Tuesday, 7 May 2019



CASE STUDY 6.8

Pokémon GO

By simply downloading the game to your smartphone, *Pokémon GO* is accessible to a wide range of users, ages and abilities. The task is simple. Find the Pokémon characters placed randomly around outside, on a combined augmented and real-world map. Using **GPS technology**, players can wander with friends through suburbs, cities and bushland to find, capture and train as many Pokémons as possible by looking through their phone cameras to see an augmented world of Pokémon characters.

GPS technology Global Positioning System technology that can pinpoint an individual object or person's location anywhere on Earth

What made the game such a success was the combination of physical movement and gaming. In 2022 there were 77 million active *Pokémon GO* players in any given month and at least eight million playing each day.[3] What's more, playing *Pokémon GO* is collaborative. By exploring with friends, players can share their captures and there are rewards for sharing locations with friends. Such was its success that during its 2016 release, players shared the physical ailments they experienced from so much time exercising outside thanks to *Pokémon GO*.[4]



FIGURE 6.20 The very popular app *Pokémon GO*

Analysis

1. As a class, download *Pokémon GO* to your phones or devices. Play as a team and see how many Pokémons you can catch in single media class!
2. Reflect on the benefits of working as a team. How has this augmented reality improved or altered your normal gaming experience?
3. Consider the possible applications of augmented reality that were proposed by Google Glass. How could these change our experience of the media and our day-to-day lives?

New media forms: Immersive content

Immersive new media content is specifically designed to immerse the audience in an alternative reality. Unlike augmented reality, which combines the real world with the virtual, immersive content, otherwise known as virtual reality (VR), does quite the opposite. It plunges users into a totally immersive world that allows for an experience that is separate from the real world. VR gaming has risen in popularity and sophistication in recent years and led to an endless stream of 'VR accidents' shared on social media where users lost track of their physical surroundings while engaging with VR.

metaverse, the a virtual-reality space in which users can interact with a computer-generated environment and other users

However, just on the horizon is a new world governed by immersive content and VR. The emerging idea of Web 3.0 – where access to the web is not governed by tech companies but by peer-to-peer networks that hope to guarantee greater rights for users – has led to a new world: **the metaverse**.

CASE STUDY 6.9

The metaverse

The metaverse may, or may not, be the new way audiences engage with media in the future. With a combination of Web 3.0 technologies and completely online identities, audiences can combine media, entertainment, work and social life in a totally online space. In essence, supporters of the metaverse want you to live your entire life online in virtual reality, and, hopefully, with the support of Web 3.0, have greater control over your data and online identities than is currently given by major tech companies. On Instagram, you don't own the images you post, and in *Fortnite*, you don't own the skins that you have earned. The media company does. By using their service, you have signed off most of the personal rights you have over the content you create. Proponents of the Web 3.0 and the metaverse hope to change that, and put the audience in charge of their online lives, content and data.

In 2021, Facebook rebranded its company name to 'Meta' in order to place itself at the centre of this new frontier of the internet and media. Yet in 2022, the metaverse is not a concrete reality, or virtual reality, for that matter.

In simple terms, the metaverse intends to transform the internet from a 2D to 3D experience. By engaging with the metaverse, you will be in and of the internet. In theory.

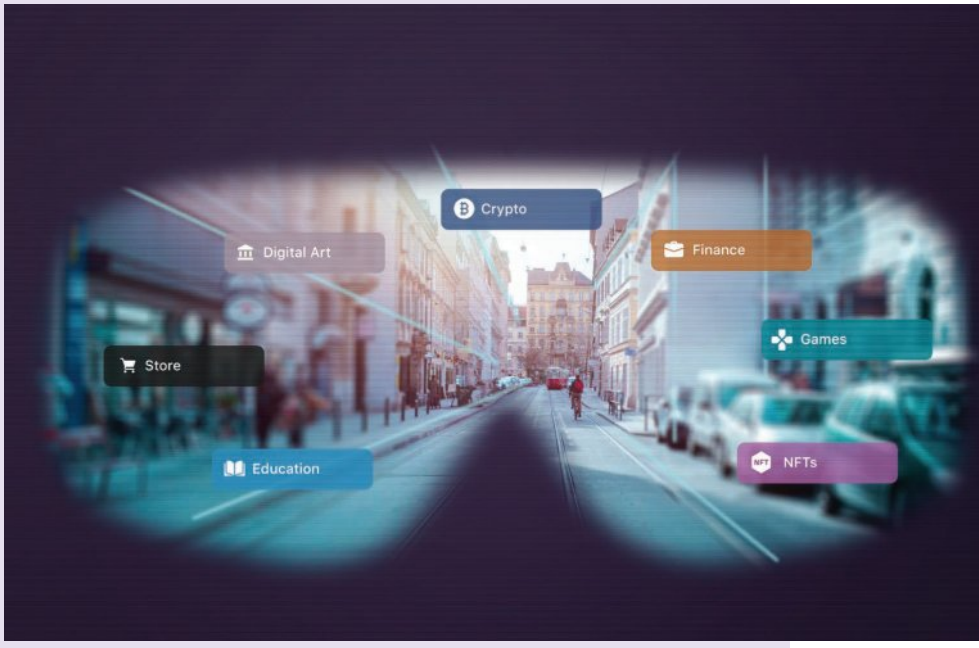


FIGURE 6.21 Concept of a city in the metaverse viewed through VR glasses, showing interface options for a range of different activities

Analysis

1. As a class, discuss the implications and possibilities of the metaverse on:
   - cinema
   - television
   - news
   - social media
   - gaming.
2. Make a list of the positive and negative implications for future media users.

New media changes to traditional media

Traditional media forms have not been replaced, but have adapted to the new media landscape. The possibilities created by digital technologies have expanded dramatically in the past two decades and much of what was considered impossible is now possible.



TRADITIONAL MEDIA CHANGES: FILM

CASE STUDY 6.10

Film: Immersive landscapes and dead actors

The world of cinema has taken advantage of rapid advances in digital technology. Films and productions thought impossible are now possible. The sheer size and scale of production in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) has led to films that more closely resemble theme park rides than actual narratives.

These grand scales have been captured due to the magic of digital technology in production techniques. The invention of green screen and motion capture allowed early adopter film producers to place actors in unique outfits and computer-generated locations. However, the performances of the actors could be wooden and unimaginative as they were often shot on a soundstage and were delivering dialogue to no-one, as their co-star would be added in later in post-production.



FIGURE 6.22 Actor Chris Hemsworth performing his role as Thor in *Thor: Love and Thunder* (2022) amid an immersive 3D digital landscape

Marvel: Immersive landscapes in production

In 2022's Marvel film *Thor: Love and Thunder* (dir. Taika Waititi), the producers used a new technology from special effects company Industrial Light & Magic called 'StageCraft'. This surrounded the actors in a 360-degree immersive digital landscape that created an immersive environment for them to perform in. Playing Thor, actor Chris Hemsworth stated:

> If you're standing on the edge of a cliff looking out at a sunset, to actually be staring into a sunset certainly pulls out emotions and reactions that you may not get using a blue or green screen. It's visually stunning because you get the actual reflection off the background, a nice orange glow on your skin from the sun. … It's a beautiful interaction that occurs.

FIGURE 6.23 Chris Hemsworth on acting in an immersive environment, 'How Marvel Studios' "Thor: Love and Thunder" Adopts a New Technology', The Walt Disney Company website, 8 July 2022

***Star Wars*: Dead actors brought back to life**

The 2016 film *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* (dir. Gareth Edwards) brought the actor Peter Cushing back to life for his role as the sneering villain Grand Moff Tarkin. When the film was made, Cushing had been dead for 20 years. Tarkin was a central character in the Star Wars universe and it would have appeared odd if he did not appear in the 2016 film, especially if a new actor was hired to play his role. Using advanced Computer Generated Imagery (CGI), a real actor was hired to perform the role of Tarkin with motion capture dots all over his face. In post-production, editors and the special effects team used all the existing footage of Cushing in his original role (which was in 1977) to re-animate his face over the actor.[5] It was a remarkable feat of special effects that created wild possibilities for the future.



FIGURE 6.24 Peter Cushing (far left) in his role as Grand Moff Tarkin in *Star Wars: A New Hope* (1977), who was brought back to life in the 2016 film *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* with the use of CGI.

Analysis

1. Discuss the new media technology used in *Thor: Love and Thunder* and *Rogue One*. Explain how technology was used to enhance the performance of actors and the narrative.
2. As a class, workshop ideas for the best possible new films that would involve an actor who has passed away and an immersive digital landscape.

TRADITIONAL MEDIA CHANGES: TELEVISION

Digital media changed television forever. The world of 'appointment television' still exists; however, audiences find themselves able to watch what they want when they want. The world of binge watching was pioneered by the streaming service Netflix, which began producing television series and making them available all at once. In many ways, this trend was inspired by the peer-to-peer file sharing of the late 1990s that saw millions share pirate media over the internet.

Today, streaming services dominate the television viewing audience who are spread across a range of services that demand a subscription fee to view their favourite programs. An explosion of television production was the fortunate outcome for audiences; however, in the world of Web 2.0, Netflix and other services are collecting the viewing data of their audiences and engineering it to take a share of each viewer's attention.

CASE STUDY 6.11

Netflix and artificial intelligence

Any user of a streaming service will know that Netflix and other services will recommend programs and films based on our interests, tracked from what we have viewed before. However, Netflix uses audience data in a much deeper way. When scrolling Netflix (sometimes endlessly) for something to watch, Netflix will use your past viewing habits to change the thumbnail image to suit your interests. You and a friend may be interested in the same film, but Netflix might use both of your habits to change the image to an actor from the narrative that may suit your interests. In many ways, Netflix knows you better than you know yourself. It knows what you watch, where, for how long and what you watch again. In more detailed terms, this is how Netflix works to take control of your attention. It collects the following data:



NETFLIX DATA COLLECTION

1. Customer interactions on the app
2. Responsiveness to shows/movies
3. Date, time, location and the device being used to watch
4. When and where you paused/resumed
5. How many shows you complete/leave midway
6. How many minutes/hours/days/weeks you take to complete a series/movie
7. How many times you search before choosing the show/movie
8. Queries you use to search your shows/movies
9. Shows preferred by men/women/children/teenagers
10. Feedback and ratings of subscribers
11. Scrolling behaviour

Analysis

1. Discuss the streaming services you and your classmates use. Pair up with people who have at least one of the same subscriptions as you.
2. Compare your recommendations. What do you notice about the difference between each one?
3. Create a list of the options in the 'recommended for you' section and swap them with your partner. Use the list to create a 'character profile' of your partner.
4. Report back to your partner. Is it accurate? What does Netflix's data collection tell you about how it uses data?

TRADITIONAL MEDIA CHANGES: THE 24-HOUR NEWS CYCLE

Digital technology and audience demand shifted the news production process dramatically. With the increase of the number of television stations in the 1990s in Australia and the USA, whole channels were dedicated to presenting the news that previously filled 30 minutes at 6 pm. This meant that 23½ extra hours of news content needed to be produced each day. With the cameras rolling, there was now less time to move through the normal, methodical processes of news gathering – the news had to go to air as soon as it became available. This had serious ramifications for the quality and quantity of news available to audiences.

More often news is reported as it happens, and the facts are clarified later. This has led to a diminishing trust in traditional news media, due to competition from a bottomless pit of 'independent news sources' springing up online, resulting in a blurring of the line between fact and fiction from the volume of competing voices.

On the flip side, with instant access to information, vision and reactions, usually shared online, traditional news media has been able to leverage its long-standing tradition of news gathering with greater speed and skill than in the broadcast era.

CASE STUDY 6.12

News production: Hillsborough and Paris

Traditional news media did not always get it right. In 1989, 96 fans of the Liverpool Football Club in England were crushed to death when crowds surged uncontrollably into the Hillsborough stadium for a match. (The death toll rose to 97 in 2021 when Andrew Devine died from injuries incurred during this event.) After the chaos subsided, popular tabloid newspaper *The Sun* used the police version of events and printed a front page with the bold headline of 'The Truth' that blamed the Liverpool supporters for the incident. Reporters claimed that many of the club's fans forced their way into the ground without a ticket and during the crush looted the bodies of the dead, fought with police and prevented them from saving lives. *The Sun*'s reporting of the event shamed the fans of the club and, ultimately, citizens of an entire city.



FIGURE 6.25 Football fans attempt to escape a crowd crush created by a failure of police control in 1989 at Hillsborough Stadium, England

A long campaign by the victims' families and dedicated journalists from rival newspapers forced several government inquiries into the event. They not only proved *The Sun*'s reporting to be false, but also that the local police were to blame for a catastrophic failure of crowd management and had covered up much of the truth. For the victims' families, it took 27 years for justice to emerge from the disaster. In the end, traditional journalism, watching itself, was able to reveal the essential truth. What was missing at the time was the capacity for the crowd to present an alternative narrative to what had been reported in the media.



FIGURE 6.26 Liverpool fans locked out of the Stade de France stadium by French police

In 2022, the world held its breath as it appeared that Hillsborough may happen again. In the Champions League final between Liverpool and Real Madrid in Paris, a disaster began to unfold prior to kick-off, as reports came out of crowds outside the ground clashing with riot police and a crush forming at the entrance. Media reports in France claimed that Liverpool fans were attempting to enter the stadium without tickets and the start to the game was delayed by disturbances they were causing. However, fans were using social media to report the opposite. Videos and images posted on Twitter were telling the opposite story as police were seen pepper-spraying crowds that included children and, horrifically, some fans who had survived the Hillsborough disaster decades earlier.

The videos detailed a failed effort by police to safely allow fans into the stadium, which deliberately funnelled tens of thousands into a narrow area near the entrance, creating a crush. Statements released by French police at the time were still attempting to place the blame on the Liverpool fans, yet, unlike Hillsborough, the media were able to report the story as it happened. The sheer volume of content created by the fans prevented any alternative narrative from appearing in the media. Within days, the French authorities were forced to retract their statements. Miraculously, no fans died in the near disaster in Paris.

Analysis

1. As a class, discuss the way audience interaction and content in major news events has contributed to the way it has been reported.
2. Consider the impact access to social media has made on news reporting and access to the truth.



6.3 Characteristics of new media audiences

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- characteristics of new media audiences.

The history of media effects theories

DIGITAL LINK

See the Interactive Textbook for information about the **history of media effects theories** to learn more about the traditional approaches to understanding the relationship between audiences and media.

CHARACTERISTICS OF NEW MEDIA AUDIENCES: MEDIA EFFECTS IN THE MODERN ERA

New media has changed audience behaviour forever. No longer are audiences constrained by gatekeepers who decide what entertainment and news are fit for broadcast; they can now seek out, interact, immerse and 'do their own research' on almost any aspect of media imaginable. In a new world where the stranglehold of media ownership is transferring from broadcast media companies to large social media tech companies, the audience have, at once, become the producer, consumer and the product.

Before we consider the impact of new media technologies on audiences, it's important to understand why audiences need media in the first place. If you study psychology, you may be familiar with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which ranks the basic needs of human survival in ascending order of significance.

In simple terms, the American psychologist Abraham Maslow suggested in 1943 that humans had a series of critical needs that needed to be satisfied before the one above it could be attended to.

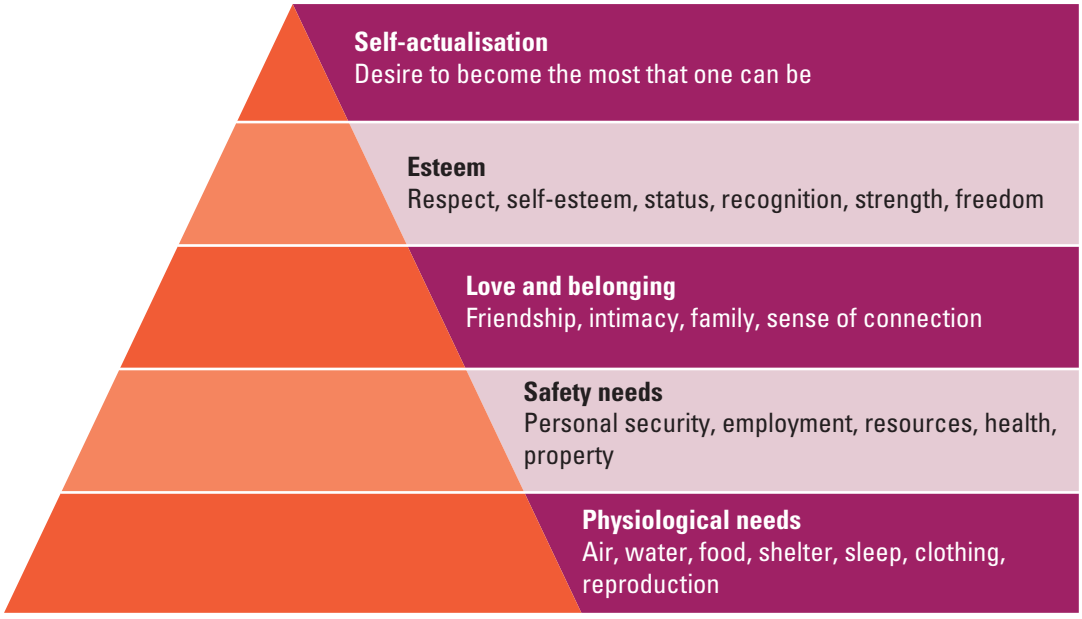


FIGURE 6.27 Maslow's simplified hierarchy of needs: why do you think we need media?

Obviously, at the base of the pyramid are the most basic needs of air, water, sleep and food. Without them, we can't survive. With them, we can seek safety, health and property as our needs move up the pyramid. At the top of his pyramid is the idea of self-actualisation, which suggests humans seek a stage where they can be the best version of themselves possible once the remaining needs are met. Just below self-actualisation, we can see where the media may play a role. The need for love, belonging and social connection can be facilitated by our consumption of media. We share our experiences of what we have watched, what films, genres and styles connect your friends and family and this, in turn, can help form part of our identities. Through Maslow, we can see *why* audiences consume media.

However, when we consider the reach of new media, Web 2.0, digital technologies and, in particular, social media, we can see how many more of Maslow's needs can be satisfied.

ACTIVITY 6.7

Research task

As a class brainstorm and consider the following needs, and explain how social media and digital technologies can provide or assist in some way with the following:

- freedom
- personal security
- sleep
- employment
- health
- friendship and a sense of connection
- relationships
- respect
- self-esteem
- status.

Now consider how Maslow's needs might be affected by:

- no television
- no film
- no news
- no smartphone
- no wi-fi.

1 What does this tell you about the significance of media in our basic needs as audiences?
2 Conduct some research on the idea of self-actualisation. How do we see this represented in social media influencers? Is it possible for social media to create the illusion of a self-actualised person?

Active and passive audience experiences

For much of the broadcast era, audiences connected with media in **passive** settings. Sitting in a cinema, on the couch in the family home or in the car, or listening to the radio on the way to school meant that audiences were not actively involved in media beyond the consumption of the product. However, with smartphones and, in particular, the ability to livestream, media creators can be anyone with a connection to the internet.

The traditional media of television (in particular, streamed content), film and radio are still hugely popular with audiences. The passive experience of watching our favourite narratives and consuming content is still a part of our lives.

passive audience experiences that do not allow for audience interaction with a media message



active audience experiences that allow for and are sometimes built on audience interaction

However, in an increasingly digital world, audiences are engaging in **active** experiences when consuming media. From engaging in multiplayer video games, debating in the comments section or posting a 'like' in a Twitch stream, audiences are significantly more active *while* they consume media than ever before.

ACTIVITY 6.8

Reflection

1. As a class make a list of the passive media experiences audiences can consume today.
2. Now make a list of the active experiences. List as many as you can think of.
3. Which list is longer? What does that tell you about the ability for audiences to be active when engaging with media in the modern world?
4. Explain the relationship between active audience behaviour and Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Audience as the consumer

Today, as in the broadcast era, the audience is the consumer. We read, interpret and share media texts based on our personal backgrounds and familiarity with specific media. How one individual consumes a text may differ from another.

Have you ever tried to show a meme to your grandparents? Then found yourself explaining why it is funny? Then trying again? Then giving up?

If so, this is because different audiences consume different media in different ways. Your connections to online communities, interests, games, genres of film and television all determine the way in which you react to certain texts. Your personal history, cultural and religious (or otherwise) background, gender and sexual orientation all play a role in determining how you respond to and interpret texts. In the broadcast era, audiences shared some understanding of the existence of media texts; however, this did not mean they all responded in the same way.

There are a range of ways audiences can respond to the same text:

- The *dominant* reading: where the message intended is the message received.
- The *negotiated* reading: where the receiver accepts some of the intended message and rejects other parts of it.
- The *oppositional* reading: where the reader completely rejects the message intended.

ACTIVITY 6.9

Make a short diary of your media use in the last 24 hours

1. Make a list of the media forms and texts you have consumed in that time.
2. How did you respond to them? Label each one with dominant, negotiated or oppositional.

The nature of new media technologies means that there is a bottomless pit of potential texts, media forms and consumption that goes with it. A by-product of this is media consumption, and possible readings of media texts are extremely contextualised. You may be part of an online community like fan fiction, an online gaming team, a group chat or a shared interest in an extremely niche form of anime, which requires you to understand specific languages, codes of behaviour and prior knowledge that not only includes you within that community, but increases your engagement with those media texts.

When considering the notion of active and passive audiences, we can now see them as *fragmented* too. Modern audiences are able to develop dominant readings of texts that would be entirely oppositional or even lost to others.

ACTIVITY 6.10

Homework activity

Compare your media habits from the previous activity with those of a friend, parent or relative.

1. What aspects of your media use require a specific understanding of the codes of behaviour and require prior knowledge? This could include aspects of gaming, media genres and forms.
2. Show these to a friend, parent or relative. What was their reading of the text? Was it dominant, negotiated or oppositional?
3. What media forms does your friend, parent or relative engage in? How do you think their media use would influence their consumption of your media texts?

ACTIVITY 6.11

Visual presentation: Dominant readings

As a class, work in pairs to create a visual presentation that explains what is required for a dominant reading of the following media texts and forms:

1. online first-person shooter games
2. Tik-Tok dance trends
3. Japanese anime
4. the *Jackass* movie series
5. the *Game of Thrones* series
6. a *Discord* gaming chat
7. a *Minecraft* Twitch stream
8. Jordan Peele's horror films
9. the Marvel Cinematic Universe
10. a long-running, popular meme
11. K-Pop music videos
12. a *Harry Potter* fan forum.

New media audiences as the producer

As you have seen within this chapter so far, new media audiences are not just savvy consumers, but producers as well. Easy and affordable access to high-quality media production equipment means any audience member with a smartphone can be a producer of media content.

Without realising it, we are media producers every day. If you create a video on your phone and share it with friends, you have produced media for an audience. Making a meme, a TikTok, a BeReal image or any other content that requires you to carefully construct that media, makes you a producer.



This has turned the tide against the power and control of broadcast-era media companies. Now anyone can be a producer of media and reach an audience of hundreds, thousands or even millions, and, in some cases, turn this audience into huge personal wealth.

The production quality of popular YouTubers varies spectacularly. It ranges from very basic and rudimentary content to the high-end editing, effects and structure found in some of the top accounts. Yet, it is the audience who choose and determine what is entertainment, and for many YouTubers, their fanbases are loyal and have an encyclopaedic knowledge of the content. What's more, the producers can interact with the audience in real time.

CASE STUDY 6.13

Emma Chamberlain

Emma Chamberlain began watching YouTube videos when she was six years old, and by the age of 16 she was preparing to quit school to become a full-time content creator. A talented editor, Chamberlain began making video edits for friends that quickly ballooned into a YouTube channel and a full-time career as a content creator, as well as amassing a personal fortune.



FIGURE 6.28 YouTuber Emma Chamberlain, pictured in 2022

Known for her self-deprecating humour and a chaotic editing style that is specific to the internet, Chamberlain has developed her own empire with 12 million followers on YouTube, a podcast, a coffee company and countless paid promotions. Chamberlain has been able to craft an audience through a simple talent for authenticity. Many of her early videos make fun of her own attempts at sewing, cooking or getting her nose pierced, yet her frenetic behaviour is matched by the jump cuts, zooming and distorted editing effects and sound manipulation that reportedly takes the YouTuber between 20 and 30 hours to produce per clip.

Since dropping out of school to create her YouTube channel, Chamberlain has appeared on US talk shows, appeared at Paris Fashion Week and is now a full-time internet celebrity. In the broadcast era, a talent like Chamberlain would have been 'discovered' first, then trained, nurtured and promoted by a media company that would have creative control over her content. However, her content, mostly based around her infectious personality and humour, may never have fit traditional definitions of comedy or performance. It is her own unique style, supported by her own talent for editing to suit a platform like YouTube, that created an audience on her own.

For Chamberlain and thousands of media producers like her, they are their own creative force, attracting the audience who decided to like, follow and share her content.

Analysis

As a class, brainstorm a list of the most popular content producers across a range of media forms.

1. Define the producer and media form they work in.
2. Explain what it is that attracts audiences.
3. Describe the production style. Is it high end? Or rudimentary?
4. How does the media form itself contribute to this popularity?
5. What does this list explain about the capacity for audiences to become producers, and the potential opportunities this can create?

New media audiences: Participatory culture

A key aspect of new media technologies is the capacity for the audience to participate in its construction, not just as passive consumers, but as active participants. Media theorist Henry Jenkins discusses the idea of '**participatory culture**' in modern media. In essence, it is a culture that has grown from new media technologies among audiences of a range of media forms. Be it through social media, gaming, or creating and producing YouTube content, Jenkins defines the basic principles of this culture as having:

- relatively low barriers to artistic expression, required skill and engagement
- strong support for creating and sharing one's creations with others
- some type of informal mentorship skill that is passed down to newcomers and novices
- a belief that their contributions matter
- a sense that social connection exists.



FIGURE 6.29 Thinker, writer and theorist Henry Jenkins

participatory culture a culture in which private individuals do not act as consumers only, but also as contributors or producers

In 2008, a huge Star Wars fan named Casey Pugh had an idea to remake his favourite film of all time, *Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope* with the help of anonymous strangers on the internet. Pugh spent months editing the film (without the permission of its owner Lucasfilm) in 15-second chunks, creating 473 scenes. From his website, he asked people to nominate one scene to recreate. What emerged is a hilarious mishmash of animation, puppets, illustrations, flying pizzas, homemade costumes, high- and low-end production value and a full, two-hour film created by hundreds of contributors called *Star Wars Uncut* (2012).

Pugh's plan was complex, yet remarkably simple. The 473 scenes were listed on his website and users could choose three to recreate (no three could be adjacent to each other, in order to keep the film random in appearance) and multiple versions of specific scenes could be made, allowing the community to vote for the best one.

Pugh's 'love letter' to his favourite film would normally land him in breach of copyright, yet Lucasfilm saw what Pugh did, with an inclusive, participatory culture of fans working together to remake and remix *Star Wars: A New Hope* and not only gave its blessing to create the project, but went on to request he do it again for *A New Hope*'s sequel, *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980, dir. Irvin Kerschner), in 2012.[6]

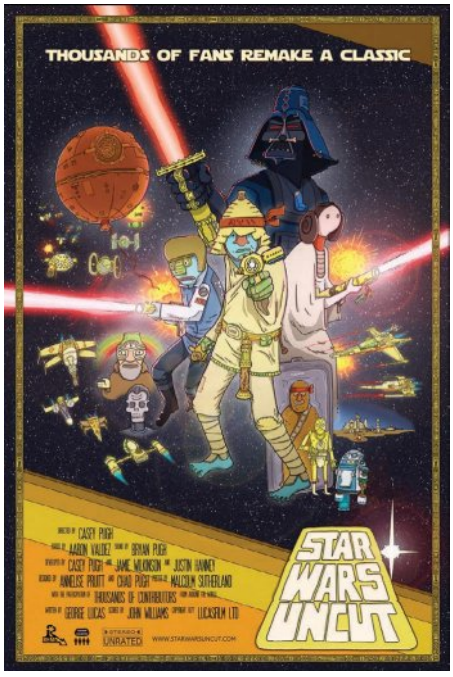


FIGURE 6.30 A poster for the fan film *Star Wars Uncut*



CASE STUDY 6.14

Minecraft

As a younger student, you may have come across *Minecraft* at some point in your life. You either played once or twice, watched videos of others playing, or got very, very deep into the game. You might still be there!



FIGURE 6.31 *Minecraft* is one of the world's most popular and participatory games.

In 2009, Swedish video game designer Markus 'Notch' Persson began designing the 'Java Version' of *Minecraft*, a totally open world game with no real purpose. Players were dropped into an infinite world of natural biomes and blocks. The only goal was to survive the first night by building a shelter and hiding from monsters. Beyond that, it was up to the player to decide what they wanted to do. By 2011, the game was a worldwide hit.

Minecraft is cheap to access and easy to learn and play, making it very accessible to younger users. Around the game there exists a huge global community of players that connect in countless forums, in and outside of the game. YouTube and Twitch are littered with expert gamers providing advice, tutorials and imparting expert knowledge to 'noobs'. Within this global community, players can connect, share experiences and develop connections.

mod the ability to modify or redesign elements of a video game

What makes *Minecraft* particularly interesting is that it is highly customisable, and players can '**mod**' the game to make it their own. A game that is already designed for infinite possibilities and can somehow become … more infinite? *Minecraft* is a classic example of participatory culture at work.

Analysis

1 What experience do you have with *Minecraft*?

2 What do you know about the world of online content, merchandise and fan culture that exists beyond the game?

ACTIVITY 6.12

Research task

Break into groups and take one of the following participatory cultures to research:

1. remix culture
2. social media activism
3. meme culture
4. fan pages on social media
5. online gaming
6. YouTubers.

Research these topics and explore the communities online. Identify ways in which each culture observes Jenkins' five principles of participatory culture. Report back to your class with a presentation of your findings.

New media audiences: Parasocial relationships

Parasocial relationships (PSRs) are the development of one-sided relationships formed between the audience and media personalities. In essence, PSRs are emotional connections an individual audience member can develop with an individual who may never reciprocate that emotion – because they have never met.

PSRs can develop for fictional and non-fictional media identities. Any individual can develop an emotional connection to a fictional character; however, they are more obvious when we consider the relationships between social media audiences, influencers and celebrities. Researchers have suggested that there are many positives to audience members forming PSRs. With our favourite celebrities communicating directly into our eyes and ears, through their social media channels in our phones and other devices, it is possible to develop a greater capacity for empathy, understanding and awareness of the world outside our own.

ACTIVITY 6.13

Reflection

As a class, consider who you follow on your social media channels:

1. What do you know about them?
2. How much do you know about them that you wouldn't know about your own friends?
3. Explain how this has happened.

THE DOWNSIDE OF PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

PSRs have existed since the days of the Egyptian pharaohs; however, social media has expanded their reach and capacity to impact audiences. With celebrities and influencers using social media to connect with fans and build their own profiles, they divulge more about their personal lives than was ever imaginable in the broadcast era. A simple comment, like or retweet from this person could suggest that the relationship is genuine (even though most major identities outsource this to media teams!).

Take the case of Belle Gibson, a seemingly relatable Australian influencer who generated thousands of PSRs with her followers through her health journey, which she claimed (fraudulently) to be curing her of brain cancer.



FIGURE 6.32 Artist Doja Cat stops for selfies with her fans at Paris fashion week in 2022

Through Gibson's social media profiles, many of her followers emotionally connected with Gibson's health 'journey', and adopted her diet to treat their own chronic conditions. Many were left in significantly poorer health as a result and were ultimately disappointed when it was revealed in 2017 that she was lying about her cancer in the first place.

In some cases, it can go wrong for both the individual and the celebrity. In April 2022, singer Doja Cat announced she was 'quitting music' after the expectations of her fans and her own perceptions of them went awry. Doja Cat's social media was known for her candid and accessible content that connected her with fans. However, in April 2022, in a now deleted tweet, Doja Cat complained that very few fans had come to meet her on tour in Paraguay, yet a barrage of responding comments from local fans suggested that she simply did not make herself available. In this instance, unrealistic fan expectations were not met, and yet the celebrity underestimated the power of the connections they had worked so hard to forge.

CASE STUDY 6.15



FIGURE 6.33 Britney Spears fans rally outside the courthouse before the announcement that her father, Jamie Spears, was suspended from her conservatorship in Los Angeles

#FreeBritney

One of the most remarkable outcomes of PSRs can be found in the 'FreeBritney' movement. Singer Britney Spears had been a global megastar from a very early age. However, fame and **tabloid media** forced her life into a downward spiral, and eventually the overbearing legal '**conservatorship**' of her father severely affected her personal life, leading to her losing control of her assets, wealth and, some believe, control over her own social media accounts.

Spears maintained a loyal and devoted fanbase despite fading from public view some time ago. However, the bland nature of her Instagram account led to two comedians starting a podcast called 'Britney's Gram' that analysed the very basic nature of her posts. Despite her devoted fanbase, she did not appear to use social media in the same way as an artist like Doja Cat. Her posts were erratic, cryptic and often unusually bland. For an artist worth millions of dollars, they lacked the polish and interaction of an established celebrity. Spears' social media also went 'dark' for long and unexplained periods.

An anonymous tip led the podcasters to uncover the true nature of the former pop star's personal life, one that was legally controlled by her father and led to a series of mental health issues for Spears. The hosts, like Spears' legion of fans, had spent hours scouring her posts and developing a PSR with one of the world's most recognisable stars.

tabloid media a popular style of largely sensationalist journalism, which takes its name from the tabloid newspaper format: a small-sized newspaper or magazine

conservatorship a court order that appoints someone to oversee the financial affairs of a minor or a person who is declared legally incapacitated

The tip-off sparked the #FreeBritney movement by her obsessive fanbase. What was once thought to be another internet conspiracy theory turned out to be true. An online and physical protest movement sprang up and brought her plight to public attention, which led to hundreds gathering outside the Los Angeles courthouse on the day a judge ended the legal conservatorship of Britney's father.

What is clear from this case study is the role of empathy and connection in PSRs. Many of Spears' fans had two decades to build their own one-sided connections with Spears. And, yet, it was social media and new media technologies that led to global concern for her welfare and a huge movement to eventually free her from her father's legal control.

Analysis

1. Explore the popularity of the #FreeBritney hashtag. How many times has it been used across a range of social media platforms?
2. What role do you believe PSRs played in the growth of the #FreeBritney campaign?
3. Similar global campaigns to free political prisoners like Nelson Mandela and Aung San Suu Kyi have used the media and grassroots activism to bring attention to their cause. Explore the history of these campaigns. How is the #FreeBritney event different?
4. Explore the story of the #FreeBritney campaign. How did PSR play a role in inspiring the movement?

New media audiences: Citizen journalism

Citizen journalism is the practice of ordinary citizens, or groups of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing and disseminating news and information.[7] In short, these are ordinary people without journalism training or being employed by a media company, who are collecting and publishing news. The development of digital media technologies in the past decade has made this a growing trend. Considering the global pandemic of 2020–22, audiences have sought to publish their voices more frequently and the audience for alternative media sources has been growing steadily for a decade.

A 2021 University of Canberra study on the state of Australian news media found the following:

AUSTRALIAN NEWS MEDIA CONSUMERS

- Only 13% of Australians paid for online news, and most (83%) said it was unlikely they would pay in the future.
- 23% of news consumers primarily used social media for news, which had risen 5% in two years.
- Most Australians (80%) said they had not read a newspaper or magazine in the past week.

FIGURE 6.34 University of Canberra study on the state of Australian news media

What was obvious from the study is that Australian audiences (and many around the world) are turning to social media for news, as trust in broadcast-era news sources has slowly been eroded by the deluge of information online. One of the fastest-growing areas has been on Twitter, where political commentary from both sides of the spectrum has risen to amass large audiences. Enter the citizen journalist. Several individuals have taken it upon themselves to step into the space of political commentary online, such as FriendlyJordies in New South Wales and the mysterious 'PR Guy' in Victoria.



One of the more remarkable citizen journalists to arrive in the last decade has been teenage self-publishing journalist Leo Puglisi. Head of his own 'Channel 6 news', Puglisi focuses on Australian politics through his homemade news broadcasts (his parents help out between his homework schedule) and high-profile Twitter presence. During the 2022 federal election, his running joke of 'I wouldn't vote for them' (he couldn't, he was 14 at the time) drew the ire of politicians, trolls and political hardliners from the left and right. Nevertheless, his 34 000+ followers watched on as his rising profile gathered him interviews with former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and then-current PM Scott Morrison, and checked in with his daily news coverage. Puglisi does not have an axe to grind like other citizen journalists, and his audience are attracted to the somewhat naive, yet refreshingly unbiased views of a teenager engaged with Australian politics.

ACTIVITY 6.14

Research task

Watch examples of Puglisi's 'Channel 6 news' online.

1. Explain how you would be able to launch your own news broadcast. List the technologies and process required to get your news broadcast online.
2. What does the popularity of 'Channel 6 news' and other citizen journalist sites tell you about the capacity for the audience to challenge traditional news media?

6.4 How audiences interact and engage with new media forms

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- the ways audiences interact and engage with the media as a result of the growth of technologies across media forms.

The sheer volume of internet users, available content and services, and the data they collect can seem more complex to comprehend than the worlds beyond our own planet. Media use has not only increased, but diversified in ways that the broadcast era could never have imagined.

Atomisation of audiences

As you have already learnt in this chapter, new media technologies have allowed audiences a means to interact and engage with the media in a range of ways. In perhaps the biggest blow to the model of the broadcast era, audiences have become '**atomised**'. In short, audiences have been broken up into millions of small, dedicated audiences that consume very specific content. A broad look at the streaming service Netflix will reveal an extremely broad range of sub-topics, genres and interests, as there is a devoted audience for almost any kind of content. YouTube has an untold number of devoted fan bases for specific ideas and interests.

atomised the process of media audiences breaking into more and more specific categories of interest

Across the web, there are forums, sites, YouTube and social media groups and channels dedicated to every passing interest you have ever had, or don't know that you have yet.

CASE STUDY 6.16

K-Pop fandom

New media technologies have allowed audiences to act on almost any impulse for entertainment and engagement. As you have seen already in this unit, the internet brought Korean culture and K-Pop into the wider consciousness of media audiences around the world. What K-Pop can teach us is not just about the power of the internet to share ideas, but to build individual audience members into a powerful collective. The Korea Foundation, the organisation formed to promote Korean art and cultural life abroad, estimates that there are 99 million K-Pop fans around the world.[8]



FIGURE 6.35 A near empty stadium in Tulsa, Oklahoma, USA greets US President Donald Trump. K-Pop fans took credit for reserving the majority of tickets and not attending.

A collective with a shared interest and passion, born from their strong literacy in social media, can create a powerful force for good and evil. A decade or more ago, K-Pop fans began a charitable movement called 'fan rice' which encouraged fans to gift bags of rice to their favourite artists, who would, in turn, donate it to the needy. In 2017, 168 tonnes of rice were donated on behalf of K-Pop group Big Bang to be sent to the underprivileged in Korea. The effect is twofold: the fans build a collective sense of unity in a charitable movement and, in turn, build the profile of their favourite artists.

K-Pop fans are known for throwing their support behind social activist campaigns too. As a social media force, they were heavily involved in the Black Lives Matter campaigns of 2020 and acted as a collective. After BTS, arguably K-Pop's biggest group of 2022, donated $1 million to Black Lives Matter, a fan-run charity matched the sum.[9]

During this violent and divisive period of 2020, a rival #whitelivesmatter hashtag appeared on Twitter and was immediately drowned out by an army of K-Pop fans, who flooded the hashtag with K-Pop video clips, images and messages in support of BLM.

In the same year, they took their fight to US President Donald Trump, who was selling tickets to a public rally in Tulsa, Oklahoma in a 19 000-seat stadium. K-Pop fans banded together to reserve tickets to the event that they had no intention of attending. The purpose? The former US President walked out to speak at a near-empty stadium with only 6000 people.[10] While the rally was held at the peak of the coronavirus pandemic in the USA, K-Pop and TikTok users gladly took the credit.

Analysis

1. How have new media technologies, particularly the internet, contributed to the global popularity of K-Pop and Korean culture?
2. Explain the concept of 'fan rice' and how K-Pop fans use it as a charitable movement to support their favourite artists and the underprivileged in Korea.
3. Describe an instance where K-Pop fans used their collective power to influence a public event involving former US President Donald Trump. How did they utilise social media platforms like TikTok to achieve their goal?



CASE STUDY 6.17

Toxic K-Pop fandom

As much as K-Pop can be a force for good, such collective behaviour of audiences can descend into evil. Within every fan community lies the competition between them. 'True fans' start acting as gatekeepers to newer fans who must prove their devotion to the community. With an increased sense of devotion comes an increased sense of entitlement (as we saw with Doja Cat's fans in Paraguay) and the conversation can often become hostile as emotions intensify. These emotions can spill over when these audiences develop PSRs and begin stalking their idols. Girls Generation's Kim Taeyeon was almost dragged off stage by a fan intent on kidnapping her.



FIGURE 6.36 Taeyeon of K-Pop group Girls Generation

Within the community, these fans can become hostile, but as a collective, they can aggressively attack anyone who dares challenge their passion. Journalists who question the quality of performances or songs can be viciously attacked online, cyberbullied, threatened and **doxxed**.

doxxed the practice of publishing private and identifying information about a particular individual on the internet, typically with malicious intention

Analysis

Research the nature of toxic fandom that has evolved from the K-Pop movement.

1 Explain the nature of this toxic fandom.

2 Research recent examples of toxic K-Pop fandom. Explain the role of PSRs in your research.

AUDIENCES AND THEIR DATA

The sheer level of choice that audiences have today will only increase this atomisation, since individual users can easily search and seek out the perfect content for the perfect moment. You may be more likely to seek out educational content for a project during school hours, yet after a long week of assessments, you may exhausted and seek out mindless entertainment on Friday nights. Netflix knows this. Because while you are watching it, it's watching you.

The audience as the product

If the media service you are using is free, then *you* are the product. Despite audience agency, changes in media structures and production now being in the hands of the audience, much of it comes at a high price. Global media institutions like TikTok, Facebook, YouTube and Google all provide a platform for audiences to publish, produce and speak to the world, and all the while, they are harvesting your data.

Every click, like, view, swipe and scroll are recorded in detail. Your behaviour across internet platforms is tracked and recorded, shared and sold to the highest bidder, including which site you went to next and how long you stayed there for. Even before Web 2.0 technologies emerged, this practice was pioneered by Google with the express purpose of selling advertising space to companies. If Google could tell a brand like Nike exactly who was interested in its products, then Nike could directly target them with a much higher chance of success.

It seemed innocuous enough. So much so that very few people recognised it was happening and major tech companies said as little as possible about this practice for decades. Fast forward to the 2020s and your data is no longer yours. Your social media apps know you better than you know yourself, and it's a fair guess that you have been using them for a very long time!

TikTok, YouTube and other social media apps use your behaviour to recommend content that it deems interesting to you through personalised algorithms, in order to keep you online as long as possible, to sell more advertising space and to collect more and more of your data. Have you ever googled a product and found it advertised to you *everywhere* you go online after that? It's because your data is being bought and sold across the internet for a range of purposes. In 2017, *The Economist* magazine reported that data has now become more valuable than oil.

artificial intelligence (AI)
computer systems able to perform tasks normally requiring human intelligence, such as visual perception, speech recognition, decision-making, and translation between languages

More troubling is the relationship between machine learning or **artificial intelligence (AI)** to analyse your data, watch your behaviour and, eventually, predict it for you. Theorist, scholar and author Shoshana Zuboff named this new industry 'Surveillance Capitalism' after the long-hidden business model of major companies harvesting our online behaviour for profit. Machine learning, which is essentially sophisticated algorithms, analyses your behaviour and learns from it, creating better and more accurate predictions the more data you put into the system. There isn't a human deciding what you watch on YouTube, but a complex mathematical equation.

CASE STUDY 6.18

Data privacy

Every human has the right to privacy, yet we have quietly signed all this away when signing up to countless apps and services with long and tedious terms and conditions that we never read. In 2020, a Russian-based 'Age My Face' app had a brief moment of internet popularity when people could take selfies and see what they would look like in 30 or 40 years. What few realised at the time was the terms and conditions allowed the owners of the app to have access to their entire photo library 'in perpetuity', which is a legal term for 'forever'. How and why the app stored this data was never made clear. Yet, for many users of the app, they no longer owned exclusive rights to their own faces. What's worse, they had handed it over for free.



FIGURE 6.37 What kind of privacy should we expect of our data?

How bad could it be? Especially if you have nothing to hide? While it may not affect you personally, how your data is used could affect others. In Zuboff's 2019 book *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, she points to a trend in data collection that goes far beyond the media and into almost every aspect of our lives. Your behaviour on social media, or any internet-connected device, generates data that can be bought, sold and manipulated to meet the ends of anyone with the money and motivation to use it.

In 2016, a data company called Cambridge Analytica used the Facebook data of millions of Americans to determine who could be persuaded to vote for Donald Trump. Using bots, false and misleading posts, they inundated the feeds of these 'persuadables' in an effort to engineer the US Presidential election in favour of Donald Trump. Democracy itself was challenged by the data millions of users have created.

Yet, in more simple terms, if you own a Google Home or Alexa device,[11] your private home conversations could be recorded while your wi-fi-enabled robotic vacuum cleaner creates a schematic of your house and its contents. If you have ever thought about tracing your ancestry through Ancestry.com, you may have your own DNA data hacked and sold to the highest bidder.[12]



Analysis

1 Describe the privacy concerns related to the 'Age My Face' app and its terms and conditions. What data did the app have access to, and why was this problematic for users?

2 How did Cambridge Analytica use Facebook data, and what impact did its actions have on the US Presidential election in 2016? Explain how data collected from social media can potentially influence larger societal and political events.

CASE STUDY 6.19

Pokémon GO (again)

The other side of *Pokémon GO*'s success was its use of data to track, predict and, in some cases, control human behaviour. The team behind the game's design were able to track the physical movements of players in real time and, in some cases, direct whole herds of people to specific locations in search of Pokémons to capture. This led to public spaces, shopping centres and, at times, into private property. As Zuboff articulated 'the seeds of behaviour modification are planted within the game's rules and social dynamics'. In quoting the game's developer John Hanke, Zuboff continues 'if you want to turn the world into your game board, you (the players) need to have a reason to go there … The game is enabling them and nudging you to have those social interactions'.[13]

Pokémon GO is a game. But it uses player data to track, predict and control behaviour without the player's knowledge. Imagine if this technology was placed in the wrong hands? Or is it already there?

Analysis

1 How did *Pokémon GO* utilise player data to influence human behaviour and encourage specific physical movements?

2 According to Zuboff, how are the 'seeds of behaviour modification' planted within the game's design and social dynamics? Provide a quote from the game's developer that supports this idea.

ACTIVITY 6.15

Class debate

Consider the following two statements:

1 Article 12 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights states:

> 'No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.'[14]

2 In 2010, Facebook owner Mark Zuckerberg was quoted as saying: 'Privacy is no longer a "social norm" as we have evolved beyond that.'[15]

Divide the class into the affirmative and negative. Devise three arguments based on evidence that responds to this statement:

> 'Society has evolved beyond the need for privacy.'

6.5 How technological developments and other factors change the media

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- the influence of technological development, audiences, the individual, media industries and institutions.

The influence of technological development

Personalised algorithms drive new media technologies. Social media companies track your behaviour in order to predict the next one. They suggest content to you that your own data suggests that you would like. They don't always get it right, but you will have noticed how often Google correctly predicts what you're looking for.

Personalised algorithms fill our social media feeds with the very things that feed our basic needs of engagement, with one simple goal – to keep us online as much as possible. When Facebook introduced the 'News Feed' in 2006, owner Mark Zuckerberg was quoted as saying 'a squirrel dying in front of your house may be more relevant to your interests right now than people dying in Africa'.

Zuckerberg's words were telling. Personalised algorithms have upended the significance of news media in our lives, whose role it was to tell us what mattered and what we needed to think about. Today, our social media feeds can reinforce what we already believe and are interested in and filter out topics which it predicts we don't.

FILTER BUBBLES

Writer Eli Pariser discussed the theory of **filter bubbles** in his 2011 book *Filter Bubbles: What the internet is hiding from you*. In the early years of Web 2.0, Pariser noticed the power of 'filter bubbles' to influence audience behaviour. If we only ever surrounded ourselves with ideas, content and discussion that we agreed with, we were less and less likely to encounter ideas that might challenge them. The role of traditional news media was to do just that: to give us the news of the day, regardless of how uncomfortable it may make us feel. Balanced news reporting was and is the lifeblood of a successful society as it ensures that media audiences are able to make informed decisions. Now, to some degree, we only see what we want to see. This has had a negative influence on audiences.



FIGURE 6.38 Mark Zuckerberg: 'a squirrel dying in front of your house may be more relevant to your interests right now than people dying in Africa'.



FIGURE 6.39 Eli Pariser, who coined the term 'filter bubbles'

filter bubbles a situation in which an internet user encounters only information and opinions that conform with and reinforce their own beliefs, caused by algorithms that personalise an individual's online experience



POLARISATION AND OUTRAGE

In 2021, an insider at Facebook released a series of documents that revealed Facebook has long known that content that makes people angry keeps them online longer. Despite the claims of Facebook that its intention is to foster closer and positive connections between its users, it does quite the opposite. The 'Facebook Papers' revealed what many media analysts had long suspected. Facebook trades on outrage. If users are angry, they are more likely to comment on a post or article and stay online.

outrage algorithms algorithms that promote content that inspire anger

Social media platforms exert considerable influence over users using '**outrage algorithms**' that come from having extensive data on users. This leads to the use of behavioural-influencing science, including:

- when we're vulnerable to influence by identifying our mood through our online behaviour
- identifying subconscious cues such as a hovering cursor that shows interest level
- employing 'dark patterns' that are designed to guide our choices by hiding content from users.[16]

CASE STUDY 6.20

Influence of audiences and individuals: TikTok

TikTok has risen in the past few years to be one of the most dominant social media platforms. Unlike other social media apps like Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook that have *some* transparency around how their algorithms work, TikTok is significantly more opaque, the algorithms being a closely guarded secret of its parent company, Bytedance. Few truly understand the reason that it has risen to be one of the most addictive social media platforms yet.

TikTok is an app for making and viewing short videos. Users scroll through the portrait-size videos as hashtags work to group users around responses to videos, 'challenges', jokes or repeating formats, or any other weird new trend emerging on the platform. At the beginning of the global pandemic in 2020, TikTok was in its infancy. However, with billions around the world stuck at home, it exploded in popularity as a means for people to connect.

What also makes TikTok different to the social media that came before it is the 'For You' feed. Unlike Instagram or Snapchat, where users nominate *who* they want to follow, TikTok does this for you, based on your behaviour. The more a user watches, the more it learns.

It is interesting then, how individuals and groups have banded together to have influence through the app. As you have already learnt, individuals can become huge stars overnight and influence trends across the platform. K-Pop fans can congregate and share similar content to engage in charity, social activism and toxic fandom.

Analysis

1. How does TikTok's algorithm differ from other social media platforms like Instagram and Snapchat, and what makes it unique in terms of content curation?
2. Explain how TikTok's popularity surged during the global pandemic in 2020 and why it became a preferred platform for people to connect.
3. How does the 'For You' feed on TikTok contribute to its addictive nature, and how does it adapt its content based on user behaviour?
4. Provide examples of how individuals and groups have utilised TikTok to gain influence and engage in various activities, such as charity, social activism and toxic fandom.

KHABY LAME

In 2022, a Senegalese/Italian TikTok star, Khaby Lame, became the most viewed individual on TikTok, overtaking Charli D'Amelio. Lame's videos are pure comedy. Relying on facial expressions, hand gestures, filters and text, his videos are carefully crafted snippets of comedy and satire of the world of social media itself. Despite creating hours of content and amassing billions of views on TikTok, he has rarely spoken a word on his feed. Lame speaks Italian and English but the decision not to talk in his videos means he is universally understood around the world.

Unlike D'Amelio, who has influenced an entire generation to copy and reproduce dance trends, Lame turns the tables and makes fun of TikTok and its popular 'life hacks' trends offering simple solutions. In a world dominated by carefully crafted lighting, trends and 'spontaneity', Lame's appeal is his authenticity.



FIGURE 6.40 Khaby Lame became the most viewed individual on TikTok in 2022.

INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS ON TIKTOK

TikTok draws users in by making it simple to belong. The app provides the tools to 'respond' and make videos appear just like those of the most popular stars and create a sense of belonging. D'Amelio is credited with popularising a range of dance trends (although some of them were not hers) and influencing a generation of users to believe that they can rise to fame and fortune in the same manner as D'Amelio and Lame. However, a central element of any influencer's career is paid sponsorship and being used as a vehicle to sell products to them.

On TikTok, like many other social media apps, loose laws and guidelines are in place to tell users when the post is 'sponsored' or, in simple terms, an ad. Charli D'Amelio has more than 140 million followers, and she also has a sponsorship deal with a tea brand called 'Muse'. In one recent **Q&A post**, she was asked, 'What's so special about the muse drink?' and responded 'This one's pretty simple. They're really good, and I really like them. And they have a lot of different flavours and a lot of health benefits'. Nowhere in the post did she tag that it was sponsored content and, in most cases, there are very few consequences for these breaches of TikTok's paid advertising guidelines.[17]

Q&A post a social media post made by an influencer or celebrity that asks followers to post questions with the intention of answering them directly

Advertising, sponsored content and product placement are not new concepts. But their links with some of the world's most popular stars is cause for concern when TikTok's largest audience are younger and more impressionable users. In October 2022, the Australian Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) issued a warning against a 'nasal tanning' spray that was heavily promoted by a range of Australian TikTok influencers. Nicknamed the 'Barbie Drug', the nasal spray was sold by influencers as a quick and easy way to get a tan, ready for summer. The TGA warned the drugs can cause kidney failure, shortness of breath, chest pain, abdominal cramping and dizziness.[18] By October 2022, these videos had been watched millions of times.



ACTIVITY 6.16

Homework activity: Sponsored content

1. Work with a partner to follow a number of influencers on a range of social media platforms. How often do they post sponsored content?
2. How often is this sponsored content labelled clearly?
3. What are the potential dangers for audiences when considering the reach and influence of TikTok stars?
4. Conduct some research and compile a list of the most dangerous products advertised on TikTok. What does this tell you about the potential for negative influence from individuals on TikTok?

Influence of media industries and institutions: How TikTok keeps your attention

TikTok is addictive. Its algorithm is designed to be so. While not all of its techniques are fully understood, what is known is that whenever a TikTok user logs into the app, they are shown eight videos from a range of topics. Based on what video the user chose, the algorithm shares another eight new videos in that genre. The algorithm also collects data about the user's device: account settings, captions, hashtags, language settings and location. TikTok then categorises the user into 'clusters' and keeps them in 'bubbles'.[19]

By providing users exactly what it thinks they want, TikTok keeps users engaged longer than any other social media app. All the while, it is collecting data.

In 2021, TikTok updated its privacy settings (which, of course, few of its users read) to enable it to collect biometric data. These are the fingerprints, 'faceprints' and 'voiceprints' of its users. This data is also analysed to optimise its algorithms.[20] What does TikTok want with such information? This, to date, has not been made clear.

A 2021 ABC documentary in Australia titled 'TikTok: Data mining, discrimination and dangerous content on the world's most popular app' spoke to two Australian teens who had begun to engage with the popular 'What I eat in a day' trend. TikTok's algorithm led both girls, who had pre-existing mental health conditions, towards more dangerous content that encouraged eating disorders. Both users ended up in hospital care, where with the help of psychologists, they were able to slowly re-engineer their TikTok algorithms.[21] It is also suggested by the documentary makers that the data is used by TikTok to gain a better insight into the personality, health, education and wellbeing of users, in order to improve the quality of content and engagement of its users.

ACTIVITY 6.17

Reflection

As a class, brainstorm the challenges of this type of data collection for individual users.

FOMO AND MENTAL HEALTH

More broadly, TikTok, as with other social media, has been accused of deteriorating the mental health of its users, specifically teenagers. One of the most noticeable aspects of social media is the Fear Of Missing Out (FOMO) it generates with users. FOMO is defined as:

> a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent. FOMO is characterized by the desire to stay continually connected with what others are doing.

FIGURE 6.41 A definition of FOMO quoted in Andre K Przybylski et al., 'Motivational, Emotional, and Behavioral Correlates of Fear of Missing Out', *Computers in Human Behaviour*, *ScienceDirect*, Vol. 29, Iss. 4, July 2013, pp. 1841–48

Further research into FOMO and social media (in particular, TikTok) has shown it contributed to lower general mood, lower wellbeing and lower life satisfaction.[22] Think carefully about your own social media feeds. How often do influencers, friends and family that you follow post content that gives you the sinking sensation that you are not on holiday? Not wearing new clothes? Or having exciting experiences? It's natural for people to want to share their positive personal experiences; however, it is suggested that this can have a negative cumulative effect on viewers of the content.

In addition to this is the suggestion that TikTok's constant stream of seemingly perfect influencers of all genders can contribute to low self-esteem and self-image in young users. Combined with FOMO, it can contribute to a sense of loneliness and disconnection from social circles.

ACTIVITY 6.18

Reflection

Examine all that you have learnt about the promotion of 'outrage algorithms' and FOMO. What impact can these have on a user who is vulnerable and in poor mental health?

TikTok and conspiracy theories

Consider your response to the previous activity. How might TikTok affect vulnerable users if they were presented with an solution to their issues, regardless of how outrageous it may seem? **Conspiracy theories** have existed for decades yet have taken a much more prominent and dangerous role in modern society as they have crept into the mainstream media space. Social media has played a significant role in this. Via the darkest corners of the web, conspiracy theories that questioned the authenticity of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and posited a supposed 'secret' world order that controls all human life found a home in websites like 4-Chan and 8-Kun.



FIGURE 6.42 Do you use TikTok?

For some time prior to the pandemic, YouTube was a popular home for conspiracy theory content, and its personalised algorithm sent more and more viewers of this content down the conspiracy theory **rabbit hole**. In the wake of the attack on the US Capitol building on 6 January 2021, YouTube, Facebook and Twitter reacted quickly to remove thousands of conspiracy-related posts, videos and accounts. However, in 2022, this type of content was appearing again in the mainstream, this time on TikTok.

conspiracy theories a belief that an event or situation is the result of a secret plan made by powerful people

rabbit hole a term to describe the internet's capacity to suck users into an extremely engrossing and time-consuming topic

Using variations of banned hashtags and keywords, videos promoting conspiracy theories appeared on TikTok in rising numbers in 2022. While TikTok made several announcements that this content is being removed, the accounts play a cat-and-mouse game with TikTok's content regulation and find new ways to outsmart it and post content. More broadly, the popularity of TikTok worldwide has led to it becoming the new home of misinformation on climate change, COVID-19 and the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. In September 2022, NewsGuard, an American watchdog for online misinformation, reported that the top 20 results in 27 searches for news stories on TikTok found that 19.5% of those videos contained false and misleading information.



ACTIVITY 6.19

Reflection

1 Consider all that you have learnt about TikTok, its business model, the personalised algorithm, its effect on users and the ability for it to spread false information. Discuss, as a class, the positives and negatives of TikTok.
2 Does one outweigh the other?
3 What reasons does your class have for its response?
4 What solutions can the class come up with when considering how to deal with these issues?

6.6 Assessment task: Social, ethical and legal issues in the media industry

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- social, ethical and legal issues in the media industry in the last two years.

ACTIVITY 6.20

Reflection

In 2023, AI began to reshape the world of media. Using one example from the previous two years, consider the changes AI technologies have had upon the media.

Now it's over to you. Every day, month and year, new media technologies release new apps, new crazes and challenges that provide benefits and challenges to individuals, governments, media institutions and media textbook writers. Few could anticipate the change Web 2.0 brought to society, or the rapid rise of social media apps like TikTok. Before you know it, we will have a new and greater challenge before us.

Take all that you have learnt and, as a class, complete the following task for assessment.

Identify a new media technology or trend that has created social, ethical and legal issues in the media industry in the *last two years*

Consider all that you have learnt in this unit. You should be able to identify the following:

1 The nature and form of the new media technology associated with the issue.
2 The way audiences interact with and are affected by this issue.
3 The way social changes or trends have been affected by this issue.
4 The ethical challenges created by this issue.
5 The possible legal implications of this issue.
6 How traditional and contemporary media industries are affected by this issue.

You may present your response as a video essay, oral presentation or formal essay. Your understanding of this issue will be based on collected evidence from what you have learnt so far in order to draw comparisons between modern issues and those of the past.

CHAPTER REVIEW

Summing it all up

Access to the means of media production has changed the landscape entirely. Gone are the days when media producers could ensure that audiences were kept at a distance. No longer does the media dictate what is entertainment and when, where and how the audience become engaged. As you have learnt, individual producers can broadcast their own content through online platforms and it is up to the audience to decide. While many have been able to create audiences unthinkable a few decades earlier, this comes on the condition that these large social media platforms facilitate the process. Through these platforms, new media theorists have begun to examine the ways that media companies can capture our attention and guide our behaviours. As you move into the final year of your study of Media, you will explore how the agency of audiences may seem limitless at first. Yet these new media companies that are in many ways bigger and more powerful than any that preceded them, use a range of practices, which may be legal but unethical, to wield control over audiences.

Revision questions

1 **Define** how the internet introduced participatory culture.
2 **Explain** how broadcast or traditional media has adapted to a new media environment.
3 **Define** the way 'influencers' have used new media technologies to their advantage.
4 **Explain** one new media technology and how it facilitates 'active' participation.
5 **Explain** how participatory culture and parasocial relationships affect audiences positively and negatively. Use evidence in your response.
6 **Explain** how participatory culture and parasocial relationships benefit the business models of large new media companies.
7 **Explain** the ways participatory culture and parasocial relationships can contribute to social activism.
8 **Explain**, with examples, how the role of gatekeeping in the media has changed over time.
9 **Explain** the dangers posed by new media technologies on data privacy.
10 **Explain** the challenges that new media technologies pose to audiences.

Practice assessment questions

1 Using examples from the chapter, identify one new media form and explain how it differs from those in the broadcast era.
2 Analyse the differences between old and new media audiences using case studies.
3 Discuss the way technological developments in media have made new audiences and creators within the media.
4 Using the legal and ethical issues you have explored within this chapter, discuss the challenges created by a new media institution or creator from the last two years.

Digital content

- Access the Interactive Textbook via Cambridge GO to access a downloadable Success Criteria checklist, digital quizzes and additional digital content for this chapter.

ISBN 978-1-009-36510-9 Hoban et al
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UNIT 3
MEDIA FORMS, NARRATIVES, CONTEXTS AND PRE-PRODUCTION

The universe is so much bigger than you realise.

— Alpha Waymond, *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (2022)

OVERVIEW

Every story we see and create is a product of the time, place and context in which it was produced. As storytellers, we draw inspiration from the world around us. We consider how characters grapple with the world we know and challenge them with what we don't. We thrust them into the universe of the human condition and test their resolve. In this unit, you will explore how storytellers patch together centuries of narrative conventions with an ever-evolving world of media codes to tell stories that reflect the political, social, geographic or historical context in which they were made. Every narrative is a product of a time and place. Then, you must consider your own context, your own time and place, your own stories and the world you wish to challenge, reject or discuss through your own narrative journey. Good luck.

WHAT'S AHEAD

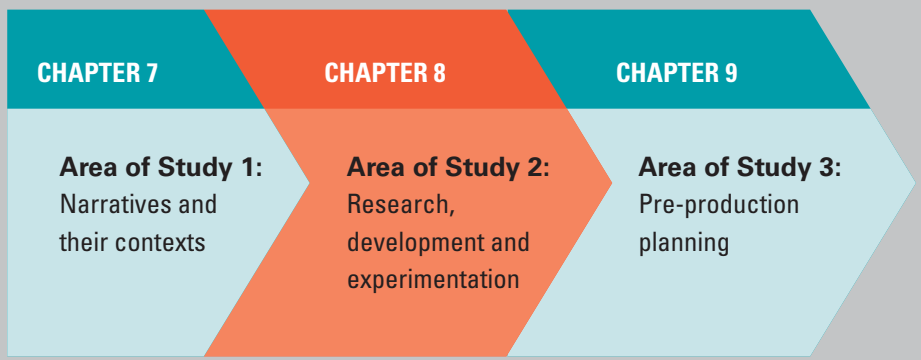


IMAGE ON OPPOSITE PAGE: A frustrating part of modern life: Sister and brother desperate to find a wi-fi signal: Ki-jung (Park So-dam) and Ki-woo (Choi Woo-shik) in *Parasite* (2019, dir. Bong Joon-ho)





CHAPTER 7 AREA OF STUDY 1

NARRATIVES AND THEIR CONTEXTS

INQUIRY QUESTION

How does the context of a narrative influence its construction and audience readings?

— VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, p. 26, used with permission

OVERVIEW

Media narratives are a product of creative and common practices using codes and conventions to engage audiences. Media narratives are works of art that combine the vision and messages of a creator, which have engaged audiences since the first rock paintings appeared on walls. Audiences are drawn to media narratives to escape reality or reflect carefully upon it. This relationship with the media creator is bonded using these codes and conventions to create meaning, and as students of media we must carefully examine how meaning is created not only to appreciate great narratives, but to consider how we too can become the storyteller.

Media narratives are also a product of the context in which they were created. Every storyteller draws from the world around them to relate their narrative back to audiences. However, at a deeper level, media narratives themselves can be a product of social, historical, institutional, cultural, economic and political contexts. The world is and has always been a complex place and narratives have long attempted to make sense of it.

In any society, local or national, common values exist that determine what people see as true and right. These values change over time as the world evolves. Media narratives can support or criticise these values as an active part of this evolutionary process. Media narratives play a hugely significant role in the development of how we, the audience and citizens of the world, understand and make sense of our existence.

FIGURE 7.1 (above) Michelle Yeoh in a modern classic screen narrative: *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (2022, dirs Dan Kwan and Daniel Scheinert)

In this chapter, you will not only explore the way in which media creators use media codes and conventions to tell stories that engage audiences, but you will also explore the way these stories are a product of a great creator and of a specific historical, institutional, political, economic and cultural context. You will consider the factors that influence audience engagement in narratives from different contexts and time periods and learn to see media narratives as significant markers of human history that rival any museum artefact.

OUTCOME 1

On completion of this unit the student should be able to analyse the construction of media narratives; discuss audience engagement, consumption and reading of narratives; and analyse the relationship between narratives and the contexts in which they are produced.

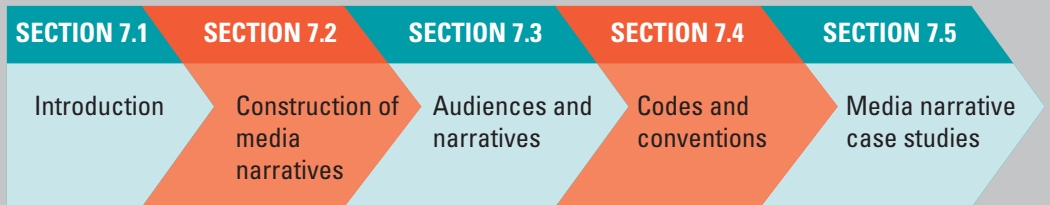
To achieve this outcome the student will draw on key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 1.

KEY KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING INTENTIONS

Key knowledge	Learning intentions – at the end of the chapter I will be able to:
Narratives	
• the construction of media narratives in selected media forms	• analyse the construction of media narratives in selected media forms
• how audiences engage with, consume and read media narratives	• discuss how media narratives are constructed, consumed and read by audiences
• the relationship between and the function of codes and narrative conventions to convey meaning in selected media forms	• analyse the relationship between and the function of codes and narrative conventions to convey meaning in selected media forms
• appropriate media language	• use appropriate media language
Contexts	
• the relationship between media narratives and the contexts in which they were produced	• explain the relationship between media narratives and the contexts in which they were produced
• the construction of representations in media narratives and how they reflect or challenge views and values of a specific context	• discuss the construction of representations in media narratives and how they reflect or challenge views and values of a specific context
• the ways in which audiences from different contexts engage with, consume and read media narratives	• analyse the ways in which audiences from different contexts engage with, consume and read media narratives
• appropriate media language	• use appropriate media language

(**Source:** Adapted from VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, p. 27, used with permission)

WHAT'S AHEAD





7.1 Introduction: The perpetual significance of media narratives

Media narratives shape our lives. The fairy tales we read as children construct our moral compass and teach us how to deal with the world. The stories we gravitate towards as teens and adults help define our identity. We watch them to check out of reality for a fixed period of time, which in turn allows us to connect with friends, family and worldwide networks of like-minded audiences.

Narratives can be created for the sole purpose of sharing unique information that we feel is necessary to pass on. They may also be told to engage and captivate others, using humour, terror, sadness or joy.

How and where we see, hear and engage with those stories as audience members depends heavily on the form in which we engage with them. Be it in the darkness of a cinema surrounded by strangers, huddled over a smartphone screen on public transport or flipping through a newspaper in a café on the way to school, the way we engage with and enjoy media narratives comes from an understanding of the construction of media codes and conventions.

Media narratives present versions of the world through the process of combining a cause-and-effect relationship between events and characters.

Media narratives may be extended and developed in a fixed period of time, like a 90-minute feature film, a one-hour documentary, or the bending and shifting Marvel Cinematic Universe. However, they may also be developing serial narratives, such as *Game of Thrones* or one-off episodes based around a single context and characters like the animated series *The Simpsons*, whose characters appear never to age. They may also be mini narratives, like a television or magazine advertisement that only provides a minor element of a media story that requires the audience to fill in the gaps. Media stories can be limited to 280 characters on social media platforms that still have the power to captivate huge audiences.

The rise of streaming shows, particularly limited series and anthologies, represents a dramatic shift in audience preferences and the storytelling possibilities within the television medium. Limited series like *The White Lotus* (2021–24), a social satire set in an exclusive Hawaiian resort, *The Queen's Gambit* (2020), a gripping story of a chess prodigy's rise amid personal struggles, and *Dahmer – Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story* (2022–), a chilling retelling of the infamous serial killer's life, have captivated audiences with their focused narratives, complex characters and high production values. These series are complete stories, told within a single season, allowing for a depth and resolution of plot often unachievable in traditional episodic television. Meanwhile, anthology series like *Black Mirror* (2011–) have gained prominence for their innovative approach, using standalone episodes to explore distinct, often dystopian, visions of technology and society. These shows leverage the flexibility of the streaming format to experiment with diverse themes, narrative structures and aesthetic styles. As a whole, this trend reflects a broader move towards more cinematic, risk-taking and thought-provoking content in the streaming era.



FIGURE 7.2 How we engage with media narratives depends on the way we engage with them. Attending a film screening at a cinema remains a popular social activity

7.2 How media narratives are constructed in different media forms

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- the construction of media narratives in selected media forms
- appropriate media language.

The construction of a media form has a significant influence on the way audiences engage with them. The construction of media narratives refers to the physical structure of the narrative itself. Audiences have been conditioned over time through popular literature and the Hollywood film industry to engage with narratives across a three-act structure. A beginning, middle and end defines most stories that we watch. How this construction varies depends on the genre, style and origin of the text. The length of each act can vary greatly as well.

The construction of media texts can also refer to the technology and techniques used to tell the story. For example, Quentin Tarantino's *The Hateful Eight* (2015) was shot on 70mm film, rather than the standard 35mm used in most feature films (many are, of course, shot digitally today), in order to capture the wide landscapes of his Western film to create a connection with Western films of the past.

When considering the construction of media narratives, you should always determine the physical structure of the story and the technologies involved in its creation.



FIGURE 7.3 Director Quentin Tarantino on the set of *The Hateful Eight* (2015)

ACTIVITY 7.1

Reflection

1. Make a list of media narratives you have engaged with in the last week.
2. Next to that list, as best as you can, indicate the media technologies used in the creation of each one.
3. Now explain where, when and how you engaged with each narrative.
4. Consider the list and explain how the technology used in the production influenced the time and attention required to engage with those narratives.
5. What role has technology played in your engagement with media narratives?



The development of media narratives

All media narratives go through a process of defining how they are constructed and will be read by audiences. Careful thought is given by media creators to the relevance of the story to modern audiences, as well as the works from the past that could act as inspiration and how the narrative itself will be consumed by audiences. Be it a feature-length film, television show or video game, the form with which the audience will engage guides its construction and distribution.

DEVELOPMENT

Before a story is told, the ideas and themes are developed. The creator must consider the target audience and which forms will best communicate and engage these ideas. For example, if the story is targeted at children, like the fairy tales you read about earlier, media forms are explored as the creator considers how new ideas can potentially impact how engaging the story will be for the audience. There is a reason animation is popular with children, as the possibilities of that media form can match those of a child's imagination.



FIGURE 7.4 Director Steven Spielberg on the set of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981)

It is important to note here that the social, political and economic context can drastically influence the development of an idea. As you will see later in this chapter, the ideas that dominate society can seriously influence the way authors create stories. What is possible to say in an animated short film in Australia may not be possible to say in other nations that have strict, government-controlled censorship of media products. Conversely, people within those countries may develop new and inventive ways to challenge these ideas.

Pre-production

Once a story idea is developed, the production is planned for the audience. Here the creator of the story takes on the task of developing, planning and organising the production. Be it fictional or non-fictional, careful and deliberate planning ensures that the successful narrative can be developed. At this stage, the creator must carefully consider the relationship between the intended genre and the expectations that it will elicit from the audience. Media codes and conventions play a significant role in not only engaging the audience in media products, but to develop genre expectations that will resonate with audiences.

Production

Each media form has a range of specialised roles that are crucial to effective and engaging storytelling. Feature film and television production often have the look and feel of several unrelated jigsaw pieces coming together as sound, vision and special effects teams craft ideas, yet their value comes from a vision of an author (or a collective), looking to utilise a wide range of tools.

The 2015 German film *Victoria* (dir. Sebastian Schipper) certainly took the idea of narrative within production to the extreme. The full run time of the film is just over two hours and it is shot in one single take. During the film, a young Spanish waitress gets caught up with a group of friendly East Berliners who become embroiled in an armed robbery and a high-speed police chase over the course of one evening. Director Sebastian Schipper certainly laid much of the foundation for the narrative in the pre-production stage with camera

movement, rehearsals and meticulous planning. However, as it was a single two-hour shoot, the performance of the actors lent itself to greater improvisation and thus a more engaging lead character. The audience was able to engage with her situation in real time.

Post-production

Advances in modern storytelling technologies have meant that the impossible can be possible. Not only have the techniques of production changed, but as you have seen in this book, modern technology has made the possibilities of storytelling appear limitless. Peter Jackson's three *Lord of the Rings* films (2001–03) all benefited from a full year of post-production to ensure each one told an authentic story. Given the critical nature of the audience reaction to Jackson's interpretation of a long-popular book trilogy, a huge crew of animators and visual effects artists completed work on over 2000 individual shots that included special effects. This work was important and a fundamental element of telling a story that moves beyond reality into fantasy and, arguably, would not have been possible without it.

Distribution

The distribution of stories can impact the nature of the narrative. Streaming platforms have opened up an endless world of diverse narratives for niche audiences. In years gone by, when the cinema was the first (and for many years the only) place to engage with narrative film, the cinema experience was an essential part of engaging with a story. Today, audiences engage with narratives on streaming platforms in distracted environments. Unlike the immersive experience of the cinema, audiences can watch narratives in chunks, on the couch at home or from the comfort of a bedroom. These environments can have a significant impact on how audiences receive and engage with texts.



FIGURE 7.5 Peter Jackson, director of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, at the Hollywood premiere of the third instalment, 2003

ACTIVITY 7.2

Reflection

1. What media narrative will you study this year?
2. Have you already seen it at home? Explain how you viewed the text.
3. Compare this experience with a potential viewing of the same text in the cinema or similar environment. How would your experience be different?
4. What does this tell you about the challenges streaming platforms can create for audience engagement?

Media forms

To understand a media narrative, you should first understand the physical shape it takes. This is known as a *media form*. Each media form allows for a variety of experiences and this in many ways often dictates the way the story itself is made and read by an audience. Media forms can be film, television, animation, a comic book, a photograph or a video game. They can be delivered in a multitude of shapes in digital and online products like streaming audio and video, podcasts and websites.



Media forms can be tangible and intangible. Tangible media forms are those where the audience determines how much time they engage with them. A series of photographs does not have a set time period to detail a narrative. That is decided by the person looking at them. Intangible media forms are found in products where the creator has defined the duration of audience engagement. For example, a television program, film or DVD all exist for a defined period in order for the audience to engage with them and understand the narrative.

FILM

Film is an enduring and popular media form. As an intangible media form, film determines the time that audiences are to engage with them, and film creates stories that follow a predictable structure, like the hero's journey or the three-act narrative. While it is most common for **feature-length** films to run between 90 minutes and two hours, it is not uncommon for film narratives to last three hours or more. However, as it is assumed that audiences consume a film text in a single sitting, creators closely monitor and plan the timing of critical moments in a story to ensure the audience remains engaged.

TELEVISION

Traditional television was timebound by advertising and daily schedules. Broadcast television (in the years before streaming) was locked into a 30- or 60-minute cycle of narratives that were expected to be interrupted by advertisements on commercial channels. One of the longest-running fiction television programs in history – *The Simpsons* – has produced well over 700 episodes that were only 22 minutes in length. This forced creators to carefully write narratives that fitted within strict timelines and, in many cases, used that time structure to entice audiences to come back either after the commercial break, or the following evening or the next week, with a '**cliff-hanger ending**'.

feature length a narrative that is over 90 minutes long

cliff-hanger ending a dramatic and exciting ending to an episode of a serial, leaving the audience in suspense and anxious not to miss the next episode

The introduction of streaming services like Netflix has meant that creators and audiences are no longer bound by time. As audiences can choose to watch what they want and when they feel most capable of being engaged (or let's be honest – as background noise too!) it means that creators do not necessarily keep to strict time limits and story structures. Yet many do rely on a cliff-hanger ending as they know that the audience can immediately start the next episode and stream for hours on end.

Donald Glover's *Atlanta* (2016–22) was developed by the comedian and musician and a team of writers from his home city of the same name. As a streaming narrative, it had the flexibility to maintain a loose storyline over standalone episodes that were only loosely connected to the central plot. Run times of each episode vary and act as a collection of ideas rather than a long and connected narrative arc. This structure allowed Glover to tackle the nuanced issues of race, wealth, fame and social media in standalone narratives, rather than as an overarching theme across the series.

For many years, streaming services relied on the culture of audiences 'binge watching' programs in one go, leading to the distribution of a whole series at a time. However, in the years since 2020, many streaming platforms have begun to return to a weekly release schedule that has had two interesting effects:

1. Audiences have more time to build a culture around the show if they are forced to wait for an episode. Within those seven days, word of mouth about a show can spread wider and build a bigger audience.
2. These weekly schedules emphasised, more than ever, the importance of the cliff-hanger.

ANIMATION

Animated narratives pre-date film. As a contemporary form of narrative, it is limitless. For so long, animation was considered an art form that specifically appealed to children due to its ability to make the imagination come alive in a way that film or television could never achieve. However, as movie-goers grew older, the desire to recapture their youth, or even see the modern adult world through an animated lens, has made it an enduring form of storytelling. From the children's classics of Disney and Pixar and the claymation of Aardman studios to the 'adult content' of *South Park* and *Rick and Morty*, animation is a form of narrative that can push any boundary in any direction.

Crucial to the animated narrative is its audience. *South Park* (1997–) creators Matt Stone and Trey Parker created an extremely simplistic form of 2D animation that struck a chord with an irreverent adult audience. What appears to be a combination of paper-cut and hand-drawn animation is actually a simple piece of software that allows the creators and writers to script, draw, record voices and produce episodes within a week. On average, each episode takes six days to develop and distribute. A feature-length animated film may take years, yet Stone and Parker are able to act on current events to make each episode directly relevant to its media-savvy adult audience. This helps develop a loyal audience who look to *South Park* for a satirical take on current events each week.



FIGURE 7.6 A still from an early 1997 episode of *South Park* (dirs Trey Parker and Matt Stone)

Alternatively, audiences who are dedicated to an animation style, such as anime, can draw on a long cultural history to engage with narratives. Originating from Japan, anime draws on centuries of Japanese and Chinese folklore to re-tell complex narratives of heroism, regret, love and loss in everything from the *Dragon Ball Z* films (1989–96) to the escapist narratives of director Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* (2001) and *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004).



FIGURE 7.7 A still from the movie *Spirited Away* (2001, dir. Hayao Miyazaki)

Such is the history of anime, and the dedication required for audiences to understand the many layers of its storytelling traditions, that much of the popular 'Shonen Battle Story' genre is based on a 16th-century text from China.[1] What may appear on the surface to be frenetic, loud and action-packed narratives aimed at children actually require an audience to have strong connections to a deep well of storytelling and styles as well as old traditions.



PHOTOGRAPHY

Photographic narratives don't dictate the audience experience in the same way as the moving image. By its very nature, audiences are asked to look, examine and determine meaning for themselves, and yet photographic narratives *do* tell a story. Generally seen within a series, either collected or constructed by the photographer, photographic narratives capture a series of moments in time that, when viewed together, can piece together a story. It can appear as a theme, an idea, a recurring event or the arc of a single character. However, as you have learnt, photographic narratives are tangible media in that the audience can determine how long they want to view the images and what meaning they wish to take from them.

Narrative photography and photo essays can be fictional or non-fictional. Fictional photographic narratives involve significant planning and preparation to light scenes, dress sets and determine the theme and ideas being explored.

One of the most common forms, however, is non-fictional photojournalism. Born from a long tradition of journalists retelling the events of the world to readers, it was the photojournalists, or photographers who accompany journalists, who were able to tell some of the most compelling narratives in history.

Paula Bronstein is an American photojournalist known for covering and providing narratives from some of the world's most dangerous conflict zones. In the midst of seismic global events and conflict, the impact of war on ordinary people is often lost. Bronstein's 2022 series *Ukraine's Elderly: Left Behind by War* details the silent victims of the conflict in Ukraine after the Russian invasion of 2022. Each image carefully details the candid yet near-hopeless existence of an elderly population that appears abandoned by the conflict. Rather than presenting a clear and obvious story, each image details the desperate existence of unknown individuals facing crisis.

ACTIVITY 7.3

Visual analysis

Examine the following images from Paula Bronstein's series *Ukraine's Elderly: Left Behind by War*.



FIGURE 7.8 Image 1



FIGURE 7.9 Image 2



FIGURE 7.10 Image 3



FIGURE 7.11 Image 4

1 Carefully examine each image. For each photograph, explain how the following codes have been used to create meaning:
   - camera
   - visual composition
   - lighting.
2 Treat each image in isolation and, imagining this is the only image you have seen from the series, explain the meaning of the image and what narrative is told within it.
3 Now consider the four images together. What broader narrative and theme is being expressed by Bronstein?
4 Explore the entire series online. Is the meaning you derive from the whole series consistent with your response to the previous question?
5 Compare your interpretation of the series with a classmate. Are your interpretations similar or different? What does this tell you about Bronstein's intention to tell a story?
6 What does this tell you about the ability for photojournalism to tell stories that lie behind significant events?
7 How does the use of depth of field in portrait photography help to create a focus on the subject, and what symbolic meanings might this technique convey?
8 How does the use of specific colour grading in landscape photography create mood and atmosphere, and what are the genre conventions for colour in this type of photography?
9 Can you discuss an example where a photographer has intentionally broken genre conventions for a specific purpose or effect?
10 How does the choice of typography in a photographic poster or cover affect the overall message or theme of the work? How does this choice adhere to or break away from industry conventions?
11 In the genre of street photography, what are some common compositional conventions, and how do they help to construct meaning in the images?
12 How does the use of high-contrast black and white imagery in photojournalism serve to symbolically represent the subject matter, and what conventions does this follow or challenge?
13 In architectural photography, how can the use of framing and perspective emphasise the features of a building or structure, and what are the industry conventions regarding these techniques?
14 In event photography, such as for weddings or concerts, how does the mise en scene – the arrangement of scenery and stage properties – contribute to the overall storytelling, and what are some typical conventions seen in these genres?

STUDY TIP

To explore how narrative is developed in other media forms like video games and podcasts, head to Chapter 4 'Narrative, style and genre'.



7.3 How audiences engage with, consume and read media narratives

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- how audiences engage with, consume and read media narratives
- appropriate media language.

Audiences and engagement

As you have learnt in the study of Media, audiences bring their own life experiences to narrative texts. The personal life experience, gender, cultural and geographical background all influence the way audiences understand, enjoy and interact with narratives. Other factors such as sexual orientation, religious and ethical beliefs as well as family background can influence how, why and what they choose to engage with. A film such as 1986's *Platoon*, by war veteran director Oliver Stone, may still communicate the horrors of the Vietnam War to most audiences; however, an older veteran of the conflict may engage with it in a deeper way based on their own experiences.



FIGURE 7.12 The movie poster from the 1986 anti-war film *Platoon* and the film's director, Vietnam veteran Oliver Stone. How might the director's wartime experiences have shaped his approach to making the film?

Yet, in more simple terms, the personal interests of an audience can guide engagement. Director Jonah Hill's 2018 film *Mid90s* (2018) details the personal struggles of a group of young skateboarders in (you guessed it) the mid 1990s. Throughout, the narrative, sound, props and symbolism are used to connect an audience of ageing skateboarders, who would mostly now be in their 40s and 50s, to a culture that was specific to a time and place that even younger skateboarders may not connect with. Conversely, the 2022 Australian reboot of *Heartbreak High* would resonate with a teenage audience due to its specific pop culture references.

ACTIVITY 7.4

Research task

1. Create a list of your top five favourite films, television or streaming narratives. For each one, explain when, where, how and why you engaged with each narrative.
2. Compare this list with your classmates. What differences in your personal experiences and backgrounds influence what you engage with?
3. Take the list home and show it to an older relative or family friend. What do they list as their top five favourites? What reasons do they give for connecting with those texts?
4. What does this exercise tell you about the way different audiences engage with texts?

Audiences and technological change

Audiences consume media based on the technology at hand. In the beginning of the 20th century, the methods were limited to film, print and radio, and the interaction audiences had with each was usually fixed to a specific location. Orson Welles' *War of the Worlds* (1938) radio play was credited with creating a public panic when

audiences mistook the broadcast fiction for a real alien invasion of Earth. As ludicrous as this sounds, it is plausible when considering that whole families would sit around the radio in the family home to enjoy these media products. In the silent film era (approx. 1895–1930), audiences watched their favourite narratives while an orchestra in the cinema played the soundtrack live.



FIGURE 7.13 Orson Welles (back right) and his cast rehearsing for one of his famous radio plays

Back when films could only be consumed in the cinema, content creators knew the conditions in which audiences would receive their films. There would be a large picture screen, immersive sound apart from the rustling of a chip packet or the slurping of a soft drink, and the audience's undivided attention. As time brought new technology (from the drive-in to the smartphone), content creators could no longer be completely certain that audiences would be 100% focused – this resulted in the need to engage audiences differently, with contemporary music, and mind-blowing special effects.

Consider the 1979 version of the film *Alien*. Director Ridley Scott had, by modern standards, a very rudimentary set of tools to gain audience engagement. The only methods of promotion to draw audiences to the cinema were posters, print reviews, TV and cinema ads. Word-of-mouth, contemporary social interest in science fiction and horror genres and a brilliant poster helped Scott draw the audience into their seats. Once there, his break from normal genre conventions meant audiences were instantly engaged in the media product.

The lead character Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) is the only one to survive the alien as the known actors, Tom Skerritt and John Hurt, were the first to die at the hands of the bloodthirsty antagonist. As audiences began interpreting the product, Scott employed a variety of codes and conventions, based on the audience's understanding of genre, such as immersive sound and long-shot duration of space and spaceships. The restricted narrative, in which the audience knows nothing in advance, borrowed from the horror genre, drew an engaged response.

Compare this then with the 2017 release of the film *Alien: Covenant*, the fifth film in the *Alien* franchise. The film offers the same techniques on a louder, faster and bigger scale thanks to increased technological capabilities, and was followed almost immediately with the film available to stream online and purchase via a cinema-standard Blu-ray and DVD release. Audiences were bombarded with advertising through television, social media, print and online forms. Ridley Scott, who returned for the 2017 film, now has a much broader range of tools to attract and engage audiences to his narrative; however, there are a range of challenges he must consider to ensure that engagement is sustained.

Audiences today and beyond, who are used to films with a greater pace of storytelling, incorporating montages and fast editing, may find it very difficult to engage with a narrative from 1979, and so may not have seen or properly understood the original film or understand the common themes and ideas that exist between them. The conditions in which audiences receive narratives can also impact their ability to read them. Should an aspect of the narrative be disrupted (missed dialogue, unnoticed facial expressions), particularly one integral to the plot, audiences tend to become confused, and therefore become disengaged. Technologies such as smartphones (which could be used to stream the 2017 film) may have increased the locations in which to consume narratives, but it doesn't mean they will be comprehensively read.



ACTIVITY 7.5

Reflection

1 How has technology changed the way media creators can tell stories?
2 How has the same technology changed the way audiences can engage with media narratives?
3 With a partner, research and consider how the *Alien* franchise of films has changed over the years. How have advancements in technology altered the production of narratives and the engagement of audiences?

7.4 How media codes and conventions convey meaning

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- the relationship between and the function of codes and narrative conventions to convey meaning in selected media forms
- the relationship between media narratives and the contexts in which they were produced
- the construction of representations in media narratives and how they reflect or challenge views and values of a specific context
- the ways in which audiences from different contexts engage with, consume and read media narratives.

As a student of media narratives, it is crucial to understand the way different media creators use codes and conventions to engage audiences. Depending on the media form, its style and genre, the way it is constructed, produced and distributed – *and* its intended audience – the use of codes and conventions can vary.

For example, a mid 1980s horror film may rely on sound, lighting, acting and mise en scene to build audiences towards moments of graphic violence. Animation, regardless of its style and greater possibilities, still relies on many of the same codes and, in particular, the conventions of storytelling to engage audiences. Photography, by comparison, does not have the advantage of sound, but camera, lighting, acting and particularly mise en scene take significant roles in the way audiences create meaning from the narrative.

Before you tackle any of the narratives you will read about next, you should revise the way in which media codes and conventions create meaning, by either rereading Chapter 4 or visiting the Interactive Textbook for this chapter.

How to write about media codes and conventions

ANALYSIS – WRITING ABOUT NARRATIVE

As discussed in the Study specifications chapter, learning to use the correct terminology in VCE Media is crucial. In order to effectively write about the way codes and conventions operate to create meaning, it is important to always refer to the technique used, how it operates, why it was done and what effect it had on the audience. This way, you can present a clear understanding of not only how a story operates, but how media creates them.

Respond to all tasks in this section using the following format:

- **Name:** Identify the story you are discussing and the element involved.
- **Describe:** In as much detail as possible, using the correct terminology, explain how the element works.
- **Why:** Explain why the media creator did this. What were they trying to communicate to the audience?
- **Effect:** Explain the impact of this element and the creator's decision to employ it.

CAMERA

Cameras control the light and the formation of the image in film, video and still photography. Their positioning, movement and operation influence the style and meaning of the images and hence our understanding of the story.

The camera angle of the shot helps define the mood of the overall scene. The camera can be subjective (such as from the point of view of a character) or objective (the standard approach to visual storytelling) and allows us to use our own understanding, background and experience to create meaning from the image.

The use of camera can be examined through Table 7.1.

Shot selection	Angles	Movement	Focus	Qualities
Extreme long shot Long shot Mid shot Medium close-up Close-up Extreme close-up Wide shot	Low angle High angle Eye level	Pan Track Zoom Tilt Dolly Handheld Camera stabiliser	Foreground Mid ground Background Soft focus Depth of focus: Deep focus Shallow focus	35mm film 70mm film 3D Animation Videotape

TABLE 7.1 The uses of camera as a technical code

ACTIVITY 7.6

Meaning in an image

Waymond (Ke Huy Quan), Evelyn's spouse, is known for being playful. She finds it annoying that he applies googly eyes to everything. Evelyn (Michelle Yeoh) is unhappy with her life and her husband, and takes off the googly eyes and dismisses his inane attempts to spread joy and laughter.

As the plot of *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (2022, dir. Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert) develops, Evelyn begins to appreciate Waymond and his attitude towards life. Instead of removing the googly eyes, just before the climactic battle of the film, Evelyn sticks one in the middle of her own forehead.

Use the writing technique of Name/Describe/Why/Effect to determine how meaning is created in this image.



FIGURE 7.14 A close-up can be used for important storytelling purposes. Evelyn Wang (Michelle Yeoh) in *Everything Everywhere All at Once*.





FIGURE 7.15 A low-angle shot of Major John Reisman (Lee Marvin) from the war film *The Dirty Dozen* (1967, dir. Robert Aldrich) creates a sense of authority and power.

Selective use of camera can easily communicate the mood and action of characters, the purpose of objects and the direction of the story. Shot selection is, of course, the most fundamental element of camera, which allows the audience to focus on specific elements of a scene. A close-up can bring the audience into a shot, which can help the audience examine specific details; conversely, as you will learn throughout Units 1–4, a long or wide angle shot allows for more information, like locations, other characters and action, to be clear and visible throughout the scene.

However, the use of angles, movement and focus can help add further meaning to images. For example, a low-angle shot is one of the most commonly used angles to shoot superheroes. When the camera is pointing up, below the actor, it places the audience in a position of weakness and in turn creates a sense of power and respect in the subject.

Camera movement is, of course, specific to visual media forms like animation and film, and it allows for a great deal of information to be shared with the audience in a short space of time. In many of Wes Anderson's films, he employs **tracking shots** that follow alongside the actors and settings to explain the roles of each player in his narratives. In the film *The Darjeeling Limited* (2007), Anderson uses a break in the action of the narrative to pan across the windows of the train carriage each of the characters is sitting in. As the camera tracks across the side of the carriage, the audience are able to see each character in a private moment where each is performing an action that develops their role in the story. Tracking shots are also used heavily in action films and allow the audience to be a part of the thrilling car chase or escape across city rooftops.

tracking shot where the camera follows along with moving action, usually when the camera is mounted on tracks that allow for smooth movement

Handheld camera vision has become more popular with the advent of camera-stabilising technologies and is often used to give the product a more 'in the moment' feel. Handheld camera was popularised by the long-running police drama *NYPD Blue* (1993–2005). The bulk of this series was shot with fluidly moving handheld cameras, which played a significant role in positioning the audience's point of view from one of a distant observer to that of a character actually *in* the narrative itself. Handheld has long been a technique used in documentary film (mostly out of necessity) as the images are required to be live and in the moment. Fictional products like *District 9* (2009, dir. Neill Blomkamp) used a combination of handheld camera and fixed shooting in the opening sequence of the film to position the audience to think they were watching a documentary about aliens who had landed in South Africa. However, you should always exercise caution with handheld camera shots, as the independent thriller *The Blair Witch Project* (1999, dirs Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez) was shot exclusively on handheld cameras and many audience members complained of motion sickness!

ACTIVITY 7.7

Meaning in an image

In this image from an *X-Men* movie, the use of the technical code of camera focus helps develop our understanding of the character. As Charles Xavier (James McAvoy) is a telepath who can read others' minds, it makes sense to use focus on the actor's face to convey Xavier's extreme level of concentration. Use the writing technique of Name/Describe/Why/Effect to determine how meaning is created in this image.



FIGURE 7.16 Use of camera can show character development, as in this example from *X-Men: First Class* (2011, dir. Matthew Vaughn).

Focus, when used selectively, can help to drive a narrative and draw the audience's attention to specific details. In Figure 7.16, for this image from *X-Men: First Class* the camera operator has used a medium depth of field to draw attention to the character Charles Xavier's ability to use his mind. While the background of the image certainly appears that it may add something to the audience's understanding of the product, at this point in time the camera operator and director have chosen to pull the audience's attention to the character.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. Why is careful shot selection important in telling a screen story?
2. How can camerawork help develop the narrative?
3. Why does handheld camerawork make a scene seem more real?
4. How can the technical code of focus be used to enhance a story?

ACTIVITY 7.8

Meaning in an image

Examine this still from the film *Léon: The Professional*.

Use the writing technique of Name/Describe/Why/Effect to determine how meaning is created in this image.



FIGURE 7.17 A young Natalie Portman and Jean Reno in *Léon: The Professional* (1992, dir. Luc Besson)

ACTING

Acting refers to the physical action of the actor playing a role within a media product. Acting is a code and a tool used by media authors to create meaning through a performance of physical movement and dialogue. Simple facial expressions convey meaning as do posture, movement and positioning in relationship to other actors. Vocal tones and inflections can add weight to dialogue and emphasise ideas and relationships between characters within a product. You may not realise it, but humans are experts at reading body language. Our movements, posture and even our glances tell others a lot about what we are thinking and feeling. A quick glance (or a glare) from your teacher can often be all you need to realise that you need to concentrate on your work! So, a careful study of the subtlety of actors' movements can often be enough explain a narrative. In the 2009 Australian film *Samson and Delilah* (dir. Warwick Thornton), the two lead actors, teens who live in a remote community outside Alice Springs, do not utter a word for the first hour of the film! As such, the audience is forced to track their thoughts through the movement of their eyes and body language.



FOCUS QUESTION

What are some ways that acting, as a media code, can engage an audience in a narrative?

Effective acting as a production tool allows the audience to share emotions with a character played for that specific purpose. Over time, the style and role of acting within media products has changed dramatically, as in silent film it was a vital function to express meaning due to the limitations caused by the available technology. Genre also determines the acting style required to communicate ideas.

The choice of actor is another influential factor in the creation of meaning. The audience's understanding of the actor, the roles they have played in the past and the public persona they cultivate can influence the way the audience reads it. Michelle Yeoh (shown in Figure 7.14) showcases her incredible acting prowess in the genre-blending arthouse film *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. In the role of Evelyn Wang, a Chinese-American laundromat owner and mother under an IRS audit, Yeoh masterfully uses physical action and dialogue to create a nuanced and emotionally compelling character. Despite being nearly 60, her own stunt work lends a dynamic physicality to the performance. Her subtle facial expressions, movements and positioning bring depth to Evelyn's journey of self-discovery through multiple dimensions. Yeoh's vocal tones and inflections also enhance the weight of her dialogue, emphasising the intricate relationships and ideas within the narrative. Known for her role in *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018, dir. Jon M Chu), Yeoh's performance here is characterised by resilience and vulnerability, as she navigates a character wrestling with unfulfilled dreams and expectations. Her portrayal not only resonates with audiences but also inspires them to root for Evelyn's self-worth and value, in turn challenging stereotypes typically associated with Asian-American women in media. Ultimately, Yeoh's performance in *Everything Everywhere All at Once* is a testament to her extraordinary talent and emphasises the importance of diverse representation in cinema.

ACTIVITY 7.9

Meaning in an image

Examine this still (Figure 7.18) from the film *Barbie* (2023, dir. Greta Gerwig) and explain how acting has been used in this image to communicate meaning about the characters.

Use the writing technique of Name/Describe/Why/Effect to determine how meaning is created in this image.



FIGURE 7.18 Margot Robbie as Barbie and Ryan Gosling as Ken in *Barbie*

Setting

The physical location where a story takes place can drive narrative forward, by referring to the time, place and construction of that location. It helps create a mood and can inform the audience about a character's state of mind or the challenge that might lie before them.

ACTIVITY 7.10

Meeting and challenging expectations

1 The choice of actor often dictates the kind of roles that audiences expect. Examine the following actors and determine the kinds of roles they have normally played:
   - Margot Robbie
   - Arnold Schwarzenegger
   - Chris Hemsworth
   - Jennifer Lawrence
   - Samuel L Jackson
   - Daniel Kaluuya.

2 Sometimes actors are chosen to play roles that *challenge* these expectations. From the list you have made from the actors above, can you find any roles they have played that challenged audiences' expectations by departing from their normal role?

ACTIVITY 7.11

Meaning in an image

Use the writing technique of Name/Describe/Why/Effect to determine how meaning is created in this image (Figure 7.19).



FIGURE 7.19 Mark Hamill in *Star Wars: Episode VI: Return of the Jedi* 1983, (dir. Richard Marquand)

The setting as a media code acts to set the 'reality' in which the audience finds a character. It could be a particular year, country or environment. It can also be used to show the audience where the character has come to at a particular point within a narrative. A film may choose to place the character in an abandoned warehouse, surrounded by martial arts experts, signalling the final showdown in the narrative.

In Kathryn Bigelow's *The Hurt Locker* (2008), the opening scenes of the film establish the role of the setting in the narrative. Set during the 2003–11 Iraq War, in the midst of a chaotic city of broken roads, traffic, harsh high-key sunlight and constant noise, the main characters, bomb disposal experts, must remain calm to realise their goal. In some media products, the setting itself can be considered a player within the story arc as the main character must look to overcome it first.



In *The Batman* (2022, dir. Matt Reeves) the film is anchored in the grim, ominous setting of Gotham City, a place that becomes a character in its own right, shaping the narrative and reflecting the characters' mental and emotional states. The city's gloomy, foreboding atmosphere, with its towering gothic architecture and eternally dark skies, sets a mood that's congruent with the challenges and conflicts faced by its citizens. Gotham City is the 'reality' for its characters, a city where the timeline seems simultaneously contemporary and timeless.

ACTIVITY 7.12

Meaning in an image

Examine this still (Figure 7.20) from the film *The Batman* (2022, dir. Matt Reeves). From the details you can see in the background of this image, explain how the setting in *The Batman* might engage the audience in the narrative.

Use the writing technique of Name/Describe/Why/Effect to determine how meaning is created in this image.



FIGURE 7.20 Robert Pattinson as the title character in a scene from *The Batman*

MISE EN SCENE

This refers to the arrangement of props, objects, actors, lighting and make-up that appear within a scene of a media product. Or put simply, it refers to everything within the frame:

- acting – how the actor is positioned
- lighting – how and where the lighting is used
- props/objects – the information each object tells us about the scene
- colours – how moods, feelings and ideas are communicated
- setting – where the shot is set can help explain the scene
- costumes – what the actors are wearing; this includes *how* they actually wear it.

Careful and well-planned arrangement of mise en scene elements can determine the nature of a media product for an audience and enhance engagement. How a media product uses the space a camera records can tell rich stories. For example, the use of a shadow over a character's face riddled with scars can engage an audience in a story behind the immediate dialogue or action.

ACTIVITY 7.13

Mise en scene

Using this image from the HBO series *The Last of Us* (2023) complete the following tasks.

1. List all of the mise en scene elements you can see within these categories:
   - acting
   - lighting
   - props/objects
   - colours
   - setting
   - costumes.
2. Explain how mise en scene has been used to communicate meaning in Figure 7.21.
3. Use the writing technique of Name/Describe/Why/Effect to determine how meaning is created in this image.



FIGURE 7.21 A still from the 2023 series *The Last of Us* (created by Neil Druckmann and Craig Mazin)

Extension task

Complete the same activity for the earlier image (Figure 7.20) from *The Batman*.

STUDY TIP

Visual composition

Consider the visual composition of the shot (Figure 7.22, right) from the samurai film *Yojimbo* (1960) directed by Japanese filmmaker Akira Kurosawa. Kurosawa was known for the symmetrical way he balanced the visual elements of his frames, and for his use of depth of field. In the foreground we have the samurai hero of the film, and actor Toshiro Mifune is playing the scene looking tense. Though Mifune dominates the frame in this composition, through the use of mise en scene Kurosawa shifts the power in the narrative from the hero to the villain. For example, Mifune's hand is positioned on the table, attempting to conceal an incriminating letter from the bad guys he has been deceiving. The antagonist has taken Mifune's sword, and holds a gun on the hero. Notice how Mifune's eyes do not look directly at the other actors – this is so the audience can study the expressions on Mifune's face as the scene plays out, and perhaps it subtly indicates that the character has something to hide. Therefore, by placing his actors in a certain stylised way, employing props and quality acting, Kurosawa is able to unfold his screen narrative in a visually dynamic way that would engage his audience. Understanding how these elements of mise en scene work will assist you in planning your own film production.





FIGURE 7.22 Japanese director Akira Kurosawa, and a still from his samurai film *Yojimbo* (1960) featuring actor Toshiro Mifune (screen left)

STUDY TIP

A note on the difference between the terms 'mise en scene', 'camera framing' and 'visual composition'

Something to keep in mind when discussing any single shot in a screen narrative is that, first, the shot has been framed by the director/camera person using camerawork. Then, for all the components that go into that frame we use the term mise en scene (actors/props/lighting, etc.). Finally, to refer to the combination of framing and mise en scene – what we see on screen – we use the term 'visual composition', meaning how the shot has been composed by the director.

EDITING

Editing defines the shots and the process by which they are arranged on screen. Used successfully, editing can be cut to create a variety of moods and ideas. It can create excitement or slow down a scene for greater understanding of an idea. When looking at editing, consider the following questions:

1 How is the vision cut?
2 How is it placed?
3 What type of pace does this create?
4 Are the vision and sound cut in a rhythm?
5 Have particular editing techniques been used?

Editing can be used to show transitions between time and place. It can help in the structuring of time, allowing the audience to move seamlessly from one place in time to another. Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) features excellent examples of editing to transition between time and place. As a slightly evolved primate discovers the brutal power of a bone he found on the ground, he throws it into the air. As the camera follows the bone, Kubrick cuts to a spaceship (the same shape and position as the bone), thus transporting the audience thousands of years in a single moment. The scene was used to not only transport the audience forward in time, but to inform the audience of the great progress human technology has made.

Hollywood film editor Walter Murch has said of editing: 'Where is the audience looking? What are they thinking? As much as possible, you try to be the audience … think of the audience's focus of attention as a dot moving around the screen … the editor's job is to carry that dot around in an interesting way.'

FOCUS QUESTION

How can editing engage an audience in a narrative?

ACTIVITY 7.14

Analysis: Meaning in editing

Editing is a common feature of action narratives. Quick cuts between events heighten the excitement and engagement of audiences within the action. For this activity, you will need to research some action films.

Choose a scene from an action film that has been edited to enhance excitement; for example, the first fight scene in the opening sequence of *The Matrix* (1999, dir. the Wachowskis).

1. In a two- or three-minute sequence, calculate the number of cuts the editor makes between shots.
2. Describe how the shots are ordered. For example, does it cut back and forth between two characters? How does this help move the action forward?
3. Describe the rhythm of the editing over the length of the scene. Does the rhythm of the editing change; that is, do some shots stay on the screen longer than others? Propose why the editor might have chosen to edit the scene this way.
4. Use the writing technique of Name/Describe/Why/Effect to determine how meaning is created in this sequence.

LIGHTING

Lighting communicates meaning and mood in media products. The use of shadow can hide a character's expression and thus suggest a sinister motive. Bright, high-key lighting can illuminate a scene to make all objects within it visible and position the audience to feel safe and calm.

Lighting can be naturalistic, imitating lighting found in reality. Lighting can also be expressive, communicating in an artistic way how a character is feeling or the mood of a particular scene.

Lighting can also be high-key or low-key. High-key is when there are multiple lights being used to remove any shadows within a shot. Television sitcoms are usually shot with this lighting technique. High-key lighting is often used in musicals and comedies. Low-key lighting promotes the use of shadows and is often used to enhance a mood of mystery, danger, etc.

As is discussed in Chapter 4, three-point lighting is one of the most common forms of media production lighting. With the light sources arranged behind the camera to come from three different directions, it gives the scene depth and illuminates shadows behind a subject. Three-point lighting is a common technique used in fashion photography, television interviews and vlogs.



ACTIVITY 7.15

Analysis: Meaning in lighting

1 Each of the images in Figure 7.23 is an example of the lighting effects mentioned previously. Try to match the film still with the effect:
   - **a** Low-key lighting is used to hide the character's eyes.
   - **b** Naturalistic lighting, possibly using the three-point lighting method.
   - **c** Low-key lighting, causing expressive shadows on the wall.
   - **d** Low-key lighting, causing expressive shadows outside.

2 Choose one of these film stills. Use the writing technique of Name/Describe/Why/Effect to determine how meaning is created in this sequence.









FIGURE 7.23 Stills from *Jurassic Park* (1993, dir. Steven Spielberg, top left), *E.T.* (1982, dir. Steven Spielberg, top right), *Fargo* (1996, dirs Joel and Ethan Coen, bottom left) and *The Godfather: Part II* (1974, dir. Francis Ford Coppola, bottom right)

SOUND

An essential element of visual storytelling since the invention of synchronised audio, sound can be discussed in a variety of ways:

1 **diegetic sound** – the sounds we hear in everyday life, like dialogue, birds chirping or wind in the trees
2 **non-diegetic sound** – the sounds we don't normally hear. These can be sound effects or music. It is used to help *enhance* a scene or mood in a film.

Sound can be described in a variety of ways. Think of the mood or pitch that non-diegetic sound can make to help us understand a story.

ACTIVITY 7.16

Research task

Research and listen to the soundtrack from one of your favourite films.

Your job is to record all of the diegetic and non-diegetic sounds in a key scene.

Examine the following example.

You should look to record the instruments used and attempt to explain them too. Which ones were used and how? What moods did they generate and how do they work with the vision and diegetic audio?

Film: *Jaws* (1975, dir. Steven Spielberg)

Key scene: 'Chrissie's last swim'

Diegetic sound: sound of the waves, birds, ringing bells from ocean buoys, rushing water, screams

Non-diegetic sounds: string instruments, light piano notes, sharp horn instruments

How is sound used in this scene?

> Diegetic and non-diegetic sound is used in the movie *Jaws* (1975). At the beginning of the scene, we hear only diegetic sounds of the two characters running down to the water. In the background, we hear the waves gently lapping against the shore as well as wind and birds chirping in the background, suggesting that it is close to dawn. As Chrissie swims out into the water alone a low, rumbling cello begins and introduces a foreboding tone as it increases in volume and pace. As soon as the shark attacks Chrissie, a combination of diegetic screams and thrashing water sounds accompany a chaotic mixture of piano, high-pitched strings and a xylophone which leads towards a crescendo of Chrissie's disappearance under the water. As soon as this happens, the audience are abruptly left with the original diegetic sounds of birds, waves and the beach wind. The director Steven Spielberg chose to use this audio to place the audience in the midst of a frenetic shark attack, taking them in and out of danger at a rapid pace. After the non-diegetic audio disappears, the audience are given time to breathe, assess what had just happened to the character and suddenly fear for the lives of all those near this beach.



FIGURE 7.24 The swimmer Chrissie (Susan Backlinie) is attacked by the shark in *Jaws*

Now it's your turn.

Pick a scene from your favourite visual narrative product and complete the following tasks:

1. Identify and list all the non-diegetic sounds you hear.
2. Identify and list all the diegetic sounds that you hear.
3. Explain how sound has been used to communicate meaning within the scene. Use the writing technique of Name/Describe/Why/Effect to determine how meaning is created in this sequence.



FIGURE 7.25 A still from 1963's *Jason and the Argonauts* (dir. Don Chaffey). Special visual effects like this battle against a stop-motion hydra came out of the work of Hollywood pioneers like Ray Harryhausen.

SPECIAL EFFECTS

Special effects are a constantly evolving element, which since the beginning of filmmaking have gone from rudimentary tools of making objects disappear and move position with editing, to the creation of modern imagination of faraway planets inhabited by entirely blue people whose lives are eerily reminiscent of the story of Pocahontas. They are essentially visual tricks and illusions that can make events that don't exist in real life exist on screen. Without special effects, the entire city of Tokyo would never have to endure the constant threats posed by Godzilla and Mothra.

Special effects can be broken into two categories:

1. **visual effects:** this refers to creating entirely virtual shots. This can include changing the background or creating the background; adding actors, characters or creatures and changing actors entirely; and adding or removing objects or props. A background to an ancient world or cutting off Lieutenant Dan's leg in *Forrest Gump* (1994, dir. Robert Zemeckis) both count as visual effects.
2. **mechanical effects:** this refers to anything that is physically created, like the use of mechanised props, scenery and scale models, and pyrotechnics. Blowing up a building, flying a spaceship into space, or a bullet in the leg all qualify as mechanical effects.

ACTIVITY 7.17

Analysis: Special effects and the audience

See the action films you will write about for the editing activity (Activity 7.14). Choose one and answer the following questions:

1. Explain how special effects have been used to enhance audience engagement.
2. Provide an example of a film you've studied where visual effects were used to create entirely virtual shots, and discuss its impact on the film's narrative.
3. How were visual effects employed to change or create backgrounds in one of the films studied in class? How did this contribute to the film's overall aesthetic or narrative?
4. Discuss an instance in a film from the class where an actor, character or creature was added or changed entirely using visual effects. How did this enhance the story or character development?
5. How were mechanical effects used in any of the films studied in class? Specifically, if possible, provide an example of a scene where mechanised props or pyrotechnics played a critical role.
6. Compare and contrast the use of visual and mechanical effects in a film from the class. How did each contribute to the overall storytelling and viewer experience?

MEDIA CONVENTIONS

Storylines

Narratives, regardless of the form they take, are driven by stories. That is what engages us and is why you, the VCE Media student, are reading this. Most products have primary and secondary storylines and they often come together. How do the plots in your media products interconnect? Do they involve the same characters? Perhaps these plots provide more information about characters or add depth to the plot.

The study of story can be broken up into these areas:

- **story principles:** any good story must follow the simple principles of establishing a character, developing a challenge or problem and finding a resolution
- **story form and structure:** this refers to the way the story is told and the means by which it is structured.

For example, you may explain the *story form* by describing:

1. Where is the story set?
2. What events start the story? (In film and television, this is often referred to as the opening sequence.)
3. Who are the main characters?
4. What challenges do they face?
5. What happens to them on their journey towards the conclusion?
6. What is the outcome of the challenge and what is the impact on the characters? (In film and television, this is often referred to as the closing sequence.)

Story structure then refers to the way the answers to the above questions are structured throughout the product. For example:

1. How, when and where are the main characters introduced?
2. How and when is the challenge set up?
3. What events or ideas are introduced to move the characters along to the main challenge?
4. How is the challenge met by the characters?
5. How is it resolved?

- **Generic story structures:** this refers to the way the story organises these elements in a familiar pattern that audiences can easily understand, such as a Hollywood love story that follows a pattern of X meets Y, X loses Y, X gets Y.
- **Character and story arcs:** these are ways to explain the way a character or story travels across the whole narrative. It is sometimes easier to deconstruct a story (or plan your own) by visualising the story with a pen and paper across a large 'arc' on the page. Over the course of the story, the character usually 'rides' this arc to arrive at their destination, which can be victory, failure or change.

A good way to study storylines is to chart the story arc on paper (as described above) and then examine the relationship between the opening and closing sequences of the story. In literature, these are often called the 'first' and 'final' acts.

THREE-ACT STRUCTURE

A common narrative device employed in many Hollywood films is the three-act structure. The first act, often referred to as the set-up, introduces the characters, setting and central conflict. This part sets the stage for the story, providing necessary context and information. The second act, also known as the confrontation, is where the story deepens and the conflict escalates. Characters face numerous challenges and their true



character is tested as the plot progresses. This is the longest act, often filled with various plot twists and complications. The final act, the resolution, provides a culmination to the narrative. It sees the primary conflict reach a climax and resolution, often resulting in significant changes or growth for the characters. The film typically concludes with a denouement, a winding down of the story where loose ends are tied up, providing a satisfying conclusion for the audience.

ACTIVITY 7.18

Analysis: Opening and closing sequences

Read the following text and answer the questions at the end.

The opening and closing sequence

The opening sequence is the first part of the media product where the story, characters and setting are being set up and introduced. It is where the reality of the movie is communicated to the audience. It's also where the possible storylines are being set up, and expectations are created by the audience. For instance, if a character will have supernatural abilities later in the movie, they will be suggested in the opening sequence, so the audience has something to look forward to, as they expect to see them being used later in the film.

In most movies, there is a protagonist: the main character on whom the movie is centred. It is this character's actions that push the story along. There is also usually a character attempting to stop the protagonist from achieving their goals. This character is known as the antagonist.

The closing sequence

The closing sequence is where all the storylines are wrapped up, the main questions are answered and the audience is able to leave the story with all their main expectations resolved and, to some extent, left wondering what would have occurred if the narrative was to continue. If you consider the steps required to tell a story from earlier in this chapter, it can be considered a crucial element of a story. This process is referred to by the French term **denouement**, which means 'outcome' or 'untangling'. Imagine the storylines and ideas as pieces of string that we're all wrapped up in while watching the movie, which we need untangling from before re-entering reality.

denouement a French term that refers to the unravelling of storylines to draw the narrative to a conclusion

Closing sequences can also leave the audience with storylines that are unresolved, making us question what may happen after the events of the movie. This can be done either to engage us beyond the boundaries of the movie or allow the audience the opportunity to propose their own ending.

Choose a film you intend to study this year and complete the following tasks:

1. Go online and read the synopsis of the film you intend to study. Using a pen and paper, draw the story arc on a page.
2. Explain the form of the story and how it is structured.
3. Explain how the character arc relates to the story arc.
4. Examine the film and explain how the story was introduced.
5. Examine the film and explain how the story was concluded.
6. Describe how the elements of both the antagonist's and protagonist's storylines were resolved.
7. Was any element of the story left unresolved? Explain why you think the director did this.

CHARACTER

Stories are driven by relatable characters. If the audience can identify with them, they will usually take an interest in their challenges. In the film *Star Wars: Episode IV: A New Hope* (1977, dir. George Lucas), the character of Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill) leads the narrative as he is an innocent, naive but capable man from a desolate planet. He has no enemies and is thrust into an extraordinary situation. His mentor, Ben 'Obi-wan' Kenobi (Alec Guinness), is immediately identifiable as the wise old mentor who will guide him through his journey. We are, however, positioned to dislike or even be suspicious of some characters. When Luke meets the brash smuggler Han Solo (Harrison Ford), his arrogance is somewhat off-putting for audiences. Over the course of the story, the relationship of the three proves to be the key to victory in Luke's quest.



FIGURE 7.26 *Star Wars: A New Hope* (1977) features relatable characters whose relationships drive the story forward. Pictured are Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill) as protagonist and Obi-wan Kenobi (Alec Guinness) as his wise mentor.

Thus, the relationship between characters is also essential to the story. For the main character, or protagonist, to succeed, they may need to resolve conflict with other characters, win allies or gain the trust of people who will help their quest. The intersection of these relationships can be seen as primary or secondary storylines within a media product.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the reasons why elements of a narrative might be left unresolved at the conclusion of a film?
2. Research and explain what purpose back story or exposition plays in a narrative. Explain whether this is used more in some genres than others.

STUDY TIP

When examining characters in media products, you must ask the following questions:

1. How are characters established?
2. When and how do you first meet the protagonist?
3. What are they doing?
4. How are they dressed?
5. How are they lit?
6. What shot is used?
7. What personal information do we know about them?
8. What motivates them and how/when do we learn this?
9. When do you first meet the antagonist? What is the relationship between the two?
10. How is this established?

If your narrative product is able to do all of these things and you can confidently answer them, you should already be able to build expectations for what might happen in the story.



CAUSE AND EFFECT

Stories are defined by cause-and-effect relationships between characters, events and actions. The protagonist will have their motivation and this sets up the cause-and-effect chain, where their actions (cause) create effects. A cause-and-effect chain could be seen, for example, as the number of guards Bruce Lee defeats before he arrives in the lair of the evil villain in the movie *Enter the Dragon* (1973, dir. Robert Clouse). However, Bruce Lee needs a reason or motivation to do this. Without character motivation, and therefore cause and effect, the narrative cannot progress.

ACTIVITY 7.19

Cause and effect

In the Bruce Lee film *Enter the Dragon* (1973, dir. Robert Clouse), the main character's goal is to defeat an evil villain who has an army of devoted followers. As Lee cannot defeat the army alone, he breaks into an underground jail and frees the prisoners held there. The effect of this action is that Lee now has an army of equal size to help him take on the antagonist, Han.



FIGURE 7.27 Bruce Lee in *Enter the Dragon*

Now revisit the media product you examined in Activity 7.17 and answer these questions:

1. Explain how cause and effect helps move the narrative forward between the opening and closing sequences of your chosen narrative.
2. Can you identify a key event in the film and analyse how it triggered subsequent actions or reactions from the characters?
3. How does the main character's decision-making drive the plot in the film? Can you provide an example where a decision significantly impacted the story's direction?
4. Discuss how the film utilises the cause-and-effect narrative structure to build suspense or tension. Are there specific scenes that stand out?
5. Can you analyse a scene where an external event (cause) has a profound effect on the characters and their relationships?
6. How does the cause-and-effect pattern in the film contribute to its overall theme or message? Provide specific examples to support your analysis.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. Define the narrative term 'cause and effect'.
2. What is a 'cause-and-effect chain'?

POINT OF VIEW

Point of view looks at from which perspective a narrative is presented to the audience. Some narratives have a shift in point of view, while others only ever present what the protagonist experiences. Point of view helps us understand the nature of the narrative and how much information the audience is being provided. This can enhance engagement in the story as the audience may not be able to predict the ending, as some elements of the story are hidden, or they will know what to expect and are engaged in watching the character deal with each situation as it arises. These are known as restricted or unrestricted narratives.

Another way of thinking of this is by contemplating whose side the audience is on. It can be indicated by a voice-over or by the audience only knowing as much as the main character. When determining the point of view, you need to examine how the audience is provided with information. As in the 1979 film *Alien*, if the audience unravels the story at the same time as the characters, this is known as a *restricted narrative*, as it is only told from the direct and peripheral vision of the main character. Restricted narration limits the viewer to what characters know (or less), which can create greater curiosity for the viewer and lead to surprise.



FIGURE 7.28 Harrison Ford as the title character in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989)

Unrestricted narratives are often told from an outsider or 'third person' view. If two characters are in a room arguing, the audience is in there with them, but unlike restricted or first-person stories, the audience is simply observing in an omniscient position, where the characters are not aware of the audience's presence. Unrestricted narration is when the viewer knows more than the character, which can help build suspense. Film narratives often utilise both restricted and unrestricted narration to some extent.

The point of view can change from scene to scene to make the narrative more exciting. The 2006 film *Babel* (dir. Alejandro González Iñárritu) tells a story of six unrelated characters whose stories intersect.



FIGURE 7.29 Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) and Corporal Hicks (Michael Biehn) discuss strategy in *Aliens* (1986)

Media codes like camera can be essential to helping us understand point of view. In Figure 7.28, we see Indiana Jones (Harrison Ford) in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989, dir. Steven Spielberg). It is important to note that a restricted narrative does not mean we are physically seeing the action take place through the eyes of the character (as in a first-person shooter game). In this image, we see Indiana Jones' reaction to a particular scene that he experiences, and so the audience ride the emotion of the story along with him, but are restricted by the knowledge that he gains along his journey.

However, in this image (Figure 7.29) from *Aliens* (1986, dir. James Cameron) the audience is positioned further back from a discussion among the characters as an observer of the action, and as such can bring knowledge of other events from the narrative to their understanding. In this scene, the audience have been able to gather information about the aliens that have surrounded Ripley (the main character) and her team. This conversation between the team creates the sense that the audience is within the scene and is one of the team, working on the solution together, thus making it unrestricted.



ACTIVITY 7.20

Restricted or unrestricted narratives

Task 1

Research the storylines used in the following films and determine whether they are restricted or unrestricted narratives. Use an example from the scenes shown in your answer.

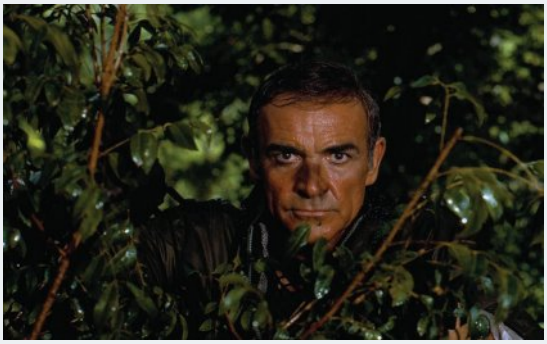


FIGURE 7.30 Sean Connery in *Never Say Never Again* (1983, dir. Irvin Kershner)



FIGURE 7.31 Cate Blanchett and Rupert Everett in *An Ideal Husband* (1999, dir. Oliver Parker)



FIGURE 7.32 Sylvester Stallone and Carl Weathers in *Rocky* (1976, dir. John G Avildsen)



FIGURE 7.33 Peter Sellers, Ursula Andress and Orson Welles in *Casino Royale* (1967, dir. Ken Hughes et al.)

Task 2

Choose one of the films above and answer the following questions:

1. Using media codes, explain how point of view is established in this narrative.
2. In the context of the film you've studied, can you identify and discuss key scenes where the narrative is presented from a restricted point of view?
3. Can you describe instances in the film where the narrative utilises an unrestricted or third-person viewpoint? How does this impact the suspense or tension within the film?
4. How does the film balance the use of both restricted and unrestricted narratives? Provide examples to support your analysis.
5. Discuss how the shift in point of view, if any, in the film affects the audience's engagement and understanding of the story.
6. Whose perspective is dominant in the narrative, and how does this point of view shape the film's overall theme or message? Can you identify a scene where this is particularly evident?

THE STRUCTURING OF TIME

Structuring of time as utilised in narratives is not how time passes in the traditional sense, but how time is structured in the media product. Are there flash-forwards? Flashbacks? Is time manipulated in any way? These conventions allow the storyteller to take the audience forwards and backwards out of the 'real time' of the story itself. For example, in order to understand the origin story of a superhero, and thus understand their intrinsic motive, the author may 'flash back' to a moment in the past that explains how and why they became the character they are. Conversely, a 'flash-forward' can give the audience an idea of what may be waiting in the future of the narrative, which builds anticipation within the audience. In the film *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1992, dir. James Cameron) the opening sequence includes a flash-forward to a world where a nuclear war has destroyed Earth, which in turn gives the characters motivation to work with a time-travelling cyborg to prevent the disaster.

Structuring of time can also be examined for its *expansion* and *contraction of time*. In some narratives, time can be expanded to slow action down to show as much detail as possible from a limited time period. For example, when James Bond is defusing a device that has the potential to destroy Earth (for the umpteenth time) he will work feverishly against a countdown clock. The 10 seconds he has left to defuse the device rarely correlates with real time. This is done to enhance the excitement and tension of the audience.

Time can be contracted too. Ever wanted to defeat your bullies but don't have time to receive advice from a quietly spoken but wise man living in your apartment building *and* train to be a karate expert? No? That's OK, just do it all in a montage. Over a series of connected, but seemingly unrelated scenes edited together, you can learn the very basics of your chosen martial art all the way to the more complex task of standing one-footed in a boat. When a lot of information or time needs to be communicated to an audience, time can be contracted to show a number of events in a period of mere minutes that could equate to a few days, weeks or years within the story. This technique is useful to show character growth.

In addition, contraction of time can be found in several narratives to communicate the passage of a fixed amount of time. An opening shot of students entering a high school is usually followed by the sound of school, which then cuts to a group of students sitting in a class. Nobody really needs to see the students going to their lockers, milling around in front of the class and racing to get the best seat, when the action is primarily concerned with what happens in the room.

LINEAR AND NON-LINEAR NARRATIVES

Hollywood films commonly utilise two distinct storytelling methods: linear and non-linear narratives. Linear narratives follow a straightforward, chronological structure, guiding the audience from the story's beginning, through the middle and finally to its end, in the order that events occur. They provide a clear, continuous progression of time and events, offering an uncomplicated method of storytelling that audiences can easily follow. On the other hand, non-linear narratives deviate from this direct timeline. They might involve flashbacks or flash-forwards, time jumps or multiple timelines running concurrently. The story may begin at the end, the middle or shift between different points in time. This narrative style, while more complex, can offer a unique perspective, add suspense or provide deeper character insights, enhancing the cinematic experience for the audience.



ACTIVITY 7.21

Analysis: Time and story arc

Considering the range of narratives you have examined in this chapter, choose one to complete the following questions:

1. Can you analyse the instances where the film you studied uses a linear narrative? How does this style influence the storytelling and the audience's understanding of the plot?
2. Identify and discuss the moments where the film employs non-linear narrative techniques, such as flashbacks or flash-forwards. How does this impact the overall storytelling and the development of characters?
3. How does the film balance between linear and non-linear narrative structures? Provide specific examples to support your analysis.
4. Discuss the impact of narrative structure (linear or non-linear) on the film's overall theme and message.
5. Does the use of non-linear storytelling add depth and complexity to the film's plot or characters? Can you identify scenes that particularly demonstrate this?

What is the relationship between media narratives and the contexts in which they were produced?

> No word is absolutely wrong or dirty or insulting. It all depends on context and intention.
>
> — Janet Jackson

As students of Media, it is vital that we understand the role that context plays in the creation and reception of media products. The time, place and society in which a media product is created is central to the ways in which we as audiences are able to understand and engage. In this area of study, you will examine the context of the media product that you consume. Through this exploration, you will gain an insight into the factors that impacted and influenced the creator of the narrative – these factors could influence the style, aesthetic and genre of the product, or the issues, themes and 'messages' presented in the narrative.

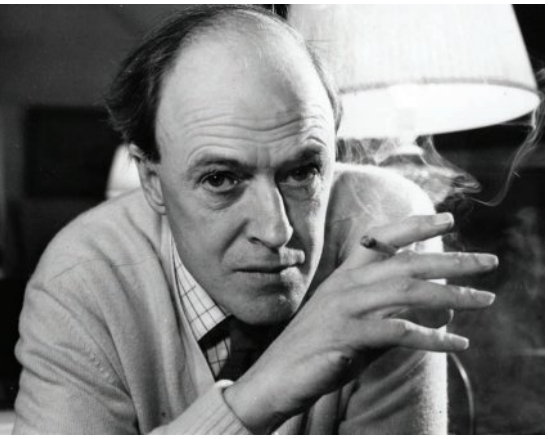


FIGURE 7.34 The late British children's author Roald Dahl, whose books written in the 1960s have been altered by their publisher to suit modern tastes

By gaining an understanding and an awareness of the context of a media product, we are able to understand how historical and societal changes have shifted. Media products are like artefacts of a particular time and place. Viewing a film from the 1960s in the 2020s can be a very different experience to the audience who first viewed the film. As modern audiences, we may find the overt sexism or racism of some media products deeply offensive and unacceptable in a modern context. However, when we apply a cultural lens and contextual frame around the media product, we can see how these lines, characters and representations were accepted by the society of the time.

For example, the classic children's stories written by Roald Dahl in the 1960s and 1970s have been criticised by some modern-day readers as offensive and inappropriate for young readers. Vivid descriptions of characters' physical appearances, references to mental health and disability and gendered terms that may not be widely accepted in modern narratives

appear throughout Dahl's works. As a result, the publisher of the books, Penguin Random House, has made changes to the language to reflect a more modern society. In his classic 1983 novel, *The Witches*, the supernatural females posing as ordinary women are now working as 'top scientists or running a business' rather than being a 'cashier or typing letters for a businessman'. This move has come under fire from many authors, academics and social commentators who feel that these classic books were written at a particular time, for a particular audience and that rather than change the language, we must teach children about context. Critics complain that revisions to suit 21st-century political correctness risk undermining the genius of great artists and artworks.

Whether the media product we are studying is from the past or is contemporary, having a sound awareness and understanding of the context in which it was created will give you a clear insight into the purposeful choices made by the creator – both artistically and thematically.

7.5 Media narrative case studies

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- the construction of media narratives in selected media forms
- how audiences engage with, consume and read media narratives
- the relationship between and the function of codes and narrative conventions to convey meaning in selected media forms
- the relationship between media narratives and the contexts in which they were produced
- the construction of representations in media narratives and how they reflect or challenge views and values of a specific context
- the ways in which audiences from different contexts engage with, consume and read media narratives.

Parasite (2019, dir. Bong Joon-ho)

CONSTRUCTION OF *PARASITE*

Bong Joon-ho's film *Parasite* (2019) is a three-act film, shot in colour, that utilises the genres of comedy, drama and thriller in each act. Set in 2019 in South Korea, *Parasite* follows the adventures and tragedies of the Kim family, led by the ambitious older son Ki-woo (Choo Woo-shik), as they desperately seek an escape from their life of poverty. A fortuitous visit from a wealthy friend sets Ki-woo on a quest to use deception and cunning to not only weave his way into the service of the wealthy Park family, but to plant his own family members into well-paid positions in the Park home.

In the first act, the audience are engaged by the affable, but deceptive nature of the Kims, who live on the poverty line in a dirty basement home in a poor Seoul neighbourhood. To convince the Park family that Ki-woo can work as an English tutor for the teenage Da-hye (Jung Ji-so) of the Park family, he must use the creative Photoshop skills of his more abrasive sister Ki-jung (Park So-dam) to forge his university qualifications. One by one, Ki-woo masterminds the entrance of Ki-jung as an art tutor to Da-song, the younger and more precocious Park family member, and his father Ki-taek (Song Kang-ho) and mother Chung-sook (Jang Hye-jin) as the Park family driver and maid, respectively.

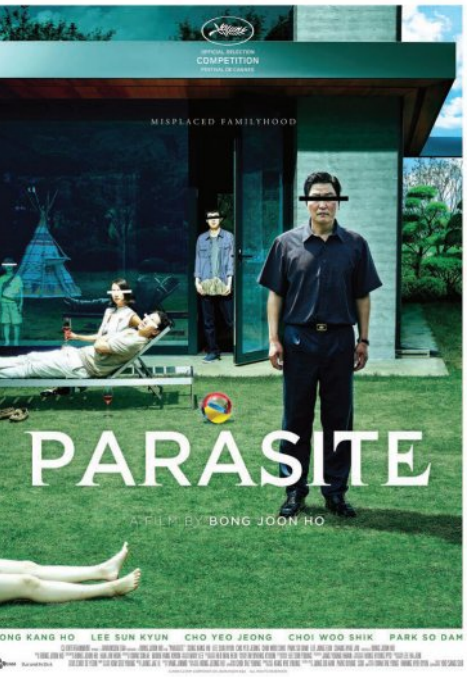


FIGURE 7.35 The film poster for the film *Parasite* (2019, dir. Bong Joon-ho)



FIGURE 7.36 In the opening sequence of *Parasite* the family are folding pizza boxes as their last source of income, moments before the apartment is flooded with fumigation gas.



FIGURE 7.37 Ki-jung and Ki-woo rehearse their scam before entering the Park family home

As the audience are engaged by Ki-woo's plan, Bong Joon-ho uses comedy as a vehicle to draw the audience into his 'hero's journey'. While the dishonesty of Ki-woo's plan may paint him as a villain in other narratives, it is the honest family bond of the Kims (and by contrast, the naive materialism of the Parks) that help the audience see humour in how they adapt to their position in life and ultimate goals. Early in the opening sequence, the family are huddled together in their basement home as a fumigator approaches their street-level window, filling the apartment with noxious gas. Rather than close the windows, Ki-taek urges them to live with the unpleasant gas as it will provide the home with free fumigation.

Through the second act, the Kims become embedded within the Park family's home as their employees, and the Parks are still unaware of the con. However, in this act, Bong Joon-ho changes the tone of the narrative towards drama, as the hidden discrimination between rich and poor begins to reveal itself. As the Parks place more and more pressure on the service of the Kims, it becomes clear that despite the Kims' ability to take an income from the Parks, they will never be considered equal. The Park family patriarch Dong-ik (Lee Sun-kyun) constantly refers to 'the line' that separates the rich from the poor. It is at this point that Ki-taek develops a deep animosity towards Dong-ik and his family's success. When the Parks go away for Da-song's birthday, the Kims gorge themselves on the Parks' liquor cabinet and remark on their disdain for the wealthy. In the midst of this act, the narrative takes a dark turn as the recently fired housekeeper Moon-gwang (Lee Jung-eun) returns to rescue her husband (Geun-sae, played by Park Myung-hoon), who had secretly been living in the basement for years, where isolation has made him somewhat deranged.

It is at this point that the nature of *Parasite* reaches a point of no return. Not only has their con been discovered, but the Parks return early, forcing a dramatic and violent confrontation between cellar dwellers and the Kims which leads to Moon-gwang being thrown down into the cellar, hitting her head on the way down. The imminent return of the Parks spurs a mad escape for Ki-woo, Ki-jung and Ki-taek into a torrential storm that has flooded their basement home, leaving Chung-sook to frantically clean their mess and lock the secret basement door, trapping the now desperate cellar dwellers in. As the escaped Kims salvage whatever they can from their flooded home, Ki-woo clings to the dream that his plan will still succeed, despite all hope seemingly lost.

In the third and final act, Bong Joon-ho uses the drama of act two to turn the audience towards a thriller. The Parks, totally unaware of the drama that unfolded in their own home the previous evening, the desperate situation of the Kims, and the couple near death in their own basement, organise an impromptu party for Da-song. Desperate to cling to his dream of success (and new-found love for Da-hye), Ki-woo decides to secretly enter the basement and murder the cellar dwellers. Fortunately, for the audience and their connection to the hero, Ki-woo's plan fails as Geun-sae has seen his wife slowly die and emerges from the basement intent on revenge. In the midst of a high-society party, Ki-woo is dramatically felled by Geun-sae, who takes a large steak knife into the

middle of the party, murders Ki-jung and in a thrilling turn of events, Ki-taek takes the knife to Dong-ik as the party guests flee in terror.

In the resolution of the narrative, it is discovered that in the chaos, Ki-taek escaped to the basement to hide from the police. Ki-woo and his surviving mother are charged with the crime; however, Ki-woo lives with permanent brain damage and is set free. As the pace of the narrative draws to its conclusion, the audience are drawn into Ki-woo's own deranged fantasy that he is able to save enough money to eventually buy the Parks' luxurious house and free his father. The narrative closes on the soul-crushing note that his dream is just that. An impossible reality that never occurred.



ACTIVITY 7.22

Analysing narrative structure

1. Create a diagram using the three-act structure, and plot the key events of each act in *Parasite*.
2. Using the diagram, complete the following tasks:
   - Annotate the moments where the convention of cause and effect drives the narrative forward.
   - Annotate the events that develop Ki-woo's character arc.
   - Identify the location of the key scenes headlined in this section.
   - Create character profiles of each of the Kim family members that explain their personality traits and role in the narrative.

HOW AUDIENCES ENGAGE WITH AND READ *PARASITE*

Bong Joon-ho's previous work and audience expectations

Parasite is a Korean film made for Korean audiences. However, its universal construction of a hero's journey and the theme of an underdog struggling to succeed are universal, as is Bong Joon-ho's representation of class struggle found in his previous work.

By the time *Parasite* was released in 2019, he was already an established director in both Korea and Hollywood. In 2006, he directed *The Host*, a monster film about a creature that emerges from a river in Seoul and begins devouring people. Such was the immense popularity of the film that a sculpture of the monster was erected next to the river where the film was shot. On the back of his early success, Bong Joon-ho was a frequent guest at the Melbourne International Film Festival.

However, in Hollywood, Bong Joon-ho went on to create notoriety as a director for his films *Snowpiercer* (2013) and *Okja* (2017). Both films were a sharp critique of wealth and inequality within society. *Snowpiercer* was perhaps his best-known work (despite *The Host* being viewed over 10 million times in Korean cinemas) prior to *Parasite* and gave audiences a good understanding of Bong Joon-ho's style and views on modern society.

Set in a dystopian future on a train that perpetually circles the world after a climate catastrophe has made the world uninhabitable, *Snowpiercer* follows the battle of the protagonist Curtis (Chris Evans), who is stuck in the squalid rear of the train where the poor and downtrodden live. Curtis fights his way to the front of the train to tackle the wealthy elite who live off the labour of the poor at the back. While the premise of *Snowpiercer* seems odd at first glance, Bong Joon-ho revealed his desire to tackle larger issues of inequality. It was on the set of *Okja*, another dystopian narrative that critiques greed, where he began conceptualising *Parasite*.

Throughout his career, one that stretches back past *The Host*, his films were often dark, violent and danced between genres. However, his views of modern society were present in many of his works as a writer and director.



ACTIVITY 7.23

Analysing a director's style

1 Watch the trailers for as many Bong Joon-ho films as you can. What do you notice about each one?
2 How would you define the style and common techniques used in his films?
3 Why do you think he chose such a diverse range of genres and styles to discuss themes of modern society and inequality?
4 How does Bong Joon-ho's concentration on class and inequality create expectations for audiences prior to the release of *Parasite*?

Parasite and Korean audiences

On the first viewing of *Parasite*, there are many elements of the text a non-Korean audience may not understand and, in turn, miss crucial elements of the narrative. In the opening sequence, Ki-woo's friend Min-hyuk (Park Seo-joon) visits and gives the family a landscape stone as a gift. The stone plays a crucial role in the narrative as it acts as Ki-woo's 'lucky charm', as he believes the stone is a metaphor for his future success. To non-Korean audiences, it may appear an odd choice as a gift. In the same scene, Chung-sook is less than impressed as she states that it would have been better if Min-hyuk had given them food.

However, in Korean culture, the gift of such a rock has meaning. Known as a 'scholar's stone' for the tradition of Confucian writers who had placed them on their desks as far back as the 16th century, the gift of such an object was seen as a wish for the recipient to find good luck and prosperity. That Ki-woo treats the stone as 'so metaphorical' suggests Korean audiences would have understood the role it played in Ki-woo's character arc and, of course, would have been shocked at its role in the third act.

In addition to the choice of the landscape stone, Bong Joon-ho's choice of actors to play each role in *Parasite* had specific resonance with Korean audiences and played a significant role in creating expectations in the opening sequence.

Much of the cast were already well known within Korea, specifically the actor Song Kang-ho, who plays Ki-taek, the father of the Kim family. Having already appeared in many of Bong Joon-ho's films, Song Kang-ho was a dominant presence in Korean cinema. Noted for his wide variety of roles, it was his common role as a comedic father-figure that meant the long-time collaborators would be able to immediately build audience expectations in Korea.



FIGURE 7.38 Bong Joon-ho and his long-time collaborator Song Kang-ho

After *Parasite's* release Bong claimed that as screenwriter he was anxious about being able to deliver the 'bold, unexpected or somewhat controversial moments in its latter part'. By casting Song Kang-ho and understanding that audiences would have certain expectations about the type of character he often plays, Bong felt that audiences would find the narrative to be convincing. The widespread success of the film suggests that the tactic worked.

ACTIVITY 7.24

Examine the past work of actor Song Kang-ho

1. List as many films that Song Kang-ho has appeared in that you can find.
2. Examine the roles he played in *Memories of Murder* (2003, dir. Bong Joon-ho), *The Host* (2006) and *Snowpiercer* (2015). Summarise the characters that he played in each one.
3. What expectations would this create for Korean audiences when he appears on screen in the opening sequence of *Parasite*?

In a smaller, yet significant role, Park Seo-joon was chosen to play the role of Ki-woo's wealthy friend Min-hyuk. Park Seo-joon's character appears briefly to create the turning point of Ki-woo's journey at the beginning of the film as a well-dressed, charming and assertive friend; everything Ki-woo is not. The choice of Park Seo-joon came from his long background as a K-drama (Korean television or streaming series) star. Popular with younger audiences, he was already established as something of a teen idol in Korea and not only was he immediately recognisable to Korean audiences as the confident and successful Min-hyuk, but he provided the perfect contrast to the meek, poorly dressed and unassuming Ki-woo. Bong Joon-ho used the shining light of Park Seo-joon in Korean popular culture to highlight the fictional darkness that the Kim family lives in.



FIGURE 7.39 Park Seo-joon as Min-hyuk

ACTIVITY 7.25

Research task

1. Research the past work of Park Seo-joon. How would you characterise his career?
2. Considering his existing popularity, how do you think his appearance in the opening sequence would have affected Korean audiences?
3. How do you think casting Park Seo-joon as Min-hyuk in this role created expectations for the narrative?
4. Make a list of actors and celebrities within Australian popular culture that could play a similar role. What are the qualities that would immediately build the same audience expectations?

HOW CODES AND NARRATIVE CONVENTIONS ARE USED TO CONVEY MEANING IN *PARASITE*

The opening sequence: The Kim family home

The opening sequence is the perfect opportunity to dive into any narrative, and Bong Joon-ho establishes not only the Kim family and their condition, but the purpose of Ki-woo's quest.



FIGURE 7.40 Ki-woo and Ki-jung huddle to get a wi-fi signal in the opening sequence of *Parasite*

As the camera cranes down below the window of their basement apartment, we meet Ki-woo and Ki-jung as they frantically search for a corner in the apartment for a wi-fi signal as theirs has been cut off, a simple but effective sign for the audience that the Kims are struggling financially. As the siblings find a weak 2G signal in the bathroom, the pair huddle together around their phones. It is in this single shot that Bong Joon-ho is able to establish the true nature of the Kims' situation. The audience are introduced to an overcrowded bathroom, strewn with toiletries, cracked tiles, mould and dirt. Strangely, the toilet is raised above the floor, and it is the only place the two can effectively use their phones.

ACTIVITY 7.26

Visual analysis

Examine the still (Figure 7.40) from the opening sequence:

1. Make note of all of the mise en scene elements.
2. Explain the camera shot used and why Bong Joon-ho chose this.
3. Explain the use of lighting. How does this support the establishment of the two characters within the shot?
4. How does the use of codes and conventions establish audience expectations within this shot?

STUDY TIP

Refer back to Section 7.4 for more detail on the function of media codes and conventions.

The opening sequence: The the pizza company

Soon after the toilet shot, the Kims' only source of income is discovered as they fold pizza boxes for a local restaurant. When the representative of the shop arrives to complain about their shoddy work, a confrontation ensues in the street that reveals more information about the family as a unit. As the pizza employee is caught in a charming negotiation with Ki-woo about their pay, Ki-jung and Chung-sook surround the pizza employee and close the space within the shot, as if to circle like sharks in the wild. Here the audience learns that not only does the Kim family have a strong bond and work together, but they also learn that they will do almost anything to survive.

ACTIVITY 7.27

Scene analysis

1. Note down the use of all codes and conventions you recognise in this scene.
2. Name and describe the way camera is used within this part of the opening sequence.
3. Explain why Bong Joon-ho chose this shot and what the audience learnt about the Kim family as a result.
4. Explain how the use of camera develops not only each individual Kim character, but also audience expectations for the remainder of the story.

STUDY TIP

Refer back to Section 7.4 for more detail on the function of media codes and conventions.

The opening sequence: Light light and darkness

The surprise visit of Ki-woo's successful friend Min-hyuk brings both the scholar's stone and opportunity. As you have read, the appearance of this stone has significant meaning to Korean audiences and Min-hyuk's offer of a job as an English tutor to a wealthy family logically follows the appearance of the 'metaphorical' gift. However, Bong Joon-ho uses the scene to further illustrate the dire situation of Ki-woo through a clever use of lighting. As the friends visit a local convenience store to share a bottle of Soju (a popular Korean liquor), Min-hyuk is shot facing Ki-woo, with his expensive scooter in the mid ground behind him and far into the background a warm, low-key streetlight. As Bong Joon-ho cuts between Ki-woo and Min-hyuk during the conversation, the warm light contrasts with the cold, dark shadows that surround Ki-woo. Throughout the entire narrative, light is used as a symbol of wealth, hope and prosperity, and shadow as the opposite, and here it is used to define the difference between a successful university student and another whose life appears adrift.

ACTIVITY 7.28

Scene analysis

1. Make notes on the use of mise en scene elements of hair and costume. How does this help differentiate the two characters?
2. Explain the use of lighting in detail. Why did the director choose these two methods of lighting in this scene? What effect does it have on the audience?
3. Explain the convention of cause and effect within this scene. What effect does this fortuitous offer have on the narrative journey of Ki-woo?

STUDY TIP

Refer back to Section 7.4 for more detail on the function of media codes and conventions.

The opening sequence: The plan

When Ki-woo decides to take Min-hyuk's offer to tutor the daughter of a wealthy family, he must first convince them that he has qualifications and an education that he does not possess. Using the crafty photoshop skills of Ki-jung, he forges his graduation certificate (a skill even Ki-taek marvels at) and as he prepares to leave the apartment for the interview, he explains to Ki-taek that he is not necessarily being dishonest, he has simply printed out 'early' the qualifications from a university he still plans to attend. A proud father, Ki-taek marvels that his son 'has a plan'. This notion of 'the plan' becomes a driving motivation for Ki-woo and the Kim family themselves throughout the narrative, and this moment acts as the 'inciting incident' in the narrative arc. As Ki-woo leaves the apartment, he walks boldly into the strong, high-key light of the day, leaving the darkness of his apartment behind.

ACTIVITY 7.29

Scene analysis

1. Discuss the convention of storylines. How does the emergence of 'the plan' drive the story forward from this point?
2. Compare the use of light at the end of this scene to that used in the scene with Min-hyuk and Ki-woo. How has lighting been used to symbolise the hope of wealth and prosperity?

STUDY TIP

Refer back to Section 7.4 for more detail on the function of media codes and conventions.



REMOVING THE HOUSEKEEPER

As the narrative progresses, the Kims begin to infiltrate the Park family one by one, first with Ki-jung as an art tutor, and then Ki-taek as the family's driver. Each infiltration takes meticulous and cunning planning on the part of the Kims. The Parks are none the wiser that this team of new employees are all related. The final piece of Ki-woo's plan is to remove the long-standing family housekeeper Moon-gwang. As this is the highpoint of Ki-woo's deception, Bong Joon-ho utilises a range of codes to illustrate how this plan comes together. A narration of Ki-jung's 'intelligence gathering' on the existing housekeeper is shared with Ki-woo in hushed, conspiratorial tones. A spirited orchestral score accompanies the development of the plan as a montage of tasks are shown to not only determine the behaviours of Moon-gwang, but in true heist movie fashion, detail the plan the Kims will use to get her fired. Within the montage, the audience discover that Moon-gwang has a life-threatening allergy to peaches and as Ki-jung walks from the same corner store where Min-hyuk and Ki-woo shared a drink in the opening sequence, she raises a peach into the air, bathed in high-key naturalistic sunlight.



FIGURE 7.41 The high point of the removal of the housekeeper in *Parasite* as Ki-jung discovers a coughing and spluttering housekeeper

A close-up is used to illustrate the pivotal role the single piece of fruit will play in 'the plan' as Ki-jung dramatically blows the tiny hairs of the peach into the sunlight. It is, of course, no coincidence that in this shot she travels up the street towards the streetlamps that had previously bathed Min-hyuk in prosperous light. As the meticulous elements of the plan fall together, the orchestral score that sat quietly in the background becomes more spirited as the volume is raised along with the heightening stakes of the plan.

At the conclusion of the scene, a carefully edited montage of a conspiracy being planned and actioned in real time, the Park family matriarch Yeon-kyo (Cho Yeo-jeong) is fooled into thinking their housekeeper had contracted tuberculosis and has her immediately fired, and through yet another piece of masterful deception, Chung-sook is hired as the Park family's new housekeeper. At this stage of the narrative, the audience are now placed at the highpoint of Ki-woo's plan for success.

ACTIVITY 7.30

Scene analysis

1 Carefully examine the use of codes and conventions in this scene. It may help to work with a partner to make notes on the use of:
- camera
- sound
- lighting
- acting
- editing.

2 How is time structured in this scene? Why has Bong Joon-ho chosen to alter time in this way (especially considering it is one of only two occasions it is used within the narrative)?

3 Explain the use of sound in this scene. How would you define the music? Why was this style of music used in this scene? What information does it convey about the sophistication of Ki-woo's plan?

4 Explain how editing and sound work together in this scene. Why has Bong Joon-ho placed a rising orchestral score alongside a montage of Ki-woo's plan? What effect does it have on the audience?

STUDY TIP

Refer back to Section 7.4 for more detail on the function of media codes and conventions.

THE FLOOD SCENE

Shortly after the success of removing the housekeeper, and the Kim family seemingly reaching its goal, chaos enters the narrative as Moon-gwang returns and her husband Geun-sae is revealed to be hiding in the basement. After a lengthy confrontation, the Kims manage to trap the cellar-dwellers below the house shortly before the Parks return from their aborted camping trip. While Moon-gwang is critically injured in the dash to escape, Ki-taek, Ki-jung and Ki-woo flee into the night and into a torrential storm. A critical point in the narrative, the flood scene illustrates both the collapse of Ki-woo's plan and the desperate return of the Kims to their flooded and destroyed basement apartment. Their lives destroyed, the audience are alerted to the struggles faced by the poor in Korea, living below 'the line' (a reference made throughout the narrative) and forced to endure a flood that would never affect the Park family, whose home is higher on the hill and leaves them oblivious to the devastation below. In one interesting sequence, the fleeing Kims travel down from the Park home, through tunnels, down staircases and alleys, all the while chased by the floodwaters as they run, signifying their geographic and symbolic fall from grace.

ACTIVITY 7.31

Scene analysis

STUDY TIP

Refer back to Section 7.4 for more detail on the function of media codes and conventions.

1 Carefully examine this still from the flood scene (Figure 7.42). Explain the use of:
   - lighting
   - camera
   - mise en scene
   - sound
   - acting.

2 For each code, explain why Bong Joon-ho chose to use them, and the impact each has on the audience.

3 You will notice that this still is from the same alleyway where Min-hyuk and Ki-woo met and Ki-jung bought the peach. What do you notice that is different about the action within this scene, compared to the others? Why did Bong Joon-ho choose to include this scene in the sequence of the flood scene?

4 Consider the movement of the actors through each shot in this sequence. What does their downward movement suggest about the situation facing the Kims?



FIGURE 7.42 Ki-taek, Ki-jung and Ki-woo flee the Park family home amid a flood to return to their basement apartment

5 At the midst of the flood scene, the family stops to catch their breath and Ki-woo wonders aloud what 'Min-hyuk would do in this situation' and Ki-jung quickly retorts that 'Min-hyuk would never be in this situation'. Why has Bong Joon-ho chosen to add this piece of dialogue in here? What comment is he making about Ki-woo's plan and his attempt to find wealth and prosperity?

6 At the close of this scene, the camera bobs below the rising floodwaters of the basement apartment, utilising the exact same shot as seen at the very beginning of the narrative. Explain in detail how camera is used in this scene and detail what Bong Joon-ho was attempting to communicate to his audience here.



CLOSING SEQUENCE

The closing sequence begins after the drama of Da-song's party and is detailed by Ki-woo's reflective narration as he details the tragedy of Ki-jung's death and his father's disappearance. In what appears as a moment for hope for the audience, it seems that Ki-woo, despite his brain injury, is able to piece together the morse code messages of Ki-taek, who it is revealed, escaped into the basement and away from the eyes of the police. It is at this point that Bong Joon-ho reserves his harshest criticism of Korean society in the narrative. Throughout the story, Ki-woo clung to a 'plan' that would see his family rise from poverty, and in this sequence, Bong Joon-ho teases the audiences that this may become a reality. However, the audience soon realise Ki-taek's survival in the basement is impossible, as is Ki-woo's quest for a life of wealth. In one short sequence, Ki-woo places the scholar's stone into a river and then cuts to a shot of a well-dressed Ki-woo purchasing the old Park home. The possibility of this ending is a deluded fantasy. The final shot of the narrative ends where it began, with Ki-woo alone in his basement apartment, yet this time, shrouded in darkness as the light that had symbolised hope has been snuffed out.



FIGURE 7.43 Actor Choo Woo-Shik, who played Ki-woo in *Parasite*

As the credits roll, a song sung by the actor Choo Woo-shik, who plays Ki-woo, reveals the truth. Titled 'Soju – one glass', the lyrics detail the life of an aging alcoholic who works everyday to the point of exhaustion.

Bong Joon-ho treats the credit sequence as a 'fourth act' of the narrative to confirm that Ki-woo's plan was doomed to fail. As Ki-taek stated at the end of the flood scene, 'if you make a plan, life will never work out that way'.

ACTIVITY 7.32

Scene analysis

1. Make notes on the use of sound within the closing sequence. How does Bong Joon-ho use this to create meaning for the audience?
2. Explain the use of lighting in the final shot. What was Bong Joon-ho attempting to communicate to the audience?
3. What does Ki-woo's fantasy suggest about the resolution of his character arc?
4. Explain the resolution of the narrative. Why did Bong Joon-ho choose this ending, rather than a more upbeat and positive resolution to Ki-woo's journey?

STUDY TIP

Refer back to Section 7.4 for more detail on the function of media codes and conventions.

SUMMING IT ALL UP

Parasite ends in a bleak fashion. There is no happy ending. Only tragedy for all involved. Yet that is the point. Ki-woo's plan was never going to succeed. Throughout the narrative, the Kims are reminded that they exist 'below' the line; an imaginary division between the rich Parks and the impoverished Kims. Whether real or imagined, the line means Ki-woo's plan was always the fantasy it became in the end. What about the title of the film itself? Who is the parasite in the narrative? Is it the Kim family, desperately feeding off the wealth of the Parks? Or is it the reverse, as the Parks bleed the work and time of poor families like the Kims to suit their own needs?

It's difficult to determine who is the hero and villain in the narrative. While it is clear that Bong Joon-ho wants the audience to like Ki-woo, his deception leads him to almost commit murder. Ki-taek, despite his devotion to his family, is something of a pathetic character who has never known success. Chung-sook and Ki-jung also have admirable qualities, yet they are the worst victims of Ki-woo's scheme. So, should we feel sympathy for the Parks? Tragedy of course strikes, yet their prejudice against the poor and those 'below the line' is clear and becomes more obvious as the narrative progresses. But is that prejudice born from naivety? Is it because their wealth has prevented them from ever really understanding who the Kims are? Even though they never really knew who the Kims were!

Parasite is a tale of tragedy in the modern world. Despite what the Kims do, they will never escape from their poverty and their greatest success could have been never sinking so low as to see the depths of the cellar-dwellers of Moon-gwang and Geun-sae. Yet the Parks know so little about the real world, and it is the tragedy of their lives that such a vast chasm of understanding exists between them.

ACTIVITY 7.33

Reflection: Summing it all up

1. In your opinion, who is the parasite? Give examples of the narrative in your response.
2. After the housekeeper has been removed, why does Chung-sook say that the Parks are 'so nice'? What is she suggesting about the impact of wealth?
3. Why do you think Ki-taek killed Dong-ik?
4. How does lighting act as a constant theme in *Parasite*?
5. Why did Bong Joon-ho opt for such a bleak ending?

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN *PARASITE* AND THE CONTEXT IN WHICH IT WAS PRODUCED

Historical context

As stated earlier, *Parasite* is a Korean film for Korean audiences, but it is a harsh critique of Korean society as well. Korea has a rich culture of film and narrative and is home to complex social, political and cultural traditions, all of which find their home in the narrative of *Parasite*.

To understand the broader context of *Parasite*, it is crucial to understand the contemporary history of Korea itself. Annexed by Japan in 1910, on Japan's World War II defeat in 1945, it was divided along the 38th parallel (line of latitude) into the North occupied by the communist Soviet Union and the South occupied by the capitalist United States. South Korea is therefore a relatively young nation.

Between 1950 and 1953, a brutal war between North and South Korea destroyed any hope of reunification. As part of a broader **Cold War** conflict, the Korean War drew in the United States, Australia and Chinese forces in a short, brutal and as yet unresolved conflict. While a peace agreement ended the fighting in 1953, the two countries are technically still at war.[2] The North followed the lead of its Chinese and Russian Communist allies and became a reclusive, aggressive and isolated state run by the descendants of a single family. The South, with the support of the United States, was under military rule right up until 1992. From that moment on, South Korea rapidly grew to become one of the world's most successful democratic and **capitalist** societies. The threat of war constantly hangs over the two Koreas as frequent missile tests in the North act as a source of tension that war could erupt at any moment.

Cold War the state of hostility that existed between the Soviet bloc countries and the Western powers from 1945 to 1990

capitalism an economic and political system in which a country's trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit



FIGURE 7.44 South Korea's neighbour to the North remains an aggressive militaristic society which constantly threatens war with the South



FIGURE 7.45 South Korean football star Son Heung-min during his compulsory military service in 2020

Such is the significance of South Korea's need for defence and readiness, their most famous athlete, Son Heung-min, a footballer who plays in England, took time out from the Premier League season to undergo compulsory military service. Musical group BTS, who would rival Son for international acclaim, are also required to serve 18–21 months of military service. The protection of South Korea's existence is a constant national focus.

South Koreans have, as a result, become accustomed to this tension and this is even referenced within *Parasite*. From a young age, South Koreans are taught to prepare for attack, and to this day air-raid drills are run in major cities as a practice for possible attack from the North; the basement home of the Kims was originally intended to protect citizens in case of attack. In the Park family home, the secret basement is a reminder that many wealthy families are able to build this feature into their own homes.

ACTIVITY 7.34

Research task

1. Research a brief history of the Korean War (1950–53). How did it shape the recent history of both the North and South?
2. Research the practice of air-raid drills in South Korea. How would that shape the lives of ordinary citizens? Why would Bong Joon-ho include the concept of a secret bomb shelter in the Park family home?
3. Review the scene where Moon-gwang and Geun-sae hold the Kims hostage in the Park home. Moon-gwang gives an impression of a North Korean news presenter. Why do you think Bong Joon-ho included this scene within the script? What does it tell you about the attitudes of South Koreans to their neighbours in the North?
4. Collect clips, images, names, dates and statistics on the recent history of South Korea and the unresolved war for your video essay presentation.

Political and economic context

In response to the communism of the North, South Korea has become a vibrant capitalist economy. A world leader in manufacturing, South Korea is the home of leading technology brands like Samsung and LG and the Hyundai motor company. Such is its rise from the devastation of the Korean War, by 2022 the South ranked ninth in the economies in the **OECD**.

The guiding principle of South Korea's economic recovery from war has been that of **neoliberalism**. A complex term that is a matter of vibrant debate between historians, economists and sociologists, neoliberalism is an economic and political philosophy that emphasises business and markets as the single most important strategy of capitalist societies like South Korea, the USA and even Australia. It supports the idea that governments should not stand in the way of big business, and should reduce regulations and restrictions on the growth of the economy, which will in turn allow profit to lead to greater employment and a better life for all. Debates rage today over the success or otherwise of this strategy.

OECD the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development is an intergovernmental organisation with 38 member countries, founded in 1961 to stimulate economic progress and world trade

neoliberalism a political approach that favours free-market capitalism, deregulation and reduction in government spending

Chaebols wealthy extended families that have significant influence over South Korean finance and politics

What is clear on the surface is that for South Korea, this approach has largely been successful. Since the 1960s the average income of South Korea has improved from $120 to over $30 000 today.[3] Added to this success story is the rise of the huge Korean companies and wealthy families known as **Chaebols**. Roughly translating to 'wealthy families', the Chaebols have, with a long history of support from the South Korean government, become an essential element of South Korea's rapid growth and, thus, also an essential element of their political system. The wealth and support of the Chaebols has directly influenced South Korean elections and their say in government policy has created a history of criticism and accusations of corruption.

However, neoliberalism has been widely criticised in South Korea and in other capitalist economies for creating a huge divide between the rich and poor. While the Chaebols control wealth and influence, there are millions in South Korea who do not. In each society that adopts this policy, there exists a class of people who 'slip through the cracks' and are never able to break the cycle of poverty, represented by the Kims and their impoverished neighbours. According to the *Washington Post*, in 2020 25% of South Korea's wealth was owned by the top 1% and only 2% was owned by the bottom half of the entire population.[4] The lack of safety nets is a common feature of neoliberal societies and South Korea is no exception. At the time of *Parasite*'s release, South Korea's spending on the poor was one of the lowest in the OECD.

The sub-basement home of the Kims in *Parasite* is a symbol of this economic divide. Built as temporary shelters for air raids, a growing housing crisis in the 1990s and 2000s led to many South Koreans making them a permanent home. In 2020, 78% of those who lived in these sub-basement apartments were from the bottom 30% of South Korean society.[5] In 2022, the authorities in Seoul announced a plan to phase out this form of housing (*banjiha*) after four residents tragically drowned in a flood similar to the critical flood scene in *Parasite*.[6]



FIGURE 7.46 Workers clear a waterlogged, mud-covered basement flat known as *'banjiha'* in the Gwanak district of Seoul on 11 August 2022, after flooding caused by record-breaking rains



ACTIVITY 7.35

Reflection

1. Define neoliberalism in your own words.
2. Considering that the communist government of North Korea controls all aspects of people's lives, why would South Korea adopt neoliberalism so enthusiastically after the war?
3. What are the flaws of neoliberal societies?
4. Where do we see these flaws represented in *Parasite*?
5. Research the history of neoliberalism, and collect images, videos, names, dates, events and statistics to include within your video essay.

Social context

Political and economic ideas like neoliberalism do not exist without a popular view that it is the only means to construct a successful society. If the majority of society believes this to be true, it is reflected in social attitudes to work and education and is often reflected in popular culture, art and discussions within the media. You may have heard of the **American Dream**: a phrase born in American literature and attitudes of the United States, which promotes the idea that free and democratic societies provide people with the equal opportunity to work hard, become wealthy and consume material items like a family home.[7] Since the 1950s, this dream has become a permanent fixture of popular thought in capitalist democracies and is certainly true of South Korea and even Australia.

American Dream the ideal by which equality of opportunity is available to any American, allowing the highest aspirations and goals to be achieved

ACTIVITY 7.36

Reflection

1. Consider the dominant attitudes surrounding your own education. Why are you doing this? What motivations drive your need for an education? What is the end goal?
2. Consider the attention given to home ownership in Australian society. How have you seen this attitude represented elsewhere in popular culture and the media in Australia?
3. Consider how you could represent this idea in your own video essay. What images and videos would you choose to present this?

In *Parasite*, this dream is the central motivation of Ki-woo. Despite its deceptive nature, Ki-woo's plan is to gain wealth for his entire family and drag themselves out of their sub-basement life and into the sunshine of the Park family home, high on the hill and safe from the dangers of poverty.

In an interview with Bong Joon-ho after the release of *Parasite*, he reflected on the setting of the Kim home as a symbol of the significance of this belief in all levels of South Korean society. This can be seen in the opening sequence when Ki-woo engages with the pizza company worker and cuts to Ki-taek, happily bathing himself in the sunlight from behind the basement window.

> People live underground but want to believe that they are above the ground because they have a moment when sunlight comes into their room … But at the same time, they are afraid of falling into a complete underground situation if things get worse.

FIGURE 7.47 Interview with Bong Joon-ho, Justin McCurry, 'Seoul to Phase Out *Parasite*-style Semi-basement Flats after Storm Deaths', *The Guardian*, 11 August 2022

ACTIVITY 7.37

Reflection

1. Why did Bong Joon-ho choose a basement apartment as the home of the Kim family?
2. What comment is Bong Joon-ho making on the impact neoliberalism has had on the lives of the poor in South Korea?
3. Review the shot of Ki-taek in the opening sequence. How does this one shot reflect Bong Joon-ho's view?
4. Are there other scenes and images from *Parasite* that represent the desire for wealth and success?

STUDY TIP

Refer back to Section 7.4 for more detail on the function of media codes and conventions.

The 2016 *Oxford Handbook on the Social Science of Poverty* outlines how these views have become popular and shaped the attitudes towards wealth and poverty that we see in society, popular culture and *Parasite*. The dominant view states that poverty is the responsibility of the individual. If one is to take advantage of the 'dream' presented by free capitalist societies, people must work hard, make sacrifices and believe that anything is possible with these two ingredients.[8]

Hollywood is a great promoter of this belief. Writer Stephen Primpare states in his 2017 book *Ghettos, Tramps, and Welfare Queens: Down and Out on the Silver Screen*[9] that since 1902, Hollywood has made fewer than 300 films that genuinely examined the lives of the poor in any realistic sense. The remainder (which is literally thousands of films) blame the poor for their own situation. Be it because of a lack of work ethic, poor morals or attitudes, Hollywood has long supported the notion that the only way for the poor to improve their own lives is take responsibility for them. Hollywood, as we know, has long played a significant role in reflecting and sustaining the popular views of society.

ACTIVITY 7.38

Research task

1. Consider the 2006 film *The Pursuit of Happyness* (dir. Gabriele Muccino). Research the synopsis of the film and watch the trailer.
2. How does the film represent the dominant view that poverty can be solved with hard work?
3. What other narratives have you seen that represent this idea?
4. Are there individuals within modern society that are respected for representing this same idea? Who are they? Include these in the preparation of your video essay.



Alternatively, there is a less-dominant view that poverty is structural, meaning that there are systems in place, such as those created by governments, business and popular culture, that demonise poverty and create barriers to prevent the poor from improving their own lives. Critics of neoliberalism, such as Bong Joon-ho, suggest that there are visible and invisible barriers in modern societies that prevent families like the Kims from ever escaping their situation. This may be the attitudes of the wealthy, or the lack of support provided to families like the Kims who have experienced a series of failures, particularly in employment, that hold them back from advancing in South Korea.

University entrance

In the opening sequence of *Parasite*, it is revealed that Ki-woo had failed the university entrance exams and, unlike Min-hyuk, had been unable to forge a life of wealth and success (even though Min-hyuk appears to come from money himself). Gaining entrance into a South Korean university is notoriously difficult and a clear indication of the invisible lines that separate the rich and poor; 70% of South Koreans have a university degree, one of the highest rates in the developed world[10] and it is a clear indication of the value its society places on higher education. With so many attempting to get into the top universities, the competition for places is intense. Students often take a 'gap year' between the end of high school and the university entrance exams just to study and prepare. For those who fail the entrance exams, like Ki-woo and Ki-jung in *Parasite*, it can mean another year of study. Failure also leads to high rates of stress and anxiety among students and increased incidences of poor mental health.[11]



FIGURE 7.48 Students in South Korea sit university exams during the COVID-19 pandemic

However, with so many attempting to use education as a means of social advancement, the quality of university graduates is limited as there are only a few universities in South Korea that are of an international standard and thus unemployment among skilled youth remains high. *Parasite*'s references to the Kims' lack of education are a clear indicator of their disadvantage; however, the emphasis on Ki-jung's forged degree from an American university is given immediate approval by Yeon-kyo. While the references in the narrative are subtle, and would perhaps go unnoticed by an international audience, Bong Joon-ho highlights the severity of South Korea's education race.

Tutors

As a result of this increased competition, South Korean parents spend more on their child's education than any other developed nation in the world.[12] The competition for university places starts when children are young and, of course, within *Parasite* the angle Ki-woo and Ki-jung take advantage of is the desperate need Yeon-kyo has for the tutoring of her two children.

Tutors are an essential element of a child's education in South Korea. As recently as 2017, it was reported that more than 83% of five-year-olds and 36% of two-year-olds in South Korea receive private tutoring to improve their school results. Many attend 'cram schools', known as *Hagwon*, after their normal school day to revise essential learning. In 2017, *The Korea Herald* reported that in many cases, five-year-olds attend normal kindergarten classes by day and go to a *Hagwon* for after-school studies for up to four hours.

When writing *Parasite*, Bong Joon-ho drew on his student job as a tutor for a wealthy family. Like Ki-woo, he was provided the job by his sister, who was already the family's English tutor; however, unlike Ki-woo, Bong Joon-ho was a terrible maths tutor and was fired after only a few weeks! It did, however, provide the basis for the protagonist's infiltration of the Park family, as Bong Joon-ho was fascinated by the way in which the poor could find their way into the lives of the wealthy.[13]



FIGURE 7.49 Students in a South Korean *Hagwon*, a cram school lesson held after normal school hours

ACTIVITY 7.39

Research task

1. Why is tutoring such a valued commodity within South Korean culture?
2. Considering how many students compete for so few places at the top universities, how does access to the tutoring system advantage wealthy families?
3. Why do you think Bong Joon-ho chose tutoring as a central element of *Parasite*?
4. Consider the role of education in creating the 'invisible line' that appears in *Parasite* and add it to your video essay.

Failed businesses and a vanishing middle class

The reference to Ki-taek's failed business ventures in *Parasite* happens so quickly, a distracted audience may miss it. During the second act, as the Kims help themselves to lunch at a drivers' café (another of Ki-taek's former jobs), the family discuss 'the plan' and mention the family's failed business ventures. In a passing comment as the family piece together the timeline of Ki-taek's varied career, Ki-taek mentions a fried chicken shop and a Taiwanese cake shop which both failed. While it seems inconsequential to the narrative, this small piece of dialogue references a financial crisis that affected many South Koreans.

In the late 2010s, fried chicken restaurants in South Korea numbered 87 000, which is almost double the number of McDonald's restaurants worldwide. Fried chicken is a popular dish in South Korea; however, the rush to open restaurants selling this simple dish was fuelled by skilled workers who had lost their jobs in the global economic crises of 1997 and 2008. Chicken shops were simple, seemingly popular and easy to start.[14]



Much like the university graduates with nowhere to go, the flood of restaurants overwhelmed the market and thousands went bankrupt. In the same line of dialogue, the failed Taiwanese cake shop tells a similar story, as a custard cake fad took Korea by storm in 2015 and, once again, the market was awash with cake stores that, once again, went bust. Even Geun-sae, the deranged husband in the cellar, was a former cake shop owner who fled to the basement to hide from loans he could no longer pay.

In both cases, Bong Joon-ho uses a simple piece of dialogue that translates to sophisticated back story for both Ki-taek and Geun-sae that suggests both were once successful middle-class wage earners, but had succumbed to bankruptcy and poverty despite their best efforts. With few safety nets built into the South Korean system for those who lose their jobs and businesses, many succumbed to the basement-dwelling life of the Kims.[15]

ACTIVITY 7.40

Research task

1. How important was this small passage of dialogue in understanding the predicament of the Kim family?
2. Look back to the definitions provided by the *Oxford Handbook of Social Sciences*. What was the dominant view surrounding the reasons for poverty?
3. Why does Bong Joon-ho include this dialogue to develop an understanding of both Ki-taek's and Geun-sae's characters?
4. Does learning this change your view on each character?
5. Gather images of Korean chicken stores and cake shops and discuss how you will add this element to your video essay response.

Production context

Custom-designed sets

The production of *Parasite* was the result of meticulous planning and attention to detail. The entire neighbourhood where the Kim family lived was a carefully constructed set, as was the Park family home, which was designed and built specifically for the production of the film. Everything within the house, including the furniture, was custom designed to reflect the wealth of the Parks. To research the role, Bong Joon-ho tasked his crew with talking to hundreds of tutors, drivers and maids to understand not only their work, but the lives of those who work in service of others.

However, it is the production design of the two homes that provided much of the key moments within the narrative. As Bong Joon-ho wrote the script for *Parasite*, he used that to support the design of the Kim and Park homes. This allowed him to design the character blocking and camera angles exactly as he wanted them, rather than have it imposed upon him by an existing home or set.

Korean Wave

Parasite arrived in cinemas outside of South Korea at the crest of a popular culture movement known as 'Korean Wave'. Known locally as '*Hallyu*', Korean culture has permeated across the globe into music, art, film, fashion and food. Korean fried chicken can be found in Australian restaurants, K-Pop music is a global phenomenon and, for some time, Korean film has broken through to English-speaking audiences with the zombie epic *Train to Busan* (2016, dir. Yeon Sang-ho) a global hit film. The spread of Korean culture continues as 2021's Netflix hit *Squid Game* was the most streamed Netflix series in its history at the time.

Squid Game, a dystopian narrative based on the same themes of disadvantage as *Parasite*, certainly benefited from Bong Joon-ho's success.

This was not an accident. With the meteoric rise of South Korea's economy in the late 1990s, the government decided that an investment in Korean arts and culture would promote the nation internationally and increase investment in the local economy. It was a calculated move that paid off and South Korean popular culture exports increased by 1.2 times to 3.0 times between 2013 and 2020. *Parasite* benefited not only from an international interest in Korean culture, but also from a government-backed effort to promote the film.

Funding from high places

One of the more perplexing elements of *Parasite*'s success is where the money for the production came from. Despite its sharp critique of the wealthy elite in South Korea (Dong-ik is a representation of the wealthy Chaebol class), its funding came directly from members of the influential Samsung family.

The chief funding for *Parasite* came from Lee Mie-kyung, the heiress to the Samsung family fortune and leader of CJ Entertainment, a film company behind some of South Korea's biggest films. She has become one of the most powerful individuals in the South Korean entertainment industry. CJ Entertainment were behind almost all of Bong Joon-ho's films and Lee used her vast wealth and connections to further the goal of spreading Korean culture worldwide. A Harvard-educated lover of the arts, Lee has been instrumental in the success of *Hallyu*.

International recognition

Parasite was the first foreign-language film to win the Oscar (US Academy Award) for Best Picture, which it achieved at the 2020 Oscars. In its long history, no film spoken in a language other than English had won the award. Bong Joon-ho took home Oscars for Best Director and Best Original Screenplay and the film also won Best International Feature Film. Winning an Oscar is a complex and political business that involves much more than pleasing 'the Academy'. However, a win can guarantee a large global audience and for Lee Mie-kyung and CJ Entertainment, a huge return on their investment. The Oscars win, as well as the Palm D'or for Best Picture at Cannes in 2019, meant that *Parasite* was the crowning achievement of *Hallyu*.



FIGURE 7.50 Korean culture has been exported to the rest of the world in a variety of forms, including popular culture and cuisine.



FIGURE 7.51 Bong Joon-ho accepting the award for Best Picture at the 2020 Oscars ceremony

ACTIVITY 7.41

Reflection

1. How did access to custom-designed sets allow Bong Joon-ho to realise his narrative?
2. What is *Hallyu* and how did it contribute to the success of *Parasite*?
3. What does Lee Mie-kyung's support for *Parasite* tell you about the financial interest in Korean popular culture?



THE CONSTRUCTION OF REPRESENTATIONS IN *PARASITE* AND HOW THEY REFLECT OR CHALLENGE VIEWS AND VALUES OF SOUTH KOREA

Parasite is a critique of the modern capitalist world, challenging the idea that South Korea is an equal society that provides opportunities for all. While characters like Min-hyuk or Dong-ik may in some ways reflect and support the dominant value that success comes from hard work, many of the characters challenge this view. As you have read, the Kims are willing to do whatever it takes to rise above the line and could not be accused of laziness or a lack of effort. However, in the same breath, their morals could certainly be questioned.

Bong Joon-ho used a variety of methods throughout *Parasite* to challenge the view of neoliberalism in South Korea. The most obvious can be seen in the characters and what motivates each one. Their personality traits and the methods they use to achieve their goals allow us to explore how the dominant view is reflected.

ACTIVITY 7.42

Character analysis

Fill in the blanks table below to determine how Bong Joon-ho challenges or reflects the dominant views of neoliberalism (towards work and poverty, for instance) in South Korea. Copy and complete the table or download the worksheet version from the Interactive Textbook. Some of the character analyses have been completed for you.

Character	Representation	Reflection/Challenge
Ki-woo	Despite his poor haircut, dress and self-deprecating conversation with Min-hyuk, he has a strong drive for success. Although he failed to enter university on several occasions, he is devoted to helping his family move forward and get out of their basement apartment.	Challenge: he has a strong work ethic and a desire to succeed, and his transformation into the well-dressed and successful 'tutor' reflects a desire to succeed despite the odds.
Ki-jung		
Ki-taek	Despite the suggestion that he may once have been successful, it appears that he has given up on success. He is dressed poorly, defers to Chung-sook when confronted and appears to have lost a number of jobs. In the opening sequence a limited effort is put into his appearance.	Reflection: he is a representation of the stereotype created by neoliberalism that laziness and a lack of work ethic leads to poverty. At the conclusion of the flood scene, he confirms this when he states the best plan is no plan at all. In short, Ki-taek had already given up trying.
Chung-sook		
Moon-gwang		
Geun-sae		
Dong-ik		
Yeon-kyo		

ACTIVITY 7.43

The line

Throughout the narrative the Park family, in particular Dong-ik, refers to 'the line' that it appears the poor are not allowed to cross. The invisible line between rich and poor society is used by Bong Joon-ho to illustrate the impossible task of Ki-woo executing 'the plan' and joining the wealthy class. While Dong-ik uses the phrase in reference to his driver and eventually Ki-taek as well, it appears throughout the narrative in a physical form.

Consider the following stills from the film and explain how Bong Joon-ho used media codes to illustrate the existence of 'the line'.

Still	Task	Response	Reflection/ Challenge
	In this scene, Bong Joon-ho uses camera and mise en scene to illustrate the invisible line that separates the rich and poor. Annotate what you can see within the shot that illustrates this.		
	In the third act of the film, Ki-woo looks down on the wealthy guests at Da-song's party and wonders aloud if he will ever fit in with the wealthy. Bong Joon-ho again uses camera and lighting to represent Ki-woo and the person he aspires to be.		
	In many scenes throughout *Parasite*, when the Kims are working for the Parks, acting and mise en scene are used to demonstrate those who enjoy the comforts of being above the line and those who do not.		



ACTIVITY 7.44

The light

As discussed earlier in this chapter, light is used as a symbol to represent the differing lives of the rich and poor. In the Kim homes, high-key, cold fluorescent light dulls the colour of the apartment. Yet inside the Park home, it is bathed in sunlight during the day (something the Kims rarely see in the basement) and warm, low-key lighting at night, creating a sense of comfort and rich colours. In the scene directly after the opening sequence, as Ki-woo enters the front yard of the Park home, he is bathed in glorious high-key naturalistic light, celebrating the success of the Parks, representing the advantages of the wealth the Parks have acquired. And, yet, during the removing the housekeeper scene, the audience find Ki-woo in the same location, but this time in the gloomy low-key light of the early evening as he executes the insidious element of the plan by poisoning Moon-gwang with peach fur.

Compare the lighting between the two family homes.

	
What representation is created of the Kim family with lighting?	What representation is created of the Park family with lighting?

THE WAYS IN WHICH AUDIENCES FROM DIFFERENT CONTEXTS ENGAGE WITH, CONSUME AND READ *PARASITE*

It is clear that *Parasite* requires a detailed knowledge of Korean culture to fully engage and read the narrative. However, the universal theme of inequality is what made the film such a success internationally. Audiences from different contexts and countries are still able to engage with the film despite the subtle references to Korean culture, as the gap between rich and poor affects all capitalist democracies. The socioeconomic status of an individual audience member may determine how they read the Kim and Park families, as well as their opinion on the dominant view of neoliberalism. As you will have learnt in this study, Australia has a long history of celebrating the underdog in popular culture.

The 1997 Australian cult classic *The Castle* (dir. Rob Sitch) celebrates the struggle of a family not too dissimilar from the Kims. However, the protagonist Darryl Kerrigan's role is not to achieve wealth but to protect and celebrate his humble family and home. Australian audiences would have a much closer reading of *The Castle* due to its very specific local references; however, those who engaged with its theme of a struggle between the 'haves' and 'have nots' would be able to engage with the enterprising cunning of Ki-woo and the Kims.

Engagement

One of the interesting elements of *Parasite*'s success is its access to audiences via streaming platforms. Released at a time when audience attendance in cinemas was declining in favour of streaming narratives at home, the first viewing of *Parasite* for millions around the globe may have been through a television, laptop or even a phone. It is possible that the subtle use of codes, conventions and dialogue (especially for non-Korean audiences) could mean that some elements of the narrative would be lost.

Reading

Essential to understanding *Parasite*, as you have discovered in this chapter, is the specific elements included within the narrative that are at the core of Korean culture. It is not commonplace in Australia, even for wealthy families, to have live-in maids and drivers working in service to the family. Yet these are essential to the plot and are familiar to many Asian societies. This is not to say that you cannot enjoy and engage with the universal message of *Parasite*; however, it can be argued that a much deeper reading can be gained from stepping into the South Korean context.

ACTIVITY 7.45

Contextual analysis

Imagine you are showing *Parasite* to someone who has never seen it before. Use all that you have learnt across this chapter and explain the specific Korean references of *Parasite* to improve their reading of the narrative.

Contextual reference	Explanation of its role in Korean culture	What role does it play in the narrative?
Soju		
The scholar's stone		
Tutoring and *Hagwon*		
University exams		
Basement apartments		
Maids and drivers		

Hunt for the Wilderpeople (2016, dir. Taika Waititi)

> It's very hard to describe my films to people, because most of my films people either find really funny or quite depressing or like a nice mix of both of them. That's what I'm more interested in, is a mix of that stuff.
>
> — Taika Waititi[16]

Hunt for the Wilderpeople is a beautifully constructed, poignant and simple narrative that showcases the power of developing complex and authentic characters that resonate with the audience long after watching. This has become the hallmark of director Taika Waititi's work – the exploration of the quirky, the downtrodden and the flawed.



FIGURE 7.52 A promotional poster for *Hunt for the Wilderpeople* (2016)



FIGURE 7.53 Ricky Baker (Julian Dennison) and Uncle Hec (Sam Neill) in *Hunt for the Wilderpeople*

Hunt for the Wilderpeople is Waititi's fourth feature film and was adapted for the screen based on the novel *Wild Pork and Watercress* by Barry Crump. It centres on the story of 13-year-old foster child Ricky Baker, who is sent to live in the remote New Zealand wilderness with kind-hearted Bella and her aloof and cantankerous husband Hec. The film is a classic coming of age mixed in with a road trip pursuit narrative, yet it is much more than these genres. Much of Waititi's work delves into the stories of Indigenous cultures, and in this case our protagonist, like Waititi himself, is a Māori contending with the challenges that the post-colonial world of contemporary New Zealand presents.

CONSTRUCTION

The film was shot in the incredibly picturesque Waitākere Ranges and Central Plateau region of the North Island of New Zealand, and this setting becomes a character all of its own throughout the film. Shot over a five-week period on a miniscule budget of NZ$4.5 million, of which half was provided via funding from the New Zealand Film Commission,[17] the film showcases the natural beauty of the country, while also juxtaposing the concrete and hardness of the urban landscape of Auckland.

The film follows a classic linear three-act structure with a solid story form that underpins the film at its core. When stripped back to its basic plot, the screenplay leaves no questions unanswered. This is achieved through the authentic script and excellent performances of the leads, Julian Dennison, who plays Ricky Baker, and Sam Neill, portraying Uncle Hec, who unveil their back stories and hopes for a better future throughout the film. The development of the relationship between the two lead characters, which goes from foe and enemy to unwavering loyalty and friendship without being at all trite, grows slowly through a series of challenges the pair face. Through these challenges, the two characters navigate their grief, loneliness and shortcomings.

The three-act structure is supported by Waititi's use of 'chapters', a nod to the story's origins as a classic adventure novel. These chapters help drive the narrative forward and bring closure to the segments that exist within the plotline. For example, the opening chapter, 'A Real Bad Egg', introduces us to the character of Ricky Baker and his journey to living with Bella and Hec. Throughout the opening sequence, we learn through the antagonist, Child Welfare Officer Paula Hall (Rachel House) that Ricky is a kid who has been in trouble with the law and has struggled to find a foster placement. By the end of the first chapter, Ricky has found a home with Bella (Rima Te Wiata) and a sense of acceptance that he is worthy of a family.

In what has become his trademark, Waititi uses the point of view of the main character to delve into dream-like fantasy worlds throughout the film. These short, often comical interludes give an insight into Ricky and provide the audience with an insight into the character and his journey. Despite the sad undertone of Ricky's tragic story of being an abandoned child languishing in the foster system, ultimately the film highlights how the concept of family is a construct and that Ricky and Hec are able to build a new family structure together.

AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT, CONSUMPTION AND RECEPTION

Despite its small budget, *Hunt for the Wilderpeople* has been a resounding success, both critically and commercially. The film premiered at the 2016 Sundance Film Festival, placing the consumption of this film firmly in the category of independent film. It scored highly with critics and was named *Empire Magazine's* number one film for 2016.[18] It has become the highest-grossing New Zealand film. Overwhelmingly, audiences viewed this film favourably, with Rotten Tomatoes critics consensus stating, 'The charmingly offbeat *Hunt for the Wilderpeople* unites a solid cast, a talented filmmaker, and a poignant, funny, deeply affecting message'.[19]

At the time of its release in 2016, Waititi was still an emerging filmmaker whose work was only beginning to be viewed outside of his native New Zealand. The popularity of the Kiwi comedy, *The Flight of the Conchords* in the late 2000s – which Waititi wrote for and starred in – led to international audiences paying attention to the unique, quirky and mundane qualities of New Zealand comedy. While *Hunt for the Wilderpeople* was intended for a broader international audience, Waititi pays homage to his homeland with many references to Kiwi slang, 'Skukzz', and culture, 'Stay Māori Bro'.

Waititi's film also opened up further exposure of Indigenous stories being told by Indigenous storytellers. While the film does not overtly reference the social disadvantage of Māori people, it touches on the overrepresentation of Māori youth in the foster and juvenile justice system.

> Through the experiences of young Māori boy Ricky Baker, the film examines the impact of the judicial system on the country's children, particularly Māori youth, and the history of colonisation that continues to perpetuate disconnection and trauma in Te Ao Māori (the Māori world).

FIGURE 7.54 Jonno Revanche and Justine Sachs, 'The Colonial Critique in *Hunt for the Wilderpeople*', *Overland*, 1 November 2016

These themes and concepts have been widely discussed by academics throughout New Zealand and have become a primary focus of Waititi in ensuring that the voices of Indigenous people around the world are heard and seen in popular mainstream media.



FIGURE 7.55 Comics Bret McKenzie and Jemaine Clement of *Flight of the Conchords*



HOW CODES AND NARRATIVE CONVENTIONS CONVEY MEANING IN *HUNT FOR THE WILDERPEOPLE*

'A Real Bad Egg': Opening sequence

The development of character and the protagonist's journey from innocence to experience are crucial conventions within the coming-of-age genre. Waititi introduces the audience to Ricky Baker in the opening sequence through a series of close-ups of a young teenager in the back of a police car. Through a mixture of close-up camera angles and shot selections, we develop an impression of a youth who is in trouble with the law. Close-ups of the police uniform, an impatient officer tapping her pen on a clipboard, Ricky's chubby hands, his snapback cap and white 'kicks' present the character as a kid that has clearly done wrong.

This is reinforced for the audience through the character, Paula Hall, Ricky's arch-nemesis who describes Ricky to his new foster mother as 'a real bad egg … '. Waititi utilises a montage edit of Ricky's misdemeanours as Paula describes his 'disobedience, stealing, spitting, running away, throwing rocks, kicking stuff, defacing stuff, burning stuff, loitering and graffiti'. These single shots, in an assemble edit of Ricky in Auckland, show a young boy on his own against the backdrop of a large urban landscape. The scene is humorous, yet also sad as it reveals Ricky to be a kid who is largely on his own, left to fend for himself with no sign of friends or a home. This description of Ricky to his new foster mother Bella is given in front of Ricky, who is acutely aware of Paula's attitude towards him.

Throughout this opening scene, we don't get to hear Ricky speak; we are simply guided towards our first impressions of the character through the views and descriptions of other characters and through the acting of Dennison in his portrayal of Ricky as a disaffected, lonely boy.

ACTIVITY 7.46

Scene analysis

1. Ricky Baker is a 'real bad egg'. Using the opening sequence, describe the audience's first impressions of Ricky Baker. Refer to the codes of costume, mise en scene, camera and/or acting and convention of character to help you answer this question.
2. Consider how Waititi uses setting in the opening sequence. How do the landscapes of rural and urban New Zealand work alongside each other to set up the narrative?
3. Waititi often uses assemble editing sequences in his films. Assemble editing is straight cuts with no transitions and can look quite raw and basic. Watch the montage of Ricky's misdemeanours and describe why this is an effective style of editing to convey Ricky's past to the audience.

STUDY TIP

Refer back to Section 7.4 for more detail on the function of media codes and conventions.

DIGITAL LINK

Look up the lyrics to the Leonard Cohen track 'The Partisan' online.

'The Partisan': Winter scene

This scene is a beautiful example of how camera, soundtrack and editing can be used to progress the narrative. Waititi plays here with the conventions of point of view and structuring of time to demonstrate to the audience the exhaustive cat-and-mouse game of Ricky and Hec trying to evade the authorities and the passing of time through the transitioning of the seasons. The montage scene utilises the haunting musical score of the Leonard Cohen track, 'The Partisan', whose lyrics

pair perfectly with the point of the story in which Ricky and Hec have endured much together and are afraid of being taken 'captive' by the authorities who seek to imprison them within the mainstream systems.

Waititi uses an in-camera one-shot montage where the camera pans around the landscape showing Ricky and Hec staying one step ahead of their captors. The sequence effectively shows the passing of time and the individual perspectives of each of the characters. Waititi explains that he mounted the camera on the tripod and moved it 780 degrees. As the camera panned, the actors would move through their shot.[20] The use of the camera in this way helps to progress the narrative at a key point in the film where Ricky and Hec are at a stalemate and grappling with the death of Hec's beloved dog Zag and scattering of Bella's ashes. This montage signals a shift in the relationship between Ricky and Hec, as they have endured the universal experience of grief and loss together.

ACTIVITY 7.47

Scene analysis

1 Watch the 'Winter' sequence (1.10.45 – 1.12.37).
   - **a** Describe how this scene is effective in progressing the narrative.
   - **b** Explain what Waititi is seeking to communicate about the characters and the story through this scene.

2 Explain how the soundtrack is an effective code to convey meaning about the characters and their journey at this point in the film.

STUDY TIP

Refer back to Section 7.4 for more detail on the function of media codes and conventions.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN *HUNT FOR THE WILDERPEOPLE* AND THE CONTEXT IN WHICH IT WAS PRODUCED

Throughout the opening decades of the 21st century, there has been a growing awareness and understanding of the issues surrounding Indigenous people around the world. Throughout colonised nations such as Australia and New Zealand, there has been a re-examination of the impact of government policies on Indigenous populations. Through a larger political representation, academic research, a global awareness of the inequality that exists within nations with Indigenous people and emerging Indigenous creative voices, the 2000s have seen more of these stories being told. Inequality exists in almost every measure in New Zealand between those of European descent and of Māori heritage, particularly in the overrepresentation of Māori youth in foster care and the juvenile justice system.[21] This backdrop is clearly evident within the film. Ricky reveals the tragedy behind the foster system when explaining to Hec his experience of losing a friend. The inference is that his friend Amber was sexually abused by her foster father and subsequently committed suicide.

> 'We were in a home together for a while, and she went to this new family and then started getting in trouble, telling stories about the dad. And then one day she was just dead.'

FIGURE 7.56 Ricky Baker (Julian Dennison) in *Hunt for the Wilderpeople*, screenplay by Taika Waititi

Ricky also alludes to the trajectory he is on if he can't stay with Hec. He explains that there are no more homes for him – just 'juvie' – juvenile detention. This further demonstrates the issues that are present within New Zealand society for Indigenous youth. In 2016, the New Zealand Corrections Department was rocked by the 'fight club' scandal, where the nation's largest prisons were dominated by Māori gangs forcing prisoners into fighting one another. Throughout the film, Waititi alludes to the broken justice system, where Hec is also at risk of being incarcerated.

The rising awareness of the chasm that exists between Indigenous people and the political institutions of such nations continues to develop through narratives created by influential First Nations voices. In response to rising criticism and questioning over the concept of celebrating Australia Day on 26 January – the date that the British First Fleet raised their flag, effectively claiming the land as a British colony – many institutions have abandoned the celebratory nature of the day. For many First Nations people and allies, the day has become one of mourning and protest. In 2017, the iconic Triple J Hottest 100 music countdown, a trademark of Australia Day celebrations, ditched the 26 January date in response to concern over the lack of recognition it gave to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their view of the day marking invasion.



FIGURE 7.57 A protest against the date of Australia Day

> The Hottest 100 will not be held on Australia Day next year, triple j says, with the station acknowledging the 'increasing debate' about January 26 and its meaning for Indigenous Australians … Indigenous songwriter Dan Sultan welcomed the announcement. 'To have it on a day that essentially celebrates genocide is disgusting and it's embarrassing,' he told the ABC. 'And for me, as an Indigenous person, it's hurtful and it's harmful.'

FIGURE 7.58 Paul Donoughue, 'The Hottest 100 Won't Be Held on Australia Day Next Year, Triple J Says', *ABC News*, 27 November 2017

Throughout the late 2010s and more recently, the inequalities and social issues that exist for Māori people have been highlighted and sought to be addressed by former New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern. Through recognition of colonial wrong-doing, Ardern issued an historic apology and financial redress to the Māori people.

> The Crown profoundly regrets its horrific and needless acts of war and raupatu [land confiscation] which have caused you and your hapu [tribe] inter-generational suffering. Instead of respecting your mana whakahaere [authority], the Crown killed and injured your people, and pillaged your land and property.

FIGURE 7.59 Jacinda Ardern, speech to New Zealand parliament, 'Te Rangiwaituhi – Maniapoto Apology', 4 December 2022, *beehive.govt.nz*

In 2014, Waititi co-founded Piki Films, a production company 'committed to thought-provoking stories from underrepresented perspectives'. Piki, which means to climb over or ascend in te reo Māori, has produced such films as *Jojo Rabbit* (2019, dir. Taika Waititi), *The Hunt for the Wilderpeople* and *The Breaker Upperers* (2018, dirs Madeleine Sami and Jackie van Beek). In 2020, Piki Films announced a new initiative, focusing specifically on Māori storytelling by Māori voices that delve into themes such as colonialism and forced assimilation.[22] Since *Hunt for the Wilderpeople*, Waititi continues to champion the stories of First Nations voices. His award-winning series, *Reservation Dogs* (2021–), follows the stories of a group of Native American teens in rural Oklahoma, who, like Ricky Baker, are kids facing huge challenges of disadvantage, poverty and a nation that sees them as problematic.



FIGURE 7.60 Taika Waititi accepting an award for *Reservation Dogs*

ACTIVITY 7.48

Research task

Research an Indigenous creator, writer, filmmaker, artist or musician and explore the ways in which their identity and experiences have influenced their work. What can these narratives tell us about a particular society from an Indigenous perspective?

THE CONSTRUCTION OF REPRESENTATIONS IN *HUNT FOR THE WILDERPEOPLE* AND HOW THEY REFLECT OR CHALLENGE VIEWS AND VALUES OF A SPECIFIC CONTEXT

Hunt for the Wilderpeople, much like Waititi's previous feature *Boy* (2010), is a film that subtly reveals how intergenerational trauma continues to impact Indigenous peoples, and that through these past wrongdoings, Indigenous families were separated, language, stories and culture lost. This is evident in Ricky's story, but also Bella's as she yearns to return to the place of 'her people' when she dies. Bella, played by Rima Te Wiata, is the perfect mother figure for Ricky. Through her costume of warm, cosy, hand-knitted jumpers, her ramshackle and cluttered home full of her treasures, and her patient and genuine embrace of Ricky, Bella reflects the importance of the family and cultural connection that Māori people share. She is acutely aware of his trauma and it is through the simple act of a 'hottie in the bed' – a hot water bottle left for him – that we see what impact a family connection can have. This recurring symbol of the hot water bottle (and its sad absence after her death), demonstrates the role a mother-figure – or in this case 'Aunty' – plays. Through Hec, we later learn that, like Ricky, Bella was also a product of the foster system with no family connections, reinforcing how the mistreatment of Indigenous people has resulted in these sad outcomes for so many. It is these small moments within the narrative that reveal much about the struggles of New Zealand's Māori people.



ACTIVITY 7.49

Scene analysis

Watch the scene where Bella explains to Ricky the items she has chosen for his bedroom. Pause and make notes on the items within the frames. What do they reveal about Bella, Ricky and the importance of culture? Hint – you may need to do some research here. Waititi has been very purposeful in the construction of this setting!

Juxtaposing the warmth of Bella is the unwavering hardness of Paula Hall, the child welfare officer who is determined to bring down Ricky Baker. Paula, played by Rachel House, is constructed as a hardline, law-abiding, cold-hearted and somewhat weary case worker who has seen the likes of kids like Ricky before. With her hair back in a tight bun, white shirt, black trousers and a clipboard, Paula carries little sympathy for kids like Ricky, who she sees as a problem. Interestingly, Paula is of Māori descent, yet is constructed to reflect the colonial view of power, order and superiority. Then there is the way Paula talks about Ricky; for instance, 'He's not just a child, he's a spanner in the works' – a reflection of the existing colonial mentality in New Zealand, where Māori children are treated as older and less innocent than their Pākehā counterparts.[23]

ACTIVITY 7.50

Reflection

Why do you think Paula is so obsessed with reining in Ricky? How is she a representation of the existing power structures in New Zealand?

THE WAYS IN WHICH AUDIENCES FROM DIFFERENT CONTEXTS ENGAGE WITH, CONSUME AND READ MEDIA NARRATIVES

There is no doubt that Taika Waititi's film is intended to resonate most profoundly with his homegrown audience. The cultural and language references unique to a New Zealander audience are clear – the funeral scene is an example of this! Yet, this film carries with it the universal themes of the importance of finding a sense of family – whether that is through blood or through the family someone can build for themselves.

Waititi serves up just enough social commentary on inequality, intergenerational trauma and the overrepresentation of Māori youth in the justice system in order for audiences to develop some understanding of the challenges that kids like Ricky Baker face. Audiences from New Zealand – or indeed any nation that has an Indigenous population and a colonial story – come to this narrative with some understanding of these issues and it challenges them to consider the experiences of the characters from the Indigenous perspective.

Emerging as an independent film, *Hunt for the Wilderpeople* was consumed initially by audiences through the positive reviews of the festival circuit. While being a box office success in New Zealand, the film has found more audiences in recent years as Taika Waititi's success and profile has increased due to his work with the Marvel franchise and later films such as *Jojo Rabbit*. Audiences have become fans of Waititi's unique and authentic aesthetic and quirky humour, which have led them to his back catalogue of work.

Star Wars: Episode IV: A New Hope (1977, dir. George Lucas)

CONSTRUCTION OF *STAR WARS: EPISODE IV: A NEW HOPE*

Star Wars was the first of the Star Wars films. Its huge box office success allowed director George Lucas to develop a series of films based on its characters and their back story. In a 1981 theatrical re-release, it was renamed *Star Wars: Episode IV: A New Hope*, giving it a new context as a chapter within the Star Wars 'franchise'. As such, it can be understood as part of an extensive narrative about a universal struggle for power between opposing forces, Jedi and Sith.

Initially, in its 1977 iteration, it was read as a contained narrative involving Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill) joining the Rebel Alliance to fight despotic overlord Darth Vader (David Prowse). Lucas intended it as an homage to serialised adventure films common in cinemas in the 1930s and 40s (for example, Buck Rogers), where chapters was screened weekly, and usually ended with a 'cliff-hanger' in which characters found themselves in perilous situations. The scrolling text in the opening sequence which recaps the story arc is a typical motif of the form. A typical plot of a serial film would involve a villain tirelessly placing the hero or heroine into deadly situations, and either the hero would have to escape by themselves or rescue the heroine from certain doom. The hero and heroine would then face one trap after another, battling countless minions before finally confronting and defeating the villain.



FIGURE 7.61 A promotional poster for the film

As a science fiction film, *Star Wars* falls in the 'fantastic future' sub-genre (which includes the 'space opera' form). It could also be described as a 'romanticised heroic magical war fantasy', where the science takes a back seat to the heroic action. The Galactic Empire, aided by the cruel Darth Vader, holds rebel leader, the beautiful Princess Leia (Carrie Fisher), hostage on the Death Star, a colossal space station capable of destroying an entire planet. She has stolen plans showing its weak points and sent them via droids R2-D2 and its companion C-3PO to Obi-wan Kenobi (Alec Guinness) on the planet Tatooine. Luke Skywalker, and eventually also Han Solo (Harrison Ford), captain of the *Millennium Falcon*, work together with Obi-wan, R2-D2 and C-3PO to help the Rebel Alliance defeat Vader and the Empire.

Obi-wan is a member of the Jedi Knights, former Galactic Republic peacekeepers with supernatural powers derived from an energy called the Force. Luke learns that his father was also a Jedi, and that Vader, a former pupil of Obi-wan, turned to the 'dark side' of the Force and murdered Luke's father. Luke is presented with his father's weapon, a lightsaber, and is invited to train as a Jedi.

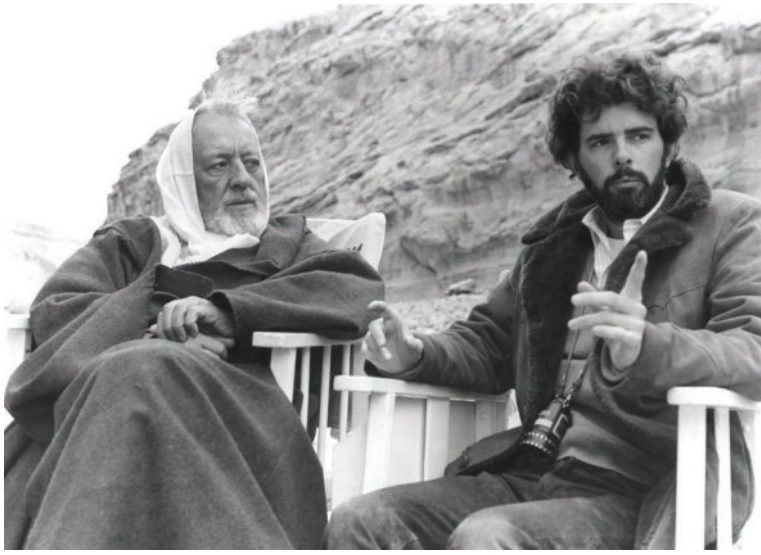


FIGURE 7.62 British actor Alec Guinness with American director, screenwriter and producer George Lucas on the set of his movie *Star Wars: Episode IV: A New Hope*

HOW AUDIENCES ENGAGE WITH AND READ *STAR WARS: EPISODE IV: A NEW HOPE*

George Lucas' previous work and audience expectations

Immediately following the success of *Star Wars*, two more episodes were made, completing the 'original trilogy'. In 1981, *Star Wars* was re-released with the subtitles *Episode IV: A New Hope* added in 1997, to coincide with the release of the 'prequel' trilogy, and it was digitally remastered with some altered scenes. The 'sequel' trilogy followed in 2015 – totalling nine films in the series.

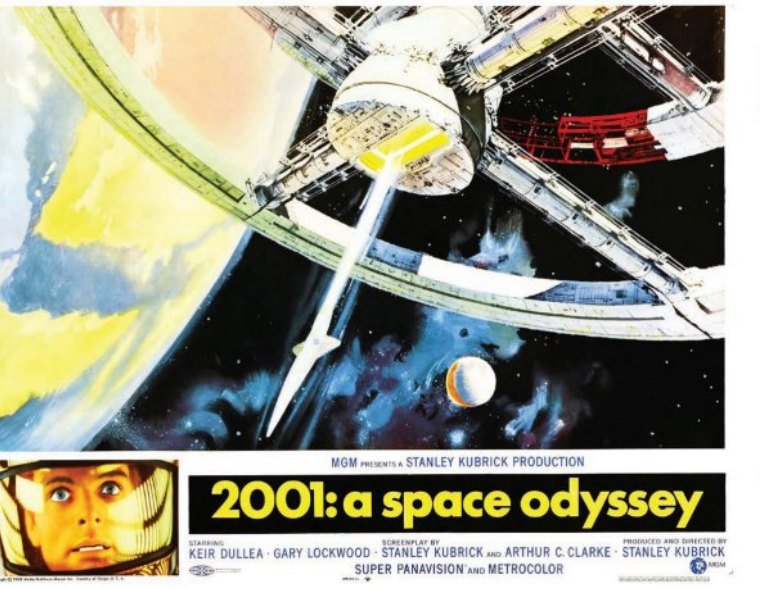


FIGURE 7.63 A poster for *2001: A Space Odyssey*, which came out about a decade before *Star Wars* and led the way for science fiction special effects

The *Star Wars* series has come to embody, in modern film form, the classic adventure serials Lucas so admired. Star Wars is now a multimedia franchise and worldwide pop-culture phenomenon, expanding into spin-off films, television series, video games, novels, comic books and theme park attractions. In 2020, its total value was estimated at US$70 billion, and it is currently the fifth highest-grossing media franchise of all time. In 2012, Lucas sold his production company to Disney, relinquishing his ownership of the franchise.

Incredibly, *Star Wars* was made on a very small budget (in Hollywood terms). Science fiction films in the 1970s were not generally as popular as they are today. The technical limitations in creating natural futuristic 'real' worlds were very apparent to an increasingly discerning audience. There were a few rare exceptions, such as *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968, dir. Stanley Kubrick). *Star Wars'* design and special effects were, however, groundbreaking and amazed audiences of the time.

While Lucas had experienced great success with a period drama set in the early 1960s, *American Graffiti* (1973), his love for science fiction had already been expressed in the disturbing and dystopian *THX 1138* (1971). This film provided much of the monochrome aesthetic for the sleek and sterile designs representing the Empire. Its bleak subject, however, meant it was a limited success, discouraging producers. He was determined to make *Star Wars* more optimistic, fun and adventurous.

> 'It's the flotsam and jetsam from the period when I was 12 years old', says Director George Lucas. 'All the books and films and comics that I liked when I was a child. The plot is simple – good against evil – and the film is designed to be all the fun things and fantasy things I remember. The word for this movie is fun.'

FIGURE 7.64 George Lucas, quoted in 'Star Wars – The Year's Best Movie', *Time*, 30 May 1977

Star Wars found new young audiences for science fiction. Its action/adventure/fantasy style avoided the old tropes of classic and early 1970s sci-fi, including using a classical film score by John Williams rather than the electronica music common in the genre at the time. By taking special effects seriously in creating the visual effects and sound companies Industrial Light and Magic and Skywalker Sound, Lucas helped push the industry's standards much higher. Incredibly, this was done at the time without CGI (computer-

generated imagery). Prior to the 1997 remaster, the only computer animation in *Star Wars* consisted of the Death Star plans rear-projected onto screens on set. Its visual effects were generated using 'digital motion control photography' (not to be confused with CGI), which created the illusion of size by employing small models and slowly moving cameras.



FIGURE 7.65 Special effects created before CGI

Lucas had a great deal of trouble getting finance for his project despite having the support of luminaries like legendary director Francis Ford Coppola. He was rebuffed by several large Hollywood studios, including United, Paramount and, ironically, Disney. Finally, Alan Ladd Jr., at 20th Century-Fox, stepped up because 'he believed that Lucas was talented!'[24] The production was fraught with many issues, including the usual budget blowouts and time constraints, and unusual ones, including Luke Skywalker actor Mark Hamill's car accident, Lucas' hypertension diagnosis, and the drought-breaking deluge at the Tatooine set in Tunisia! Since its limited release in 1977, *Star Wars* phenomenal success has redefined the sci-fi genre, changed the technology of film production and inspired generations of filmmakers (like JJ Abrams, who worked on the sequels).

To what extent was Lucas the visionary behind the film?

According to film editor Richard Chew, who saw an early cut of *Star Wars* in April 1977:

> I'd only seen the film in bits and pieces, only the parts that I was working with, but the first cut was the first time that I saw it in its entirety and I was astounded. I don't think I was able to get up from my chair for about ten minutes after the screening – realised the look of the film, the thrust of the film, the characters of the film came as a result of the vision of one man.

FIGURE 7.66 Richard Chew, quoted in Paul Duncan, *The Star Wars Archives: Episodes IV–VI, 1977–1983*, Koln: Taschen, 2020, p. 150

HOW CODES AND NARRATIVE CONVENTIONS ARE USED TO CONVEY MEANING IN *STAR WARS: EPISODE IV: A NEW HOPE*

Act 1: Attack on Tatooine – Luke commits to action

At the end of Act 1, the orientation phase in a film, characters are often driven into action, and reluctantly accept their fate, which then drives the narrative forward. In *Star Wars*, audiences are given a very clear indication of Luke's commitment to the Rebel cause after he witnesses the aftermath of the destruction of his home at the hands of the Empire, including the burnt corpses of his uncle and aunt at their farm on the planet Tatooine.

Act 1: Danger in the canyon

The representation of the Galactic Empire, and specifically Darth Vader, as the antagonists is established immediately in the opening with their violent pursuit and boarding of Princess Leia's spaceship, where stormtroopers quickly and efficiently overwhelm the small resisting force and capture the princess. The use of deadly force is further exaggerated when the giant Vader interrogates the captain, lifting him by the throat



FIGURE 7.67 Darth Vader (David Prowse) chokes the rebel ship's captain

and throwing his dead body against the wall. The audience is in no doubt as to the antagonist's cruelty, but the attack on Luke's home is shockingly brutal.

Luke is absent during the attack because he has gone with C-3PO in search of R2-D2, who escaped the family compound to deliver Princess Leia's message to Obi-wan Kenobi. At this point in the scene (0:28:20), Luke has entered dangerous Sand-People territory and is lying unconscious while R2-D2 hides in the shadows emitting pathetic squeaks and pops, and the Sand-People toss his 'landspeeder' hovercraft. Off camera, a guttural scream is heard by the attackers, amplified, resonating and otherworldly, accompanied by a non-diegetic orchestral music 'sting' foretelling the entry of a new character.

The Sand-People flee as a cloaked figure approaches Luke lying helpless on the sand. The camera cuts to the cowering R2-D2 and we see a point-of-view (POV) shot as the figure grabs Luke's arm, feels his head, then, accompanied by anxious and mysterious music suggesting potential danger, turns towards the camera. The figure pulls back its hood, to reveal, in mid-shot (MS), a kindly and dignified white-bearded old man, who says 'Hello there! Come here my little friend. Don't be afraid.' (0:29:00). The release of tension is matched by quietly rising orchestral music, as Luke recognises the man as 'Ben Kenobi' (played by the great Shakespearian actor, Sir Alec Guinness).

As Luke recovers, he tells 'Ben' that R2-D2 is searching for Obi-wan Kenobi. We see Ben's astonishment in medium close-up (MCU). In shot-reverse shot with Luke he reveals that indeed he is Obi-wan. With the mystery revealed, they retreat to Ben's desert home, taking a mangled C-3PO with them. The meeting has set up Ben as Luke's mentor, an archetype often used in film, particularly adventure films.

ACTIVITY 7.51

Scene analysis

Watch the scene of Obi-wan meeting Luke in the rocky canyon:

1. Describe the mise en scene, especially in relation to colour and costume.
2. Describe in your own words the non-diegetic orchestral music during key moments of the scene: Ben's first appearance; Ben hearing the name 'Obi-wan'.
3. Name some 'mentor' characters in other films.
4. Why is an actor like Alec Guinness so suited to the mentor role?

STUDY TIP

Refer back to Section 7.4 for more detail on the function of media codes and conventions.

Act 1: Ben's house

The scene continues in the simply furnished adobe-style interior of Ben's cliff-top house, where the *Star Wars* back story is revealed. Luke's father, a Jedi Knight, was 'the best star pilot in the galaxy' who fought in the 'Clone Wars'. Ben then presents Luke with his father's lightsaber and tells him how he died at the hands of Darth Vader. This last earnest revelation is shown in close-up to highlight Luke and Ben's sad expressions (0:33:00). Ben goes on to describe the power behind the Jedi: the Force, 'an energy field created by all living things', and how Vader was drawn to its 'dark side'. The tension is broken at this point by R2-D2 in close-up issuing shrill tweets, and our attention returns to its 'mission', to deliver the princess's message to Obi-wan.

An ethereal 3D holographic video image is projected showing the full text of Princess Leia's message (0:33:25). R2-D2 is in possession of vital information needed by the rebels in defence against the Empire. Over soft compelling music, Ben turns to Luke and asks for his help. This is the moment the hero is called to action, but refuses, in narrative terms called 'the debate'.[25] Luke says desperately, 'I can't get involved. I've got work to do!'. Ben tempts Luke further, saying he should learn the way of the Force, but Luke is too fearful. 'That's your uncle talking' is Ben's reply, but not even this can shame Luke into action.



FIGURE 7.68 Luke and Ben see Princess Leia's holographic plea 'Help me Obi-wan Kenobi!', projected by the droid R2-D2

ACTIVITY 7.52

Scene analysis

1. What is the effect of the setting's limited and contained space on the relationship between the two characters?
2. What codes and/or conventions add to the disappointment we experience when Luke refuses to help Ben?

STUDY TIP

Refer back to Section 7.4 for more detail on the function of media codes and conventions.



Act 1: The Death Star

As Luke offers to take Ben only as far as Anchorhead, the scene 'wipes' to the Death Star. (The 'wipe' is one of the editing tropes used in the adventure serials Lucas admired. It is applied stylistically throughout *Star Wars*.) This scene insertion communicates to the audience the enormity of Luke's refusal, as the Empire closes in on the rebels. In the monochrome interior of the Death Star, we are informed that the Emperor has dissolved the senate and given power to the 'Governors', who will use fear to rule the planets, and that the Death Star has enough power to destroy any planets that resist. 'Lord' Vader also demonstrates the power of the dark side of the Force by using it to strangle Admiral Motti (Richard LeParmentier) (0:36:41).

ACTIVITY 7.53

Scene analysis

1. How do codes of lighting and sound contribute to the threatening atmosphere on board the Death Star?
2. Note the use of camera angles framing Vader and Governor Tarkin (Peter Cushing). How do they denote their power?

STUDY TIP

Refer back to Section 7.4 for more detail on the function of media codes and conventions.

Act 1: The turning point – the attack on the Luke's home

With the threat growing, the following scene shows the destruction of the Jawas and their transport. Ben explains to Luke how the Imperial Troopers disguised the attack as if it were by Sand-People. It should be noted that the level of violence is somewhat muted in this scene, with Jawa bodies hidden under their robes. Nevertheless, Jawas being cute teddy-bear type creatures makes this attack all the more heinous. When Luke realises that the Jawas were hit because they came into contact with the droids, he fears his home will be next and rushes to his landspeeder. A short connecting montage takes him to the smoking ruins of the Skywalker farm.

This is the turning point. With rising tragic orchestral sounds, we experience Luke's first-person realisation as he walks towards a burned corpse. In sequential grisly shots, we see the charred and smoking human remains juxtaposed with Luke's horrified expression. The camera fixes on Luke's face as he first turns his head away from the horror, then returns his gaze purposefully towards the death scene. His facial expression and defiant stance leave the viewer in no doubt that he is now committed, determined to join the fight against the Empire.

The actor, camera and non-diegetic music have combined to communicate meaning in this sequence. No dialogue is needed to explain Luke's transformation from meek farm boy to avenging hero. The narrative has foreshadowed Luke's transformation when R2-D2 initially escaped the farm compound to find Obi-wan. Luke is shot from below against the sky, worrying about the droid, and the trouble he might cause. The turning point is a parallel moment where the hero's journey begins. We are at the end of the orientation phase and now enter the complication phase.

ACTIVITY 7.54

Scene analysis

1. How does the director indicate Luke's sudden understanding that his home may be the next target?
2. Describe how the camera is used to show Luke's point-of-view.
3. What are the two key plot points discussed above? What are some other significant plot points in the opening (orientation) stage of film narratives?

STUDY TIP

Refer back to Section 7.4 for more detail on the function of media codes and conventions.



FIGURE 7.69 The turning point for Luke, the murder of his aunt and uncle by the Empire

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN *STAR WARS: EPISODE IV: A NEW HOPE* AND THE CONTEXT IN WHICH IT WAS PRODUCED

Historical context

The Republic versus Empire as a narrative trope is a particularly American sensibility and the subject of a great deal of Hollywood storytelling. British imperial rule was overthrown in the eight-year War of Independence beginning in 1775. Imperialism is a policy of extending a country's power and influence through colonisation, use of military force or other means. *Star Wars* can be read as continuation of American anti-imperialist sentiment going well beyond the Revolutionary war.

George Lucas was born at the end of World War II and grew up in its aftermath. The Nazis had inflicted the worst possible horror upon the world through imperialist aggression. The atom bomb demonstrated that we could wipe ourselves out. The post-World War II period was called the Cold War, a war of ideologies between the USA and the USSR, which threatened to break out into nuclear war and Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD). The Vietnam War escalated during the 1970s, and the Watergate trial had just begun. Lucas was concerned about the development of corrupt militarised imperial governments – in Eastern Bloc countries as well as in the USA.

Star Wars reflected the fraught politics of the era. *Star Wars* was already conceived partially as a political lesson, building on a wide support base of political protest.

> It was really about the Vietnam War, and that was the period where Nixon was trying to run for a [second] term, which got me to thinking historically about how democracies get turned into dictatorships? … Because democracies aren't overthrown; they're given away.

FIGURE 7.70 George Lucas quoted in Mark Caro, "Star Wars" Inadvertedly Hits Too Close to U.S's Role', *Chicago Tribune*, 18 May 2005





FIGURE 7.71 Harrison Ford as Han Solo – clearly a 'gunslinger' character archetype borrowed from the Western genre

In *Star Wars*, the Imperial Army costume is influenced by Nazi uniforms (particularly winter uniforms of the Eastern Front). The Death Star can be viewed as the ultimate nuclear weapon. Darth Vader, while not the only leader in the *Star Wars* Empire, is the most powerful. He is tall, imposing and expressionless, a frightening ruthless figure. Dressing a villain in all black is symbolic. The light/dark, black/white dichotomy has long been a symbol of good versus evil in Western literature. The predominant colours of the Empire are white (represented by the stormtroopers), black (seen through Darth Vader) and red (displayed by the personal bodyguards of the Emperor). White, black and red are the colours of the infamous 'blood flag' of the Nazi Third Reich.

Social, political and economic context

While *Star Wars* is ostensibly anti-war, it also celebrates the idea of the 'warrior hero'. Lucas was influenced by the classic Western stories which depicted a 'loner'-type gunslinger, fighting injustice on the untamed frontier. The farmer who takes up arms against outlaws is a typically Hollywood trope. Lucas was also heavily influenced by the *Jidaigeki* or Samurai films of Japan, from which the name 'Jedi' comes. Samurai warriors were depicted in *Jidaigeki* films as a priest class, both fearsome in battle and highly disciplined and reflective in life. The Jedi Knights are the embodiment of these characters.

The spiritual elements of the Force have heavy leanings towards the teachings of Bushido. The samurai moral code was similar to the European concept of chivalry. It stressed sincerity, frugality, loyalty, mastery of martial arts and honour to the death, through self-sacrifice. The lightsabers the Jedi brandish are just as recognisable as swords the Samurai wield. The costumes Lucas chose for the Jedi Knights were inspired by the robes of the samurai.



FIGURE 7.72 A promotional poster for *The Hidden Fortress*, a 1958 samurai (or *Jidaigeki*) film by Japanese director Akira Kurosawa, often cited as a strong inspiration for *Star Wars*

Star Wars films have been criticised as presenting the 'ultimate conservative morality tale' in which religion (represented by the spirituality of the Force) is significant. Faith includes a belief in salvation through a higher power or religion. The Force in *Star Wars* is a redemptive religion, where good actions are rewarded with the faithful being elevated to a higher plane. When Obi-wan is cut down by Darth Vader in their lightsaber fight, he doesn't die, but lives on as Luke's spirit guide. This is key to the film's closure, where he is heard to say, 'Use The Force Luke'.

Luke Skywalker cannot escape his destiny to become a Jedi like his father, despite his uncle trying to keep him from his predestined path. Predestination is a belief, chiefly religious, that human actions are determined by forces beyond our control. Presented in the opening as a hapless teenage farm boy, focused on escaping the drudgery of farm life, Luke is forced into action by the vicious action of the soldiers of the Galactic Empire, who brutally murder his adoptive family and burn the farm. By accepting his destiny, Luke Skywalker has become an enduring film hero, and archetype of the modern era.

ACTIVITY 7.55

Class discussion

From what you have read about *Star Wars*, debate the topic: *Star Wars* is the 'ultimate conservative morality tale'.

The Shawshank Redemption (1994, dir. Frank Darabont)

FROM BOX OFFICE FLOP ALL THE WAY TO THE TOP!

The Shawshank Redemption was released in 1994 and is an adapted script based on the 1982 novella *Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption* by Stephen King. The film is set in 1947 and depicts a man's experiences in a Maine prison following his conviction for a murder he did not commit. The story follows the character, Andy Dufresne (played by Tim Robbins), who is sentenced to life in Shawshank State Penitentiary. He is subjected to cruel and unusual punishment and finds solace in his friendship with fellow inmate Red (played by Morgan Freeman). While in prison, he befriends the prison inmates and staff, and eventually gains the trust of the prison warden. His resilience and determination lead him to plan an escape, which he succeeds in executing. The film reflects the themes of hope, friendship and freedom in the face of oppression and injustice. The film is set during a period of social and political change in the United States. It was released during a time of increased attention to issues of crime and justice, capital punishment and civil rights.



FIGURE 7.73 Tim Robbins and Morgan Freeman in *The Shawshank Redemption*

CONSTRUCTION

The film premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival and then hit US theatres during the 1994 summer season, going toe to toe with knockouts such as *Pulp Fiction* (dir. Quentin Tarantino) and *Forrest Gump* (dir. Robert Zemeckis). Darabont's story about an imprisoned banker did not meet audience expectations at first, with some critics writing about its lack of female characters leaving it underwhelming. Summer hits in the United States tend to have lots of action and adventure whereas *The Shawshank Redemption* was a slow burn.

Warner Home Video distributed over 300 000 copies in the next year all over the United States and the film turned a corner, becoming one of the most rented videos of 1995. In 2023, with a score of 9.3/10 beating out *The Godfather* (1972, dir. Francis Ford Coppola), *The Shawshank Redemption* had held the title of number one in the Top 250 films on IMDb.com since 10 August 2008. Darabont describes the simplicity and beauty of the original novella capturing his attention from the first read and contends that as much as he loves each character, it was Red as the observer that made the story, because writers like himself are also observers and interpreters of the events that happen around them.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

The Shawshank Redemption is set in the mid-to-late 1940s, at the height of the Jim Crow era of oppressive laws against African Americans in the United States. The film follows the story of Andy Dufresne, a wealthy banker who is wrongfully convicted of murder and sent to the maximum-security Shawshank State Penitentiary in Maine. Throughout the film, Andy is forced to deal with the rampant racism and brutality of the prison system. He ultimately finds friendship and redemption in the form of the prison's library, which he uses to help him survive in his new life. The film presents a stark and unflinching look at the realities of life in prison and the power of hope and friendship to help one survive the worst of times.



Opening sequence

Fade from black to the title marker with The Ink Spots' song 'If I Didn't Care' magically dripping from the speakers. This immediately whisks us back to an era forgotten, but one we can only dream of living in. This diegetic music plays on a car radio in a dark and secluded place. A man grabs a gun with bullets wrapped in cloth. He drinks from a small bottle of liquor. In a close-up shot we see a sad, forlorn man staring deep in thought, he aches within. As he takes another sip, the sound transitions the audience to a court room. The same man sits in a brighter close-up shot and the viewer hears of the gruesome murder of this man's wife and her lover. As Mr Andy Dufresne, named by the prosecuting attorney, tells the courtroom his belief about the night's events, the story hits us in flashback sequences and reveals insights to a double homicide killing. The opening scene introduces the film audience to multiple narrative possibilities and to our screen surrogate, Andy Dufresne, a man being convicted for the murder of his wife and her lover. Tim Robbins' character, Andy, stands mute in front of the judge as he listens intently. 'You strike me as a particularly icy and remorseless man Mr Dufresne. It chills my blood just to look at you.' And with that Andy is ordered to serve two life sentences for the murders.

The audience is now confronted with another panel of people, this time from the point of view of Red, a convicted murderer, who is meeting with his parole board, who don't seem to believe he has rehabilitated for his sins. Red is not successful in his attempt for parole and is escorted back to his cell block.

The tone of sombre institutional life in this feature-length drama is further outlined by Red to the audience through spoken dialogue with other inmates shortly after his hearing. The rules of confinement at Shawshank Penitentiary are quickly framed as Andy arrives to serve his two sentences.

ACTIVITY 7.56

Scene analysis

Watch the opening sequence of *The Shawshank Redemption*.

1. What role does diegetic sound play in establishing the narrative?
2. Name an acting element that Tim Robbins utilises to develop his character Andy in the opening sequence. How is it effective in setting Andy up for the audience?
3. How has Darabont framed the two main characters (Andy and Red) in their respective shots so that we understand their importance to the overall story?

STUDY TIP

Refer back to Section 7.4 for more detail on the function of media codes and conventions.

NARRATIVE DEVELOPMENTS IN THE FILM

Andy wins over Captain Hadley, the guards and his mates

After months of being attacked by a group known as 'The Sisters', Andy has settled into the routine of prison life. He works in the laundry and has kept the names of his attackers to himself, in order to not take on any further punishment. But in the spring of 1949, a roof needs resurfacing and Red cons his way into getting Andy and the other boys the job. A week of 'outdoor detail' in the sunshine only costs each man a pack of smokes, with Red making his 'usual 20%' commission.

Upon overhearing the head guard, Captain Hadley (Clancy Brown), telling the other guards that he has inherited $35 000 and is going to be taxed by the IRS badly, Andy stops working. Red tells Andy, 'Are you nuts, keep your eyes on your mop!' Andy stops again and walks towards the guards, an insane thing to do if

you want to live another day. The guards turn and are surprised to see Andy who exclaims, 'Mr Hadley, do trust your wife?'

Captain Hadley, a vile and ruthless man, grabs Andy and tells the other guards, 'Step aside Mert, this fucker's having himself an accident'. Hadley takes Andy by the collar of his shirt and hangs him over the edge of the roof. In the last moment before Hadley lets go Andy shouts, 'If you do trust her, there's no reason you can't keep that $35 000!' Men below watch in anticipation for the body of someone to drop; Andy is held with only inches of roof separating him from a sure death below. Hadley and Andy discuss the inheritance monies and how Hadley can keep it all. In an overhead shot that pans to a straightforward business-talking banker, Andy is in his element. He is confident, despite being held off the edge of a very high building. Andy describes the way he could help Hadley with paperwork and a bond is instantly formed between the two characters. In return for his setting up the documents, Andy asked for three beers a piece for each of his co-workers on the roof. 'I think a man working outdoors feels more like a man if he can have a bottle of suds.' Hadley throws Andy back onto the safer part of the roof and the musical score shows a change in the story.

Through the voice-over narration of Red, the audience learns that the men working on the roof received their beers on the second-to-last day of work and got to enjoy a few minutes of peace. Red states, 'We sat and drank with the sun on our shoulders and felt like free men … We were the lords of all creation.'

Upon being asked by Heywood (William Sadler), a prisoner mate of Andy's, if he wanted a beer, Andy sighs and regretfully declines, 'No thanks, I gave up drinking'. Heywood is astonished and walks back to the boys. Here the character of Andy shows incredible change from the drunk in the opening sequence. Red in voice-over states, 'I think he did it just to feel normal again, if only for a short while.'

ACTIVITY 7.57

Scene analysis

Watch the scene on the roof.

1. If you were shooting this roof scene today, what alternative camera techniques and/or angles would you use and why?
2. How does Red's voice assist in the explanation of the narrative? Can you think of any reasons to omit his voice-overs?
3. What other films have you watched that had voice-over narration? What makes this technique effective?

STUDY TIP

Refer back to Section 7.4 for more detail on the function of media codes and conventions.

Warden Norton visits Andy, who is reassigned jobs in the prison

In what seems to be a raid or 'tossing of the cells' from the guards, Andy is visited by Warden Norton (Bob Gunton). Andy, who has been sitting quietly reading the Bible, makes a very good first impression by having this text in hand. Warden Norton states, 'I'm very pleased to see you reading this, any favourite passages?' Andy dryly replies, 'Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh'. The Warden smiles, and says 'Mark 13:35, I've always liked that one. But I prefer, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."' Suddenly, a bond is formed. Upon inspection of Andy's cell, the Warden stares at the giant poster of Rita Hayworth, the famous actress that Andy has pinned up to his wall. 'I can't say I approve of this. But I think exceptions can be made,' Warden Norton excuses Andy. The scene is tightly shot within the confines of the jail cell in close-up shots.



FIGURE 7.74 Morgan Freeman as Red

As the Warden exits the cell, the musical score fades up and Red's voice narrates to the audience like an all-knowing deity that the cell toss was just an excuse. The next sequence shows Andy entering the Warden's main office. It is day and the room is filled with light. Warden Norton states, 'Perhaps we can find something more befitting a man with your education'.

Andy meets with Brooks (James Whitmore), an old-timer, and gets the dime tour of the Shawshank library, which consists of a closet and stacks of old books. Andy questions Brooks if he has ever had an assistant, Brooks answers in the negative. Andy asks, 'Why me, why now?' Captain Hadley immediately breaks the air by yelling from the next room and Andy is asked by a guard to help him set up a trust fund for his children.

ACTIVITY 7.58

Scene analysis

Watch the scene described above.

1. In your own words, how do you interpret the Bible readings by Andy and the Warden in the prison cell? What does each character tell the other through these biblical passages?
2. There are three entrances by characters through doorways in this sequence. Describe, using media language, the contrast of the Warden's office, the library and Andy's prison cell.
3. Create a list of narrative possibilities that Darabont has set up for his audience in these three scenes. Be as creative as you can!

STUDY TIP

Refer back to Section 7.4 for more detail on the function of media codes and conventions.

Tommy tells Andy the truth

Tommy (Gil Bellows), a young man with a wife and baby girl, asks Andy to help him pass his high school equivalency test. At first Andy says, 'I don't waste time with losers'. Andy, in a medium shot standing amid the new library he has designed for the prisoner population, does not look Tommy in the eyes until Tommy pleads that he 'ain't no goddamn loser'. Andy tells Tommy that if they do this, and Andy helps him, they 'do it all the way'. This over the shoulder close-up of Andy shows the determination and wisdom of the character. Andy has developed over the years. Tim Robbins' character wears glasses now and has a bit greyer hair around the edges than when he got to prison.

In a montage sequence narrated by Red, the audience watches Andy tutor Tommy in the library, at supper time, and the scene culminates with a dolly into Tommy sitting his test. The ticking of a stopwatch adds to the stress of the moment and when time is called Tommy erupts. The next scene shows perhaps a day later with Tommy and Red having a heart-to-heart conversation and Tommy is stunned when he hears why Andy is in prison.

In the final scene of this sequence of events, Tommy sits on a backward chair between the bodies of Andy and Red. The framing here shows a confined Tommy. He tells the men about a cellmate he met at another prison who boasted about killing a golf pro and his lover and how it all got blamed on the woman's husband, who happened to be a banker. Andy stands in shock, now confronted with the fact that someone else knows the truth to his story.

ACTIVITY 7.59

Scene analysis

Go back and watch this sequence of events unfold.

1 Describe the camera's framing in this sequence. Choose three specific shots and detail how Darabont is showing us characters being confined.

2 What is the difference between Red's voice-over narration and Tommy's storytelling? Use two media codes or conventions to answer this question.

STUDY TIP

Refer back to Section 7.4 for more detail on the function of media codes and conventions.

Andy tricks everyone and vanishes

As the sirens scream, Warden Norton peers up from the dirty shoes left in his shoe box. A tracking shot leads Norton and Captain Hadley and other guards down the cell corridors where Red is pointed out as a possible accomplice. Red looks through the bars of his cell in a tight close-up in astonishment.

In Andy's cell, the Warden cannot fathom how Andy could disappear until he throws a rock at a poster of Raquel Welch and the rock does not deflect but instead penetrates the wall and the diegetic sound of the rock falling metre after metre is heard by the characters in the space. As Warden Norton rips the poster from the wall the camera backtracks into the blackness down the same cavernous crawl that hours before Andy would have also made his way through.

'In 1966, Andy Dufresne escaped from Shawshank Prison,' Red states, 'all they found of him was a muddy set of prison clothes, a bar of soap, and an old rock hammer, damn near worn down to the nub.' The following montage sequence shows the steps Andy took through the years leading up to his escape. It is amazing to think of the meticulousness and patience it would have taken to only dig so far each night in order to not get caught.

Andy crawls through the hole he has dug and then into the sewer system of the prison. Red describes the scene in hindsight, 'Andy crawled to freedom through 500 yards of shit smelling foulness I can't even imagine. Or maybe I just don't want to.' Upon exiting the pipe across the main yard from the prison fences Andy strips in the torrential downpour of rain and bathes in the clean heavenly waters from above. He opens his arms to the skies and breathes his first breath of free air in years.

ACTIVITY 7.60

Scene analysis

1 How does Darabont keep his audience engaged? Consider the code of editing in this response.

2 Describe the use of cause and effect in the narrative, using this sequence in your response.

STUDY TIP

Refer back to Section 7.4 for more detail on the function of media codes and conventions.

Closing sequence

A doorway opens to a parole board panel, reminiscent of the opening sequence. Red details to the young men and women that he has lost hope and does not care anymore about his life, and with that, he is given his freedom. Red spends some time working as Brooks did in a supermarket, bagging groceries, before he sees a compass in the window of a shop. In a voice-over Red tells the viewer that, '[it's a] terrible thing to live in fear'.



Red visits the hay fields and upon hiking for a bit finds the oak tree Andy described to him in their final encounter. He also unearths a box that Andy has left for him under a piece of obsidian rock hidden within a stone wall. He is astonished to see all the money his friend has left him and a letter telling Red he's only got a bit further to go.

In the final shots, Red walks upon the white sands of Mexico, the Pacific Ocean extending in the background forever. Red's hat flies off in the wind and Andy sees his dear friend approaching. The two smile and embrace as the camera flies overhead and the credits roll.

ACTIVITY 7.61

Scene analysis

1 How does the closing sequence reflect the opening sequence?
2 How does Darabont use props and costume to show a passing of time from beginning of storyline to end?
3 What camera techniques or other media codes have you found the most effective in this film? Discuss with several examples.

STUDY TIP

Refer back to Section 7.4 for more detail on the function of media codes and conventions.

ACTIVITY 7.62

Thematic concerns of the film

Hope

1 Create a list of quotes from the film whenever a character speaks of optimism or a better future. What patterns, if any, form due to character interactions throughout the film? Make a flowchart that shows these occurrences and analyse with your class.
2 If you could write a letter to Red or Andy as a pen pal, what would you say? Begin an ongoing dialogue as a practice of developing a character further.

Friendship

1 Create a mind map of the main friendships and relationships within the narrative. Use different coloured lines for the guards and the prisoners. Why do you think certain relationships form in the story? Write your response in paragraph form.

Freedom

1 Consider the three characters we see freed in this story – Andy, Red and Brooks. How does each individually deal with their circumstances after leaving Shawshank Penitentiary? (Go back and listen to Brooks' and Red's voice-over narrations for more insight to their character development.)
2 Make a list of types of freedoms you and your classmates enjoy. Discuss why these freedoms are important.

Justice

1 There are several minor characters that help the audience understand how life and death is played out in the world of the narrative. Choose ONE of the characters from the list below and write a response that details how this man experienced justice in the story:
   - Tommy
   - Heywood
   - Captain Hadley
   - Brooks.
2 Discuss a scene from *The Shawshank Redemption* that shows injustice. After discussing, brainstorm ways in which you would right this wrong if you experienced this directly.

Gun Crazy (1950, dir. Joseph H Lewis)

> We go together, Laurie. I don't know why. Maybe like guns and ammunition go together.
>
> — Bart Tare (John Dall) in *Gun Crazy*

CONSTRUCTION

The term 'film noir' was first coined by French critics to describe a range of American films released between the late 1930s and the mid-50s that were characterised by their shadowy lighting, expressionist camera set-ups and morally ambiguous characters, who would often find themselves caught up in events that would ultimately lead to their downfall. This film movement has been heralded as one of the high watermarks of American cinema and saw the release of numerous classics like *The Maltese Falcon* (1941, dir. John Huston), *Double Indemnity* (1944, dir. Billy Wilder) and Jacques Tourneur's *Out of the Past* (1947). However, of all the iconic films of the era, Joseph H Lewis' 1950 film *Gun Crazy* is perhaps one of the strangest and most under-appreciated there is.

Shot in stunning black and white over just 21 days and costing a mere $300 000 (a microscopic sum when you consider that the average Hollywood A-picture's budget in 1950 was in the range of $1.4 million), this cinematic diamond-in-the-rough is a perfect example of doing a lot for next to nothing.

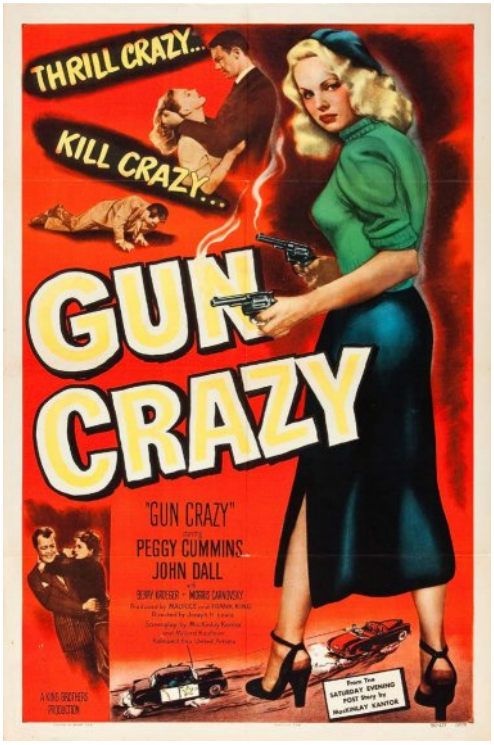


FIGURE 7.75 A promotional poster for *Gun Crazy*

The film's story follows the downward spiral of Bart Tare (John Dall), and his corrosive relationship with circus performer Laurie Starr, played to staggering effect by Peggy Cummins. The two soon-to-be lovers meet at a circus sharp-shooting event that resembles the tale of William Tell, and tasks its contestants to shoot candles off one another's heads. The bizarre scene plays out like a parody of the love-at-first-sight cliché, relaying all the tropes that we've come to know as gospel in romantic comedies: close-ups, shallow depth of field, side-glances between the couple and playful banter are a few of the morsels on offer. Naturally, the two are instantly drawn to one another, and as an audience we instinctively know from years of watching scenes like this that they are destined to be together. However, their would-be love affair, founded in both their physical attraction and passion for guns, quickly descends into a life of crime, and it is not long before the pair find themselves on the run from the law.

The film's narrative structure is typical of the noir movement, telling the story of a seemingly good, if not naive man, and his descent due to his own greed and the calculations of a perilous woman, a character archetype that would be later coined as the *femme fatale*. The three-act structure of the picture reveals itself in a linear fashion, beginning with the courtship of Bart and Laurie, then moving into an electric second act that follows the crime spree of the two, before the narrative is eventually resolved in a ghostly stand-off between the outlaws and the authorities in an isolated and fog-drenched swamp.

While the bones of the narrative may seem familiar and straightforward, it is the film's unique narrative point of view that is most notable. Whereas larger productions of the time would naturally follow the police hunt for the fugitives, Lewis instead chose to focus the story solely on Bart and Laurie, rarely cutting to the



authorities except for reasons of exposition. The result is that the narrative is revealed from the perspective of the outlaws, and in this sense, we see the events from their point of view only, which builds empathy for their plight and positions the audience to align ultimately with the criminals. In a time of American cinema where filmmakers were banned from glorifying violence, *Gun Crazy* offered a subversive look at social outsiders.[26]

AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT, CONSUMPTION AND RECEPTION

Produced by the King Brothers, a duo known for their output of **exploitation pictures**, *Gun Crazy* was made with a minimal budget, on a minimal production schedule, designed to make a quick buck, not to be analysed in textbooks.

exploitation pictures films that are characterised by their use of sensational or controversial subject matter to attract audiences

reparatory cinemas cinemas that program classic and cult films

As this was a B-film, audiences of the time period would have most likely consumed the picture at a drive-in cinema, or as a second feature on a double-bill, screening after a more prestigious studio film. Originally released under the title *Deadly is the Female*, and then later pulled from distribution and rebranded months later under its more literal namesake, it is understandable that the film went largely unnoticed by moviegoers and failed to recoup its budget. Audiences from 1950 onwards would have likely recognised the narrative as being reminiscent of the gritty stories being told on-screen at the time, but the lack of star power and dynamic set pieces would most likely have been reasons for the film's critical and financial failure.



FIGURE 7.76 A promotional poster for *Deadly is the Female* – the original title of the film

It is surprising then that over 70 years later the film has been championed by film scholars for its unique construction, rebellious subtext and progressive representation of women. In the decades after its lacklustre release, *Gun Crazy* has since found a dedicated cult audience, often playing at festivals and **reparatory cinemas** alike; and in 1998 was selected for preservation in the United States National Film Registry by the Library of Congress for its significance to film history.[27]

HOW CODES AND NARRATIVE CONVENTIONS ARE USED TO CONVEY MEANING IN *GUN CRAZY*

The honeymoon montage (28:51:00)

In film noir, the heroes are often opposed to and corrupted by the capitalist society in which they live. Our own couple's pursuit of the American work ethic never leaves the ground. They do *try* to conform to the traditional, socially accepted way of life, but are instantly struck down.

Lewis, an editor before he became a director, constructs the couples' honeymoon in a montage of idyllic moments that lasts nine shots and less than a minute in length, ominously representing the limits of their normal life. The two buy a ring together and create corny postcard-like moments across the state, all shot

using **rear projection** to create an artificiality to the scenes, until they are abruptly cast down and forced to pawn the ring. The reasons for this are never explicit but suggested; the cold and unexpected way one's dreams can quickly be taken away in a not-so-fair and dog-eat-dog capitalist society. The scene ends with the two at a lowly lit roadside diner where they share a meagre dinner. Defeated in less than a minute of screen time, the two lament they don't have enough money to add onions to their burgers.

rear projection a filmmaking technique in which an image is projected onto the back of a translucent screen, creating a reflected image that can be viewed from the front – think of those clichéd driving scenes where the steering doesn't seem to match the moving background

ACTIVITY 7.63

Scene analysis: The honeymoon montage

1. Make a list of all of the locations that Bart and Laurie attend.
2. Consider their costume and acting choices in the scene: how are they markedly different to the film up until this point?
3. Explain what the montage suggests about Bart and Laurie's relationship.

STUDY TIP

Refer back to Section 7.4 for more detail on the function of media codes and conventions.

The Hampton robbery

Lewis begins Act 2 of the film with a montage of low-level hold-ups performed by Bart and Laurie. Each crime cross-cuts into the next and suggests both a passage of time and an improvement in their proficiency as criminals, as the pair become notably more confident and ordered.

Following the scene, we find the two driving towards their next mark, The Hampton Savings and Loan Bank. The entire hold-up of the bank comprises an uninterrupted long take that plays out over four tension-filled minutes, a stylistic choice not commonly seen in the era, and rarer still in B-films. For the sequence, Lewis mounted a camera in the rear of a limousine and positioned the frame between the two characters to create the illusion that the events were taking place from the point of view of an unseen character in the back seat, which one could infer is the audience itself.

At first, the pair can't seem to find a car park and they bicker about their roles in the heist, a suggestion that things aren't going as planned. The tension is amplified when Bart enters the bank and the passive camera, like Laurie, is forced to wait; the events of the robbery are hidden from both character and the audience.

When a roaming police officer approaches Laurie and strikes up a conversation, the audience, like the character, grows more and more anxious, desperate for Bart to return, but simultaneously scared of what will happen if he does. All the while, the camera continues to be positioned impotently from the back seat where we are forced to watch the events unfold like an observant infant.

negative space the areas of space not seen within the frame

The scene is a masterclass on how to use **negative space**. The sequence itself is seemingly simple, but it is the action that occurs in the mind of the audience that is most engaging. With no cuts or break in the action, the audience have no opportunity to pause or catch their breath, and must maintain their focus throughout the scene. The longer Dall's character stays in the bank, the more likely he is likely to get caught and, in a stroke of genius, Lewis has positioned the viewer to root for the success of the criminal. When Bart does eventually exit the bank, and Laurie disables the waiting police officer, the adrenalin between the characters and indeed the audience is palpable.



By filming the scene in a single take and deftly positioning the camera with a limited view, Lewis was able to create a sense of both immediacy and authenticity to the crime. It was perhaps a product of a limited budget, but in limiting the audience's exposure to the events inside the bank, he managed to construct one of the most compelling crime scenes in all of noir.

ACTIVITY 7.64

Scene analysis

Watch the Hampton robbery with the sound off.

1. Make note of how limited the camera is in the scene. Describe what action the audience does see.
2. Watch the scene with the sound on. Explain how the camera and sound design work together to create tension.
3. Using evidence from the film, discuss why not showing the action of the robbery is more effective in terms of building a sense of anxiety for the audience. Consider the framing, editing and acting in your response.

STUDY TIP

Refer back to Section 7.4 for more detail on the function of media codes and conventions.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN *GUN CRAZY* AND THE CONTEXT IN WHICH IT WAS PRODUCED

Historical context

As has been previously stated, *Gun Crazy* was produced in the several years after the end of World War II and reflects the often-bleak narratives of the film noir movement. These pictures were popular with audiences in part because they captured the mood of post-war America and the sense of unease and disillusionment that was prevalent at the time. However, while produced during this period, *Gun Crazy* was not released until 1950, a time when the national point of view was moving away from cynicism towards a more socially conservative and family-driven worldview.



FIGURE 7.77 The values of 1950s America centred around the nuclear family.

Contributing to this was a strong sense of nationalism and need for solidarity after the fallout of World War II, and a shared need for moderation after the Great Depression 20 years earlier. People had faced the horrors of war, and grown up in a time of significant poverty, and coming out of such an era of turmoil, the nation was understandably seeking stability.

Contributing to this sense of conservatism was also the rapid growth of the nuclear family. With troops returning from the war, marriages, birth rates and house ownership all increased significantly, which led to an emphasis on the family and wholesome conservative values. It is within this landscape that the Hays Code was established.

The Hays Code

The Hays Code was a set of rules that enforced censorship on the American cinema between 1934–67. Formed in response to an increase of public complaints about the lewd content of movies, and a growing influence of Christian lobby groups, the Code was an initiative by the film industry to adhere to conservative public opinion.

The self-imposed Code outlined that films required a certificate of approval for distribution, and demanded strong restrictions on language, sex, violence and glorification of crime, all of which were very much up to the discretion of the censors.[28] Two of the more bizarre directions of the Code called for women in love scenes to have 'at least one foot on the floor', while the men, on the other hand, were free to have stable barring; second, people should not be in a 'horizontal position' if they were kissing, so the kissing scene from *Spider-Man* (2002, dir. Sam Raimi) would have most likely been called into question. (This scene saw Spider-Man (Tobey Maguire) and Mary-Jane (Kirsten Dunst) share a kiss after a dramatic battle.)

While at times ridiculous, the unflinching nature of the Code meant that it influenced the creation of films and their content, the distribution of films, and the type of content that audiences had access to consume. Some film scholars have even argued that regulation actually helped push filmmakers to find more creative solutions to storytelling problems, requiring the nuanced transmission of messages that smart audiences would be able to decipher. Naturally, the subversive content of *Gun Crazy* was looked upon unfavourably by the Hays Code.



FIGURE 7.78 The voice of morality in Hollywood, William H Hays

One element of concern for Joseph Breen, a leading film censor who enforced the Hays Code, was the sexualisation of Bart and Laurie. In this regard, Lewis pushed the Hays Code as far as it would go. While he couldn't outwardly show any sexual behaviour between the two, the director instead implied their affair through dialogue and framing; a much greyer area of censorship and one almost impossible to police.

For instance, after an all-too-brief dating montage, there is an abrupt shot in the first act where Bart and Laurie marry at a roadside chapel before they spend the night together. The shot appears starkly out of place when compared to the rest of the sequence that one can assume was clearly constructed to adhere to the Code's stipulation that:

> Sexual relations outside of marriage were to be presented in a way that would not arouse passion or make them seem permissible.

FIGURE 7.79 The Production Code quoted in Black, Gregory D. (1996). *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies*, Cambridge University Press, page 131

Another example of the Hays Code's fingerprints on the film occurs in Act Two, as the couple are planning their first robbery. Bart is seen squinting through a gun barrel, as Laurie exits the bathroom behind him. Wrapped in a white bath robe, obviously naked beneath, Laurie looks the symbol of the seductive *femme fatale*. In this, Lewis is clearly responding to the Hays Code's caveat that there would be:

> 'care in the selection and photographing of the costumes of women' and that 'intimate part of the body – specifically the breasts of women – be fully covered at all times.'

FIGURE 7.80 The Production Code quoted in Black, Gregory D. (1996). *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies*, Cambridge University Press, page 131

Here Lewis is conforming to the demands of the code, but certainly flirting with its interpretation. As the two begin to argue, Laurie sits on the bed and proceeds to pull on her stockings, while in the foreground, Bart is repeatedly cleaning his guns with a brush. The scene soon leads to the two kissing on the bed.



FIGURE 7.81 Bart and Laurie



FIGURE 7.82 A promotional poster for *Gun Crazy* with the 'blame' being laid at Laurie's feet (or guns)

In a letter from the Hays Office, approval for *Gun Crazy* was granted under one stipulation that: 'the scene of Dall and Cummins kissing on the bed will be the one in which you blur and fade out' a – even though, at this point in the story, the two are married. Apparently, the case for censorship was to protect the imaginations of audiences from being over-stimulated by the erotic atmosphere and fetishist overtones of guns and black stockings and by fading out, the audience would assume the two cooled off before resuming their plans.[29]

Ultimately, what agitated the Hays Office about *Gun Crazy* was that it lacked a strong 'voice for morality'. The narrative was centred on a young criminal hero and the Code had an absolute prohibition of sympathy for 'the side of crime, wrongdoing, evil or sin'.[30]

The influence of the censors caused Lewis to construct Laurie as less sympathetic and more as a stereotype of the *femme fatale* archetype, and Bart as a character who was corrupted by her. Our criminals could not simply be anti-authoritarian: at least one of them needed a conscience.

The Hays Office further outlined that there needed to be 'a greater recognition on the part of Bart, for the career of crime which Laurie has led him to'. Thus, the censors pushed that Bart be cast as an 'unwilling victim' and constantly plea with Laurie to stop their crime spree, and that all dialogue about the 'next job' should be given to Peggy Cummins' character.[31]

It is unsurprising, then, that of the three endings that were drafted for the film, the film ends with Bart killing Laurie as she attempts to shoot the apprehending police officers. This ultimately brings a sense of morality back to the world of the film, and affirms to audiences that crime does not pay, while shifting Bart from a villain into a repentant victim.

Films like *Gun Crazy*, it turns out, thrived under the production code. While there are direct notes sent by the Breen office to filmmakers, the fact that the film was a smaller B production meant that it was less

scrutinised than were larger studio productions. Additionally, the very fact that there was a Hays Code at the time also meant that more mischievous filmmakers were wont to push the limits of acceptable content; thus, Lewis and his blacklisted screenwriter, the uncredited Dalton Trumbo, offer a script full of double-entendres and framing choices that suggest more than they show. In this sense, *Gun Crazy* pushes the boundaries of the Hays Code without ever breaking it.

If the dominant ideological view of the United States at the time of *Gun Crazy*'s release was one that was conservative in nature, then Lewis and his production offer a narrative that is a contrast to this, with a subtle mockery of the establishment.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF REPRESENTATIONS IN *GUN CRAZY* AND HOW THEY REFLECT OR CHALLENGE VIEWS AND VALUES OF A SPECIFIC CONTEXT

During World War II, women contributed actively to the American labour force, working in jobs that fuelled the war effort. A large proportion of bullets, uniforms and supplies were made by female hands. It was women who supported the troops who were fighting abroad; however, when the men returned home, many women were displaced from the assembly lines they had upheld for years prior.

This sudden change, in unison with the rapid growth in marriage numbers and a booming birth rate, meant that the role of women was suddenly shifted to the domestic front. These newly established families, which moved to newly established suburbs (between 1950 and 1970 over 74 million Americans moved to the suburbs), were emblematic of the nation's wholesome and stable persona, one focused on growth and prosperity, as well as modesty.[32]

Within this national identity, men and women observed firm gender roles. Men were the breadwinners, and women were maternal homemakers. These conservative roles were indeed reflected in the pop culture of the era. *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* (1944–66) was a radio and television sitcom that centred around the Nelson family. The family of four represented the idealised version of the nuclear family, with Ozzie as the loving and humorous father, Harriet as the dedicated mother, and David and Ricky as the playful but well-mannered children. The show portrayed the family as happy and harmonious, and bolstered the societal norms of the time. In a similar vein, Disney's *Cinderella* (1950, dirs Clyde Geronimi et al.), which was one of the largest box-office draws of its day, also reinforced strict gender roles, despite the narrative being female-centric. The protagonist, Cinderella, seemingly holds less agency than the male characters and harbours the singular goal to marry a prince, as if this were the highest level of personal achievement. The idea of our animated heroine defeating the evil queen and riding off into the sunset alone and self-sufficient was a concept still decades away. It is against this backdrop of binary gender roles that *Gun Crazy* was released.



FIGURE 7.83 Ozzie and Harriet were the idealised American family of the 1950s.

While not immediately recognisable as a feminist text, the representation of women in *Gun Crazy* is actually quite subversive and seems to critique the one-dimensional





FIGURE 7.84 Ann Baxter and Bette Davis square off in Joseph L Mankiewicz's screwball masterpiece *All About Eve*

sketches of women that were prominent on screen at the time. It is important to note that there were indeed empowered female characters in films during the 1950s, such as Bette Davis' ambitious Margo Channing in *All About Eve* (1950, dir. Joseph L Mankiewicz) and Joan Crawford as Vienna in *Johnny Guitar* (1954, dir. Nicholas Ray), and in almost every film made with Barbara Stanwyck, but the representation of women with the agency of men was few and far between.

If the popular narratives of the 1950s often reinforced a conservative ideology, especially in the representation of women, then Laurie Starr stands in defiance of this established view. While the central character of *Gun Crazy* is introduced as Bart, it is undeniably Cummins' character who propels the story forward. Time and time again, Bart struggles with the outlaw lifestyle and pleas for a 'normal life', offering to take a job at Remington and settle down, to which Laurie rebukes, 'I want things Bart. A lot of things. Big things. I don't want to be afraid of life or anything else.' Where Dall's character craves modesty, Laurie wants anything but.

In fact, one could argue that the gender roles are reversed in *Gun Crazy*. It is Bart, not Laurie, that desires to be married. When she finally yields to Bart's proposal, she says, 'if that's what you want', as if the prospect of being married had never crossed her mind. When millions of women across the United States were making their nuptial vows and raising families, Laurie Starr dreamed of raising hell and planning the perfect robbery, exclaiming, 'What's the use of looking ahead? Today's the thing – that's my philosophy. Today.'

One of the most interesting ways to look at the character of Laurie is by examining her first appearance in the film. When Laurie is introduced to the circus audience by the announcer Packett (Barry Kroeger), she enters the frame firing her two six-shooters in the air dressed as a sideshow cowgirl. After a reaction shot of John Dall looking on admiringly, the camera returns to a medium close-up of Cummins wryly smiling before turning her weapon directly down the barrel of the camera. The gun flare startles Bart, and immediately engages his affection; he's hooked. The shot, however, is not only directed at Dahl's character, but towards the audience itself. By breaking the fourth wall of the film, Laurie in turn breaks the reality of the scene and is arguably threatening the very people watching the film. It's a declaration perhaps that she is far more menacing than any love interest they have known before.

Another way in which we can see how Laurie challenges the conservative representation of women at the time is in comparison to other women in the script, in particular Bart's sister Ruby (Anabel Shaw). Where Laurie is cast as anti-authoritarian from her very first frame, Ruby is seemingly the embodiment of traditional American values: she is married, with three children and lives in the town she grew up in. While Ruby is a minor character with little to do with the plot, the filmmakers shrewdly construct her to be a satire of this fantasy. There is only one scene in which Ruby is not inside the kitchen or exhausted from housework; each time Lewis returns to Ruby she is seen stirring pots, settling babies or breathlessly answering the phone. In comparison to Laurie, Ruby seems to be a parody of the American Dream and perhaps a subtle suggestion from the filmmakers that a traditional way of life is not all it is advertised to be.



FIGURE 7.85 A strange moment of domestic bliss?

One of the more explicit moments where we see Laurie's disdain for the maternal lifestyle is towards the end of Act 3 where she suggests to Bart that the two steal one of Ruby's children, as 'no one would ever dare stop us with a baby'. A ridiculous line of dialogue that also positions Laurie as both an unequivocal villain and a character completely in contrast with the stereotypes of the 1950s.

THE WAYS IN WHICH AUDIENCES FROM DIFFERENT CONTEXTS ENGAGE WITH, CONSUME AND READ *GUN CRAZY*

Gun Crazy is undoubtedly a product of its era. The stylistic and thematic choices both reflect those found in the film noir movement. Audiences at the time of the film's initial release were seemingly not receptive to the particular narrative. This lack of success can, of course, be attributed to lack of marketing and star power; however, in the subsequent 70 years since the raging lovers hit the silver screen, the film has become one of the seminal pictures of 1950. One way to understand this shift in appraisal is by looking at a shift in the way in which audiences consume and read narratives today.

Consumption and engagement

One of the principal reasons for the reappraisal of *Gun Crazy* came once the film found success abroad. In the United States, the film was largely unseen; however, it was in France during the late 1950s that members of the French New Wave celebrated the film for its stylistic inventiveness and muted anti-heroes.[33] Jean-Luc Godard would borrow heavily from *Gun Crazy*'s narrative in his seminal film *Breathless* (1960) and the praise of then-critic François Truffaut would cause the film to be championed by American critics like Paul Schrader, who called the film 'one of the best American Films ever made'.[34] Now, in the 21st century, we have the luxury of seeing the film with favourable insight. Audiences can stream the film wherever and whenever they please, while using YouTube and online journals to further explore the depth of a film that for a long time was largely forgotten.



Reading

We have already established that the post-war era in the United States upheld a largely conservative ideology, in part as a reaction to the turmoil of the Great Depression and World War II. It could be argued that moderation and conservatism are ideals that surface in a reaction to instability. One insight into *Gun Crazy*'s lack of financial and critical success may be because mass audiences of the era were not in-tune with the film's anti-authoritarian content. The idea of sympathetic outlaws robbing American institutions like banks and payroll offices were not characters that audiences were likely to identify with or celebrate.

It is interesting then to consider that a film released only two decades after *Gun Crazy*'s release that traversed a very similar narrative arc was a roaring critical and financial success and has been attributed to heralding a new era in Hollywood cinema. Arthur Penn's 1967 film *Bonnie and Clyde* was considered a 'rallying cry' for filmmakers of the counterculture movement, who saw the moral ambiguity of using bank robbers as protagonists a form of 'revolution', and whose crimes against the establishment seemed to 'legitimise' not conforming to society.[35] *Gun Crazy*, like *Bonnie and Clyde*, was loosely based on the real-life story of Depression-era criminal lovers Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow. With everything that was happening in the United States throughout the 1960s, especially in regards to the growing distrust of the government, its involvement in the Vietnam War and the assassination of social reformers like Martin Luther King Jnr, Malcolm X and John F Kennedy, one can assert that *Gun Crazy* would have found its audience; it was a film that was simply ahead of its time.



FIGURE 7.86 Ahead of her time, Peggy Cummins' turn as outlaw Laurie Starr would influence filmmakers for years to come. (*Right*: Faye Dunaway as the outlaw Bonnie in 1969's *Bonnie and Clyde*)

Nomadland (2020, dir. Chloé Zhao)

Nomadland is a 2020 film directed by Chinese-American filmmaker Chloé Zhao. The film was an adaptation of a 2017 nonfiction book by American author Jessica Bruder titled *Nomadland: Surviving America in the Twenty-First Century*. The film is notable for winning three Oscars in 2021: Best Picture, Best Actress for star Frances McDormand and Best Director for Zhao, who was the first woman of colour and second woman ever (behind Kathryn Bigelow) to win that prestigious award.

The film depicts the life of a woman in her sixties named Fern (McDormand), who lives and travels around the United States in her RV ('recreational vehicle' or campervan). Fern is dealing with the aftermath of the death of her husband, the closure of her workplace, loss of her job and the emptying of the small town that she lived in with her husband. We follow Fern as she meets a range of people on her travels and finds a real sense of community with fellow RV nomads. According to the online Cambridge Dictionary, a nomad is 'a person or a member of a group of people who move from one place to another rather than living in one place all of the time'; this neatly describes Fern and the people she meets, who have the freedom to travel around the US working seasonal jobs to fund their lifestyles. Eventually, Fern returns to her hometown of Empire, Nevada, which is now a ghost town, and visits the house she shared with her husband. She seems to have processed her grief and the film ends with Fern hitting the road again, truly committed to the nomadic lifestyle.

HOW ARE CODES AND NARRATIVE CONVENTIONS USED TO CONVEY MEANING?

Nomadland's narrative has a strong sense of *verisimilitude*, which is the quality of seeming true or of having the appearance of being real. Chloé Zhao employs a range of filmmaking techniques to give the film a documentary-like feel.

Acting and casting

One particular code that stands out immediately in *Nomadland* is that of acting, and by extension, the *casting* of the film. The film features two famous actors in major roles, with Frances McDormand playing the protagonist Fern and David Strathairn as her fellow nomad and potential love-interest, Dave. The choice of actors is an influential factor in the creation of meaning. The audience's understanding of the actor/s, the roles they have played in the past and the public personas they cultivate can influence the way the audience reads a performance.



FIGURE 7.87 Fern (Frances McDormand) and real-life nomads including Linda May on the right of the shot, holding her dog



FIGURE 7.88 Fern and Dave (David Strathairn) sharing a meal, overlooking some spectacular scenery



FIGURE 7.89 During the shoot: director Chloé Zhao, cinematographer Joshua James Richards and lead actress Frances McDormand

McDormand is well known for delivering award-winning performances. Before winning the Best Actress Academy Award for *Nomadland* in 2021, she won the same award for *Fargo* (1997, dirs Joel and Ethan Coen) and for *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* (2018, dir. Martin McDonagh). Her performance in *Nomadland* – notable for being a substantial role for an older actress, as historically these kinds of roles have been rare – is all about warts-and-all realism. McDormand is very charming as Fern, and gives a convincing performance in depicting a nomadic life. We see a lot of seemingly mundane moments of Fern's life on the road: driving, cleaning, eating, repairing her RV or working in a range of casual jobs, all of which create a feeling of authenticity that you are observing her nomadic day-to-day reality.

Significantly, Zhao employs non-professional actors for most of the roles in the film. Even more significantly, many of the actors with speaking roles are real-life nomads, using their real names for their characters. The most prominent of these characters/people are Bob Wells, Swankie and Linda May. In a fictional narrative, it is rare to see media creators use non-professional actors. However, this has proven to be a powerful tool for directors who want their narratives to seem closer to reality and have a documentary-like feel.

This approach of casting 'non-actors' originated in Italy in the years just after World War II, in a style of film known as Italian Neorealism. That generation of filmmakers managed to bridge the gap between reality and fiction by employing people who were living closely to the situations they depicted in film. In much the same way, Zhao used mainly real nomads playing themselves or a scripted version of themselves, with McDormand and Strathairn seamlessly playing off them. For example, the story Bob Wells tells Fern about his son passing away was apparently a real tragedy. Similarly, the scene early in the film where Linda May explains to Fern why she chose the nomadic lifestyle – because she was left feeling suicidal when she realised that a life of work amounted to a pittance of savings – was also authentic.

Camera

Use of camera is another code that stands out in *Nomadland*. Once again, Zhao employs the use of camera in a way that enhances the realism of each scene. As we can see in Figure 7.89, the cameraman is filming McDormand using a Steadicam. This device, supported on a harness, allows a camera operator to smoothly follow an actor without the image appearing unsteady. This approach is the hallmark of how documentaries are filmed, as the filmmakers record the unscripted actions of people, which can be unpredictable.

SUBVERTING GENRE AND NARRATIVE CONVENTIONS TO INCREASE AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

The road movie genre

Zhao deliberately subverts a couple of genre and narrative conventions in *Nomadland* to play with the expectations of her audience.

The early scene in the Amazon fulfilment centre break room, where Fern is being introduced to her new co-workers, shows us a range of real people talking about their lives to McDormand as if she were a real Amazon worker. The person who explains their tattoo features their favourite Morrissey line: 'Home, is it just a word? Or is it something you carry within you?' This question seems to really drive the narrative, as arguably this is what Fern will be searching for. It is also a poignant question for a film in the 'road movie' genre, which *Nomadland* arguably participates in. Film critic Susan Fraiman has discussed the film in this context, arguing that *Nomadland* plays off a genre tradition including films such as *Easy Rider* (1969, dir. Dennis Hopper), *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967, dir. Arthur Penn), *Natural Born Killers* (1994, dir. Oliver Stone) and *Thelma & Louise* (1991, dir. Ridley Scott). Most road movies (with *Thelma & Louise* being a rare exception) feature male characters escaping the domestic sphere or a socially accepted lifestyle, and, as Fraiman puts it,

> […] 'these works challenge social as well as cinematic norms, they also offer what amount to cautionary tales. In each case, women who wander meet tragic fates at the end of stories involving rape and other threats of male violence.
>
> By contrast, Nomadland casually debunks this and other myths about women on their own: that they're hopeless with tools and need men to fix stuff; that a woman without kids or a mate is a pathetic loser who cries herself to sleep at night. When Fern has a flat and appeals to Swankie, the irascible pirate of a woman has four words for her: "Well, go change it!" Fern's confession that she doesn't have a spare earns a lecture from her superbly self-sufficient friend: "You're out in the boondocks and you don't have a spare? You can die out here. … You have to be able to change your own tire!"'

FIGURE 7.90 Susan Fraiman, '"Nomadland" Swerves from the Manly Road Movie', *Public Books* website, 19 November 2021

Fraiman nails why an audience would feel some level of tension seeing Fern putting herself in a potentially vulnerable position. It is our experiences of other road movies which makes us feel this way, and Zhao knows this genre and its conventions. For example, there is a scene where we see Fern get a big fright in her RV, when a stranger (a male parking attendant) knocks on her door in the middle of the night. This moment suggests the potential for an attack or some other catastrophe befalling Fern; we are relieved when this doesn't occur.

ACTIVITY 7.65

Scene analysis

The opening sequence is the first part of the media product where the story, characters and setting are being set up and introduced. It is where the reality of the movie is communicated to the audience. It's also where the possible storylines are being set up, and expectations are created by the audience.

Watch the start of *Nomadland*, until the end of the Amazon warehouse sequence.

1. What *cumulative* effect do the first few scenes have in terms of your expectations for the character of Fern?
2. Interpret the inclusion of the Morrissey lyrics: 'Home, is it just a word? Or is it something you carry within you?' How does this resonate for Fern's journey?



A romantic sub-plot?

A narrative convention that Zhao plays with is the relationship between Fern and Dave. In many Hollywood films, we know that a romantic sub-plot is commonplace. Zhao plays with our expectations as we know that McDormand and Strathairn are the main actors in the film, the characters are both around the same age, single, and living the same nomadic lifestyle; and could be a good match, in the conventional film narrative sense. Strathairn as Dave, in typical Hollywood movie romantic conventions, is a fairly attractive prospect for Fern – he is handsome and charming (apart from when he clumsily breaks Fern's special dinner plates), and exceedingly kind to Fern, finding work for her, and even inviting her to have Thanksgiving dinner with his family. Fern initially seems to be uninterested in Dave or his advances, but we have the sense that it may be part of the ritual of a Hollywood romance where initial lack of intertest eventually turns into romance. We see them dancing and almost playing hide-and-seek with each other in one scene. When Dave decides to settle down and live with his son's family, and leave his life on the road, he invites Fern to join him. Dave's invitation does seem tempting. However, Fern rejects the hospitality of a generous-sized room and comfortable bed to go back and sleep in her RV, suggesting that Fern is too used to her nomadic lifestyle and freedom, and the lure of the road. This is not presented in any judgemental kind of way, but more suggesting that Fern has chosen a particular way of life and is happy to stick with it.

ACTIVITY 7.66

Plot point analysis

As we discussed in Chapter 4, for the narrative to move forward and generate more engagement for the audience, the author needs to create a series of challenging turning points that change the direction of the story. If the main character can solve one problem, that must create an even bigger one that also needs resolving. In a Hollywood three-act narrative, there are generally three major turning points that drive a story forward.

The plot points are subtle in *Nomadland*. Copy and complete this table and fill in the description column to help understand the narrative construction of the film. Note: you may disagree with the choice of scenes – feel free to choose others and justify why with your description/s.

Plot point/turning point	Scene	Description
Inciting incident/Call to action	Fern visits Linda May's trailer. Linda tells Fern to join her at the annual meet-up in Quartzite, Arizona.	
Refusal of the call	Fern tries to make life in Nevada work.	
Acceptance of the call	Fern heads to Quartzite, Arizona and finds the RTR (Rubber Tramp Rendezvous).	
Act 1 break	The RTR comes to an end. Fern watches everyone leave and adjusts to life in the desert alone.	
Midpoint	Dave tells Fern his son is expecting a child and wants him to move in with them.	
Act 2 break	Fern considers Dave's offer, has Thanksgiving dinner with his family, then leaves in her RV.	
Act 3 break/End of film	Fern returns to Empire.	

WHAT REAL-WORLD CONTEXTS HELP US TO READ *NOMADLAND*'S NARRATIVE?

Historical, social and economic contexts

There are a range of factors that help us to better understand *Nomadland*. In terms of historical, social and economic contexts, the film depicts the world of a group of people who have chosen a non-traditional lifestyle due largely to the ramifications of the Great Recession. This was a severe economic downturn also known as the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) that hit the global economy during 2007–09, with its effects being felt for most of the next decade. In the United States, the real-world effects included the closure of many manufacturing businesses, the loss of many jobs and a high unemployment rate.

In the film, set in 2011, Fern and her husband had been employees of the US Gypsum (plaster) plant in the town of Empire, Nevada. This was a real town which was greatly affected when the plant closed, causing the work to dry up and most people to move out of the town. Due to a lack of employment opportunities, many people have chosen to live 'off the grid' as nomads, as living in a motor home is much cheaper than paying for rent or a house mortgage. Notably, the people Fern meets are older white Americans. *Nomadland* is based on the 2017 non-fiction book by Jessica Bruder, who wrote the novel based on her experiences with such older people still dealing with the impacts of the 2007–09 recession. In Bruder's research, she met people who acted as themselves in the film, such as Linda May and Bob Wells, and the film capitalises on the work Bruder put into her book.

In the film scene where Fern has travelled to the desert of Quartzite, Arizona, to the Rubber Tramp Rendezvous, she listens to Bob Wells lay out the mission: 'If society is throwing us away and putting us out to pasture, we workhorses have to gather together and take care of each other, and that is what this is all about.' This reflects Wells' real-life practice. He has been a full-time camper for over 10 years, and is the founder of the website *Cheap RV Living*, in which he shares resources on how to live on the road. He also has a YouTube channel with more than 400 000 subscribers, where he provides helpful tips while his non-profit Home on Wheels Alliance funds programs that bolster the nomadic community. Another real group, which Fern's experience really borrows from, is RVing Women. This was founded in 1991 and boasts more than 2000 members. Some travel alone and are retired, while others go together in small groups and continue working. The organisers on the website share that, 'We want women to develop skills and friendships in that special atmosphere of a women-only space.' Bruder and Zhao were greatly inspired by these kinds of subgroups in the nomad movement.





FIGURE 7.91 (*Left*) Real-life nomads: Kathy Wardell, a full-time camper and member of the mid-Atlantic chapter of a group called RVing Women, poses outside her RV during a camping weekend at the Ramblin Pines campsite just outside Baltimore in Woodbine, Maryland. (*Right*) Women who are part of the group meeting during Oscars weekend of 2021, when *Nomadland*, the film depicting their lifestyles, won Best Picture.



PRODUCTION AND INDUSTRIAL CONTEXTS

Learning a bit more about the way Zhao and her crew shot *Nomadland* enhances and reinforces the sense of authenticity that the codes of casting and shooting style encourage. Producers Frances McDormand and Peter Spears optioned the film rights to the book in 2017. After seeing Chloé Zhao's film *The Rider* (which also featured a cast of non-actors) at the 2017 Toronto International Film Festival, McDormand decided to approach her to direct the project. The movie was filmed in seven states over the course of four months, during which McDormand, Zhao and other crew members lived out of vans alongside the real-life nomads.

McDormand actually performed several of the jobs done by people who do nomadic work and inspired the book, such as harvesting beetroots and packaging Amazon orders with the CamperForce program. McDormand nicknamed the van used in the film 'Vanguard', which she decorated with her own personal items and slept in during the shoot. We see Fern say this to Linda in the film, and no wonder McDormand was so convincing, as she was living in the actual van. McDormand blended into the nomadic community so well that one of the local Target stores even asked her to apply for a job!

The non-professional actors and their real-life stories guided the movie's script;

> 'We had no idea who we'd come into contact with on a daily basis', Zhao said. 'Everything happens simultaneously, because once we meet someone like Swankie, we realise she has to be in the film, and that informs the journey that Fern is going to take', Zhao said. McDormand told *Deadline* that everyone worked together to learn about the lifestyle and make the movie together: 'We were able to move very swiftly and improvisationally when necessary and live in the community of the van dwellers in a way that wasn't disruptive but cohesive.'

FIGURE 7.92 Nancy Tartaglione, '"Nomadland': Frances McDormand & Chloe Zhao On Being Docents For The Van-Dwelling Community – Venice', *Deadline*, 11 September 2020

Film critic Eric Kohn wrote an article explaining the method of shooting the film. He interviewed Zhao's assistant director, Hannah Peterson, who explained that Zhao would adapt her script on the fly after meeting different nomads on the road, and would listen intently to people to weave their personalities and personal narratives into the story she wanted to tell. Zhao's longtime producer Mollye Asher told Kohn that people would initially be skeptical about appearing on camera, but would soon open up to Zhao because she 'makes people feel special. Chloé truly wants to hear their story and she wants them to tell it.'

Many of Frances McDormand's co-stars, such as Charlene Swankie and Bob Wells, had no idea that she was a Hollywood star. Bob still did not know this until after they shot an emotional scene in which Fern remembers her late husband, Beau. Afterward, he said to McDormand privately that it meant a lot for her to tell him that story and that everything was going to be OK. She subsequently revealed to him that her husband's name was actually Joel Coen (a famous film director) and that he was still alive, which surprised Bob as he learnt that McDormand was in fact an actress. In an interview with *Variety*, Swankie spoke of the happiness she felt from participating in the project. 'I felt more love from Fran and Chloé and the film crew than I felt from my own biological family. I can never really show my gratitude for that', she said.



FIGURE 7.93 Chloé Zhao, winner of the Best Director for *Nomadland*, poses in the press room during the 93rd Annual Academy Awards at Union Station on 25 April 2021 in Los Angeles, California

THE WAYS IN WHICH AUDIENCES FROM DIFFERENT CONTEXTS ENGAGE WITH, CONSUME AND READ *NOMADLAND*

For an Australian audience, a film released towards the end of the Trump era, set in the American Midwest, did raise some expectations of seeing more of a political angle to the film. Zhao (and Bruder before her) apparently made a deliberate effort to depoliticise the story, much of which takes place in Trump country: 'I tried to focus on the human experience and things that I feel go beyond political statements to be more universal – the loss of a loved one, searching for home.'

The film was also released at the height of the COVID-19 global pandemic, at a time of lock-downs and great restrictions on people's freedoms. The cinematography and genre may have appealed to audiences whose movements were restricted. For Jessica Bruder, it was Fern's emotional journey that would resonate for a global audience at that time, 'Fern has a certain control...a sort of constrained agency [of her life]'.

As a film dealing with the ramifications of a severe economic downturn on individuals, at the time of writing audiences around the world can sadly relate to this situation. Hopefully, *Nomadland* and its message of community spirit and self-discovery in the face of great challenges gives us hope.



ACTIVITY 7.67

Reflection on the ethics of filmmaking

Some film reviewers argued that Zhao's 'depoliticisation' of *Nomadland* left it open to criticism, especially the scene set in an Amazon warehouse, as Amazon has been accused of dehumanising mistreatment of its employees. Some critics felt the film romanticised poverty, while others felt that Fern had a level of dignity and agency to choose her way of life: 'I'm not homeless', Fern says. 'I'm just … houseless. Not the same thing, right?'

Do some research on what critics said about the film then discuss the following:

- *The filmmaking approach to Nomadland was ethically sound.*

Use evidence to justify your position for or against this statement.

Some suggested places to start are listed here:

- ReAnn Quick, 'The Ethics of Filming Poverty: Who Has a Right to Tell "Nomadland" (2020)?', *Flip Screen*, 25 April 2021
- Jessa Crispin, 'Amazon Is a Disaster for Workers. *Nomadland* Glosses Over That', *The Guardian*, 24 March 2021
- Wilfred Chan, 'What *Nomadland* Gets Wrong About Gig Labor', *Vulture*, 22 February 2021

CASE STUDY 7.1

***Black Mirror* (2011-, creator Charlie Brooker)**

Black Mirror, an anthology series produced by Netflix, offers an incisive critique of contemporary society through its use of narrative conventions and media codes. Each episode is self-contained, presenting a unique narrative that combines elements of science fiction and psychological thriller genres. The series utilises a broad range of codes and conventions, from the visual, such as stark contrasts in lighting and dystopian settings, to auditory codes, with disconcerting soundscapes augmenting the sense of unease. These conventions work in harmony to underscore the narrative's central themes, engage the audience, and shape their reading of the narrative.

The context of the series is pivotal in understanding the narratives presented. Each episode's storyline can be viewed as a response to a particular aspect of our current socio-cultural context. Themes of surveillance, technology addiction, and the erosion of privacy are prevalent, mirroring our world's ongoing digital transformation and the profound changes it has brought about.

Black Mirror provides an explicit critique of the institutional context of contemporary media production. The series often explores the concentration of power within a handful of multinational tech companies and their increasing influence over everyday life. Additionally, it probes the commodification of personal data and the ethical implications of such practices.

The economic context is likewise critical in understanding *Black Mirror*. The series was released during a time of significant shifts in the television industry, with streaming services like Netflix disrupting traditional distribution models. This change in the economic landscape has allowed for greater creative freedom, enabling shows like Black Mirror to thrive with its unconventional storytelling.

Finally, the political context of the series is apparent in its recurrent exploration of power dynamics. Many episodes of Black Mirror depict societies where technology is wielded as a tool of control, reflecting real-world concerns about the potential misuse of advanced technology by powerful entities.

Overall, *Black Mirror* stands as a testament to the potential of media to mirror and interrogate the complexities of our contemporary context. Its creative use of narrative conventions and response to various historical, institutional, political, economic, and cultural factors offers audiences a thought-provoking and often unsettling viewing experience.



FIGURE 7.94 Charlie Brooker, creator of Netflix anthology series *Black Mirror*



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CHAPTER REVIEW

Summing it all up

The narratives that we consume are a product of a time and place. Every director and media producer draws on the influences of their own creative interactions with narratives and their own reaction to the world around them. Directors and media creators straddle two worlds. One of these is based in the codes and conventions developed over centuries of storytelling, and the other is based in the moment the story is conceived. Bong Joon-ho used *Parasite* to question the world of modern South Korea, to shine a light on those who have not reaped the benefits of the nation's rapid growth. Taika Waititi told a story of an unlikely alliance between an errant Māori boy and a disgruntled farmer, while drawing the audience towards deeper social issues within New Zealand. *Star Wars* tells the story of good vs evil, in a social context of great social upheaval in the United States. *The Shawshank Redemption* and *Gun Crazy* both draw our attention to the past in different ways. While *Gun Crazy* exists as a timepiece of social commentary on 1950s America, *The Shawshank Redemption* shows us what storytellers can do when they look back on those same attitudes and values of years gone by with a new perspective. *Nomadland* is a road movie that tells a story about a real subculture which has developed in recent years in the United States, while *Black Mirror* is a Netflix anthology series which makes viewers think twice about their use of technology in a rapidly-changing world. When telling a story, context is everything.

Revision questions

1 **Define** the process of developing a media narrative.
2 **Explain** the way different media forms can influence the way a narrative is told.
3 **Define** the way technology has changed the way media producers have been able to tell stories and develop narrative.
4 **Explain** how institutional context can influence the production, distribution, consumption and reading of media narratives.
5 **Explain** how the media narrative you studied is a reflection of the time and place it was produced.
6 **Explain** how the media narrative you studied uses codes and conventions to convey meaning to an audience in one scene.
7 **Explain** how the media narrative you studied has been read by a range of audiences in different contexts and time periods.
8 **Explain** how audience reading and consumption context can influence audience reading using the media narrative you studied from this chapter.

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Practice assessment questions

1 **Explain** how the construction of media narratives in one or more media forms influences audience engagement.

2 **Define** the way different audiences engage with the media forms you mentioned in the previous response.

3 Using two or more examples from a narrative text you have studied, **explain** the relationship between codes and conventions to convey meaning.

4 Using one narrative text you have studied, **explain** how the social, historical and institutional context influenced the construction of the film.

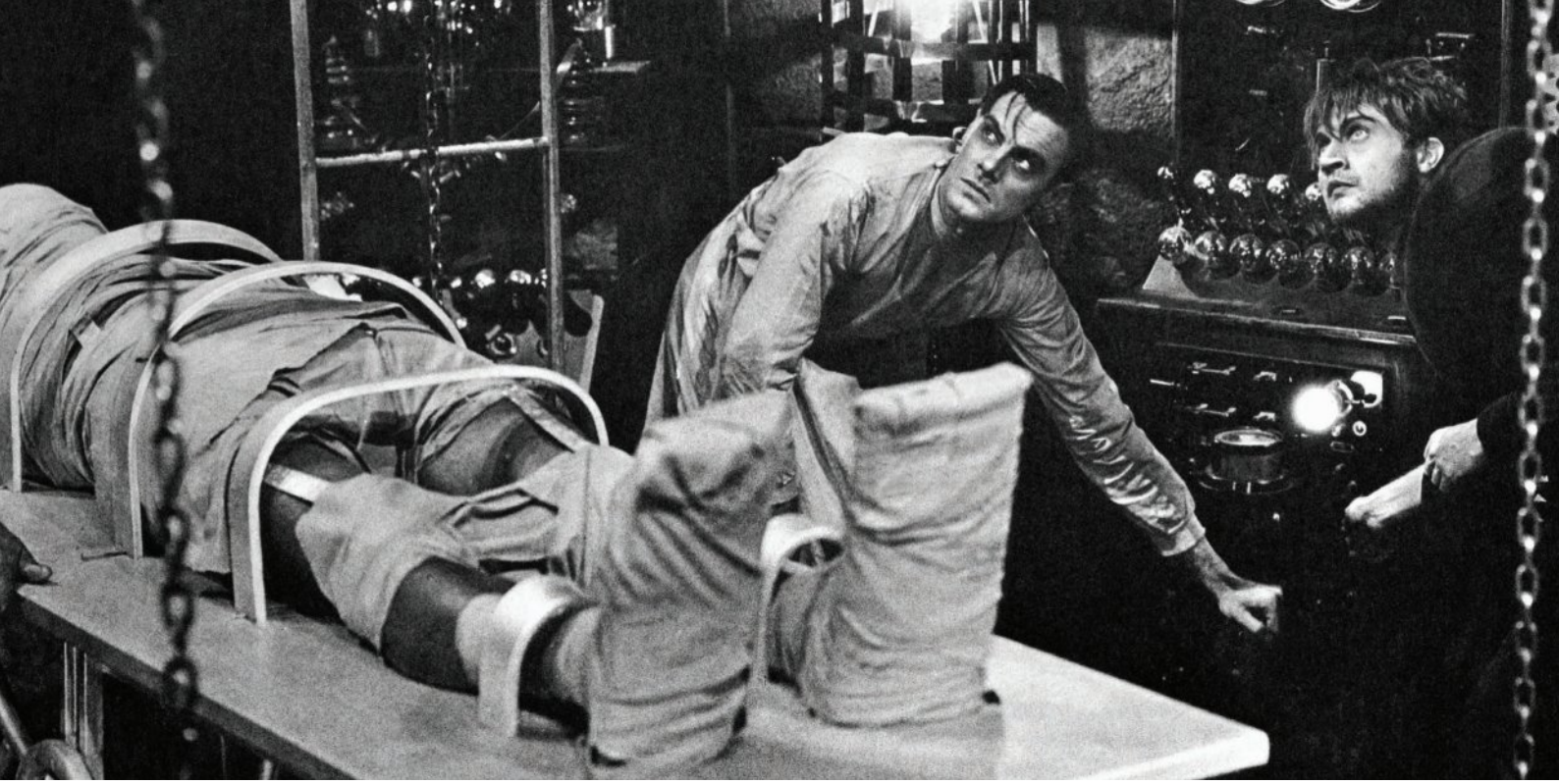
5 **Analyse** the way one media narrative you have studied this year has reflected or challenged the views and values of the context within which it was produced.

6 **Compare and contrast** the way audiences from different contexts engage with and consume media narratives.

Digital content

- Access the Interactive Textbook via Cambridge GO to access a downloadable Success Criteria checklist, digital quizzes and additional digital content for this chapter.

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CHAPTER 8 AREA OF STUDY 2

RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND EXPERIMENTATION

INQUIRY QUESTION

How are ideas, research, investigation and experimentation used in the development of media products?

— VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, p. 28, used with permission

OVERVIEW

Research is a vital component to developing your own ideas. Great filmmakers have found their ideas in an investigation of their own lives, the people who surround them and in the stories that formed their own love for telling them. It's time to borrow, adapt and recreate ideas and techniques that appeal to you and reflect the ideas you want to express and communicate the most. More importantly, it's a chance to dive into that 'one thing' from your study of media that you love the most and learn everything there is to know about it.

FIGURE 8.1 (above) Colin Clive, as Dr Frankenstein, and Dwight Frye, as his assistant Fritz, prepare to bring their monster to life in a scene from the 1931 movie version of *Frankenstein* (dir. James Whale). Creating a monster is in a sense what you are about to undertake with your media production!

OUTCOME 2

On completion of this unit the student should be able to research and document aspects of a media form, codes, narrative conventions, style, genre, story and plot to inform the plan for a media production.

To achieve this outcome the student will draw on key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 2.

KEY KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING INTENTIONS

Key knowledge	Learning intentions – at the end of the chapter I will be able to:
Research and development	
• methods for developing ideas for a media production	• develop ideas for a media production
• research on a media form and products to inform a production	• research a media form and products to inform a production
• how codes and conventions are used by media producers to convey meaning and engage audiences	• analyse how media producers use codes and conventions to convey meaning and engage audiences
• how audiences read and are engaged by media codes and narrative conventions	• analyse how audiences read and are engaged by media codes and narrative conventions
Experimentation	
• research to inform the development of skills in a selected media form	• undertake research to inform the development of skills in a selected media form
• media equipment, technologies and processes appropriate to a selected media form and proposed product	• develop skills in the use of equipment, media technologies and processes appropriate to a selected media form and proposed product
• the process of recording, documenting and evaluating research	• record, document and evaluate the exploration and development of skills in a selected media form
Media language	
• media language to evaluate and document research of a selected media form	• apply media language in documentation and evaluation

(**Source:** Adapted from VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, pp. 28–9, used with permission)

WHAT'S AHEAD

SECTION 8.1	SECTION 8.2	SECTION 8.3	SECTION 8.4	SECTION 8.5
Introduction: Conducting production experiments	Brainstorming and gathering knowledge	Researching	Documenting and presenting your research	The exercises, presenting and reflecting

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8.1 Introduction: Conducting production experiments

Before you put down your ideas on paper and get this crazy film up and running, you have the opportunity to undertake two production experiments. Think of these as mini-products because you will research, produce and analyse and reflect on your overall process. This investigation of different types of techniques and aesthetics will inevitably inform your final product, but each of these experiments needs to be fully realised whether it fails or succeeds. You may end up using these experiments in your final product or using your newly developed skills to enhance your final media product.

SAT (school-assessed task) the major production for VCE Media Units 3 & 4

media production what the Units 3 & 4 student will produce for their SAT

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the requirements of the second Outcome of this unit. You will conduct an investigation into the various aspects of the media form in which you intend to create your **SAT (school-assessed task)**. Put simply, you will examine elements of filmmaking, photography, animation, audio, print or another hybridised form to better prepare yourself for your major production.

The task comes in three parts:

1. research
2. production activities
3. a complete **media production** development plan.

Media production development task

Your assessment for this Outcome will involve a series of small tasks:

1. You will need to research and gather knowledge about your media form.
2. You will need to research a specific element of this that interests you.
3. You will need to use media equipment and technology to create a production exercise.
4. You will need to submit a reflection and analysis of these exercises.



FIGURE 8.2 Steps involved in the Media production development task

8.2 Brainstorming and gathering knowledge

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- methods for developing ideas for a media production
- research on a media form and products to inform a production
- how media producers use codes and conventions to convey meaning and engage audiences
- how audiences read and are engaged by media codes and narrative conventions.

It's important to approach your media form from a distance to understand all the elements. Are you interested in film? Animation? Documentary? Photography? A printed series of layouts? A hybrid digital presentation? Is it the form or the idea that attracts you? You should already have started thinking of an idea on your holidays so now is the time to set the wheels in motion.

During this process, make notes in a brainstorming document, either on a physical page or on a digital document. You'll use all of the ideas you collect here in your final Media development plan submission. So let's begin!

Throughout your study of media representations, you looked at how media codes and conventions were used to construct or suggest meaning. Look back to your notes as you begin brainstorming ideas. What other conventions will help your audience understand your ideas? Ask classmates if they can follow your ideas.



FIGURE 8.3 Dr Frankenstein faces the monster he created in *Frankenstein*

ACTIVITY 8.1

Developing your ideas

Begin the process of brainstorming and gathering knowledge. Outline your ideas in a sketch book or Word document so you can drop ideas into them when they come to you. Start one now!

Narrative

The term *diegesis* gets thrown around quite a bit by Media students and teachers. Understanding your plot line, characters and their relationships are some of the most important factors in telling a great story. By creating a back story for each character that inhabits your narrative, you are in turn building the conventions of the diegetic world of your story.

One task you may set yourself in this outcome is investigating different types of characters and creating a back story for each of them, so that you can better comprehend the world of your story.



FIGURE 8.4 Brainstorming ideas is an important part of the creative process.



Ideas for creating character lists:

- Use an old Teledex to make character profiles; believe it or not, they still make and sell inserts at office supplies stores.
- Most scriptwriting software, such as StudioBinder, has character sheets as one of its functionalities.
- Create a spreadsheet for each scene of the film and its corresponding characters.
- Make a list of props every character needs, and reasons why they could not survive without them.
- Enter your findings into your brainstorming documents.

ACTIVITY 8.2

Developing your ideas

It's your creative licence! This world that you will soon create for your story has rules and codes that you have the final say over. In your production experiments, you might want to explore the storylines of other films to help get the ball rolling.

1 Construct lists for the 'rules of the world' of your favourite films or animations. Explain how the story unfolds.
2 Explain how and what you would like to incorporate into your own production and explore in an exercise.
3 Outline your findings in your brainstorming documents.

Genre and style

curated media content that has been gathered and collected by users for a specific audience

sepia a reddish-brown colour associated particularly with monochrome photographs

An audience should understand what your genre is very quickly. As student media makers, we don't have a whole lot of time to introduce every facet of our story; some of this must be implied through props, opening *title typography* or other clues craftily **curated** in the background. *Colour correcting* your shots with a subtle green tinge tells your viewer they are in a sci-fi film, while adding **sepia** tones takes us back in time to the Western genre and beyond.

ACTIVITY 8.3

Developing your ideas

When thinking about styles appropriate to your production's narrative, you can easily make a collage of other stories from the same category.

1 The big question is, how does your story stand out?
2 What makes your final product unique and authentic to your personal style?
3 Outline your findings in your brainstorming document.

DIGITAL LINK

See the Interactive Textbook for some tips on coming up with ideas.





FIGURE 8.5 Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) uses a washed-out stylisation to convey a war-torn European landscape.

Structural qualities

Producers construct products so that audiences understand them. We all love being tested; however, the harder something is to figure out, the less chance we have of getting our idea across to our specific and intended audience. The first screening of your piece could be its last, so working out the best way to tell your story is vital.

Choosing to shoot a sequence and then editing the shots in a variety of ways could be a fantastic experiment for those wanting to shoot a short film later in the year.

ACTIVITY 8.4

Developing your ideas

Consider ways in which you could order or reorder a sequence from your idea.

1. Regardless of the form you have chosen, create a series of storyboards, sketch out your story possibilities and identify the possible effects and meaning derived from your storyboards.
2. Outline your findings into your brainstorming documents.

In your study of narrative and ideology, you would have looked at the way a feature-length film's storyline was presented to its audience and how meaning was conveyed through specific directorial choices. What could non-linear editing do for your project that linear editing cannot? You may also experiment with the way sound is edited to convey meaning.

In former VCE Media student Dominic Allen's film production *Two Men*, the two main characters are brought closer to the audience through the use of multiple shots. The first shot is of both men in a wide shot, followed by a mid-shot and, finally, a close-up shot of each character. This sequence of edits introduces each man by increasing their **screen real estate** or ownership within the frame. This can be referred to as building the visual intensity of a character.

screen real estate relating to how much space an object takes up on the screen



FIGURE 8.6 Stills from Dominic Allen's *Two Men* – employing a sequence of cuts from long, to mid, to close-ups on the actors increases their screen real estate, building the visual intensity of each character.

handheld shot camera shots created without the stability of a tripod

dolly the apparatus used to move a camera during the shot

Some other varieties in structure you may find you need to flesh out before you draw up a shot list for your final production might be the use of camera movement. Will you choose to go **handheld**, will you stabilise shots with a tripod or will you create flow with a **dolly** effect?

The mid-shot of two characters within a frame can become boring pretty quickly. What other methods could you implement to make a scene dynamic? Or, do you have what it takes to break conventions entirely and shoot from uncommon angles to reach a desired effect? This is your chance to experiment to see what works for your piece.

Aesthetic qualities

Beauty rests in the eye of the beholder; however, a director makes their own decision about what they want to shoot and how they intend to shoot it. This creation of personal style is what makes art so wonderful and also so mind-boggling. The audience is left to interpret the message and thus find the beauty between the subject and the style.

Each shot you capture implies its own message to the audience. This is what makes this outcome so enjoyable as you are getting the opportunity to test and question your very own style. Nothing is set in stone, yet!

ACTIVITY 8.5

Developing your ideas

If you want to make a film or animation, look back to your filmmaking heroes and ask why they are your heroes.

1 Take single frames from your favourite screen stories and analyse them using your knowledge of:
   - **a** mise en scene
   - **b** symmetry
   - **c** colour
   - **d** the use of line/depth/distance
   - **e** light vs darkness in the frame.

Choosing to storyboard or location scouting for this Outcome will lend itself to an expansive practice of perception and appreciation for the aesthetic, and it will present you with a multitude of possibilities for your film. The last thing you want is to limit your production.

2 Add all of your notes and findings to your brainstorming.

ACTIVITY 8.6

Visual analysis

1 Examine this still from Sofia Coppola's *Marie Antoinette* (2006).

2 Explain how the use of light, line and texture engages the audience.



FIGURE 8.7 Kirsten Dunst as the title character in *Marie Antoinette*

ACTIVITY 8.7

Developing your ideas

Assess the equipment available to you at home or at school.

1 What equipment will you be able to use for your production and exercise?

2 Do these tools allow you to do this?

3 What software and editing tools do you have access to?

4 Do they have the capacity to perform the functions you have in mind?

5 Enter your findings into your brainstorming document.



8.3 Researching

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- methods for developing ideas for a media production
- research on a media form and products to inform a production
- how media producers use codes and conventions to convey meaning and engage audiences
- how audiences read and are engaged by media codes and narrative conventions.

production design set of written and visual documents that detail the stages of production of a proposed product (written in Unit 3) that the student will realise in Unit 4

You need to begin building a Media **production design** for your research and experiment. You should use the template provided to begin structuring the 'formal' findings of your research.

If you're stuck for ideas, this book you're reading now is full of ideas, directors, films, styles and discussions of techniques that have been used to engage audiences. Revisit the narrative, style and genre, and media and change chapters to read about established and new forms of audience engagement.

Everything you need to springboard your research is right here in this book!

Find a technique or process that you like and want to pursue and learn. Begin with an investigation into the background of the process, technique or skill. Take notes on everything, especially keeping a log of every website you research. You may intend to emulate a very specific technique.

ACTIVITY 8.8

Developing your ideas

Examine all of your brainstorming and then answer the following questions:

- What is the skill you want to explore?
- What do you already know about this skill and what are you hoping to learn or get out of the exercise?
- Who performs this skill in the real world? How did they do it?
- What technical capacity, equipment and skill are required to learn it?

The key is to keep it simple and set achievable goals. For instance, if you are competent in Adobe After Effects, then you could choose a new process within the application, but understand that you are not going to conquer the entire application that is After Effects in just three weeks.

You will meet with your teacher to discuss your goals for these experiments and how achievable they will be in the given timeframe. Your teacher will outline the boundaries of the experiment with you.

Some ideas to help you make a plan could be:

- editing transitions between characters
- using lighting to change understanding of a character
- using effects software to create realistic explosions
- using soundtracks to alter meaning
- animating the same character in three different animation styles
- creating a podcast in a variety of formats.

ACTIVITY 8.9

Developing your ideas

1 Record the following findings in your design.

2 Develop this experiment around an accomplishable goal that will inform your learning. Are you researching a specific camera technique that you would like to emulate in your final film?

AMAZING FACT

The **dolly zoom**, also known as Hitchcock's 'Vertigo effect', tests a camera operator's understanding of lens focus and camera movement.

dolly zoom aka '*Vertigo* Effect'; an in-camera effect that appears to undermine normal visual perception. The effect is achieved by using a zoom lens to adjust the angle of view (often referred to as field of view, or FOV) while the camera dollies (moves) towards or away from the subject in such a way as to keep the subject the same size in the frame throughout.



FIGURE 8.8 A shot from Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1957), starring Jimmy Stewart, suggesting the famed camera effect

STUDY TIP

Former VCE Media student Jamie Miller made the impressive *Magnum Opus* in 2020, which won the prize for best film at that year's VCAA Top Screen awards. Having a look at Jamie's content in the Interactive Textbook could be a good resource for your research!

DIGITAL LINK

See the Interactive Textbook for access to Jamie Miller's media design folio, finished production *Magnum Opus*, and reflective video interview.

ACTIVITY 8.10

Research task

Now examine work from a past student at your own school in the media form you have chosen and write a potential intention and audience statement.

8.4 Documenting and presenting your research

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- methods for developing ideas for a media production
- research on a media form and products to inform a production
- how media producers use codes and conventions to convey meaning and engage audiences
- how audiences read and are engaged by media codes and narrative conventions.

From the beginning you are recording your findings. Make it paramount in your process that you use a pen and saturate that design plan with ideas. Once experimentation is done, it is time to record your findings and evaluate if this skill or process is of use to you in the coming weeks.

The SAT is time-sensitive and time is of the essence. The questions you asked yourself at the beginning of your investigation need to be answered in a neat and tidy way.

FIGURE 8.9 Recording your findings is paramount.



Whether it's during Year 11 or over the summer holidays before Year 12 begins, any ideas you have for your major Media production should be recorded:

- If you're someone who generates your ideas before bed or when you wake up from a dream, have a notebook and pen beside your bed to record any interesting ideas.
- Some students have a corkboard in their bedroom on which they can place relevant pictures or quotes when generating ideas over a period of time.
- If you're a technologically inclined person, using a memo or notepad app on your phone or tablet can be very useful for those moments when you know you'll otherwise forget the idea in a fleeting moment. Always back up the files by emailing them to yourself if the list gets longer over time.
- You could also write directly onto a brainstorming page. This way you don't lose your work and it's all in the same place.
- Use Keynote or PowerPoint presentation slides.
- Audio or video recordings – a simple vlog recording of your face and voice is easy to do, and you do not need to spend hours editing this portion of your work. Once you've collated all your ideas you can begin to put your brainstorming together via a range of methods:
    - A simple piece of paper with a key word or phrase in the middle can help you generate ideas. A mind map is a great tool for grouping ideas visually into related themes or topics. Compared to lists or notes, a mind or concept map is visual, and therefore it quickly connects ideas.
    - There is digital mind mapping software available where you can choose how you'd like to present your ideas via colours and shapes, if aesthetics is what you're going for. Once you've completed one or even a few mind maps, your idea can evolve via specific techniques to evaluate further.

A simple pros and cons list may benefit your production idea, but taking it one step further creates more directed focus and may allow you to better decide if it's worth pursuing or perhaps altering it slightly. You may even decide that it may be best suited in another medium entirely. Some other brainstorming activities are listed here:

- **PMI** stands for plus, minus, interesting
- **SWOT** stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats
- **SCAMPER** stands for substitute, combine, adapt, modify, put to another use, eliminate, reverse.

To present your research, use the template below and submit it to your teacher.

PART ONE: THE RESEARCH

1 **What form are you using?**
    - What are your reasons for using it?
    - What do you see as its greatest qualities?

2 **Outline the media codes and conventions of your form.**

Explain the narrative conventions and story styles appropriate to the selected media form and genre you have chosen. In here, you should show evidence that you understand the basic structure of stories specific to your genre and examples where elements of the technique you want to experiment with are evident.



3 **Explain the structural and aesthetic qualities of that genre and style that engage and are read by audiences.**

Show evidence of research that examines how individual codes work alone and with others to create meaning in your chosen form. Discuss and analyse examples.

4 **What are you researching?**

- What is the skill you want to explore?
- What do you already know about this skill and what are you hoping to learn or get out of the exercise?
- Who performs this skill in the real world?

5 **Research the work of at least three individuals or works that use the technique or practice that you wish to explore.**

- What is it that you like about their work?
- How do you intend to incorporate it into your own idea?

6 **Write your intention.**

- Write a detailed statement of how you intend to use technical equipment to present three experiments with the codes, conventions, aesthetic qualities or genre of your chosen form.



DIGITAL LINK

See the Interactive Textbook for a downloadable version of this form.

8.5 The exercises, presenting and reflecting

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- research to inform the development of skills in a selected media form
- media equipment, technologies and processes appropriate to a selected media form and proposed product
- the process of recording, documenting and evaluating research.

You are essentially building upon your prior knowledge here, so dig deep and think to yourself: how can I help my future self? You may end up using these experiments in your final product or using your newly developed skills to enhance your final media product.

Let's look at Jamie Miller's first experiment on the next page for his film *Magnum Opus* (2020). Jamie begins by stating an intention, describing the equipment he will use, showing the method he works through, outlining his results (and it's great to see here there are several examples) and, finally, Jamie evaluates his findings and forms conclusions on where he will go from here.

CRITERION TWO



RESULTS

The initial frame captured *(1a: below, left)* is with a high aperture of f/8, a shutter speed of 1/30 and an ISO of 600. It is being lit by the daylight from the window and one fill right. The next frame *(1b: below, right)* features many alterations. I have added a key light on the right of the frame to highlight the foreground more, lowered the aperture to f/2.8 to create a blurred background effect, and to correct the white balance and make the image more natural, I turned the ISO up to 1000. As I was shooting at 24 FPS, I also changed the shutter speed to 1/50 in line with the idea that the shutter speed should sit around roughly double the frame rate. The result of such changes is a far more aesthetically pleasing shot that looks like it has been lit professionally.





The above shots feature centralised framing. A convention of formal interviews, and shots in general, in film and television is to shoot them according to the rule of thirds, which means lining up the subject along one of the dividing thirds of the image and not in the centre. With this in mind, I changed the framing of the shot to match the rule. The result is a nicer looking image that more strictly adheres to the technical codes of framing researched in criterion 1. I also wanted to further enhance the difference between the foreground and background, so I added a backlight in shot 2b *(next page, right)* which better contoured the face of the subject.

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DIGITAL LINK

For further detailed information about conducting experiments for your SAT, and to read Jamie Miller's folio for Magnum Opus, please visit the Interactive Textbook.

CRITERION TWO





My primary reference for this experiment was the interview style of *'Garth Marenghi's Darkplace'* as explored in criterion 1. A convention of this aesthetic was the black backdrop, so I covered the window with a black sheet to see the difference. Shot 3a features the background, as well as the key and fill lights. Shot 3b features just the key light, and shot 3c features the key and back light. 3b and 3c appear more striking due to the greater contrast created by limiting the amount of light on the subject, and thus appear to be preferable in replicating the aesthetic of my reference material.







Following this, I again wanted to alter the framing to adhere to the rule of thirds, as seen throughout shot 4. Shot 4b features the key and back light only akin to shot 3c, which matches my chosen aesthetic. For shot 4c, I added a small LED where the fill light was, which filled in some of the shadows on the actor's face.







Post-filming, I took the footage into Final Cut Pro X and corrected the exposure, as well as adjusting the cropping slightly. I settled on Helvetica Neue at size 66 font as it provided a simple, understated elegance that did not detract from the overall image. I italicised the profession to differentiate it from the name. I went with white text with a drop shadow to make it pop but not be too distracting. I initially had the text on the left of frame, but moved it to the right (shot 5b) so that it would balance the frame more and not clash with the colour of the subject's clothing.

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FIGURE 8.10 Excerpts from 2020 VCE Media student Jamie Miller's media design folio, referring to his experiments





FIGURE 8.10 (*Continued*)

Having trouble coming up with an experiment for your production? Take a look at some of the various media products for each medium below. With a classmate, make a list of different codes and conventions associated with each product and then consider how you could research and test an individual element to further your understanding for the SAT.

Videos:

1. Time-lapse video
2. Stop-motion video
3. Multi-camera shoot
4. Reverse video
5. Split-screen video
6. 360-degree video

Podcasts:

1. Interview podcast
2. Unscripted podcast
3. Narrative podcast
4. Ambient sound podcast
5. Music podcast
6. Multi-host podcast

Animations:

1 2D animation
2 3D animation
3 Motion graphics
4 Stop-motion animation
5 Whiteboard animation
6 Cut-out animation

Photography:

1 Long-exposure photography
2 High-speed photography
3 Light painting photography
4 Double-exposure photography
5 Aerial photography
6 Infrared photography

Multi-media productions:

1 Interactive video
2 Augmented reality
3 Virtual reality
4 Immersive experiences
5 Interactive installations
6 Motion capture



Documenting your exercises

The equipment and technology you use for this outcome should be your own or your school's property. You are developing a new skill by testing a process for a specific audience. Always keep the targeted audience in mind.

How will this process make your life easier in the production process later? Also ask yourself, will the type of influence you have over your audience change, for better or for worse?

You need to begin documenting your exercise. Create a new document that will constitute Part Two of this assessment. Here you will need to write your intention for this exercise. It has three elements:

1 the intention
2 an explanation of how you will use technical equipment and practices to achieve this
3 a reflection on what did and did not work in your exercise.

This is a written explanation of the intended product. It should briefly cover the initial sequence along with the ways you aim to explore and experiment with your selected element. You need to be specific as to what effect you want to create. You also need to suggest possible ways to achieve this.

Some springboard ideas to get your creative juices flowing:

- an exercise in editing; for example, a sequence of shots and/or sound to achieve a required intention for a particular audience
- recording sound using equipment you or your school have



- lighting; for example, lighting a space for a specific intention
- organising a layout of a page using typography and/or images
- using photographic software to edit images; that is, filters and correcting colour
- planning a multimedia presentation or product with reference to design plan specifications
- creating a comparison collage of a variety of filters to convey a specific intention or style
- planning, photographing or recording an activity within a set number of shot types and/or camera angles
- arranging a composition within a frame to achieve a particular style, which is filmed or photographed.

Make sure you review the rubric throughout the outcome and discuss it with your teacher before setting off on this first of three adventures.

See below for the full template for this section of the Media production design.

PART TWO: THE EXERCISE

Intention

This is a written explanation of the intended product. It should briefly cover the initial sequence along with the ways you aim to explore and experiment with your selected element. You need to be specific as to what effect you want to create. You also need to suggest possible ways to achieve this.

You also need to describe the media processes being applied to develop particular skills to present specific ideas and/or achieve particular effects. For example: How does the focus on audio/editing assist in the overall production and what skills are required/being examined?

During

This section of the task will consist of a written description outlining the techniques you are using. You should also give details of the effect you are trying to create and achieve and the information you are trying to convey to the audience.

1. Basically, you need to explain why you are using each effect/track.
2. Explain how the research informs your decision. What elements will you try to emulate and recreate and what elements will you attempt to adapt and improve upon?

Outcome

This needs to be at *least* one page in length. Discuss what you have discovered in undertaking the task. You need to explain how the completed exercise has realised the stated intention of the task. You will also need to outline the extent to which the intention was realised.

This means considering which editing effect/audio track/photo manipulation technique best conveys the idea you were looking to achieve. Justify your answer. What was wrong with the other ways? Explain why the original idea is better or worse than other options. What makes it more/less effective?



DIGITAL LINK

See the Interactive Textbook for a downloadable version of this form.



CHAPTER REVIEW

Summing it all up

This Outcome serves you, the student, in a number of ways. In a short span of time, you will investigate, perform and evaluate a specific skill or process that you have until now not attempted. By learning something new, you have one more piece in your media arsenal that you have been building throughout the last two units. Your findings throughout the various experiments need to be documented using media-specific language relevant to the tasks and your study of VCE Media. Records will show an analysis that ends with a conclusion that informs the reader if you will consider utilising this skill set in your future SAT.

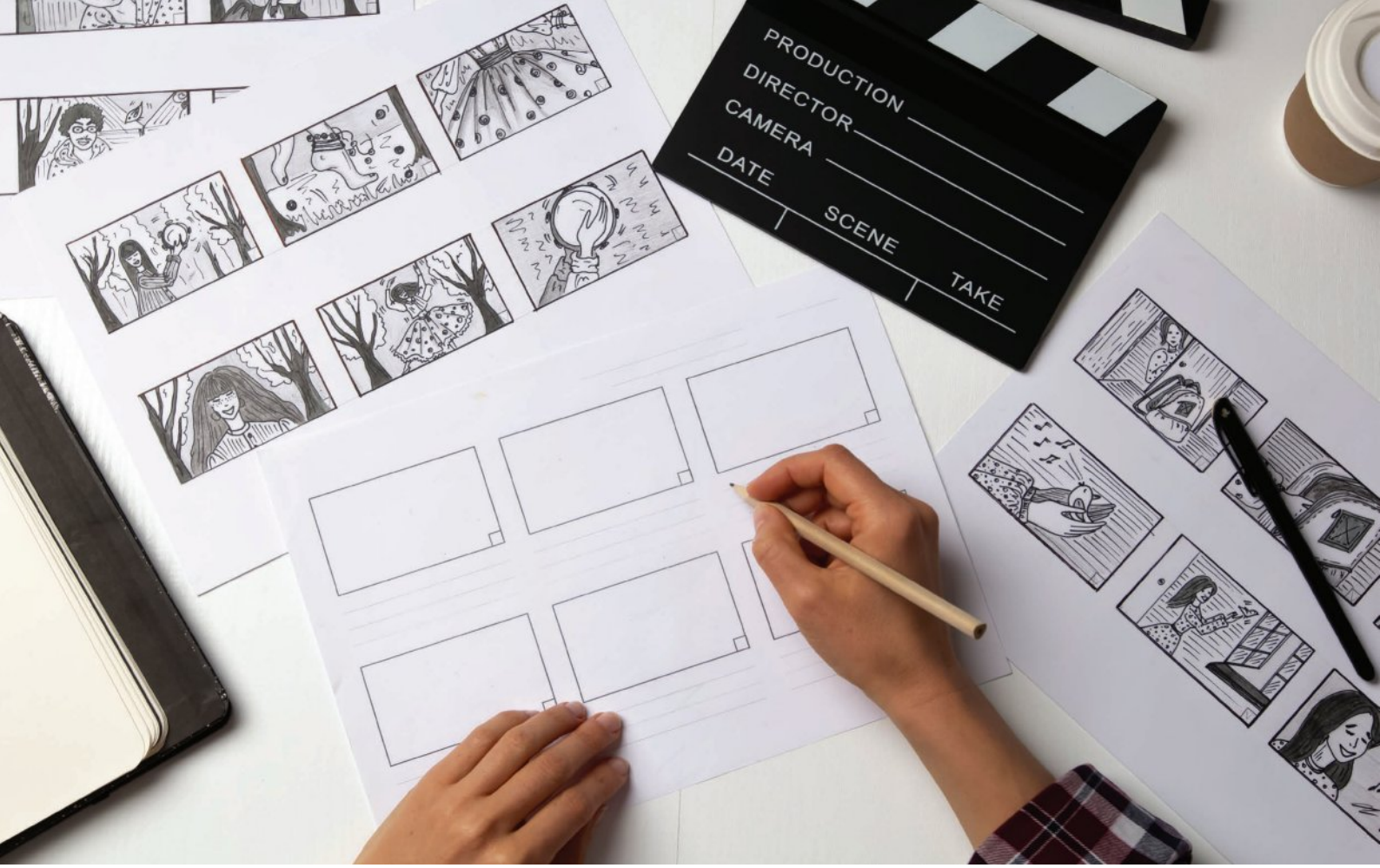
Perhaps the process was too time-consuming. Perhaps you did not enjoy what was achieved in respect to your chosen genre or style.

Think about your audience. Think about your personal style. Question everything and show your work within your design plan. Most importantly, enjoy this process of making media and getting to question everything you do!

Digital content

- Access the Interactive Textbook via Cambridge GO to access a downloadable Success Criteria checklist, digital quizzes and additional digital content for this chapter.

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CHAPTER 9 AREA OF STUDY 3

PRE-PRODUCTION PLANNING

INQUIRY QUESTION

How do students refine their ideas and concepts to create media products?

— VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, p. 29, used with permission

OVERVIEW

The 2002 documentary *Lost in La Mancha* tells a cautionary tale. Film director Terry Gilliam was attempting to make a film about the legendary Don Quixote. Everything that could have gone wrong, did. Everything that couldn't be planned for, happened. At the end, he was left with the documentary *Lost in La Mancha* (dirs Keith Fulton and Louis Pepe) that told the story of a desperate director trying to save a film that seemed to be doomed from the beginning. This doesn't have to be you, however, as you are about to embark on your own challenging journey, which requires planning and facing a number of 'what ifs'.

FIGURE 9.1 (above) The more work you can put into development and pre-production for your SAT, the better your final product will be.

It also requires you to stay the course on a clear vision of what you want to have in your hands at the end of the journey. Rather than make the 'story about trying to make the story', use this time to plan and prepare to never find yourself in Gilliam's shoes!

OUTCOME 3

On completion of this unit the student should be able to develop and document a media pre-production plan demonstrating the student's concepts and intentions in a selected media form for a specified audience.

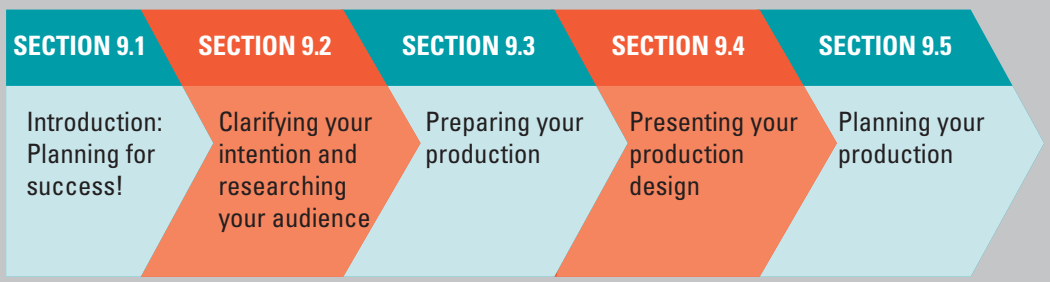
To achieve this outcome the student will draw on key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 3.

KEY KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING INTENTIONS

Key knowledge	Learning intentions – at the end of the chapter I will be able to:
• the intention and audiences for a proposed production	• document the intention and audiences for a proposed production
• methods for documenting the narrative of a proposed production	• document the narrative of a proposed production
• methods for producing visual planning documents for a proposed production	• produce visual planning documents for a proposed production
• codes and conventions, technologies and processes relevant to the selected media form, proposed audience, narrative and production	• apply codes and conventions, technologies and production processes appropriate to the selected media form, proposed audience, narrative and product
• methods for documenting production and post-production roles, tasks and timelines	• document production and post-production roles, tasks and timelines
• media language relevant to the planning and production of a media product in a selected media form	• use media language appropriate to the planning and production of a media product in a selected media form

(**Source:** Adapted from VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, p. 30, used with permission.)

WHAT'S AHEAD



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9.1 Introduction: Planning for success!

Undertaking a media product is a complex and rewarding journey. A comprehensive production design is essential to ensure that your creative vision is realised, and all the practical and logistical elements are in place. Preparing a professional document will help you to have a smooth and successful production experience. It should contain everything a media producer needs to realise their product according to their creative vision. This can include the results of your production activities, a detailed treatment of the project, script, storyboards, mock-ups, casting and location notes, production schedules, permissions and consents.

Your design plan should be clearly laid out and easy to follow. Fancy borders and glitter pens are not compulsory; a professional document is. Your production schedule should be appropriate to the magnitude of your project, cast and crew should be in place, permissions organised, locations secured, and equipment identified and ready to go. Test yourself by asking if another student could pick up your production design and have a go at making your product; and if the only thing your team notices is that the person in charge is wearing a different face, then your production design is ready!

9.2 Clarifying your intention and researching your audience

LEARNING INTENTION

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- the intention and audiences for a proposed production.

The story so far …

You've hit on an idea for your media product, and you've pitched it to your teacher and classmates. In explaining it to your class, there are certain key pieces of information you should have communicated. The pitch explains the project in brief, introducing your class to the idea at the heart of your product and the form it will take. It demonstrates evidence that you've begun to think about your potential audience and artistic influences that can help you shape your product into a coherent whole. More importantly, you've considered the technologies and processes that will be crucial to the execution of your product, and your production activities have put them to the test.



FIGURE 9.2 Pitching your project to the class can help solidify your ideas.

There's no doubt in your mind that your media product is going to be the best the world has ever seen. But right now, despite the effort you've already put in, it's an embryo waiting to be born. It needs to be carefully shaped before it's ready for the world.

The best media products are those that are carefully planned, but they are also the ones whose creative evolution has been thought through carefully. You need to consider your overall creative intent, the story you wish to tell and exactly who your audience will or could be.

Creative intention

Put simply, your Statement of Intention is the outline of your 'vision' for your media product. This is where your creative ideas should be explored without limit, before coalescing into something that is distinctly and recognisably your own.

There are as many ways to approach this opening section of your product design as there are VCE Media students. It will depend on how much you are already bringing to this stage of the process. Some of you may have a fully formed narrative floating around in your heads. Others of you might have a decent sense of your chosen media form or subject matter and little else. Even if you've got a solid vision, it's worth brainstorming anyway, because looking at the project from a fresh point of view might feed in new ideas that make your product even better.

Here are some ways you can flesh out your creative intention.

MIND MAP

Creating a mind map can be a terrific way of expanding on a core idea and looking at different ways it can be developed. You get a great sense of how the elements in the mind map connect, so if you need to backtrack and figure out where your ideas came from, it's all there.

Mind maps are also useful if you've already got a clear sense of what you want your product to be. Many media products are collaborative efforts in one sense or another. With a mind map at your disposal, you have an illustration of the thinking processes that went into the creation of your design. Think of it as your brain on paper.

CONVERGENCE OF INFLUENCES

Complete the sentence, 'I'd like to try … ' Are you influenced by particular artists? Particular styles? Constructing a map of how these influences will coalesce in your design is like making a mind map from the outside in. Your influences will hover like satellites around the core, which is where you describe the shape of your concept. They don't have to be expressed in words either. You might want to create a collage of screen grabs, photos, concept art – anything that creates an overall visual picture of your concept. Look for what's common about your influences, or the elements you think will collide favourably. Your concept is whatever meets in the middle.

MATCHING FORM TO CONCEPT

Your heart might be married to a favourite media form. Each form has its unique strengths and limitations, and these can lend themselves to particular ideas. A photography folio needs to tell a story visually and thematically, without the benefit of sound. An audio product is the exact opposite, relying entirely on sound. Where you take your creative design can emerge from the possibilities your chosen form has to offer. Maybe your passion is audio and you'd like to create a product that is likewise *about* audio. A photography folio could represent stillness in particular settings.

Because you've thought through the possibilities of your media form in Media production development, you should have a good idea of how to turn that knowledge into creative ideas.



SCOPE

Don't forget to keep your vision realistic! There are practical realities to be mindful of as you develop your ideas. You are going to face very specific timeframes, and VCAA imposes its own requirements for different media forms that must be adhered to.

Media form	Conditions
Video or film sequence	3–10 minutes, including titles/credits
Radio or audio production	8 minutes minimum, including titles/credits
Animation	10 minutes maximum, including titles/credits
Photographic presentation, sequence or series	• can be analogue or digital • minimum 10 images • shot, processed and edited by student
Print production	• can be digital or traditional print • 8 pages/layouts minimum • produced and edited by student
Digital and/or online production	Comparable complexity with the other media forms
Convergent or hybridised media production	• incorporates aspects of a range of media forms • meets the conditions of all media forms used

TABLE 9.1 Scope of your media form

STATEMENT OF INTENTION

Once you've decided on the creative path you intend to take, you need to communicate that to your stakeholders: your teacher and anyone helping you make your product. Although the creative visualisations we've already discussed are a great way to give people a sense of how your ideas have formed, it's worth expressing your vision in a clear, organised way. Which means writing it.

What you include in your Statement of Intention will depend on your intention, but here's a checklist of common elements you should include:

Element	✔
Form The media form you have chosen and explored in Media production development	
Genre The genre you wish to work in	
Theme The glue that holds your concept together artistically	
Engagement techniques Techniques you will use to engage an audience	

TABLE 9.2 Statement of Intention checklist

This shouldn't be daunting, since by now you've studied several narrative media products across a variety of forms. You have an awareness of the ways different narratives are structured, and you know how they can be used to engage audiences.

What might be less obvious is how a narrative can be expressed through some of the media forms available. A video or film sequence is the most familiar media form when it comes to narrative. Similarly, it isn't hard to see how an animation or even a radio production can tell a story. But a print production? Or a photographic folio? Absolutely!

Print productions can include comics or graphic novels, zines or newspapers. Even a poster tells a story, and a series of posters even more so.

Photographic series can be made to express narratives too. A story with a clear beginning, middle and end can emerge quite comfortably from a set of connected stills. Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962) with the soundtrack removed is a perfect example of how well this can work.



FIGURE 9.3 If you choose to produce a print layout narrative, you might employ a comic or graphic novel form.

When it comes to digital productions, the narrative layers you include might become more complex and interactive, but there's plenty of room for them. A game is a perfect example of this.

A narrative doesn't have to be fictional. It could be that you know someone with a fascinating real-life story you feel deserves to be shared with the world. Documentary might be your passion; maybe you see yourself as an archaeologist, digging around for information until a narrative emerges from the earth. You might even prefer a fiction/non-fiction hybrid, incorporating elements of docudrama.

The crucial questions to ask yourself are:

- What story am I telling?
- How will it be told through the selected media form?



ACTIVITY 9.1

Developing your ideas

Answer the questions in the 'Audience factors' box clearly and comprehensively, and your narrative statement is complete!

> Every film should have its own world, a logic and feel to it that expands beyond the exact image that the audience is seeing.
>
> — Christopher Nolan

Audience

The worst thing you can decide if you want your media product to have legs is to think small when it comes to audience. There's a world of difference, for instance, between a short film that gets seen by family and friends and an award-winning career starter.

Too many students, when wanting to take the easy way out with their audience statement, limit themselves to the following brief statement: 'My audience is my Media teacher and my classmates'. Take the time to brainstorm a wider demographic for your product. This will inevitably broaden the scope of your design plan, and it may also strengthen your narrative.

A common supporting reason is that the student wants to use some element they don't have copyright permission for. Which is fine: if your vision is to create a visual narrative inspired by a favourite pop song, you shouldn't let anyone stop you. But think about how to maximise your audience anyway. Maybe you want to include your work in a portfolio when you apply for industry-related work or further study. If so, say so! Most students want their work to reach a wider audience. The challenge is in figuring out what that audience is and how an understanding of that audience can shape your product.

What are some of the audience factors that need to be considered? You can't please all the people all the time, so your media product won't have an audience of 'everyone'. Which means you need to figure out what your audience is going to look like. A certain measure of this understanding may stem from the experiments you undertook earlier. This research would be informing some of the moves you make now in terms of timing and scheduling that will need to be set aside for you to complete your SAT. In all fairness, this year of study across the board is going to be hectic, to say the least. Be reasonable in what you are planning for as you will be producing this most likely during your school holiday periods.

Investigate the interests of different audience groups and narrow down the list until you hit on the broadest possible audience that might be attracted to your media product. Or work the other way. Look at media products that inspire your future product: what audiences did *they have*? Is there an overlap between their audiences and yours?

Whichever way you go, the effort is worth it. A media product with a clear sense of its potential audience stands a far better chance of reaching and engaging that audience.

AUDIENCE FACTORS

Some audience factors you might want to consider:

- *Demographic/social* – Is your media product more likely to appeal to a younger or older audience, or a mixture of the two? A particular gender? People of a particular cultural background?
- *Interests* – If you intend to make an audio documentary about pop culture conventions, for instance, it is likely that your potential audience will be very specific. Similarly, a series of photographs depicting the life cycle of the hydrangea may not attract a mass audience.
- *Prior audience experience* – There are no truly original ideas anymore, right? Any media product is going to borrow elements from what's come before. This might attract an audience to your product you hadn't planned on, if they're fans of media products with similar elements. Plunder your audience research from Area of Study 2 to get started. Having a keen sense of the overall aesthetic you intend to adopt – and knowing your influences well (see Section 9.3) – will ensure this kind of 'surprise' audience comes as less of a surprise.
- *Production context* – Some people just like to see what up-and-coming media producers are up to. Your production context is that of a VCE Media product, which brings a particular audience. At the very least this will include your Media teacher and classmates, as well as friends and family. Does your school hold an annual film festival? You might also find a wider audience for your product if you are successful in being selected for Top Screen (if you've made a video or animation), Top Designs (photography and print) or Seasons of Excellence. Even if you don't see this as your primary audience, it's one you should be mindful of and plan for in your design folio.

RESEARCHING AUDIENCE

You could generate a Google Form, Survey Monkey or other survey template software to ask specific questions to determine who your audience are. The surveys can include direct questioning where you will receive a written response. Written responses as opposed to tick boxes and multiple choice allow you to obtain more qualitative, reliable data. Depending on your production, using statistics from certain sources may be equally effective, such as data on how many young people in Australia experience anxiety in their adolescence.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) can be helpful depending on your type of production. Ask your teacher if they can send a link of your survey/s to the school staff or students to help generate data from a broad age range.

Understanding your audience's expectations is essential too. While you should have a singular creative vision, knowing your audience lets you make conscious decisions about how accessible you make your product and what effect that will have on its audience. Revisiting some of the activities in Chapter 2, Section 2.2, is a good way to start to get a better understanding of your audience.

STUDY TIP

There are also a number of comprehensive research techniques available in Section 2.2 of this book.

ACTIVITY 9.2

Developing your ideas

Compile all your audience research and accompany these findings with a written statement that clearly identifies the intended audience for your product.



9.3 Preparing your production

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- the intention and audiences for a proposed production
- methods for documenting the narrative of a proposed production
- methods for producing visual planning documents for a proposed production
- codes and conventions, technologies and processes relevant to the selected media form, proposed audience, narrative and production
- methods for documenting production and post-production roles, tasks and timelines.

Now it's time to get down to the nitty-gritty of fleshing out your vision – and figuring out just how it's going to come together in a practical sense.

Influences

Once you've chosen the form and genre of your media product, you should identify examples of media products that are particularly influential and/or effective. Going for a short gangster film with a uniquely Victorian flavour? Check out the Aussie thriller *Two Hands* (1999, dir. Gregor Jordan), a crime drama that features a young Heath Ledger who plays Jimmy, a teen who finds himself caught up in a world of danger and violence after taking a job as a debt collector. Ledger gives a powerful performance and the gritty cinematography, intense action sequences and snappy dialogue make for an exciting movie-watching experience. There are plenty of precedents for this sort of narrative that are worth plundering for elements that could inform your variation on a specific narrative with associated themes.



FIGURE 9.4 You may choose to make a detective or gangster-type film and incorporate elements inspired by other media products that influence you.

Cast your net widely as you investigate influences. A gangster film set in Victoria should draw on more influences than a couple of episodes of *Underbelly* (2008–13). Look at what other Australian filmmakers have done with the genre. You may even want to include elements from overseas gangster films and give them an Aussie spin.

Chances are your classmates and teacher, parents and family, even random people you meet, may be able to steer your ideas with inspiring stories. Make visible your ideas to as many people as you can. Expand your influences through researching techniques and making annotations used within your chosen medium to build key knowledge during this stage.

Animation, to look at another example, has many variants: flash animation, traditional hand-drawn cell work, 2D or 3D, and others. Each of these lends itself to particular styles, and you want to work within what is achievable and what is effective. Exploring the work of your predecessors is a quicker way to figure this out than making a dozen different animations and seeing which one comes out best!

Your research could even point you towards other media forms altogether. A photography series on war memorials could be informed by films or print publications or even radio texts that offer different perspectives on the theme. An animated teen rom-com will in all probability feature elements common to live-action equivalents.

What remains at the heart of your research is the notion that you are plundering your influences to understand how they use the codes and conventions that will be relevant to your own media product.

ACTIVITY 9.3

Developing your ideas

Provide a written explanation of the role your influences will play in your media product.

> Nothing is original. Steal from anywhere that resonates with inspiration or fuels your imagination. Devour old films, new films, music, books, paintings, photography, poems, dreams, random conversations, architecture, bridges, street signs, trees, clouds, bodies of waters, light and shadows … always remember what Jean-Luc Godard said: 'it's not where you take things – it's where you take them to'.
>
> — Jim Jarmusch

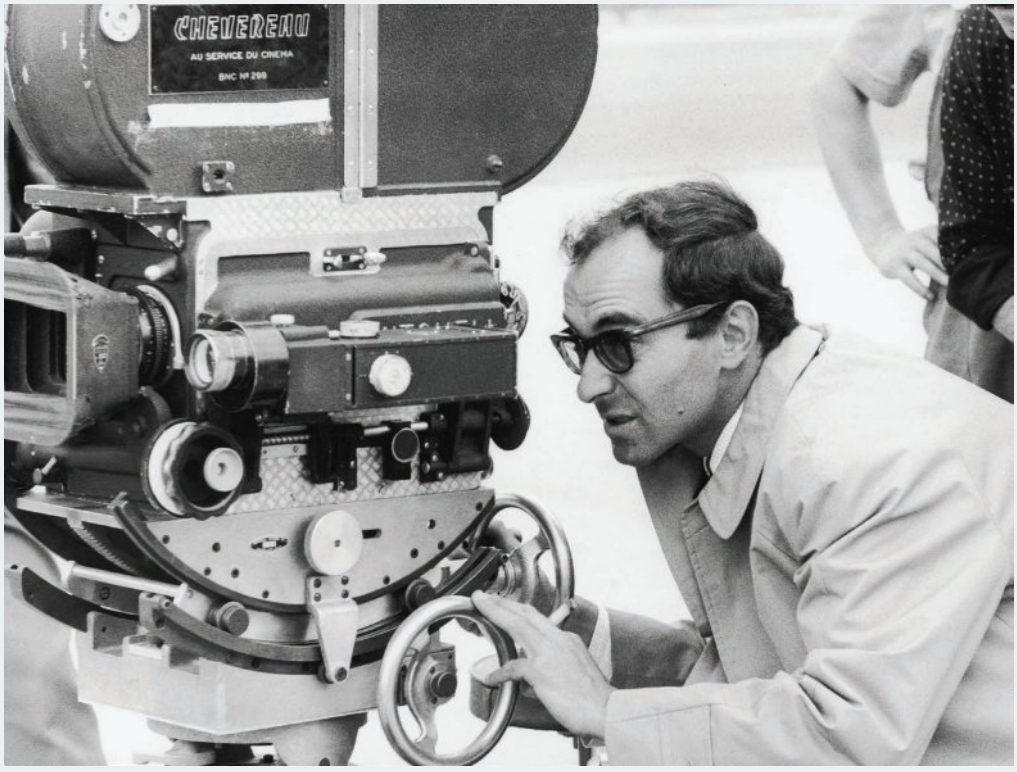


FIGURE 9.5 Jean-Luc Godard on the set of *Passion* (1982)



AMAZING FACT

In the Holocaust film *Schindler's List* (1993), director Steven Spielberg shot his film in black and white, but a few times in the film a little Jewish girl appears wearing a red coat. This bold use of colour stands out as a potent symbolic code as she represents the innocence of the Jews being slaughtered. When the protagonist sees her, he is motivated to act to save as many Jewish people as he can.



FIGURE 9.6 The girl in the red coat in *Schindler's List*

STUDY TIP

Symbols are objects, characters, figures or colours used to represent abstract ideas or concepts. *Motifs* are recurring structures, contrasts or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes.



FIGURE 9.7 Master director Alfred Hitchcock framing his next shot on set

> Originality is the art of concealing your sources.
>
> — Benjamin Franklin

MOCK-UPS

Just like a storyboard for film, mock-ups are visualisations of what each shot in your series, sequence or presentation will look like. The mock-up can be hand-drawn, photographed, or collaged with photos and drawings, as long as it resembles the end-product. Written details should be provided along with the visualisation such as shot size, camera angle, subject/s, location, props, costume, hair and make-up information. Even objects required for the photograph that will not appear in the shot will be helpful, such as a hair straightener and hair spray for the model whose hair becomes frizzy on rainy days. Specialist equipment may also be necessary to list for each specific photo, such as a lens, lighting gels and reflector.

If it's a good movie, the sound could go off and the audience would still have a perfectly clear idea of what was going on.

— Alfred Hitchcock

METHOD OF PRESENTATION AND EXHIBITION

This relates to the physical mounting of your work, and the sequence with which it will be presented, for example, in a grid pattern on a wall of a gallery. Questions to consider are: How will you be presenting your completed photos? Why are you presenting them in this way? How will this presentation help your intention? How will this presentation influence your audience?



ACTIVITY 9.4

Developing your ideas

Provide a comprehensive explanation of the codes and conventions you will employ in your intention and product, and how they will appeal to your intended audience.

Production technologies

Exactly how is this thing going to get made, then? It's time to get yourself a clear understanding of the technologies and media processes needed to make it all happen.

This is an area you've already started thinking about – and working on. One or more of your production experiments were an exploration of some of the technological aspects you needed to refine before powering ahead with the main production process. But that was a taster of what's to come. Now you need to consider *all* the technology essential to the execution of your media product.

Choose a scale of production appropriate to your creative vision and the available resources. This is the first time you have been made to think about the nuts and bolts of your final product – production experiments aside. Tread carefully, auditing and assessing what you've got and how you plan to make use of it.

Imagine your vision is to tell the emotionally raw story of a British army sergeant bunkered in the forests of France in World War II. Your story deserves no less than a full recreation of a battle, with a suitably atmospheric location, actors in authentic period uniform, genuine World War II-era rifles and an on-camera skirmish the likes of which Steven Spielberg would be proud. Believe it or not, this is achievable: if you have access to re-enactors, an armourer, suitable weaponry and a store of costumes. For Ben Head, a VCE Media student in 2016, it was. His video product *Quiet* appeared as part of Top Screen in 2017.

On a considerably smaller scale but no less effective was the same year's *[Insert Child's Name Here]*, a video product by Tessa Himpoo with a cast of three and a contemporary suburban setting … which was shot and sound-recorded entirely on Tessa's mobile phone and edited with available editing software.

As far as VCAA are concerned, it's a level playing field. You may only have access to the equipment in the Media department of your school, and that might not be much more than a basic camera and microphone. Your teacher is going to assess your work against a number of criteria, none of which have to do with budget or access to resources. The only question is: What have you done with what you *have* got?



DIGITAL LINK

Visit the Media Production Hub in the Interactive Textbook, to watch Ben Head's and Tessa Himpoo's SATs.



TECHNOLOGY CHECKLISTS

To organise your technology, create a checklist of the technologies typical of your chosen media form and available to you. Narrow it down to the ones you might use. Then make notes next to any you're planning on using in unusual ways.

Here is an example of a checklist for a video product. The list sticks to fairly broad categories. This means that, for instance, there is a listing for *External microphone* but not for the bits and pieces that might go with it, such as cables, boom poles, wind socks, etc.

Technology	✔	Notes
Camera	✔	DSLR borrowed from Media dept.
Recording media	✔	3 x 64GB SD cards
External microphone		None available. Re-record all 'dirty' dialogue as wild tracks
Sound recording device		N/A
Lights	✔	Practical lighting + workshop light bought at Bunnings
Green screen		N/A
Editing software	✔	Adobe Premiere on laptop

TABLE 9.3 Technology checklist

ACTIVITY 9.5

Developing your ideas

Complete an available technology checklist and place this in your production design.

Production processes

Just like production technologies, this is something you've already started as part of your production activities (see Chapter 8). Now it's time to think about *all* the processes you'll need.

The lighting set-ups on all your previous videos have been fairly practical, but now you've chosen photography as a form and one of your goals is to use lighting more carefully. Experimentation might only get you so far. How will you go the distance? Will you need additional self-training? How will you achieve it? Will you need to call on additional learning resources? If so, what resources are available?

The internet is a terrific place when it comes to situations like this. Sites like YouTube are full of good-quality tutorials that can teach you how to master some very specialised processes. Nevertheless, there are limits to what you can find, and if you have a *really* specialised effect you want to achieve, you may find yourself having to adapt an existing process and teaching yourself a few new tricks as you go.

Choose processes that don't take you *too* far outside your comfort zone. That isn't to say you should produce something with similar complexity to everything you've ever made. You want this one to stand above the rest.

The fact that you've experimented with technologies and processes through your production activities means you're ready to try something new. But if you've never dabbled in animation before, now may not be the time to attempt that 10-minute **machinima** using Blender and motion capture!

machinima an animated film created using an old or obsolete video game engine

Like your production design, your final product is an assessable outcome with a very real deadline. While VCE Media students have a history of pushing this deadline almost to breaking point, it's the sort of immovable object that can end up breaking any student running at it headlong. Add to the mix your other studies, family commitments, social obligations and other intrusions. All of a sudden, making sure you've chosen the right production processes becomes very important! Before you even begin, schedule a sit-down with your housemates. These are the people that will see you at your very best and, at times over the next few months of Year 12 study, possibly your most stressed. Schedule a chat, and go through your plans. Be open to everyone's opinion and take notes. Explain what you are considering for your final media product of secondary school and how you endeavour to produce it. Hopefully these are the people that can be honest and know your capabilities. Let each person have their say and take on board the suggestions made. Chances are these might be some of your actors or assistants 'on set', so really listen!



DIGITAL LINK

Visit the Media Production Hub in the Interactive Textbook, and watch Shanon McKenzie's animated film *Monday* and her reflective interview for tips and advice on working with animation.

PROCESS CHECKLISTS

To organise your production processes, create a checklist of the ones typical of your chosen media form. Narrow them down to the ones you might use. Then make notes next to any you're planning on using in unusual ways.

Here is an example of a checklist for a fiction narrative video product. Some of the notes focus on workflow considerations while others specify additional self-training that will be needed.

Process	Notes
Lighting	Noir lighting. Study online tutorial videos for best set-ups
Practical effects	Gunshot wounds and blood. Develop processes for quick application on set
Editing	Multi-camera workflow for major action scene
Visual effects	After effects for muzzle flares. Study online tutorial videos
Sound design	Record elements → Apply effects → Mix stereo track

TABLE 9.4 Process checklist



ACTIVITY 9.6

Developing your ideas

Complete a process checklist and add this to your design.



9.4 Presenting your production design

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- methods for documenting the narrative of a proposed production
- methods for producing visual planning documents for a proposed production
- codes and conventions, technologies and processes relevant to the selected media form, proposed audience, narrative and production
- methods for documenting production and post-production roles, tasks and timelines.



FIGURE 9.8 Hitchcock found the actual process of shooting a film to be the least interesting stage of production.

Alfred Hitchcock used to claim that the dullest part of making a film was, for him, the actual shoot. His reason? He'd worked so thoroughly with his production team on the screenplay, the production design and the storyboards that he'd already visualised the finished product before a frame of film was exposed.

While this story might be a bit of fluff to impress his audience, Hitchcock revealed one grain of truth: it's possible to have a strong indication of the overall shape of a media product from written and visual representations.

Some representations run through all media forms. Any narrative (or non-narrative) text can be summarised in a detailed *treatment*. Visual representations like *storyboards* or *mock-ups* offer indications of the visual qualities of a media product.

The focus in this section will be on written and visual representations of a *video/film* product, with some space given over to alternatives more relevant to *audio* and *photography* products.

Treatment

Every media product can be represented as a treatment. The exact structure will vary from media form to media form, but they all provide a detailed summary of the product's *narrative* and *presentation*.

The treatment for a fictional narrative should be straightforward to put together. The focus of this kind of treatment is a *detailed summary*, from start to finish, leaving out nothing important. (A good way to make sure you've covered everything is to break your treatment down by scenes.) Someone reading your treatment will understand what happens in your narrative and to whom it will happen. This kind of treatment also benefits from indications of intended *style* where appropriate.

While a non-fiction narrative (such as a documentary) means you can't predict exactly how your finished product will tell its story, you need to have a clear sense of the overall story you *expect* to tell. There are ways you can control the shape of the narrative, by breaking the narrative flow into sections and by knowing what topics you want your real-life participants to talk about. The treatment you write should give a detailed indication of the narrative you intend to tell, as well as descriptions of any techniques that will help you control its direction.

A photography treatment should provide detailed descriptions of each still in the presentation. The saying goes that 'a picture tells a thousand words'. While you don't have to go that far, your description of each photograph should give a sense (in words) of subject, framing, lighting and depth of field – with reasons for your choices.

Print products depend on type. A graphic novel treatment should be approached the same as a fiction narrative but broken down by page or double-page spread. A magazine treatment needs to describe content while giving a sense of layout. An online product does too.

DIGITAL LINK

Visit the Media Production Hub in the Interactive Textbook and watch former VCE Media student Steven Gerekelis' reflective interview for tips and advice.

Script

Some media forms need one; others don't. If you're producing a magazine or a photography series or anything else that doesn't obviously need a script … Move along, there's nothing to see here.

However, sometimes the need for a script isn't obvious. A documentary, for example, might have a narration script, pre-interview and interview questions, and full scripts for re-enactments or dramatised segments.

VIDEO/FILM SCRIPT: FICTION NARRATIVE

Whichever option you choose, you'll notice scripts sometimes have their scenes numbered, but sometimes they don't. A script won't have scene numbers during the writing and development phase. When it's ready to go into production, the scenes are numbered. This is for ease of workflow, so everyone involved can refer to a given scene by its number.

Refer back to Chapter 5, Section 5.4, for more information about setting out a film script. Your script is a document that needs to be written clearly following the standard format demonstrated in the Interactive Textbook. Everyone needs to be clear about their roles – the actors, camera person, and especially you, the director.

DIGITAL LINK

See the Interactive Textbook for 10 quick tips on writing a fictional screenplay.

As discussed previously, free scriptwriting technology exists to help you out. StudioBinder and WriterDuet are two such programs available to you.

AUDIO SCRIPT: FICTION NARRATIVE

While there is no one standard format for an audio or radio narrative script, the variants that exist tend to have certain features in common. Like a video/film script, these serve a couple of key purposes. Dialogue and other sounds are visibly separate, and scene changes are easy to identify at a glance. Unlike a video/film script, the one-page-per minute rule does not usually apply.

Because of the nature of dialogue recording for an audio product, when an audio script enters production, individual *lines* are often numbered. This can make retakes easier for the editor to find.



FIGURE 9.9 The script could be the blueprint to your success.

AUDIO PLAY

Scene: 1

OUTDOOR AMBIENCE: BIRDSONG, SLIGHT BREEZE THROUGH FOLIAGE, ETC.

VOICE: INDISTINCT MURMURS AND CONVERSATION

SOUND: FOOTSTEPS (X1) ACROSS PAVERS

THE VOICES DIE DOWN TO SILENCE

MATTHEW:
I'm glad you could all attend this gathering today. I know things have been tough for all of us lately, which is why we're meeting like this.

POPPY:
Are we supposed to be impressed by your candour? Is that what you expect?

VOICE: DISGRUNTLED MURMURS

MATTHEW:
Please, please... Can we all just settle for a moment, do you think? I'd like to be heard out if I may.

SOUND: AN ALMIGHTY EXPLOSION

VOICE: SCREAMS AND SHRIEKS

MUSIC: DRAMATIC ACTION MUSIC, VERY UP-TEMPO, VERY INTENSE

FIGURE 9.10 An example of script formatting for an audio production



FIGURE 9.11 Pre-production storyboards are crucial to visualise your film before you shoot

DIGITAL LINK

See the Interactive Textbook for a storyboard template.

ACTIVITY 9.7

Developing your ideas

Once complete, include your script in your production design.

Storyboards and shot lists

Storyboards are the real reason Hitchcock used to claim the film shoot was boring. He always worked thoroughly and closely with his storyboard artists to ensure they really were a visual equivalent of his films on paper.

Revisit Chapter 5, Section 5.4, for a crash course in putting together a set of storyboards. Any media product with a moving visual element – video, film, animation and some digital products – can only be improved by having those visuals carefully laid out in the form of storyboards. They give you an at-a-glance sense of how your product is going to look as a completed piece, and they're an excellent visual shorthand for communicating ideas to your crew.

One piece of advice given in Chapter 5 is just as valid now: some of the best filmmakers are also some of the worst artists when it comes to pen and paper. Luckily, technology can come to your rescue! *Photographic storyboards* are becoming more popular with filmmakers. They use photos instead of hand-drawn storyboards. Just go out to your locations – or near equivalents if you can't access the real thing yet – with your actors or some stand-ins and take stills of all the shots you need. You can print these or put them in an electronic document, ready to be annotated.

DIGITAL LINK

See the Interactive Textbook for a shot list template.

'That's great,' you say, 'but I want to use shot lists instead of storyboards.' There's one catch: they serve a very different purpose!

But, shot lists are incredibly useful for continuity purposes. On location, you or another member of your crew will keep track of whether you have all the shots you need. Shot lists let you check these off as you go. You can also jumble them into shooting order to give you a running sheet for each day's work.

ACTIVITY 9.8

Developing your ideas

Once complete, include your mock-ups and/or storyboard in your design.

> For me, filmmaking combines everything. That's the reason I've made cinema my life's work. In films, painting and literature, theatre and music come together.
>
> — Akira Kurosawa

9.5 Planning your production

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- methods for documenting production and post-production roles, tasks and timelines.

Up to this point you've been transforming outpourings of creativity into various elements you will use during production.

Now it's paperwork time.

A media product is no small undertaking, and every successful project on any sort of scale is well planned and well documented. Start thinking about your collaborators. Will you fly solo, or will a carefully selected team support you along your journey? What roles will they take? How do you know you have the right person for each role? Above all, how will you make sure your team is helping you turn your vision into a reality?



DIGITAL LINK

Visit the Media Production Hub in the Interactive Textbook and watch former VCE Media student Rachel Ivell's reflective interview for tips and advice.

DIGITAL LINK

See the Interactive Textbook for an example of an actor profile from former VCE Media student Lauren Ould's production design.

The talent

Different media forms have different takes on the notion of 'The Talent'. What it boils down to is the people you'll need in front of the camera (or microphone, for an audio product). For a fictional narrative, these will be actors. Non-fiction narratives still tend to be about particular people, so the subject(s) will be the talent. Photography, print and online products may require models. Even an animation might call on people taking on a performing role, whether voice actors or physical models on which to base your animation.

Getting hold of people can be challenging for the uninitiated. Here are some suggestions:

- *Ask friends and family*. If the performance demands of the roles aren't too challenging or specialised, you may be able to direct 'amateurs' to give suitable performances.
- *Ask drama students*. Does your school offer Drama as a subject? If the answer is 'yes', you've got a ready supply of experience-hungry actors right on your doorstep!
- *Hold auditions*. Acting work has its ups and downs, and there are plenty of professional actors who might be 'between jobs' who are interested in gaining as much on-camera experience as they can, even if it's unpaid. You wouldn't be the first VCE Media student to make use of this pool of talent, so don't be afraid to go where others have gone before.



FIGURE 9.12 Hold an audition when casting your production if you can.

Putting out a casting call is easy thanks to the internet and social media. There are plenty of websites and Facebook groups designed to link actors with directors. Just make it clear that you're looking for talent for a VCE Media production, and that you can only offer a credit and experience.

How much of the casting process you document in your production design depends on how comprehensive you want your design to be. One possibility is to include actor profiles, but this is optional.

ACTIVITY 9.9

Developing your ideas

Confirm your talent and use the release forms to check their availability. Add these to your production design.

Assigning crew roles

When selecting a crew and assigning roles to different people, it is important that you remain the key creative at the heart of the product.

> The creation and production of the media product is an individual undertaking. In some cases, the implementation of the production plans may require the student to work with others. Throughout both the production and post-production stages, the student should be the key principal in the production process. All work undertaken by any cast or crew, or external assistance, must be under the direction of the student and documented along with the pre-production plans.
>
> — VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, p. 32, used with permission

While this doesn't mean you have to do everything yourself, you need to be the creative glue holding everything together. Members of cast and crew can make creative suggestions, of course – and they probably will. But all creative decisions have to end with you, and there has to be enough of your input, both artistically and logistically, that your teacher can award marks to you and not to someone else on your team!

Try to 'cast' crew roles according to areas of strength. While you aren't looking to hire experts in every field who can carry the creative load for you, offer roles to people with some prior skills in the area in which you want to involve them. You wouldn't bring someone on as your camera operator if the only time they've ever used a camera is to Snapchat their friends on their phone.

Complex productions benefit from having lots of runners handy. Called gofers in Hollywood, these are people who 'go fer' stuff when you need them to. Odds are you're going to be very busy just about the whole time, and so are your principal crew. Which means any time you suddenly realise you need some tape to hold a stray cable down, or the key prop for the scene got left in someone's car, your runners will be your best friends!

Keep a comprehensive crew list with contact details so you know at a glance who is doing what and how they can be contacted. Also note any resources they might be expected to bring.



FIGURE 9.13 Try to 'cast' crew roles according to areas of strength.

DIGITAL LINK

See the Interactive Textbook for a downloadable release form for your talent giving permission to appear on camera in your production.

ACTIVITY 9.10

Developing your ideas

Construct a list of required and available crew. Add this to your production design.



Locations

Locations should be chosen based on suitability, availability and convenience.

Select locations that provide all the features you need – if you can. The trouble is, there are two ways reality can intrude:

1 The real world isn't always so kind, and you might have to compromise.
2 Even if you *do* find all your ideal locations, you may not be able to access them all in the production window.

Unless your concept absolutely demands a set of very specific locations, seek out locations within a reasonable distance of each other. You want to make the most out of each production day, and time spent travelling between locations is time *not* spent actually producing anything.

Document details of the locations you intend to use. Identify which parts of your product you need each one for. In the case of a video product, this might be a list of scenes to be shot at each location. Also include particulars about the location: street address, parking and transport options for your team, and which part of the location is being used.

ACTIVITY 9.11

Research task

1 Visit your locations to determine their suitability to shoot your product.
2 When you do, take a number of images that might replicate how you intend to use them in your production.
3 Include these images in your production design with annotations that relate to elements of each location that may require you to alter elements of it.

DIGITAL LINK

See the Interactive Textbook for a downloadable location release form.

The legal stuff

PERMISSIONS

Every element of your production that does not creatively originate with you can only be used by you if you have written proof of consent.

Any people involved in your production – actors, models, crew – need to give consent that you can use their efforts as part of your product. This includes anyone featured prominently in front of the camera. Any impromptu footage or B-roll (supplementary footage) for a documentary needs to be carefully vetted for who turns up in it.

DIGITAL LINK

See the Interactive Textbook for a downloadable permission form to clear any copyrighted material that might appear in your production with the appropriate copyright holder/s.

At a minimum, get a simple written, signed and dated declaration that the contributor's intellectual copyright may be used at no cost for the purposes of the specified media product for dissemination to any audience.

Media products produced solely for an audience of your Media teacher, friends and family might use copyrighted elements without the permission of the copyright holders. If this applies to you, be very clear that your product's shelf life legally consists of being a Unit 4 assessment piece *and no more*.

Just in case you think you might like it to have a life beyond that, even if you don't feel that way right now, look into open source and royalty-free materials. Freesound.org is a popular outlet for open-source sound effects and music, provided you credit the creator in your product. The Creative Commons website goes even further, serving as a storehouse for royalty-free images, text, music or audiovisual resources. Search online and you will undoubtedly find more! You still have to document the elements you use, even if they're open source. Clearly identify the source of any royalty-free elements you find online.



FIGURE 9.14 An example of how you can attribute the creators of royalty-free content in your film's credits. Still from Shanon McKenzie's animation *Monday*.

OH&S AND LEGAL BEHAVIOUR

Occupational health and safety (OH&S) is just as important as copyright when it comes to the legal stuff.

OpenChannel's website provides a safety checklist for film and television productions, and it can be used for any media production with physical locations. Familiarise yourself with any points in this checklist that apply to your production. Include a version of the checklist relevant to your production in your production design.

VCAA and your Media teacher will expect all behaviour during your production to be 100% legal. This includes restricting what participants under the age of 18 are permitted to do; for example, smoking on screen. You will be guided by your school's expectations as well, so much of this shouldn't apply, but if it does, be very aware of what is and isn't legal.

This applies to drone use too. There are very strict regulations surrounding the use of drones, so be sure not to break them!

Production schedule

During the early stages of your planning, your production calendar is going to look fairly empty. You'll have all your due dates noted, and you should have blocked out when production and post-production are scheduled to take place.

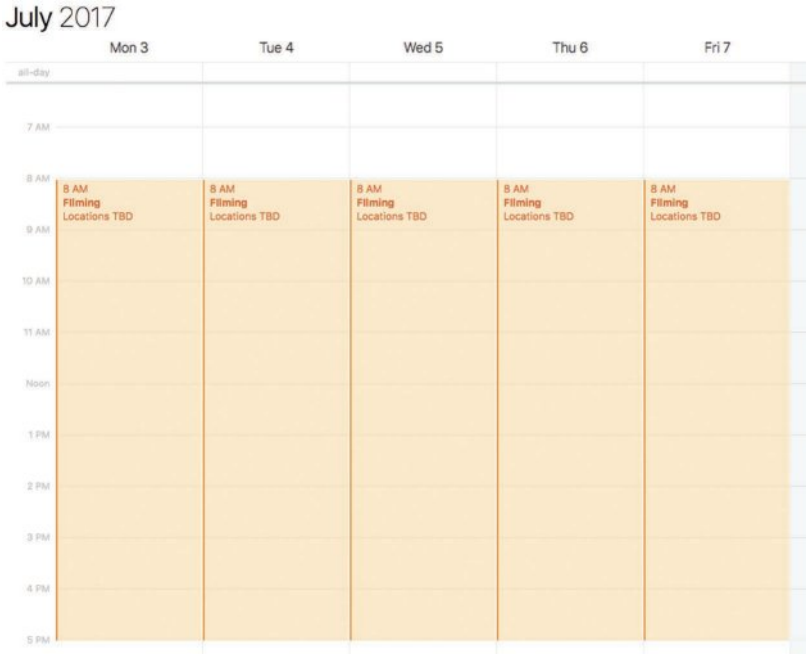


FIGURE 9.15 An example of production time blocked out during the early stages of preparation



The closer you come to production, the more detailed your schedule will be. How you schedule your production is going to depend on location choices, cast and crew availability, maximising shooting time, and other factors particular to your product and chosen media form.

By the end of the pre-production process the schedule might look something like Table 9.5.

Production timetable

Date	Time	Actors	Crew	Location	Scene #	Scene details	Notes
27–6-2023	–	–	–	–	–	–	Prepare all equipment, props and costumes. Check in with actors
3–7-2023	1pm to 3.30pm	– Hero – Villain	– Director – Actors – Gofer	Clifftop	22	As many possible shots from final confrontation	All props required. Costume and make-up completed before arrival at clifftop scene
4–7-2023	1pm to tbc	– Hero – Villain	– Director – Actors – Gofer	Alleyway	18	Remainder of the chase scene	All props required. Costume and make-up completed before arrival
6–7-2023	–	–	–	–	–	–	Log footage and review against shot list
7–7-2023	12pm – 5pm	Child 1 Child 2 Mother	– Director – Actors – Parents – Gofer	The park playground	23	The final scene	All props required. Costume and make-up completed before arrival. Area cleared of debris
8–7-2023	–	–	–	–	–	–	Log of footage and prepare list for any potential reshoots. Otherwise begin editing

TABLE 9.5 A production timetable broken down by shooting day

Include contingency time in your schedule. Things can go wrong, or you might find later on that you're unhappy with some of your material. Allow extra time to guard against the unexpected. If everything works out perfectly, you can give this spare time to post-production.

Your key collaborators need to be aware of your schedule and have access to updated versions as it evolves. Maintain an online calendar and give your team members access to it.

DIGITAL LINK

See the Interactive Textbook for a downloadable production timetable template.

ACTIVITY 9.12

Developing your ideas

Construct and complete your production timetable and include it in your production design.

Post-production schedule

Instead of focusing on the logistical needs of each individual day, your post-production schedule might be blocked out in chunks. Giving several weeks over to a phase called 'Editing' makes sense even as you get stuck into it.

Other post-production collaborators need their work factored into the schedule. This way, you know when to expect various elements to arrive. A composer needs to deliver their music at a point in your timeline that works best for you. The two of you might hold a spotting session to identify the music that's needed, then they put the music together while you refine your edit or work on post-production effects.

Animation – especially computer animation – is unusual in that its post-production time tends to suck up production as well, all of it becoming an amorphous whole. Shanon McKenzie, whose animation *Monday* was selected for Top Screen 2017, has acknowledged that post-production started for her when production started for everyone else. The animation, editing and sound design all occurred together.

Organising all the information in the form of a detailed calendar is, as with your production schedule, very much the best way to go.

ACTIVITY 9.13

Developing your ideas

Complete your post-production timetable and include it in your production plan.



CHAPTER REVIEW

Summing it all up

Production can be a frenzied time. You'll face much tighter deadlines than in pre-production, and if you have a team around you, their needs will become your needs. Keeping a clear head under this pressure – while your studies for other VCE subjects continue too – can sometimes seem impossible. Making major creative or technical decisions from scratch in the thick of it can be worse: it can just seem plain nuts!

Which means that even though a production design is an expansive, labour-intensive beast to put together, it's a really helpful one. It assembles all the planning and preparation for your product, ahead of production, in a clear and organised way. This is the document that goes with you on your journey as your media product comes together. It guides every step of the process, informing you with decisions you already made when your head was clearer and your time demands were less severe.

Through this document, you will be able to communicate to all your collaborators precisely what your vision is, how it has been formed, what it is going to look like at the end of the day and how you are going to achieve it. Depending on the form your product takes, a good design will make available at a glance your script, storyboards, mock-ups, visual references, technical evaluations, role descriptions and schedules. Any question you might be presented with on your production journey should have its answer somewhere in your production design. This leaves you time to focus on actually getting things made without turning yourself into a gibbering mess.

Even though your production design needs to be the most effective working document it can, don't forget that it has to be balanced with the rest of your studies, home life and other commitments. It's very easy to allow something of this magnitude to take you over. Go down that dark path and it will dominate your destiny forever! Hopefully you can enjoy the creative process. As Akira Kurosawa once said, 'It is wonderful to create!'

DIGITAL LINK

See the Interactive Textbook for a downloadable version of this checklist.

Production design plan checklist

Stage	Task	Notes	Complete
Researching	Decide on the media form you wish to use		
	Decide on your overall creative intention		
	Written Statement of Intention – form – genre – theme – engagement techniques		
	Narrative and audience – Can you identify them?		
	Codes and conventions – Can you identify those that you will use?		
	Available technology – What will you use?		
	Technical processes required – What do you need to learn?		
Presenting	Written script – Is it properly formatted?		
	Storyboards – Could anyone use them?		
	Shot lists – Is every possible shot accounted for?		
Planning	Talent – Who are you using and when? – Have they signed clearance forms?		
	Additional crew – Who will be around to help and when?		
	Locations – Images need to be included for planning – Clearance needs to be documented		
	Production schedule – Calendar of rehearsal and production dates		
	Post-production schedule – Has adequate time been provided to complete these?		

Digital content

- Access the Interactive Textbook via Cambridge GO to access a downloadable Success Criteria checklist, digital quizzes and additional digital content for this chapter.

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UNIT 4
MEDIA PRODUCTION; AGENCY AND CONTROL IN AND OF THE MEDIA

Don't hate the media, become the media.

— Jello Biafra, The Dead Kennedys

OVERVIEW

In this unit, your aim is to determine how traditional forms of narrative are constructed and read by audiences, and then create your own media production. You will need to consider how audience demands can be met within a modern context of technological, legal and financial constraints. You have more tools at your disposal than students five, 10 or 15 years ago could have possibly imagined; however, as you will find out, you will need to find a balance between what has come before, what stands in your way and what lies beyond. You will also investigate the very nature of media communications and attempt to determine who really holds the power – the creator of the media product or the audience that consumes it? Good luck!

WHAT'S AHEAD

CHAPTER 10	CHAPTER 11
Area of Study 1: Media production	**Area of Study 2:** Agency and control in media

IMAGE ON OPPOSITE PAGE: Creators of media messages today can come in all shapes and sizes!

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CHAPTER 10 AREA OF STUDY 1

MEDIA PRODUCTION

How do students realise their intention through their media productions?

— VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, p. 32, used with permission

OVERVIEW

Is the battery charged? Does this script make sense? Have I booked the dark room? Where is the SD card? Which font should I use? Does this fake blood look real? These are the questions that will dominate your waking – and sleeping – thoughts as you edge closer towards the submission date for your major production. A clear head and an even clearer plan will be essential over these weeks and months as you embark upon your final practical task in VCE Media. Each week will present new challenges and unexpected hurdles that, if you are prepared to face them, will ensure you reach the finish line with the realisation of a long-held dream to be a fully-fledged media creator!

FIGURE 10.1 (above) Filming of the *Joker* (2019) sequel film, *Joker: Folie à Deux* (2024, dir. Todd Phillips), with Stefani Germanotta (Lady Gaga) as Harley Quinn pictured in the centre.

OUTCOME 1

On completion of this unit the student should be able to produce, refine, resolve and distribute to a specified audience a media product designed in Unit 3.

To achieve this outcome the student will draw on key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 1.

KEY KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING INTENTIONS

Key knowledge	Learning intentions – at the end of the chapter I will be able to:
• production and post-production processes used to realise pre-production plans	• realise pre-production plans through production and post-production processes
• the operation of equipment, materials and technologies used in the creation of media products	• operate equipment, materials and technologies in the production of a media product
• media codes and conventions relevant to the selected form, product and audience	• apply media codes and conventions to construct meaning relevant to the selected media form, product and audience
• reflection and feedback processes to refine and resolve media products	• use reflection and feedback to refine and resolve a media product
• methods for documenting development, refinement and realisation of media products	• document the development, refinement and resolution of a media product
• media language appropriate to the construction and evaluation of media representations	• use media language relevant to the construction and evaluation of media representations

(**Source:** Adapted from VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, p. 33, used with permission)

WHAT'S AHEAD

SECTION 10.1	SECTION 10.2	SECTION 10.3	SECTION 10.4	SECTION 10.5	SECTION 10.6	SECTION 10.7
Introduction: Executing your production plan!	Production checklists	Production design annotation	Rehearsals	Post-production checklist	Testing and feedback	The Statement of Outcome

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10.1 Introduction: Executing your production plan!

As an example, let's say you have chosen to produce a short film for your School-assessed Task (SAT). Picture the scene … It's the week before you shoot the biggest film of your young career. Literally months of work have gone into the preparations that have brought you to this moment. Initial spark of inspiration? Check. A story to tell? Check. Comprehensive overview of the style, genre, codes and conventions that form the aesthetic and artistic backbone of *your* telling of *this* story? Check, check, check and check!

Have you built on the creative core of your idea through a treatment, a script, storyboards? Of course, you have. What about a clear sense of the technical considerations that will turn your vision into concrete reality? No doubt you've conducted at least two thoughtfully planned and carefully scrutinised production experiments that have given you a clearer understanding of some of the key media technologies and processes you'll need to make this production happen.

By now, you've documented all this in loving detail in your media production design – along with casting notes, shot lists, location data, production schedules, clearances and release forms and anything else that's going to make the actual production of this *magnum opus* a practical reality.

So … do you really have everything ready to go?

What you need is going to be different depending on the form of your media product. A traditional cell animation with no dialogue, for instance, is going to have a production history as complex as determining how often you can get yourself in front of your light box with pen and ink so you can get drawing. An online product might need nothing more than a Media student sitting at their laptop at regular intervals until it's done.

Even in these situations, which are probably about as stripped down as the making of a Media product is likely to be, two things are crucial: organisation and equipment. These are messed with at your peril!

10.2 Production checklists

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- production and post-production processes used to realise pre-production plans
- the operation of equipment, materials and technologies used in the creation of media products
- media codes and conventions relevant to the selected form, product and audience to construct meaning
- reflection and feedback processes to refine and resolve media products
- methods for documenting development, refinement and realisation of media products
- media language appropriate to the construction and evaluation of media representations.

Let's stick with a video product as our example – but please note that many of the processes and checklists mentioned will apply to whichever medium you have chosen to work in. Here are some of the things you can't afford to forget before you go on location that first fateful day.

Get your shooting script finalised. In the last chapter we noted the need to number all of your scenes when the script becomes a production draft. This is the locked-down, let's-hope-there-are-no-more-revisions version you're taking on set. It's the one your crew is familiar with and can discuss with you, the one you need to be happy with because it's what you're filming. This doesn't mean you can't make minor changes on the day, or that your actors all need to be word perfect, but it's substantially the work that will appear on screen.



FIGURE 10.2 Steven Spielberg and George Lucas discussing a film script in the mid 1980s.

Once it's in the shape you want it to be when it goes out to cast and crew, get it out to your cast and crew. As much as this sounds like a no-brainer, it's only fair on your team – as well as your production – that they receive a copy of the final script in a timely manner. Actors need to learn lines, crew need to be familiar with the demands of each scene, and key personnel (such as your art director or your special effects supervisor) will need to make preparations based on what the script calls for. Extensive pre-production discussions cover a lot of this latter ground, but there's nothing like having the words in front of you to know you're providing the *exact* effect the story needs.

Are your locations locked down? Don't turn up on the day without being 100% sure you're allowed to be there. Have all the relevant permits printed and filed in duplicate. One copy should be in your production design, present and easily available on location. The other can sit in a drawer at home, safe and sound in case anything happens to the one you've taken with you. Make a call the week before shoot day just to make sure the company hasn't double booked or that other problems haven't come up!

Equipment checklist

Are your batteries charged? This is actually a more general call to ensure all your equipment is in full working order. Fully charged batteries are a life saver if you're nowhere near a wall plug. (And even if you are, having your camera tethered to the nearest wall is going to restrict your flexibility of movement more than you can possibly imagine!) If you have an external microphone that runs on its own batteries rather than phantom power, make sure they're good too. Bring fully charged spares if you can. Using non-practical lighting? Make sure the globes light up, and bring spares if you can. Recording to SD card? How much data will it hold? Is it the correct speed and class for your camera? Have you brought extras?



FIGURE 10.3 Have you prepared all the equipment you will require for the shoot?

Your equipment needs to be in a fit state to use, too. Clean all your lenses thoroughly and pack a portable lens cleaning kit in case they get grubby on location. Don't forget any lenses you intend to use, especially if you and your camera operator need a particular lens for a special effect.



On the subject of cameras, bring something that can act as a reflector and cutter, just in case 'lighting by God' needs a few tweaks. Portable is best, especially an object that can do both jobs. You need reflective on one side to boost the light on your subject, and non-reflective on the other to cut unwanted light. A white A2 cardboard sheet with the back painted black has saved many a student production.

Props and costumes. Has all the glue and paint dried before Day One of shooting? Is each prop or costume piece labelled for its corresponding scene? You don't have the Hollywood luxury of turning over one or two scenes a day, so a clearly labelled inventory is going to give your art department (such as it is) and runners a fighting chance at getting the right piece to the right person at the right time.

And another thing … Have you camera tested all your costumes and props? The camera may lie, but it hasn't kissed the Blarney Stone. Tweaks are sometimes necessary to make your no-budget efforts shine, be it by adjusting the piece itself or figuring out the most sympathetic way to light it. Which brings us to the most important question of all for all you aspiring Tarantinos: does your fake blood *actually* look real?

Scheduling checklist

Time management. One of the suggestions made in the last chapter when it came to drawing up a production schedule was to factor in some 'wiggle room' for pick-ups, reshoots and just generally to cover yourself for unforeseen unmitigated disasters. Scheduled wiggle room is only going to be of any use if you can stick to your schedule. Disasters do happen, like that summer beach scene being marred by a hailstorm, but don't fall behind schedule just because you decide everyone's having too good a time to actually get on to the next scene. Hollywood this isn't – and even some Hollywood filmmakers have been undone by tight budgets and even tighter schedules. Don't believe us? Go watch *Lost in La Mancha* (2002, dirs Keith Fulton and Louis Pepe) and try not to look Terry Gilliam in the eye.

When you're on set, keep the shoot moving along at an appropriate pace and avoid delays.

10.3 Production design annotation

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- production and post-production processes used to realise pre-production plans
- the operation of equipment, materials and technologies used in the creation of media products
- media codes and conventions relevant to the selected form, product and audience to construct meaning
- reflection and feedback processes to refine and resolve media products
- methods for documenting development, refinement and realisation of media products
- media language appropriate to the construction and evaluation of media representations.

Is your production design in (or near) your hands at all times? It's the creative lifeblood of your media product, so don't be without it!

Are you remembering to annotate any changes you make on the fly? One thing that is true of virtually every media production is that something, for some reason, gets changed along the way. Little tweaks are completely

understandable – and acceptable – and documenting them immediately means you won't forget them down the road. It also means your editor won't refuse to speak to you when the raw footage unexpectedly doesn't match the script! Post-it notes are a good way to document changes, stuck in your production design next to whatever has been changed.

(A word of warning: stay true to the representations and style decided on in the development phase of your product. Major changes without an incredibly good reason are frowned upon by VCAA and will likewise be thought of unfavourably by your Media teacher.)



DIGITAL LINK

Visit the Media Production Hub in the Interactive Textbook and watch former VCE Media student Beau Arnfield's reflective interview for tips and advice.

10.4 Rehearsals

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- production and post-production processes used to realise pre-production plans
- the operation of equipment, materials and technologies used in the creation of media products
- media codes and conventions relevant to the selected form, product and audience to construct meaning
- reflection and feedback processes to refine and resolve media products
- methods for documenting development, refinement and realisation of media products
- media language appropriate to the construction and evaluation of media representations.

Spend some time with your cast as they run lines for each scene. Little adjustments to the dialogue might come up during this process. Your media product is your baby, but they're only making a few fashion suggestions for onesies. Be open to ideas, and never be an artistic dictator. Remember, they're your mates! It's also fair to suggest at this point that your location is probably someone else's house/property/school/warehouse/rooftop. Production sets are fast-paced environments, but they don't need to be stressed-out spaces. Take time to respect the fact that you have been given the opportunity to shoot in someone's personal space. Pick up litter as you go, because it's the little things that go a long way. You never know who is watching you during your shoots, maybe a future employer, and your attention to respecting your location could indelibly go a long way for you and you aren't even aware of it yet. Food for thought, so pick up those wrappers!

Run through the camera movements for a scene without the camera, just watching the actors from where you intend the camera to be. Then bring the camera in for a run-through *before* you roll. When you do yell 'Action!' let your camera run; don't be afraid of an extra few seconds on the end of the take, as it may just catch the end of a line, or a smile that adds to the scene and it could save you from ruination in the editing studio. Go back and check it's all in focus! Take out the SD card and watch the footage on a laptop or other screen to make sure everything translates according to plan. Then, put the SD card back into your recording device! Any tricky focus changes during a shot should be carefully rehearsed too. Check your lighting: is it falling where it needs to? Is it appropriate to the mood of the scene and the genre of the overall product? Then, when it's perfect, do one more take anyway, for safety measures. All too often the 'perfect' take has something wrong with it you didn't notice at the time.



10.5 Post-production checklist

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- production and post-production processes used to realise pre-production plans
- the operation of equipment, materials and technologies used in the creation of media products
- media codes and conventions relevant to the selected form, product and audience to construct meaning
- reflection and feedback processes to refine and resolve media products
- methods for documenting development, refinement and realisation of media products
- media language appropriate to the construction and evaluation of media representations.

Here is an example of a day-to-day checklist during the production phase:

Diagram head	Diagram label
Cameras	lens cleaned, operating and batteries charged
Sound recording device	microphone cleaned (they get dusty), operating and charged
Costumes & props	cleaned and ready for next shoot (don't let your mate wear the main character's dress out after the first day of shooting to a party, it won't come back looking the same)
Lighting gear	cleaned and packed, charged up for next day of use
Crew and cast	have copies of the script for your next day of shooting
Transportation	of people and gear for tomorrow is set
Your media production	is safe with you and tells you who you need to call for
design	the next scene tomorrow!
Your homework for any	is done so you aren't thinking about it
other subjects	while you're creating movie magic

10.6 Testing and feedback

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- production and post-production processes used to realise pre-production plans
- the operation of equipment, materials and technologies used in the creation of media products
- media codes and conventions relevant to the selected form, product and audience to construct meaning
- reflection and feedback processes to refine and resolve media products
- methods for documenting development, refinement and realisation of media products
- media language appropriate to the construction and evaluation of media representations.

Once you've got a rough cut together, you need to start thinking about your audience for the first time since those early days of assembling your media production design. Consider screening it to test audiences for honest feedback.

Let them know in advance that it's in a rough-and-ready form and they'll be forgiving of that aspect – but they might spot some crucial issues that have whooshed right past your eyes simply because you're too close to the project.

You don't even need to organise a group screening. Why not upload the rough cut to a private Vimeo page and get everyone to answer some set questions on SurveyMonkey?

Some questions you may want to ask are:

- Did the opening sequence grab you? Tell me what you liked or disliked.
- What qualities did you like about the main protagonist? Was their acting legit?
- Did you understand the storyline? If not, what did you not get?
- Did the soundtrack work with the visual composition? Can you give any suggestions of music or music types that you think that could have added to a particular scene?
- What was your favourite part and why?
- Can you give me any productive comments, I can take it …

The feedback you get from this process must be documented. Keep a record of comments, statistics from the surveys and advice from your teacher. The refinement of your process throughout the production stage shows your teacher how you may have resolved reoccurring problems as well as providing evidence of realisation of the final product. All of it can then be used in your Statement of Outcome.



10.7 The Statement of Outcome

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- production and post-production processes used to realise pre-production plans
- the operation of equipment, materials and technologies used in the creation of media products
- media codes and conventions relevant to the selected form, product and audience to construct meaning
- reflection and feedback processes to refine and resolve media products
- methods for documenting development, refinement and realisation of media products
- media language appropriate to the construction and evaluation of media representations.

When it's all done and dusted, there's one thing you should remember: it isn't all done and dusted. Even after your work is edited, credited, mixed and polished, that final cut deserves one more thing. Your honest reflection. Write or record an evaluation using media language relevant to the media construction after production, but also after post-production. A vlog is a really cool way to record your thoughts, and it's super easy to add to throughout the process. It doesn't have to be colour-corrected or have fancy typography, but it should serve as a record of your processes and achievement through the three-phase production journey.

DIGITAL LINK

See the Interactive Textbook for a downloadable Statement of Outcome form.

This can be as short or as long as you want it to be, but the more in-depth you go, the more you will learn for your next production. And there *will* be a next one, because you've got a taste for it now. It's under your skin, the pride and passion and all the rest. There's the knowledge that your art is something to be absolutely proud of. You've made it look easy, and you've made it look good.

Why wouldn't you want to do it again?

FIGURE 10.4 A vlog is one way you might want to record your honest and thoughtful reflection on your project





CHAPTER REVIEW

Summing it all up

Submitting the outcome

It's the due date. What do you need to give your teacher?

1. Your production design with all annotations made during production.
2. Your SAT – be it in physical or digital form, your teacher must have your SAT in the intended format.
3. Your Statement of Outcome.

Well done! You did it!

Now it's time to give your actor that costume dress they wanted to wear out to the party.

Now it's time to sit back with friends and family and press Play, if you're not completely sick of your film yet!

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CHAPTER 11 AREA OF STUDY 2

AGENCY AND CONTROL IN MEDIA

INQUIRY QUESTION

Who holds the power and influence – the media or audiences?

— VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, p. 33, used with permission

OVERVIEW

We live in challenging times and the media we use are, in large part, instrumental in creating these challenges. In an era of phenomenal technological advancement and, at times, a breathless flow of information and media content, it can be hard to keep up with the changes, challenges and opportunities created by a modern media world. In this chapter, you are about to embark on one of the most important studies of your media journey. By the end of this unit, you will be more aware, critical and cautious of the new

FIGURE 11.1 (above) Hopeful influencers pose for photos outside the Paul Smith store on Melrose Avenue in Los Angeles. The huge pink wall is a magnet for those hoping for their moment of fame.

media world, but alert to its opportunities too. Here is your chance to stop, take stock and understand the vast array of issues that contemporary media has created. It will help you understand how we got here, why we are here and where to go next.

OUTCOME 2

On completion of this unit the student should be able to use evidence, arguments and ideas to discuss audience agency, media influence, media regulation and ethical and legal issues in the media.

To achieve this outcome the student will draw on key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 2.

KEY KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING INTENTIONS

Key knowledge	Learning intentions – at the end of the chapter I will be able to:
• the changing relationship between media and audiences	• analyse and discuss the changing relationship between media and audiences
• the influence of both media and audiences	• analyse and evaluate the extent of the influence of the media and audiences
• how media is used by globalised media institutions, governments and individuals	• explain how media is used by globalised media institutions, governments and individuals
• arguments, evidence and ideas to explain contemporary media influence and audience agency	• analyse contemporary evidence, arguments and ideas to explain the influence of media and agency of audiences
• the regulation of media and audiences in Australia	• explain and discuss the regulation of media and audiences in Australia
• the issues and challenges relating to regulation and control of the media	• analyse issues and challenges relating to regulation and control of the media
• ethical and legal issues in the media	• evaluate ethical and legal issues in the media
• media language used in evaluation and discussion	• use media language in analysis, evaluation and discussion

(**Source:** Adapted from VCAA, *VCE Media Study Design 2024–2028*, pp. 28–9, used with permission)

WHAT'S AHEAD

SECTION 11.1	SECTION 11.2	SECTION 11.3	SECTION 11.4	SECTION 11.5	SECTION 11.6	SECTION 11.7	SECTION 11.8
Introduction: What is agency and control?	Changing relationship: Media and audiences	Explaining contemporary media influence and audience agency	The influence of media and audiences	How media is used by different stakeholders	The regulation of media in Australia	Issues of regulation and control of the media	Ethical and legal issues in the media

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11.1 Introduction: What is agency and control?

agency the capacity to interact with media messages and make free choices

control media that has the power to influence

DIGITAL LINK

See the Interactive Textbook for detailed information on how this chapter is structured in line with each Key knowledge dot point from the Study Design.

The production, distribution and interaction with the media is evolving at a rapid pace, and the line between the media and the audience is now more blurred than ever. The notion of who has **agency** – the capacity to interact with media messages and make free choices – and who has **control** – media that has the power to influence – is not so easy to determine any more. What you must examine are the ways in which the power and influence can potentially be exerted by anyone with the capacity to make media products.

The relationship between the media and audiences has changed radically. Prior to the availability of media technologies like smartphones, mobile networks and high-speed internet, there was a clear distinction between those who created the media and the audience that received its messages.

Early studies of media and communication, prior to the internet, explained this relationship in a very rudimentary way. In this simplistic diagram, there is the suggestion that all the control lies in the hands of the media author to create and control the message and, potentially, influence audiences.



FIGURE 11.2 Traditional linear view of the relationship between the media and communication

ACTIVITY 11.1

Research task

1 Consider the storyline for *The Lord of the Rings* (2001–03, dir. Peter Jackson) movie trilogy: an adaptation of a famous series of books, presenting a simple story of good against evil, and a heroic quest against insurmountable odds.

2 Research the story of *The Lord of the Rings*. What was the intention of Peter Jackson in adapting the stories for the screen? What message was Jackson and his co-writers Fran Walsh and Phillipa Boyens intending to send?

3 What understanding does the audience have about the battle of good versus evil?

4 What have you already learnt about media narratives and their contexts that suggests this is a simplistic understanding of how media authors can control a message? What else should we consider when comparing the relationship between media authors and audiences?



FIGURE 11.3 'The Lord of the Rings in Concert', April 2015. *The Fellowship of the Ring* was screened with live music performed by the 21st Century Symphony Orchestra and Brooklyn Youth Chorus.

The control of the mass media

The term 'mass media' emerged in the 1920s when the dominant form of communication was the printed newspaper. As printing a daily newspaper with a large circulation to a big audience like Sydney or Melbourne was expensive, there were generally few individuals with the money and capacity to do so. For audiences, this was in many cases, the *only* source of information. With few competing voices, audiences placed a great deal of trust in the printed word.

The companies or **institutions** that owned these newspapers were structured much like governments and had one or a handful of individuals at the top of the media organisation's pyramid. As these newspapers were read by a huge audience, the capacity for this small group of influential people to spread a dominant message or ideology through their reporting of news became very possible.

The notion of the '**feedback loop**' can help us understand the way media messages were created, distributed and presented to audiences, which affected them in a particular way, who then presented a 'reaction', which suggested some capacity for the media (especially those at the top of organisational pyramid) to guide and craft the preferred reaction and influence.

What you must remember about this model of feedback is that it assumes that the audience had little agency to interact with media messages. Prior to the internet, this was certainly the case. Newspaper readers could not tweet their reactions to controversial articles, nor could anyone record and upload their 'reaction videos' to significant moments in television or film. There simply was not always the avenue for audiences to present an immediate reaction. It often took place over time, sometimes, a matter of days or weeks.



FIGURE 11.4 A 1960s 'newsie' sells papers on the street straight from the printing press to the audience

institution an established and regulated organisation that owns and produces many different media products and systems

feedback loop the process of creating media messages, the reading and presentation of a response in the audience and the reaction of the original creator of the message

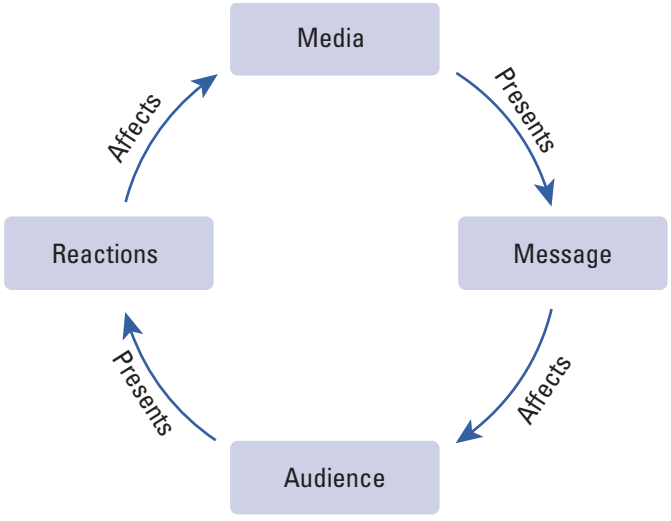


FIGURE 11.5 The traditional feedback loop of the media and society

ACTIVITY 11.2

Audience feedback in modern news media

1. Go to your school library or local newsagent and read the major stories from one of Victoria's major newspapers. Choose one article that interests you and read it.
2. Now examine how audiences provide feedback within that paper (hint: check the letters to the editor section). What does it tell you about the time required for audiences to provide feedback to print media? It may help to research how long it takes to print and produce a physical newspaper.
3. Now go online and seek out the same article.
4. Choose an article that is open to comments, read it and count the comments against the time it was published and when you read it. What differences can you see in the feedback loop provided by online articles?

How the internet changed everything

As you will see in this chapter, there are still several people at the top of the 'media pyramid' (although the 'pyramid' itself may have changed with new technologies), but today many millions of media users can interrupt the message as soon as it becomes available. Anyone can now take the message and provide immediate feedback, remix, reshape and redistribute it.

The immediacy of access to this new information, and the rate in which it can be shared, altered and commented upon, means the audience too have great capacity to wield agency and control over the feedback loop itself and the original intention of the message. Contemporary media researchers are exploring how increased audience agency has permanently altered the balance of power between major media institutions and control over the message.

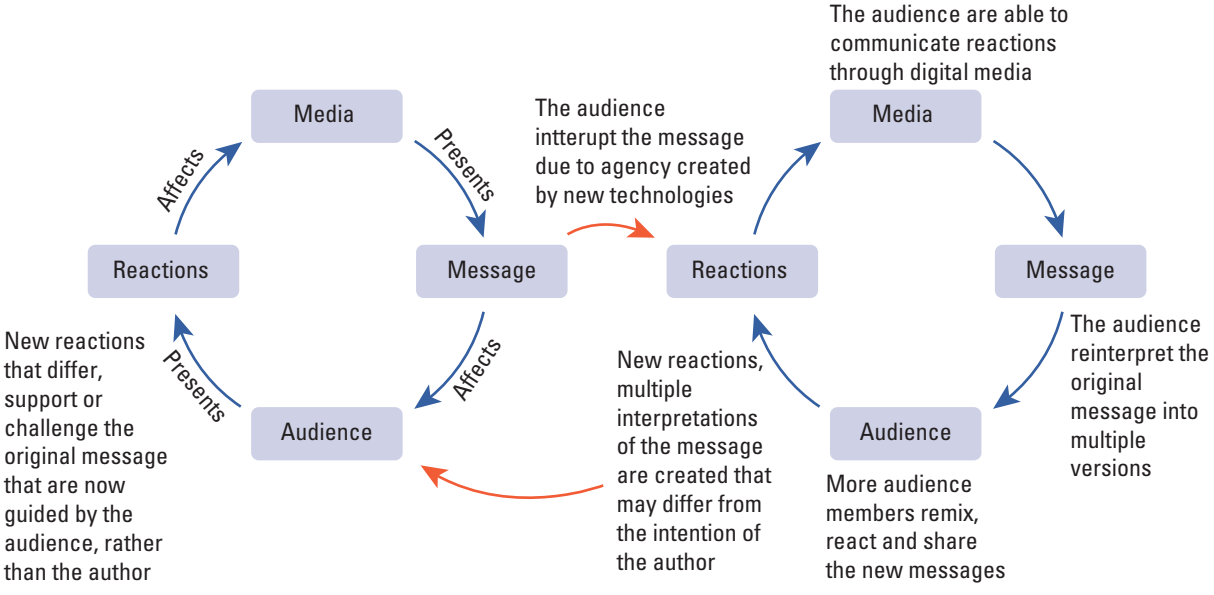


FIGURE 11.6 The modern feedback loop

What is media influence?

Before you embark further into this study, it is essential to acknowledge that the media has some power to influence audience behaviour. Later in this chapter, you will have the opportunity to explore the way different

media theorists and thinkers have attempted to explain the way media influences behaviour in the past, present and future.

While you may claim that you don't blindly follow and repeat everything you see and hear in the media, the media must have *some* power and influence in more subtle and nuanced ways. Otherwise, why does advertising exist?

But what does influence actually look like?

Media influence is primarily focused on alterations to human behaviour due to a media message. Anything audiences do in response to the media can be deemed a 'media effect'. Enjoyment is an effect, as is fandom, discussion and debate of your favourite programs and screaming at a horror movie. Over the history of the media, most media effects research is mostly concerned about aberrant and anti-social behaviour, or more generally any deviation from the norm. This is not to say that media effects cannot exhibit positive behaviours.



FIGURE 11.7 Advertising billboards have been a successful advertising method for decades.

A 'media effect' can be any of the following behaviours:

Desensitisation to violence	Blind imitation	Right/wrong confusion
Violent behaviour	Mean world syndrome	Racial stereotyping
Political persuasion	Unhealthy lifestyle	Increased empathy
Altruism	Media addiction	Confirmation bias
Fact/fiction confusion	Poor self-image	Narcissism

TABLE 11.1 Potential media effects

DIGITAL LINK

See the Interactive Textbook for information about the **history of media effects theories** to learn more about the traditional approaches to understanding the relationship between audiences and media.

ACTIVITY 11.3

Analysis: Media and behaviour

1. Examine the table above and work with a pair to match behaviours that you have recognised in your own media use.
2. Use the same table to match behaviours you have seen in others around you or in society in general.
3. Are there specific examples of media products, forms or events that you can match to these behaviours or others in the list?
4. As best as you can, determine from the response to the previous question whether the audience had agency or it was a case of media control that created the behaviours.
5. Consider your response to the previous question. What gaps are there in your understanding at this point? What parts do you not understand? Create a list with your teacher and class to explore as your study continues.



11.2 A changing relationship: Media and audiences

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- the changing relationship between media and audiences.

The relationship between media and audiences used to be somewhat fixed. The internet changed this, and while a simple interpretation of the new relationship between the media and audiences suggests a more democratic one where audiences have agency, it is in reality not so clear. The push and pull between media institutions, governments and audiences is complex and must be examined from the beginning to the present to gather a full picture of our possible future.

Who were the gatekeepers?

A key component of your understanding of agency and control is that of the 'gatekeeper'. In simple terms, a gatekeeper is an individual or organisation that decides what information can travel from a media author to the group, and what cannot; a person who opens or closes the gate of information.

The term 'gatekeeper' was coined by social psychologist Kurt Lewin in 1943.[1] Gatekeepers were considered an essential element of the broadcast media world. A journalist could decide what stories to report on, or the editor could decide what stories to air on the nightly news.

The decision was and still is made for a range of reasons within the news media. It could be a story that is considered too dangerous or flimsy for public consumption. It could even be because the owner or producer of that news outlet personally objects to that story becoming public knowledge. This decision was also based on what was more exciting and would gather the biggest audience, rather than what was important (but less exciting) for the public to know. Hence, the old news journalism catchphrase: 'if it bleeds it leads'.

free to air television stations and broadcasts that are received through a free transmission of a digital signal to audiences



FIGURE 11.8 Walter Cronkite was one of America's most trusted news 'anchors' in the 1960s and 70s.

The Hollywood film industry has been notorious in the past for gatekeeping films that were made for the public, the stars we saw and the stories that were told. In Australia, a long history of gatekeeping has maintained a specific level of content on Australian **free to air television**. In the broadcast era, gatekeeping was not without its critics and generated a long-held and cynical view towards news reporting and popular film.

There are far fewer gatekeepers in modern media. The internet and social media have made almost all information available, and on face value it appears that the gate is wide open to audiences. Audiences can determine what they see and engage with to a large extent. The methods of gatekeeping employed by large social media companies is less visible than it was in the past; audiences in many cases do not know what is being withheld from them by large systems designed to keep feeding them what is exciting, instead of what they need to actually know.

Even more problematic is that the apparent lack of gatekeeping means all manner of information that may be false or deliberately misleading is available to audiences too. This will cause you to evaluate the different forms of media gatekeeping over time.

ACTIVITY 11.4

Research task

1. Find a copy of the *Herald Sun* and *The Age* that were printed on the same day.
2. Compare the front pages. What information is presented on the front page of each paper?
3. What similarities and differences can you see? Do both run the same story? Or have they prioritised different information as important?
4. Quickly scan through the remaining pages of each paper. What does the selection of articles from page 2 onwards tell you about what information is kept in and out of each paper?
5. For homework, choose the topic of the main article from each paper and search them on your social media feeds. Make note of what you are able to find. How does this information differ from what you read in local newspapers?

THE EVOLUTION OF AGENCY AND CONTROL

The evolution of the media is critical to understanding where we find ourselves today. Charting the ebb and flow of control, agency and control again is crucial to understanding your own use of the media. While things were perhaps easier to understand about media control in the past, they are much more complex in the present and will be in the future.

The broadcast era refers to a period in the 20th century where audiences were somewhat reliant on the news and information broadcast to them via radio, television and print. Due to the limitations of technology at the time, audiences relied on these messages to connect with the outside world. As you will learn, many studies and theories of media influence and control observed the relationship between the groups involved in the media process as one of 'cause and effect' based on the power exerted by those in control of the media.



FIGURE 11.9 Prior to the widespread availability of television, the newspaper was a dominant media form.

THE BROADCAST ERA

Newspapers

The term mass media emerged in the 1920s when the dominant form of communication was the printed newspaper. For a few decades, newspapers were the primary source of contemporary media and were a vital link to the outside world, so those that printed them could easily use them (if it was their wish) to influence the thinking and behaviours of audiences.

The production of newspapers was and still is a huge process. While busy reporters would find and source news, editors would carefully select what would 'lead'



the news and work with copy editors to write eye-catching headlines and set the layout of the paper. Each article followed a set format of 'Who, What, Where, When, How' and if there was space, 'Why'. Journalists needed to ensure their stories were as factual as possible in the time allowed. It took a huge staff of specialists to prepare the paper for printing, which occurred overnight and ready for the next morning.

The business model of newspapers was not necessarily news. It was advertising. If people could be encouraged to read a specific newspaper with a great story, there was a greater chance they would see and read the advertising printed between the articles. This model sustained the print media industry for a century.

ACTIVITY 11.5

Research task

1 Find a copy of today's newspaper and carefully scan the front half of the newspaper for the advertising. What kinds of products are being sold? Who are the major advertisers?

2 In years gone by, newspapers were filled with hundreds of advertisements from a wide range of companies. What does the newspaper in front of you tell you about the modern sustainability of this business model?

Entertainment

As radio, film and television emerged over the next few decades, experts began to investigate the relationship between these increasingly dominant media forms and the potential each had for influencing and controlling the actions of the audience. In the early days of mass communication, the power of print, radio and advertising to reach, control and reinforce dominant ideologies was studied further. These new technologies revolutionised life around the world.

Big Five studios the five major Hollywood studios that produced the bulk of films seen in cinemas: MGM, Paramount Pictures, RKO, 20th Century Fox and Warner Bros

B film a cheaply produced film, often shorter than a more prestigious and bigger-budgeted 'A' picture, shown as the second part of a double-feature, produced by the Big Five studios and smaller independents such as Republic Pictures

Production of cinema, particularly in Hollywood, was limited to a small number of studios that controlled the industry. Stars, storylines, genres and the cinema experience were dictated by the **'Big Five' studios** who controlled what audiences saw in the cinema. While a huge industry of '**B-films**' existed, they often struggled to get onto screens in front of audiences. Like news, cinema required hundreds of specialised roles and much of the global industry was based in Hollywood, a suburb of one city, Los Angeles.

In wealthier nations where televisions and radios could be purchased for the family home, concern grew over the way in which audiences could become 'glued' to entertainment for hours on end. By the beginning of the 1960s, televisions were in most homes in America and Australia and although programming did not run all day, audiences were given hours of entertainment, and few reasons to step away from the screen. The following decade was one of the most turbulent for both nations as the Vietnam War and cultural upheaval led to violence and protest (most notably led by students and young adults) in the streets.

Since television was the most recent and major change in normal family life, it was quickly blamed for the real-world violence. In 1972, after the chaos of the 60s had settled, the United States Surgeon General had even deemed television violence as a public health problem.[2]

Production of television varies (to this day) between live and pre-recorded programming. Each format requires specific talents, skills and professionals who generate the content. Like film, there are hundreds of roles required.

Right up until the turn of the 21st century in Australia, there were only five major television stations that created news and entertainment for Australian audiences. Outside of the **ABC** and **SBS**, which are government owned, the three remaining channels are privately owned and were often the outlet for powerful individuals competing for advertising dollars and audiences.

ABC Australian Broadcasting Corporation

SBS Special Broadcasting Corporation

ACTIVITY 11.6

Research task

1. Find a television program or film made before 1990 on a streaming service or from physical media you may have at home and watch the closing credits.
2. How many specific roles and individuals can you count within the credits?
3. What does this tell you about the skills and financial power required to produce a one-hour television program or feature film?

The internet

The internet has existed in some form since the 1960s. It was invented as a means of keeping important government information in the United States spread across various networks in case of a catastrophic nuclear attack. It was not until the mid 1990s, when home computers became affordable and available, that use of the internet became commonplace. During this time, much of the content available on the internet was created by people who knew how to write the code required to create websites. Control of the internet lay in the hands of those who knew how to create it.



FIGURE 11.10 Access to the internet has connected people and communities around the world.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, peer-to-peer file networks and small social media experiments emerged; however, the internet was comparatively slow, basic images took minutes to download and most homes had their internet connected to the home phone line.

In 2005, a faster form of internet, broadband, became commonly available to homes in Australia, as it had around the world. This meant that access to the internet was faster and the individual user could upload and create content on the internet with greater speed. This moment in the internet's history is significant as it marks the point where internet technologies, which had been slowly developing for decades, were placed into overdrive. The years that followed saw the introduction of an internet created by the users. YouTube, Wikipedia, Twitter and Facebook were all released at this time and the internet was changed forever.



Web 2.0 the second stage of development of the internet, characterised especially by the change from static web pages to dynamic or user-generated content and the growth of social media

the internet of things the interconnection via the internet of computing devices embedded in everyday objects, enabling them to send and receive data

This era is commonly known as **Web 2.0**.

The introduction of Web 2.0 technologies, social media and '**the internet of things**' has led to a new, and much more opaque understanding of agency and control. The balance of power has shifted. Individuals can call governments and institutions to account, and when acting collectively, audiences can change the course of world events, in part through their actions online. Thanks to the internet, the individual has been able to start a blog, create a Facebook page, crowd-fund a narrative film, reach millions with a YouTube channel or guide the purchases of followers through sponsored TikTok posts seen by an even bigger audience. We can search any corner of the internet and connect with millions of people we have never met in person (and may never meet) in a way that was thought impossible prior to the internet.

However, a hidden form of control lies under the surface.

Personalised algorithms drive the modern internet. Your every behaviour on a connected device, be it your laptop, phone, smart watch, health tracker or even your robotic vacuum cleaner, is recorded, stored as data and used to predict your next move. These complex data equations can determine a profile of what you are most likely to like, do, watch and interact with to keep you online for longer.

Social media uses this data to feed you more of what you like, to keep you scrolling and attentive. The longer you use these services, the more data they can collect. The more they collect, the more they can target you with specific advertising, and sell that data to the highest bidder. The companies that collect this data are now some of the richest in the world.

According to *The Economist*, by 2017 data collected from the internet became more valuable than oil.[3]

The large social media companies of the 21st century – Twitter, Facebook, TikTok, Instagram (and probably a few new ones by the time you read this) – have exerted the kind of control over audiences that the captains of the broadcast media industry could only dream of. While audiences may feel they have greater freedom with the media than ever, personalised algorithms, data collection and artificial intelligence (AI) guide much of what we see and do, now and into the future.

Never has the media had such control and, in the same breath, never has the audience experienced such agency.

ACTIVITY 11.7

Research task

1. Consider your responses to the activities on newspapers, film and television. How do you access these forms of news and entertainment with the internet?
2. Compare your search results on a current news topic with the person next to you. How do your personalised algorithms alter your results based on your internet activity?
3. Find someone who uses the same streaming service as you. Netflix, Amazon Prime and others all use your views to recommend new content for you to watch. Depending on your gender, interests and views, even the thumbnail of the content can be altered! Compare your 'recommended for you' with a partner. How well does the personalised algorithm know you?

The media, democracy, governments and voters

Elections are a fundamental part of a functioning democracy like those in Australia, the USA and elsewhere in the world. The media has long played a key role in communicating the ideas of political leaders and many have sought to control the message via the media to win these elections.

CASE STUDY 11.1

Nixon vs JFK: The broadcast era

The relationship between Australian and American history in the 1960s has a direct link to the rise of television as the dominant media form. A keen study of the major events of that era, be it the Vietnam War or the moon landing, will find a direct link to the televised image that helped guide public debate and action towards them. One of the first American politicians to properly use television to their advantage was an American presidential candidate, John F Kennedy (JFK).



FIGURE 11.11 Inside the studio for the 1960 US presidential debate

Prior to television, politicians were rarely seen in the flesh. Voters could hear them on the radio, or see them in print, but little was known about them beyond that. Television humanised politics as the form allowed media audiences to see and hear their leaders talk in real time. In 1960, 87% of American homes, more than 46 million, were equipped with a television, compared to 25% in 1956. Television was, in the 1960s, the dominant media form.

JFK was a young, handsome and well-spoken politician. JFK and his political party were attempting to exercise control through the media form of television by cultivating a positive image on a range of television appearances before the election.

In the lead-up to the 1960 American election, JFK debated his opponent, the older and more experienced Richard Nixon. In August of 1960, when the first debate appeared on television, Nixon had been unwell and refused to wear make-up on screen. His physical appearance was that of an older, unwell man who lacked strength and confidence. By contrast, the young Kennedy had just finished campaigning in sunny California and was the picture of good health.

The August 1960 'Presidential Debate' was broadcast on television and radio. Research after the event recorded that those who listened to the debate on the radio found the debate and ideas of Nixon made him the winner. However, the television audience of over 70 million focused on the physical appearance of the two and declared Kennedy the winner.

In this election, the audience had limited agency. While many would have engaged with the debate on televisions or through the radio in their homes, there was little opportunity to provide feedback. Most would have had the time to think about the message, and discuss it with friends, co-workers and neighbours the following day. American voters would then exercise their agency at the ballot box with their vote.

Here we can observe a clear distinction between the power of certain media forms to influence an audience. Not only this, but it was also a deliberate attempt by a media-savvy political party aspiring to control and sway public opinion with the dominant media form of the day.

JFK went on to win the election where more than half of all voters reported that the televised debates played a role in their decision, and 6% of those surveyed stated that the debates were the specific reason they voted for JFK.



FIGURE 11.12 US presidential candidates meet and debate for the first time on television

Analysis

Carefully consider this case study and answer the following questions. *Note*: you will need to hang on to them as they will form the basis of a research task later.

1. To what extent did JFK use the media to exert control in this event?
2. How would you define the extent of agency the audience was able to wield? Define the nature of television and radio as media forms in your response.
3. What agency did audiences have to respond to this political message?
4. Consider how the audience was surveyed in 1960. Voters were asked their opinion via phone, mail or door-to-door surveys. How would the nature of the feedback loop affect the ability of those two political leaders to act upon their own message?

CASE STUDY 11.2

Clinton vs Trump 2016: The post-broadcast era

Fast forward to 2016 and America was asked to vote for the election of their 45th president. Since 1960, the televised election debate has become a fundamental element of democracies the world over. They are still heavily choreographed events that each candidate prepares for to manage body language, handshakes and facial expressions.

This time, the technology available to the audience and the feedback loop of these messages changed the balance of control and agency. On 26 September 2016 as the two presidential candidates, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, met on stage for the first political debate of the campaign, they began a ceremony that had been set in the American political tradition since Nixon and JFK. Meeting together on stage and using a nationwide television broadcast to attempt to sway voters in their direction, each candidate was faced with a vastly different media landscape. As the debate began, a number of media forms began participating:

- **Television:** using the traditional debate format, allowing each candidate time to respond to each question, the broadcasts were watched live by millions.
- **Twitter:** an incalculable number of journalists, commentators, politicians and ordinary citizens posted their thoughts, retweeted those of others and provided a vast platform for live political debate among the audience in real time. During the debate there were almost six million tweets that mentioned and tagged either candidate.
- **YouTube:** played three live streams from *Bloomberg TV*, the *Washington Post*, the Spanish-language channel *Telemundo* and independent streaming which allowed for public commentary.
- **Online news:** live commentary from journalists across a range of news platforms.
- **Facebook:** live streams allowed for open comment and political debate between supporters of both candidates.

- **Print media:** journalists and analysts recorded the debate to make extended commentary in the following day's paper.
- **Memes:** active users of the internet were creating and sharing memes in real time, commenting on the debate and, in some cases, changing the message entirely.

In the 2016 campaign, the nature of the audience's involvement completely altered the way in which the candidates and their supporters attempted to sway the opinion of voters. Most elections are hotly contested; however, the sheer volume of media available to voters meant that a bottomless pit of views, opinions, videos, posts and blogs were available to those willing to search.

On Facebook, the ferocity of the debate reached such a level that many users began 'unfriending' and hiding the opinions that they disagreed with. Thanks to the personalised algorithms that defined internet usages, Clinton supporters only saw news and posts by other Clinton supporters, Trump supporters only saw what they wanted to see and when they met online, their positions had hardened so greatly that few could see eye to eye.



FIGURE 11.13 A brief moment of civility between 2016 presidential candidates Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton

Unlike the 1960 election, audiences were not meeting and discussing their views face to face, they were meeting in online spaces where the capacity to vent more aggressive opinions is provided by the relative anonymity of the internet.

American voters, whose attention was divided between the televised debate and online commentary, only heard or saw posts sympathetic to their own beliefs, reinforcing what they already believed. Much of this was driven by internet **memes**.

memes an image, video, piece of text, etc., typically humorous in nature, that is copied and spread rapidly by internet users, often with slight variations

Just like tweets, Facebook posts, Snapchats and Instagram photos, the political memes of the 2016 campaign were a direct example of agency exerted from the 'bottom up'. There are no gatekeepers for memes and, as such, the simpler the message is, the faster it can be shared and consumed by audiences.

What memes also do is oversimplify and sometimes distort a complex message. In the 2016 campaign, memes drew the audience's attention away from the debate, and towards a single moment captured in an image, of a weird facial expression, a movement and the thoughts of an anonymous author over the top of a presidential candidate. The original message was no longer clear.

Analysis

1. How did social media change the impact of the 2016 televised presidential debates?
2. What agency did the audience have in this election?
3. How did social media change the way that agency was exercised?
4. How does the nature of memes alter the intended message of a political debate?
5. In terms of agency and control, where did the power lie in these debates? In the hands of the audience? Or in the personalised algorithms of social media?
6. Using the example of the two presidential debates of 1960 and 2016, explain how this demonstrates the dynamic and changing relationship between the media and the audience.



ACTIVITY 11.8

Group task

Work in groups of three to complete the following task:

On two blank pieces of paper, recreate the feedback loop seen in Figure 11.6, with one for the Nixon vs JFK debate and one for Clinton vs Trump.

1. One person, using red pen, should chart the role all media forms played in the Nixon and JFK election campaign, noting down how and where each form participated. Your goal in the second circle is to explain how the feedback loop would have operated in the 1960s.
2. On the second piece of paper use a blue pen to create one circle to chart the role traditional news media played in the Clinton and Trump debate.
3. A third must create the second circle for Clinton and Trump, but using a green pen, that focuses specifically on the role social media technologies played in the same process.
4. Once complete, you need to carefully examine the results:
   - **a** How have social and online media contributed to the flow of information?
   - **b** How do you define the difference between those who have control in each instance?
   - **c** How can you explain the difference in agency within the audience?

2022 AND BEYOND

In the Australian federal election of 2022, the role of televised debates was seen to be waning.[4] As you can see in 2016, the way audiences engaged with these democratic traditions has become fragmented by social media. Personalised algorithms have polarised audiences and rational debate has become harder to come by. In many cases, the news media itself has responded to this polarisation and tend to represent it themselves, so looking to traditional news media might not provide the balanced debates audiences were once used to.

In 2022, Larry Sabato, director of the Center for Politics at the University of Virginia, stated in *The Guardian* online news:

> Believe it or not, I watched all four of the Kennedy-Nixon debates and you could hear a pin drop anywhere you went. Everybody was watching. In fact, over 70m watched and the number of votes that year? 70m.
>
> But in the era of 400 channels, when polarization is so intense that the vast majority of voters already know for whom they're voting, it doesn't matter what happens in a debate or if there is a debate.

FIGURE 11.14 Larry Sabato quoted in David Smith, 'The End of the Debate? Republicans Draw the Curtain on Political Theater', *The Guardian*, 18 September 2022

CONTROL AND SOCIAL MEDIA INTO THE FUTURE

In 2020 and 2022, the elections in the USA and Australia played out in much the same way. However, the polarisation of voters forced social media companies to acknowledge some responsibility for their role. Amid the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic and Trump's election loss, misinformation about the pandemic and Trump's claim that the election was stolen spread rapidly online, particularly among those whose personalised algorithms had led them there.

In January 2021, former US President Donald Trump was suspended from Twitter for posting what Twitter stated was a breach of its guidelines. While he was reinstated in 2022 after entrepreneur Elon Musk purchased Twitter, Trump's suspension was a seismic moment for the relationship between governments and social media.



FIGURE 11.15 In 2021 social media site Twitter suspended the account of former US President Donald Trump.

While Trump went on to establish his own social media platform, he could no longer broadcast opinions to his 89 million followers between 2021 and 2022. A key component of his political strategy, Trump used Twitter to bypass the media and speak directly to the audience. His supporters called it political censorship; his opponents called it responsible regulation. No matter how you may see it, it was a moment where a technology company, not elected officials, or the audience, took control and was able to silence one avenue of a high-profile politician (a former president no less) to sell their message to the audience.

ACTIVITY 11.9

Analysing Twitter

1. What do Twitter's actions in 2021 tell you about the control now wielded by social media institutions over media messages?
2. Using the example of Trump's account suspension in 2021, explain how this demonstrates the dynamic and changing relationship between the media and the audience.

Audience as producers

The development of the internet in the 2000s opened the door for audiences to become media makers themselves and build audiences in a way once considered impossible in the broadcast era. The control wielded by broadcast media meant that the 'star' was carefully selected, curated and presented to the audience, who had little access to them beyond more carefully managed interactions controlled by the media itself. Social media allowed people to build an audience and interact with them directly. One of the first things to arise from free and open access to the internet was anonymity. Audiences could (and still) never be sure exactly who they were interacting with over the internet. To circumvent the control broadcast media held over the media, some used deception to build an audience.

LONELYGIRL15

A key moment in the transfer of control from old to new media can be found in a small YouTube video that landed in 2006. In the early days of YouTube **confessional videos** were popular. Using a webcam attached to a laptop (they weren't built in then!) users would 'confess' their daily lives to audiences and build small followings of viewers interested in the daily minutiae of ordinary people's lives. One account that grew quickly was 'Lonelygirl15'.

confessional videos a popular trend in the early days of Web 2.0, where ordinary users would detail their day-to-day lives to internet audiences

In 2006, a teenager called Bree (Lonelygirl15) began a video confessional of her life as a home-schooled teen and her parents, who appeared to have strange religious beliefs. Her confessions were the normal, innocent thoughts of a normal teen girl; however, the more bizarre elements of her life gained her a huge following and she quickly became one of the most viewed accounts on YouTube. Thousands of views grew into the hundreds of thousands in a matter of months as audiences, now fans, became engaged in a slowly developing narrative of Bree's life, her only friend Daniel and the sinister details of her parents' beliefs. Blogs and fan pages emerged trying to unpack her story and solve the mysteries of Lonelygirl15. The *New York Times* ran a regular column on each new episode. Lonelygirl15's channel was one of the most watched on YouTube for almost two years.

The trouble was Bree wasn't real. None of it was. Lonelygirl15 was the idea of two aspiring filmmakers who saw YouTube as a vehicle to build an audience and hopefully get funding for their own independent film. The 'bedroom' where Bree made her confessionals was actually that of co-creator Ramesh Flinders, decorated with props bought from Target. The $130 webcam was the most expensive piece of equipment in the production. When the fake was eventually exposed by a major newspaper, the creators expected a backlash. But the opposite occurred. Fans stuck around. Not only did the confessionals continue, but it went on to become one of the longest-running YouTube serials of the time, creating 400 episodes.

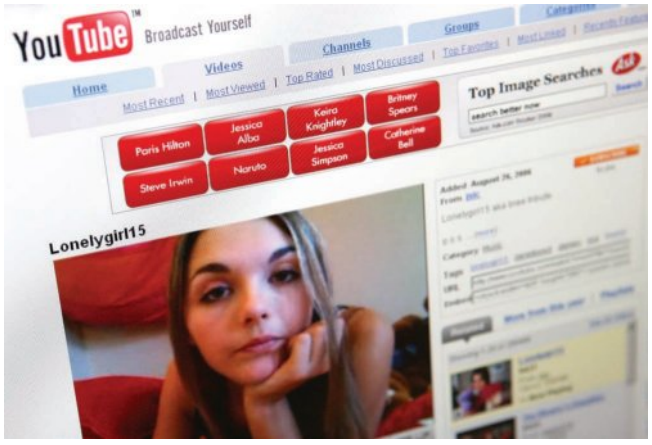


FIGURE 11.16 Lonelygirl15 proved that anyone could build a huge audience on YouTube.

So how did Ramesh Flinders and his cohort Miles Beckett do it? They studied the new platform of YouTube carefully and learnt how to manipulate the platform to promote their video. Pretending to be Bree themselves, they began responding to the comments under each video, knowing that interactions would promote the video into the recommended feed of new visitors to the fast-growing site. Using the thumbnail algorithm used by YouTube at the time, they also timed their edits to ensure the thumbnail that YouTube used would appeal to audiences.

They also studied other popular confession videos and mimicked the style and aesthetic to make it seem as realistic as all the other genuine videos. They also went to the trouble of hiring Jessica Rose, an actor from New Zealand who had just arrived in Hollywood looking to start her career. Rose was not 16, but 19.[5]

The original intention of Flinders and Beckett was soon discarded. They realised that whatever they hoped to make on the big screen would never be able to reach the audience it achieved on YouTube. Social media had allowed them to create an internet phenomenon by letting the audience believe what they wanted to believe. As Rose stated after the truth of Lonelygirl15 was revealed, 'we never lied, we just put it out there'.

SOULJA BOY

At the turn of the 21st century, hip hop music was one of the most popular forms of music around the world. Born from the inner-city culture of the USA, the art form spread to countries around the world thanks in part to the rise of a hip hop sub-genre, gangsta rap. 50 Cent was one artist whose music was marketed and sold by a record industry that held even tighter control over the means of production than film, television and radio. What made 'Fiddy' stand out was that he had a story to tell and sell. A former drug dealer who had been shot nine times went on to sell 12 million copies of his album *Get Rich or Die Tryin*.[6] An aspiring 15-year-old artist named DeAndre Cortez Way, with no audience and no record contract with a notoriously fickle music industry did not have the same story to tell, or a huge music industry to sell it for him; however, he used the internet to find the same audience.



FIGURE 11.17 Soulja Boy was one of the first artists to use the internet to launch a career without major music industry support.

Limewire a peer-to-peer file sharing app that began in 2000 and was credited with enabling the video and music piracy trend

In the early days of social media, Cortez Way began posting his songs on a file-sharing site known as **Limewire**, popular with internet users keen to avoid paying for music and download it for free instead. Cortez Way's trick was simple. He posted his own tracks to Limewire under the names of 50 Cent's most famous songs (he also hid his songs under the names of the biggest hits of Britney Spears and Michael Jackson). Fellow Limewire users, hoping to illegally download 50 Cent's music, instead found themselves listening to Cortez Way's music – now going by the name 'Soulja Boy'. He then used Myspace, a precursor to Facebook, to link his artist profile to YouTube where his 2007 breakout song 'Crank That', and its viral dance, earned him millions of online listeners and a reported $7 million selling his music online. Soulja Boy has since gone on to have a lucrative career in music, acting, fashion and production.

Within the hip hop industry Soulja Boy remains a divisive figure. Some feel he scammed his way to success via the internet. However, to the world of internet rappers using services like Soundcloud to promote their music, he created an entirely new way for musicians to circumvent the music industry and build careers for themselves.

ACTIVITY 11.10

Media and the audience

1. Compare the Lonelygirl15 and Soulja Boy examples of using social media to build an audience. Why do you think deceiving the audience worked in the early days of social media?
2. Using either example, explain how anonymity on social media can be both a positive and negative aspect for audiences.
3. Using both examples, explain how Lonelygirl15 and Soulja Boy demonstrate the change in the relationship between media and audience in the mid 2000s.



FIGURE 11.18 Casey Neistat was one of the first major YouTubers to build an audience on the platform.

CASEY NEISTAT

Casey Neistat was one of the first major YouTube celebrities. Unlike Lonelygirl15 and Soulja Boy, he was completely honest and authentic with his audience. This tactic would become one of the defining features of popular YouTubers and social media influencers. The more the audience could relate to them as a genuine individual, the more popular they became.

Beginning as a filmmaker and working in television, Casey Neistat walked away from his career, worn down by the financial controls of film and television, to begin making short films and stories for YouTube in 2010. His videos and vlogs range from riding into stationary objects blocking New York City's bike lanes to travel vlogs and filming himself running a marathon. His visual style mixes solid filmmaking techniques (some with remarkable production values) with a rough and raw aesthetic that feels authentic to his 19 million subscribers on YouTube.

Neistat's background in filmmaking and his pure joy in crafting stories is evident in his work, but he pioneered a whole generation of vloggers, creators and YouTube celebrities. What makes them different to storytellers in traditional media is speed and relatability. Uploading stories and clips frequently guarantees a returning audience; however, this speed does not allow for slick production, so the relatable nature of YouTubers like Neistat and those that followed created an audience that broadcast media institutions could not replicate. Added to this speed of content creation is the capacity for YouTubers to directly communicate with their audience, providing and acting on feedback.

ACTIVITY 11.11

Analysis: YouTubers

1. As a class, brainstorm a list of past and present YouTubers with the largest followings.
2. Work with a partner to create a short presentation on one from the list you created as a class.
3. Define their following, the style of their content, how often they upload and how they interact with their audience.
4. Explain how the frequency and production of their clips is relatable and easy to consume.
5. Conclude your presentation by defining the way your YouTuber has contributed to the dynamic and changing relationship between the media and audiences.

Audiences as crowds

One of the defining aspects of social media and Web 2.0 technologies is the way the audience are able to connect and take control for themselves. Through fan forums and pages, comments threads and audience created websites, there is now a place for everyone on the internet to feel at home. Be it your favourite band or artist, anime, film, a love of obscure train schedules or fans of My Little Pony (the 'Bronies'), social media has created communities for people to gather, connect and, at times, act as one.



FIGURE 11.19 People wait in line for the opening ceremony during the BronyCon convention, a gathering for *My Little Pony* fans, a community built from connections on the internet and Web 2.0 technologies

In 2018, the Fox television network in the USA announced it was cancelling the popular comedy series *Brooklyn 99*. Quick action by a global network of fans saved the show within 31 hours. Using the 'SaveB99' hashtag across Twitter and Instagram, they quickly gathered global attention. Significant celebrities contributed to the cause too, with renowned director Guillermo del Toro pledging his own support to the hashtag, as did *Hamilton* creator Lin Manuel Miranda and Mark Hamill of the *Star Wars* franchise. The avalanche of furious fans and the celebrity support created a quick announcement that Fox's television rival NBC had picked up the show for the next season.

NBC's motivation was partly in support of the maniacal reaction of the fan base of *Brooklyn 99* and partly a sign of the changing nature of media and the internet. Fox cancelled the show because it was not drawing in enough viewers and the broadcaster needed them to sell advertising, the model it had relied on for decades. However, NBC bought *Brooklyn 99* and produced the next season specifically to launch it on its streaming service, knowing full well that its fanatic fanbase would tune in. The rabid response from the fanbase was a certain factor in NBC's decision.

FIGURE 11.20 Television show *Brooklyn 99* was saved from cancellation by an internet campaign of fans and celebrities.





Fans demanding their favourite shows' return is not new. In the late 1800s, there was a letter-writing campaign to author Arthur Conan Doyle to revive the character Sherlock Holmes after he was killed off in an 1893 novel. A new book was written and, surprisingly, it was revealed that Holmes 'didn't actually die'. The same occurred in the 1980s when another letter-writing campaign revived the television show *Designing Women*. However, in an age where more and more fans can gather online and their campaigns are visible to the whole world, the power of crowds on the internet can direct the media to act. While Fox was willing to accept the backlash, NBC gained a legion of new fans and goodwill by publicly taking on a new series. When fans act as one, the world notices and there can be great examples of accountability from broadcast media institutions.

ACTIVITY 11.12

Research task

Research the following examples of when fans have forced media institutions to change their behaviour.

For each example explain the following:

1. Explain the event.
2. How did audiences act as one to instigate change?
3. What was the outcome? What level of influence did the audience have?

Sonic the Hedgehog	***Voltron***	***Loki***	***Westworld***
Fans furious at the shape of Sonic the Hedgehog's teeth in a promotional trailer forced the film to be reanimated.	Voltron cartoon fans blackmailed the show's creators to create a gay relationship that had been spawned from fan fiction.	An obsessive fanbase on Tumblr influenced Disney to bring Loki back to the MCU.	Show creators admit to reading fan forums on Reddit to alter the script of the futuristic series.
The Snyder Cut: Justice League	***Glee***	***Arrested Development***	***Roswell***
Rabid fans (and the original director) launched an online campaign to have the DC film *Justice League* re-edited.	A strong reaction to an announcement that two popular characters would leave the show forced a dramatic U-turn from creators.	Fans demanding a new season of the offbeat comedy forced a new series by sending bananas to the television studio.	Rumours of a cancellation of a popular teen show saw 6000 bottles of Tabasco hot sauce sent to studio executives.

11.3 Explaining contemporary media influence and audience agency

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- arguments, evidence and ideas to explain contemporary media influence and audience agency.

Media effects theories still provide researchers with a framework for the study of the relationship between the media and audiences. For example, the spread of false information on social media by 'foreign actors' and other powerful interest groups is a cause for concern about media influence and is studied widely. Reinforcement, agenda setting and cultivation theories still play a part in guiding communication policy, as governments balance communities' rights to free speech with the need to prevent the spread of potentially dangerous misinformation.

DIGITAL LINK

See the Interactive Textbook for more information about the **history of media effects theories** to learn more about reinforcement, agenda setting and cultivation theories.

While media theories of the past were a result of academic research which focused on human psychology and behaviour, new and emerging media theories today tend to focus less on effects that the media might have on audiences, and more on the intricate patterns of relationships between users. The following are some of the theories that have recently emerged.

Spreadability

Spreadability theory recognises that audiences can now shape, share, reframe and remix media content made by others. Media texts are not fixed in form but can be repurposed and transformed by media users to suit their own needs. The theory was developed to explain the 'viral' spread of short content, especially 'memes' which social media users share with additions like captions or comments to give them new meaning. Spreadability blurs lines between producers as 'owners' of information, and audiences who use existing texts in 'unlimited and unpredictable ways'.

STUDY TIP

See Chapter 6 for information on the new media technologies that enabled spreadability.

The theory compares spreadability with 'stickiness', a term to describe how media texts may be fixed in culture, how 'ideas are understood and remembered, and have lasting impact'.[7] The stickiness of media products was considered highly valued for creators because it held texts in place and safeguarded their 'ownership' of the product. Stickiness fits with the traditional broadcast model of production where the audience relationship with a media text (for example, a TV show) is restricted to their consumption of it.

With the power of Web 2.0, content becomes spreadable; texts are detached from sites specifically selected by producers. Users become part of the creative process and share ownership among themselves across multiple platforms. Spreadability does pose some dangers. While some say it heralds the free exchange of knowledge and content, others fear it simply encourages piracy. Many music creators don't see the benefit of freely spreading their content, but instead zealously protect their products by prosecuting imitators. However, rather than baulking at the appropriation and dilution of their original content, some producers



FIGURE 11.21 The famous Cadbury 'Gorilla' commercial had nothing to do with chocolate, but its viral success convinced marketers of the value of 'spreadability'.

(including many musicians) have come to rely on the spreadability of their products to improve their audience reach. 'If it doesn't spread, its dead'[8] has become a marketing credo.

The Cadbury 'Gorilla' video is an early example of marketers using spreadability to enhance their brand identity. The video placed an actor in a highly sophisticated gorilla suit playing drums to a Phil Collins song. The video, originally intended for TV broadcast, went viral 'watched by millions on YouTube and inspiring parodies from the likes of Wonderbra, *The Mighty Boosh* and Children in Need'. The ad had nothing at all to do with chocolate, but brand association resulted in a 10% boost in sales. Spreadability was quickly embraced by producers as a powerful marketing tool.

ACTIVITY 11.13

Analysing spreadability

1. Conduct some online research to explore Henry Jenkins' explanation of spreadability. Explain in 100 words how Jenkins defines the theory.
2. Consider the popularity of Soulja Boy or Lonleygirl15. How did Web 2.0 and spreadability contribute to the popularity of both media products?
3. As a class, create a list of popular memes, viral internet trends and events. How does spreadability help explain its capacity for the audience to exert agency?
4. Considering this same list, how does spreadability help explain its capacity to exert influence over audiences?
5. Using the examples of audiences as crowds, explain how spreadability has the capacity to influence the media itself.
6. Create a simple diagram that explains how spreadability operates.

Filter bubbles

The news stories we read, movies we watch, the length of time we engage with texts, interact with friends, our likes, swipes, selections, even individual keystrokes, give providers useful information that can be 'monetised' through targeted advertising. There is a growing understanding that when you sign up to any app's 'terms of reference', you may be voluntarily handing over your private information such as contact lists, your photograph collection, links to other apps, and even biometric data in the form of faceprints and voiceprints. Some of the largest corporations in the world now have comprehensive digital profiles on billions of users.

The value of advertising on social media is expected to surpass the US$200 billion mark by 2024. Given the huge profits to be made it is unsurprising that media companies have designed ways to direct users' attention to selected products and targeted advertising using algorithms. Your identity is a marketable product. You signed up for the best possible internet experience, delivered by the most sophisticated software computer science can provide.

New media theorists have become concerned profiling can inadvertently direct users into 'filter bubbles'. When every aspect of online experience is managed and curated, users can end up in a state of intellectual isolation, separated from alternative content or information that disagrees with their viewpoints. As the choices made by AI and algorithms are not transparent, users are often not aware they now inhabit isolated cultural or ideological 'islands'. Social scientists believe it is unhealthy for societies to be artificially broken up into online tribes without their intent, potentially undermining civic discourse and making people more vulnerable to propaganda and manipulation.[9] Discourse is the free exchange of ideas which leads to understanding and brings people together. Its absence can lead to a dangerous fracturing of society. The concept of filter bubbles was first identified by Eli Pariser, executive of Upworthy, activist and author. In his book *Filter Bubbles* he claimed that:

> The filter bubble tends to dramatically amplify confirmation bias – in a way, it's designed to. Consuming information that conforms to our ideas of the world is easy and pleasurable; consuming information that challenges us to think in new ways or question our assumptions is frustrating and difficult. This is why partisans of one political stripe tend not to consume the media of another. As a result, an information environment built on click signals will favour content that supports our existing notions about the world over content that challenges them.

FIGURE 11.22 Eli Pariser on *Filter Bubbles*, 'How Filter Bubbles Distort Reality: Everything You Need to Know', *fs blog*

There are plenty of examples where competing ideologies fail to find common ground and conflicting views are amplified by social media, such as the 2020 US election that resulted in the storming of Washington's Capitol Hill. The crowd included many who believed that the election had been 'stolen' and that democracy was under threat, a conspiracy theory that was promoted by social media sites such as Parler, Gab, TheDonald and MeWe. Social bubbles seldom leave room for opposing views.



ACTIVITY 11.14

Analysing filter bubbles

1. Sit next to a partner and google the same subject. Do your results differ? How do you think your filter bubble might affect your search results?
2. Examine your own social media filter bubble. What are your interests? How might it affect what you see?
3. Research Eli Pariser's definition of filter bubbles. Define how he explains the theory in 100 words.
4. Analyse filter bubbles and their potential to influence audience behaviour.
5. Create a simple diagram that explains how filter bubbles operate.

Parasocial relationships

In the middle of the last century, researchers in sociology observed that some audience members would react to some TV celebrities as they would if they were actually in their living room. The term 'parasocial interaction' (PSI) was first used by Horton and Wohl in 1956 to describe viewers' responses to TV media 'personae'. They recognised that media personalities were expert at creating the illusion of intimacy with their unseen audience. They would gesture, laugh and gaze with twinkling eyes into the camera, as if in close personal communication with their audience. It is such a convincing and appealing act that media users can easily develop feelings of loyalty and emotional connection to media personae. Others, however, may imagine themselves in a deeper relationship with their celebrity 'friends'.



Developing some sort of 'relationship' with media personae is the accepted experience of everyone in an audience. Fictional drama does not work without 'audience identification'. Great actors create empathy for their characters, and a measure of their success is how 'real' their performances are. The degree to which audiences enter into the drama depends on their 'suspension of disbelief'.[10] Our level of enjoyment of any media product is contingent in some degree on a desire to engage with and join in the performance.

Media researchers have acknowledged that parasocial relationships (PSRs) may be beneficial to society where, for example, media personae act as positive role-models. The fact that children have (PSRs) with toys is considered a normal and positive developmental process. Most parents will willingly sit their children down to watch children's TV and sing or clap along with actors or animated animals in a fictional playground. Interaction with the media is considered to be normalising and beneficial to identity formation in young audiences. Most of us have positive memories of kids TV (especially the theme tunes!). Evidence consistent with social cognitive theory shows that children learn from both positive and negative televised role models, to 'acquire norms and standards for conduct'.[11]

In the post-broadcast era, celebrities, whether they be actors, musicians, chefs, sportspeople, talk show hosts or social media influencers, can manage their media output to the point that they may be ever-present on our screens in one medium or another. PSI has been power-boosted by the internet in the 21st century. As media technology has become more portable, asynchronous and ubiquitous (available anytime, anywhere), our access to celebrities is unrestricted.

Followers with stronger (PSRs) with celebrities are seen as vulnerable to marketing techniques such as product endorsement. Advertising on social media is very lucrative, and celebrities are often associated with brands that enhance their persona. Users are said to feel more compelled to buy brands they perceive as improving their PSI with celebrities.

Negative consequences of PSRs also include negative body image and body dysmorphia in young people, when 'ideal' images and methods of maintaining media standards of beauty are presented by celebrity idols or social influencers. PSI is also blamed for imitative behaviours in some followers including binge dieting and extreme exercise.

Politicians across the political spectrum tend to attract fanatical and zealous followers. Aggressive public discourse on social media where followers defend their political idols is not an unusual outcome. The extreme behaviour of some followers can be seen as a result of PSI, where followers' belief in, and commitment to their political platforms, become part of the follower's own identity.

ACTIVITY 11.15

Parasocial relationships

1. Consider your own potential for PSRs. Which celebrities, identities or characters are you most interested in? Who are your heroes? How do you follow them and how do you engage with their lives?
2. Consider what you know about others around you. How can you explain the effect of PSRs on others?
3. How have Web 2.0 technologies potentially increased the capacity of PSRs to influence audiences?
4. Using the example of the 2016 US presidential election, as well as the impact of filter bubbles, explain how PSRs could be formed with political leaders.
5. Create a simple diagram that explains how PSRs operate.

11.4 The influence of media and audiences

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- the influence of both media and audiences.

Direct examples of media influence and that of audiences should always be considered carefully. While some cases can be measured scientifically or with data, we must always be conscious of the idea that there is rarely definitive proof that the media and audience can completely wield control and influence behaviour. Yes, we can point to data and reported behaviours to *suggest* influence, but it is rarely definitive.

All we can do as students of the media is make observations that, if supported by evidence, can point to *possible* explanations for media and audience influence.

Consider the **moral panic** that has long plagued violent video games. At various stages over the last few decades, instances of violence and crime (especially those perpetrated by the young) were often blamed on violent video games. The *Grand Theft Auto (GTA)* series (1997–) was a particular target of this in the media. Politicians, police figures and concerned public figures would point to games like the *GTA* series, which promotes and rewards acts of violence within the game, as a cause for the desensitisation of the young to violence and increased violent behaviour itself.

moral panic an instance of public anxiety or alarm in response to a problem regarded as threatening the moral standards of society

On face value, it might appear that they have a point. The game is participatory. Players can decide what they want to do and when, and extreme acts of violence are rewarded as a means of progress within the game. In 2016, a violent brawl broke out between two rival groups of teenagers in Melbourne's Federation Square. Immediately after the event, the Victoria Police commissioner labelled the incident and associated rises in youth crime a by-product of 'the grand theft auto generation'.[12] The commissioner was attempting to link the game to real-world violence and suggest those involved in the brawl had been affected and influenced by the game, making further links to rising rates of youth crime in the state.

In the same breath, these claims can easily be pulled apart. The *GTA* series is one of the biggest-selling video games of all time. By 2022, it had sold over 350 million copies worldwide. So, by the logic of the Victoria Police commissioner, that would see an exponential rise in violent crime around the world, which has not happened. In addition to this, a 2021 New Zealand-led study into the potential effects of violent video games found no correlation between playing violent video games and aggressive behaviour. The study explored and compared 28 studies from previous years and gathered data from 21 000 gamers around the world. The study concluded: 'current research is unable to support the hypothesis that violent video games have a meaningful long-term predictive impact on youth aggression.'[13]

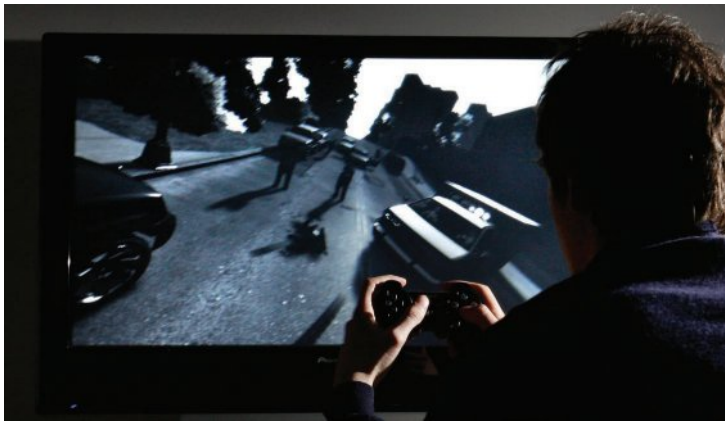


FIGURE 11.23 *GTA* is one of the biggest-selling video game franchises of all time.

Influence of the audience: Fyre Festival

In 2017, some of the world's most famous models and celebrities began posting mysterious orange tiles to their Instagram accounts. Little information was given, beyond a hint that they were all heading to a once-in-a-lifetime event. The tiles were intended to promote 'Fyre Festival', a luxurious and exclusive music festival to be held in the Bahamas in May 2017.

The trouble was the festival was never really going to happen. Fyre Festival is an excellent case of how social media can be used to separate thousands of people from their own money, the power of PSRs and, more importantly, how social media can build up and bring down an entire event.

The idea was simple. Tech entrepreneur Billy McFarland and rapper Ja Rule had devised an app that would make it easier to book talent for major events, and to promote it they conceived a music festival to be held on a luxurious Caribbean island that was rumoured to be previously owned by infamous drug lord Pablo Escobar. Festival-goers were encouraged to pay thousands of dollars for the cha nce to share private jets, yachts, villas, celebrity chef-prepared food and music with some of the most famous influencers, models and musicians in the world, all in one of the most exclusive locations imaginable. With the clout created by Fyre Festival, the two entrepreneurs would be able to attract investors who would part with millions of dollars to build their app.

Neither the event nor the app happened.

Thousands of well-educated wealthy festival-goers had been duped by McFarland to part with their money. So how did he do it? Through the power of social media and the fear of missing out.

The Fyre Festival hit the public's consciousness when orange tiles appeared on the Instagram pages of some of the world's top-earning models; Hailey Bieber, Shanina Shaik, Bella Hadid and Allesandra Ambrosio.

The tiles were promoting Fyre Festival in a typically ambiguous way. If you knew, 'you knew'. The orange tiles also appeared on Emily Ratajkowski's page. And Kendall Jenner's. The Orange Tile Campaign was extended to 400 lesser-known influencers who were all promised access to the festival, private villas and a luxury experience for posting the tile. Kendall Jenner was reportedly paid over $250 000 for one post.[14]

The most expensive festival package for sale went for the measly sum of $250 000. The least expensive was $1200.



FIGURE 11.24 Rapper Ja Rule and Billy McFarland, the 'brains trust' behind Fyre Festival

McFarland and the Fyre Festival team were able to leverage social media to sell out 95% of their tickets in 48 hours. What followed is an interesting study on influencers and the fear of missing out (FOMO). Fyre Festival had employed Jerry Media, owners of the infamous 'F*ck Jerry' meme account, to handle their social media marketing. Jerry Media's inboxes were soon inundated with influencers from all corners of the internet, hoping to be part of the festival, with many posting the orange tile anyway, without any deal with Fyre Festival.

Add together the power of the world's top models, over 400 carefully selected influencers and an incalculable number of lesser-known people who

attempted to attach themselves to McFarland's enterprise and you have the perfect case study for influence. Not only were the audience under the spell of Fyre Festival, but influencers were too. The internet currency of Fyre Festival greatly outweighed its real-world currency.

Natalia Antonova, an internet security expert and former editor of Bellingcat, a Dutch organisation that specialises in seeking out internet scams, argued that audiences wanted to believe Fyre Festival was real. Antonova told author Gabriel Bluestone in the 2021 book *Hype: How Scammers, Grifters, Con Artists and Influencers are Taking over the Internet - and Why We're Following* that people addicted to social media had become 'isolated' and 'lonely' and therefore more 'easily manipulated...every post we make is an advertisment of our personalities' and people are desperate for validation through likes or comments on their posts.

For thousands of internet users who could afford Fyre Festival, there was an influencer they followed who was promoting it. In addition to this, Fyre Festival was a chance for ordinary people to get closer to their favoured influencer and snap a once-in-a-lifetime image for their own profiles.

Derrick Borte, a German-American filmmaker, told Bluestone in the aftermath of the festival that everyone 'feels like they're just one Instagram post away from fame and fortune' though this new kind of stardom can also lead to 'some vacuous character and behaviour'.

For the 8000 individuals who bought tickets and the influencers desperate to be involved, it was all for an experience they could share on social media, rather than the experience itself.

Antonova and Borte's comments clarify how and why Fyre Festival captured attention before its catastrophic downfall. The pyramid of influencers – from the Jenners down – saw the Fyre Festival as a chance to climb up one more rung in the influencer ladder. McFarland had created a social media fantasy and thousands were duped by an idea, rather than a reality, all sold on Instagram.

FIGURE 11.25 The tent village awaiting Fyre Festival patrons was not the luxury experience they were sold on social media.





The final nail in Fyre Festival's coffin came, ironically, via Instagram. For a year, the myth of this once-in-a-lifetime festival had been building across social media, yet it took one post for Billy McFarland's house of cards to come crashing down. One single post of a sad meal of bread, a tiny salad and a slice of supermarket cheese broke the reality of Fyre Festival to the outside world. What was sold as exotic meals prepared by celebrity chefs was the furthest definition of food from it.

The image was shared across social media and news services around the world and the scam in the Bahamas was world news.

McFarland was eventually sentenced to six years in prison for fraud. Millions of dollars went missing and customers left out of pocket were, in 2022, still battling in the courts to recoup their losses.

ACTIVITY 11.16

Research task

1. How did Billy McFarland use social media to create the idea of Fyre Festival?
2. How did celebrities and influencers help promote the festival to paying customers?
3. How did this then translate to thousands of customers paying to attend the festival?
4. Explain the influence of social media over the customers of the Fyre Festival: what did it promise them beyond the music, food and location?
5. What role does the theory of spreadability play in explaining the development of Fyre Festival?
6. What role do PSRs play in explaining the development of Fyre Festival?
7. Considering what you have learnt about the influence of both media and audiences, explain the extent of influence exerted by Billy McFarland during the creation and development of Fyre Festival.

ACTIVITY 11.17

Homework task

Find and watch the documentary *Fyre: The Greatest Party that Never Happened* and complete the following tasks:

1. What are the details of this event?
2. What 'influence' or 'behaviour' was observed as a result of this event?
3. What role did the media form play in the claim of influence?
4. What media effects theories exist to potentially explain these claims?
5. What other evidence is there to support, challenge or reject these claims?

11.5 How media is used by different stakeholders

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- how media is used by globalised media institutions, governments and individuals.

When considering agency and control, it's important to establish who the **stakeholders** are. Governments, institutions and the individual all have a vested interest in the media, its production, consumption and distribution. At different times in history, the push and pull of control and agency has shifted.

stakeholders governments, institutions and audiences that all have a vested interest in the media

Governments and the media

Democratic or otherwise, governments used the media to share ideas of their dominant ideology. For example, Australian government politicians use the media to spread messages of government decisions that affect the population. One of their primary roles was and is to protect and serve the citizens of the nation and, as such, the media is a powerful tool to tell as many of those citizens as possible about decisions that affect their lives.

AUSTRALIA AND WAR

Throughout the broadcast and post-broadcast era, the Australian government has attempted to use the media to encourage people to support the nation during conflict. During World War I (1914–18) and World War II (1939–45) the Australian government used the media to encourage Australians to unite against enemies and, in most cases, volunteer to fight. Through a coordinated effort of news media, radio and print, the government worked to present a positive image of the war (and in the case of the Japanese attack on Darwin in 1942, censor disturbing information). In the case of World War I, Australia sent an entirely volunteer army of young men to war. Many met their deaths, and thousands of others returned home wounded. Regardless of the impact of war, the Australian government successfully used the media to not only exert some control over the population to raise a volunteer army, but also to encourage a positive public attitude towards the sacrifice made by so many.

ACTIVITY 11.18

Propaganda posters

1. Use your skills from your study of media representations to annotate this image. What message is it attempting to convey?
2. How many Australian men served in World War I? (*Hint:* visit the Australian War Memorial website or similar.)
3. Based on your response to the previous question, do you think the Australian government was successful in controlling the behaviour of the young men it needed for the war?
4. Have you or anyone else in your class learnt about the role of the media in Nazi Germany? How was media used in a range of forms during Nazi Germany (1933–45) to influence behaviour?



FIGURE 11.26 A propaganda poster from World War I that encouraged young Australian men to volunteer for war



TAC ADVERTISING IN VICTORIA

In the late 1980s, the Victorian government embarked on a campaign to reduce the deaths on Victorian roads from motor vehicle accidents. Using a coordinated effort of television advertising, radio, newspaper and billboard messages, the Victorian government worked with the TAC (Traffic Accident Commission) to create a series of graphic television advertisements, depicting the worst outcomes of road accidents to reduce the road toll. Since the inception of the campaign, that has since spread to social and digital media, it has cut the Victorian road toll by 50% and saved the Victorian government millions in healthcare and compensation and, in turn, saved thousands of lives had the campaign never existed. While people still die on Victorian roads today, the effect of the Victorian government's effort to control behaviour can be measured. When considering how to explain this case study with media communication theories, it will be important to consider how widespread this effort to control behaviour was across a range of media platforms.

ACTIVITY 11.19

Research task

1. Research the effectiveness of a TAC campaign of your choice.
2. How much money has the campaign saved the Victorian government?
3. To date, how many estimated lives has the campaign saved by raising awareness of road safety?
4. Research the nature of current and former advertising campaigns. How do you think the graphic nature of the television advertising contributed to its success?
5. How does this campaign illustrate a level of government control with the media?
6. Has the Victorian government been completely successful in its aim to control behaviour? Justify your response.

CHINESE GOVERNMENT MEDIA CONTROL

Around the globe, media control depends upon the strength and control of the government. In 2022, the Chinese government used the media as a central component of its tight grip on the world's most populated country. Unlike Australia, which has over a century of democratic traditions, the Communist state of China exercises strict control over what the media can and cannot say, and in most cases, it is run by the state itself. The purpose is to control the message. Chinese citizens do not enjoy the same freedoms to criticise the government that we do in Australia and much of the internet is not only censored, but heavily monitored and used as a tool of social control. A range of key words are banned within Chinese search engines (the vast majority of global social media services are banned and have a Chinese equivalent) and the state-run news service consistently reports news that is strongly supportive of the government. This is not to say that protest and dissent against the government does not exist in China; however, government control of the media is effective in holding back any effort that might threaten the control of the ruling Communist Party.

The 'tank man' of Tiananmen Square

In 1989, the Chinese government faced one of the biggest protests against its rule in its entire history. Demanding greater social freedoms and democracy, hundreds of thousands of students flooded the famed Tiananmen Square in Beijing in protest. The government responded by sending in the army to crush the protest.

What followed was a brutal crackdown that led to the deaths of 1000 or possibly even 10 000 people.[15] Accurate records are, to this day, hard to determine due to the strict censorship of the event within China. While the incident lives long in the memory of Chinese citizens, it cannot be openly discussed and 'Tiananmen' is still among one of the banned words in Chinese search engines. One of the most famous images of the event, printed widely outside China, was that of a lone man, standing in front of a line of tanks at Tiananmen Square in support of the student protestors. Arguably one of the best-known news images of the event is largely unknown within China, not present in history education and banned from public discussion.[16] For many of the younger generation, there is little knowledge of the man in this image, or the event that took place.



FIGURE 11.27 The famous 'tank man' image from the 1989 Tiananmen Square protest

ACTIVITY 11.20

Research task

1. Research the story behind the photograph and video of this event. How did the two journalists get the images to the outside world?
2. Why is the Chinese government so determined to control the message of the Tiananmen Square event?
3. Explore the list of the top 10 social media sites in China. How does the list compare to Australia or even Europe?
4. How do Chinese social media users find ways to exercise agency and get around the strict censorship of Chinese media control?
5. What does this case study tell you about the effort required by governments to maintain media control?

Institutions and the media

In the broadcast era, media institutions held the role of gatekeepers and determined what made news and entertainment for huge audiences.

While the internet promised a great 'democratisation' of media, where everyone had access to information, which remains largely true today, the control of media institutions remains in the hands of a wealthy few. It's just the media institutions that have changed. They're no longer film and television studios, they are technology companies. Using personalised algorithms, the new media institutions have captured the eyeballs of media users the world over. The result of this shift in media forms is the transfer of control from one group of individuals to another.

Personalised algorithms

Social media institutions are among the biggest of any industry in the world. They are certainly the biggest in media. They have captured our eyeballs and attention in a way that broadcast media could never imagine or anticipate.

So why is social media so addictive? Why do we keep scrolling, hoping for something that will capture our attention? Why can't we put our phones down? It's all by design. For every media institution working to capture your attention, there is a mathematical equation designed to keep it. These are known as personalised algorithms.

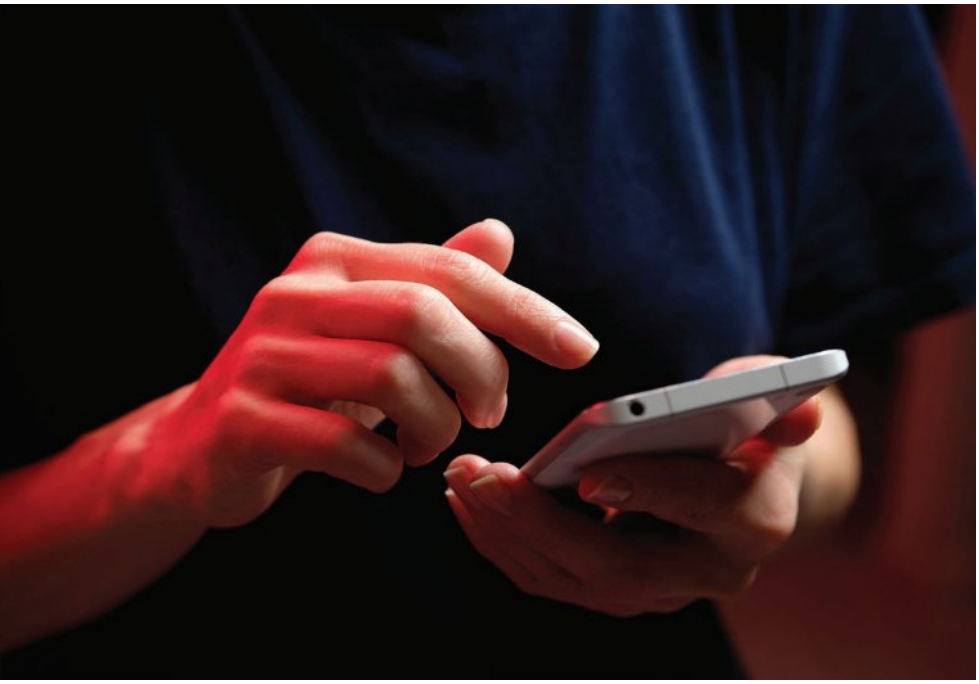


FIGURE 11.28 Every click, scroll and view are recorded and fed into our personalised algorithms.

Prior to the internet, audiences were well known for rewatching, rereading and relistening to their favourite content. Video tapes and DVDs would be worn out after constantly viewing and rewinding a classic movie scene or children's Disney movie. We revisit this content because we liked it and want to experience it again.

New media institutions have found a way to provide you with this without you doing the hard work. The content you want and other content 'you may like' appears in a sidebar and all you need to do is click and continue (or worse still, leave it on autoplay). Before you know it, hours have passed, and your attention has been secured. As Author Carissa Veliz says in her 2020 book *Privacy is Power: Why and How You Should Take Back Control of Your Data*, 'your desire is produced by the power of tech.'

This desire is created by data and we help that process along. When we use social media and anything connected to the internet, we are creating data. That data is collected, sorted and analysed by algorithms in order to track and predict what we might do next. The process, used across the internet, is known as 'machine learning' or artificial intelligence. The more you feed into the machine with clicks, likes, views, posts, comments and shares, the machine is watching, and by knowing where, when and how you access it, the machine learns more about you than you know about yourself.

A child watching YouTube can develop a personalised algorithm quickly. As a child focuses in on a particular video (of which there is an entire ecosystem of content), YouTube is collecting data and feeding more videos back into the playback loop. Bright colours and movement will always capture a child's attention and as the need for excitement is met in one video, there is another already in the queue waiting to play and repeat the process, promising the same reward.

Kinder Surprise egg unwrapping videos can be lined up and repeated as a child watches an endless stream of the egg being unwrapped and finding the toy inside. It is a simple process of anticipation and reward. In the real world, a child may be lucky enough to convince their parents to buy one in the supermarket, or wait patiently, and much longer, for a desired birthday present.

The feeling of euphoria, big or small at the end of that wait, is one many of us can remember in our lifetimes. This feeling can be replicated quickly and repeatedly with personalised algorithms. It may never compare to the real thing, but an endless stream of videos simulating this can drip feed small doses of that euphoria instead. Currently on YouTube, there are more Kinder Surprise egg-opening videos than could be watched in a human lifetime.[17]



FIGURE 11.29 Another Kinder Surprise egg, ready to be unwrapped

Personalised algorithms work just as well on adults. Unboxing videos are a continuing trend feeding the same basic need that Kinder Surprise videos do. There is a small dopamine hit (the Kinder egg euphoria) we all experience unwrapping a present or when making a new purchase. This dopamine hit can be delivered repeatedly with more and more unboxing of products that appeal to us as adults.

As Carissa Veliz has arged in her work, when using social media or other internet services, personalised algorithms can make us addicted to this hit, however we find it.

These algorithms were primarily designed to generate data for targeted advertising. Have you ever googled a product you wanted to buy and suddenly found videos and content related to that product showing up everywhere you look? That is one of the key goals of the algorithm, to show you what you want and let others sell it to you.

What you actively contribute to social media is recorded too. As Veliz states, 'Likes and comments give you that dopamine hit.'

Facebook and TikTok have been known to track your behaviour right across the web, not just in their app, so they know what you're doing while you're away, and so they know how to keep your attention when you come back.[18]

These algorithms are smart. Even though it is determined by a machine analysing your behaviour, Spotify can predict your mood and recommend music to suit.[19]

Social media algorithms can determine ideas and opinions that we agree with and constantly feed this back to us, confirming and solidifying what we think to be true. Netflix harvests data of all its users to not only recommend what we should watch next, but to develop its own content to deliver the engagement we require. Although, we can all agree that 'Netflix originals' don't always get this right![20]



ACTIVITY 11.21

Your YouTube data

1. What does your YouTube homepage say about you? Sit with a partner and swap devices to show your YouTube homepage to someone else.
2. What can you learn about this person from the recommendations made by YouTube? What are their interests?
3. Can you make a prediction about their personality based on what you can see?
4. If you're feeling *really* brave, go into your YouTube history and delete your 'watch history'. Now over the course of a week, track and record the 'recommended' videos. Does this reflect the same person described back to you in the original activity?
5. In a short response supported with evidence, explain how globalised media institutions are able to wield control over contemporary audiences.

ACTIVITY 11.22

Homework activity

1. What do you *really* want for your birthday? Search for it online and view at least two or three different websites and social media pages with this product or service.
2. Now, over the next few days, track how this item appears in other areas you visit online. How often do you see it?
3. What does this tell you about the power of personalised algorithms?

Filter bubbles and gatekeepers

There is, of course, a downside to personalised algorithms. Cast your mind back to Eli Pariser's theory of filter bubbles. The more social media and the internet feed us what we want, the less we begin to see things that may challenge our beliefs and ideas. The role of media and news in the broadcast era was to share an understanding of the world, whether we liked it or not. It was and is a central element of a properly functioning society to develop a balanced view of the world. We need to know the views of others and accept that people might disagree with us or find their dopamine hits in different ways.

Filter bubbles are as much a result of human nature as they are personalised algorithms. Our own personal biases to what we *want* to be true can be facilitated by global media institutions. Our views on society reflect our personality, gender, family, history, religious, cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

Yet, information that challenges our views is, well, challenging. So, we often gravitate to the content that affirms our beliefs, that makes us feel smart and right. The obvious results are groups of people all over the world that have gathered in filter bubbles who will never be able to agree on anything.[21]

Global media institutions have begun to wield a degree of control over the lives of audiences because they can use personalised algorithms to validate our view of the world and, in the same breath, make it harder for us to get along with others.

The new gatekeepers?

Global media institutions have gained this control by taking a very loose approach to gatekeeping. Personalised algorithms have created a world where people rely more on feelings created by what they see than actual reasoned fact. If it feels right, then you are more likely to click, view and share it.

In the broadcast era, it was more common to see a balance of views as gatekeepers determined what was important to society, and while media had the capacity to shape agendas and guide us on what to think about, social media and the internet generally do not provide the same safeguards. While your social media feed might supply you with data and statistics on the dangers of climate change, a relative may retort that climate change is a deep state conspiracy designed by world leaders who are really reptiles in disguise aiming for worldwide control!

In the broadcast era, facts were somewhat important. Global media institutions and, in particular, the machine learning that determines your algorithm do not apply the same human intuition to determine fact from fiction. It's not surprising that the internet is awash with falsehoods, misinformation and conspiracy theories. The agency created by the internet has meant that anyone can upload and publish almost anything. Social media institutions are not necessarily bothered by what audiences engage with, just that they are engaged.

So, if that same relative also believes the 1969 moon landing was faked, there is a fair chance their filter bubble has fed them more information, leading them to believe the reptile overlords were behind that too.



FIGURE 11.30 Are reptile overlords responsible for everything?

ACTIVITY 11.23

Research task and class presentation

1. Examine your own social media accounts, the liked pages, who you follow and what you subscribe to. How would you describe your own filter bubble?
2. As a class, choose a topic that you would normally debate in English and develop a driving question for everyone to contribute to. It could be the need for climate action, the gender pay gap, human rights or gun control. Individually research the topic and come back to the class with your response to the question.
3. While researching, consider how your views on the issue are shaped by your own personal background and experiences. What influence has this had on your point of view?
4. Now research the topic exclusively on Google, social media and YouTube. How does what you find reflect the filter bubble you are in?

5 Carefully consider the factual basis of the evidence you have found. What impact has the lack of gatekeeping had that was presented to you by your filter bubble?

6 Rather than present your position to class, prepare a presentation that *your filter bubble* has created for you. In your presentation, point out where and when misinformation, falsehoods and misleading information was presented to you and on which platform.

7 At the end of the presentations, determine the role of filter bubbles and personalised algorithms in each response. Write a short response to the following question:

- 'Global media institutions have played a significant role in controlling the views of their users. Do you agree or disagree?'



FIGURE 11.31 The data we create online is being recorded and monetised.

Surveillance capitalism

The goal of personalised algorithms is to encourage data collection. This data is contributing to one of the world's most lucrative industries. This is known as surveillance capitalism. Shoshana Zuboff's 2019 book *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* defines this as:

> A new economic order that claims human experience as free raw material for hidden commercial practice of extraction, prediction and sales.

FIGURE 11.32 Shoshana Zuboff (2019), *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*, Profile Books, London, p. 1

In short, Zuboff writes about a new world where our every move online, and offline, is turned into data (raw materials) that is extracted, used to predict and even control our next move and turned into an opportunity for profit.

Surveillance capitalism is a by-product of personalised algorithms and data that goes way beyond the media and into every aspect of our lives. However, it explains how global media institutions have become so wealthy. They collect *a lot* of data on their users. They then sell it too.

A focus of Zuboff's work is, of course, *how* these institutions collect this data (mostly without our consent) but primarily she looks at how media, governments and other institutions are using it to predict and even *guide* our behaviour.

HOW SURVEILLANCE CAPITALISM WORKS

With billions of users generating data each day (e.g., in 2022, Google processed roughly eight billion searches a day),[22] that data can be collected and collated to provide personal and collective information. You may travel outside of your home and your phone's geolocation tracks where you are, and if you're using Maps, where you're going, too.

You may enter a store and facial recognition is used to record your behaviour and movements while inside. In 2022, Kmart and Bunnings were forced to admit they were using facial recognition in their stores[23] without customer knowledge.

Let's say you're in a shoe store (don't worry, the data collectors already know which one) and you're drawn to buy new shoes. Your debit card will record the purchase and a store loyalty card will track the item and determine when you might need to buy another one. How? You may have bought 'smart shoes' that track your every step, or by using the data from your wearable technology. If you use a step counter or run tracking app, this can be used to predict when those shoes will be worn out and guess what ads will appear in your feed? Worse still, your wearable tech, which can record heart rate, sleep patterns and other health data, could be used to predict an injury or illness (especially when you ask 'Dr Google' about your symptoms) and this might be used against you by your health insurance or even your employer or, worse, a future employer.

All this data you create each day is sold by each service to data broking companies that collect and trade data all over the world. This is then used by a whole range of governments, companies and interest groups to analyse and predict behaviour. An entire market of 'data futures' allows investors to confidently predict and bet on new products, services and global trends. It also allows governments to learn about their voters, and nefarious third parties who want to manipulate elections.

A global industry, hidden behind opaque privacy policy statements (that few read) and cookie policies, collects and trades your data.



FIGURE 11.33 Facial recognition is one tool in the process of surveillance capitalism.



FIGURE 11.34 Comedian, actor and filmmaker Bo Burnham stated that social media and data companies were 'coming for every second of your life'.

It was only in 2009 that Google admitted it was storing user search histories and in 2010 was found to be scraping individual wi-fi data using the Google street view cars in Germany;[24] and in 2010, Mark Zuckerberg, founder of Facebook, stated that 'privacy was no longer the social norm'.

Whether we agree to it or not, our data is being collected and there are few gatekeepers to stop them.

In 2019, comedian, actor and filmmaker Bo Burnham was quoted that these data collection companies were:

> Coming for every second of your life … they used to colonise land, that's where money was to be made, then they colonised the entire earth … There was no other place for businesses and capitalism to expand into, and then they realised human attention … they are attempting to colonise every minute of your life.

FIGURE 11.35 Bo Burnham speaking in the video *Self-esteem in the Age of Social Media*, Child Mind Institute, YouTube, 2019



'BUT I HAVE NOTHING TO HIDE'

If you believe you have nothing to hide, then the collection of your data may seem unimportant to you. Yes, there may be a lot to learn about you online; however, you haven't done anything wrong. So why care?

There are two things to think about. Surveillance capitalism thrives on your willingness to accept a lack of privacy and the profit unseen institutions are making from it, and the even more unknown forces who might use it against you.

Carissa Veliz has arged that human beings require a degree of privacy to 'unwind from the burden of being with other people.'

Shoshana Zuboff is somewhat more blunt:

> Industrial capitalism transformed nature's raw materials into commodities … Surveillance Capitalism lays its claim to the stuff of human nature for a new commodity … It's obscene to suppose that this harm can be reduced to the fact that users receive no fee for the raw materials they supply.

FIGURE 11.36 Shoshana Zuboff (2019), *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*, Profile Books, London, p. 94



ACTIVITY 11.24

Short written response task

'Humans have the right to privacy and the right to profit from their own data if they so wish.' To what extent do you agree?

- Write a response using evidence.
- Use the Burnham, Veliz and Zuboff quotes in your response.
- In your response, consider how modern communication theories like filter bubbles and modern internet practices like personalised algorithms contribute to surveillance capitalism and the control global media institutions now have over audiences.

How the media is used by institutions

TWITTER AND ELON MUSK

hate speech abusive or threatening speech or writing that expresses prejudice on the basis of ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or similar grounds

harmful content media content that can cause harm or negative influence for audiences

In 2022, one of the world's richest men, Elon Musk, bought Twitter for US$44 billion (A $68 billion). What appeared to be a personal grievance about the control exerted by the previous owners, who banned accounts based on disinformation, **hate speech** and **harmful content**, became one individual purchase of the popular microblogging platform, which he pledged to turn into the 'world's town square'. Musk's original claim was to equalise debate on politics and social issues that frequently took place on Twitter.

In the chaotic days of the 2020 US election, two years prior to Musk's purchase, then-President Donald Trump was banned from the platform for spreading misinformation about the COVID-19 pandemic and unproven claims that the 2020 election had been fraudulently conducted and 'stolen', preventing the former president from serving a second term in office. This occured along with a range of other banned accounts spreading misinformation and dangerous content.

Twitter is more than just a platform for petty arguments; news journalists, celebrities, political figures and activists have relied on the platform to promote views and, in many cases, their own careers, since its inception in 2006. The ecosystem of Twitter, its subtle rules, conventions and accepted behaviours (despite it often being described as a 'hellscape' for minority voices)[25] had all been determined by its users and staff who had long been battling – usually unsuccessfully – its place in a divisive social media environment of anonymous debate and abuse in 280 characters.



FIGURE 11.37 In 2022, when billionaire Elon Musk purchased Twitter, he changed his profile description to 'Chief Twit'.

When Musk bought the platform, he set out to reverse many of the bans and actions put in place by the previous owners and began to wield significant control over the nature of the platform. In a chaotic few months after the purchase, he reinstated previously banned accounts (including the unbanning and rebanning of rapper Kanye West after a series of anti-Semitic [prejudiced against Jewish people] tweets), banned links to rival social media services and even banned the account @elonjet that used publicly available flight data to track the location of Elon Musk's personal private jet. The 2022 purchase of Twitter by one individual demonstrates the power of new stakeholders over powerful institutions in the modern media environment.

ACTIVITY 11.25

Elon Musk's Twitter takeover

The changes and controversy of Musk's takeover in late 2022 were so rapid and breathless that the platform will most certainly have changed by the time you read this activity.

1. Chart the history of Twitter after Elon Musk's takeover in 2022. How did the platform change?
2. Compare the justifications for Musk's banning and unbanning of selected accounts with those of the previous owners. What was the key motivation of both owners in control who could and could not use the platform?
3. What does Musk's takeover of Twitter in 2022 tell you about the power and influence of large media institutions (and the individuals who own and run them) in the modern media landscape?

How media institutions in traditional media wield control

NEWS CORP AND RUPERT MURDOCH

Billionaire Rupert Murdoch and the Murdoch family run the world's largest traditional media empire: News Corporation. In 2022, Murdoch's media empire controlled 37% of news services in the UK, and a massive stake in the USA media market in Disney, Fox Studios and the influential Fox news network. In Australia, he owns 150 regional and national newspapers. The reach of Murdoch and his family to influence opinion and attempt to control behaviour is vast and not limited to English-speaking audiences. The Murdochs have a long history of 'choosing sides' in the politics of local countries and guiding their news services towards heavily favouring particular candidates, often blurring the lines



FIGURE 11.38 Media tycoon Rupert Murdoch owns one of the world's largest news media empires.

between news and opinion on its many services. While News Corp is not alone in this practice, its size and reach in several countries gives it a disproportionate potential for control over voting and political thought.

In 1997, British politician Tony Blair was able to snatch an unlikely victory for the British Labour Party by striking up a friendship with Rupert Murdoch, media mogul and owner of the vast majority of British newspapers at that time. Murdoch instructed his papers to put their support behind Blair and he won by a huge margin. What makes this remarkable was that Murdoch and his news outlets have traditionally placed their support behind conservative political parties, the direct opposite of Tony Blair's progressive Labour Party.

In recent years, News Corp's Fox News placed unwavering support behind US President Donald Trump and his conservative Republican Party. In Australia, News Corp's support for the Liberal Party has been equally strong. It is an interesting study of how much news media, and one family controlling large swathes of media, can or cannot control behaviour.

In years gone by, news media played an active role in deciding how people voted in key elections. It is common practice for the chief editor of a newspaper to publish an article the day before an election to advise people how to vote. However, during the month-long 2022 Victorian state election campaign, the *Herald Sun*, the most popular News Corp news service in Victoria, ran 150 negative stories on the Victorian Labor Party (according to former Labor Premier Steve Bracks)[26] and only 30 negative stories on their competitor, the Victorian Liberal Party, which News Corp traditionally supported. The position of the paper was clear; however, its local competitor *The Age* stated in a review of election coverage after the result that 'A fundamental tenet of journalism is that opinion be kept separate from news reporting.'[27] The end result of the election? The Victorian Labor Party won with an increased majority from the previous election.

Why? This is hard to determine. However, in 2022, the availability of alternative news sources on social media suggests that audiences were not necessarily consuming the News Corp message, despite the tabloid's wide readership in Victoria. As media students, we can only speculate at the power of social media to dilute the message of major news corporations.

ACTIVITY 11.26

Research task

1. Research and make a comprehensive list of the media owned by the Murdoch's News Corp empire.
2. Research the reach and influence of Fox News in the USA. How is it different to what we see in Australia?
3. Research the conflict between 'news' and 'opinion' in contemporary journalism. How does this have the potential to control the behaviour of audiences in countries where there is large news media control by a single influential group?
4. Research the front covers of the *Herald Sun* during the 2022 Victorian election. What does it suggest about the views of News Corp and the challenge of blurring news and opinion?
5. What does the Victorian election result suggest about the way audiences are consuming news? Does wide ownership of news services necessarily mean a large audience?

Facebook: Mark Zuckerberg



FIGURE 11.39 Mark Zuckerberg is the figurehead of Meta, owner of one of the largest social media platforms in the world: Facebook.

Facebook was the first social media company to take the world by storm. Written and devised by Mark Zuckerberg and a group of friends in their college dorm room, the service grew to define social media (despite its notable predecessors like MySpace) around the world. Despite its waning popularity with younger social media users, it remains a dominant force and is growing a huge audience among older social media users. Based in the USA, most Facebook users do not live there, with its users spread across the world. Its highest user base is in India, with 400 million accounts. Roughly 50% of Facebook users do not speak English as their first language. In 2022, reports stated Facebook had 2.93 billion active users each month.[28]

So, what does all this mean? While Zuckerberg's role in Facebook, and its parent company Meta, has ebbed and flowed over time, and his control over the company is opaque and contested, Facebook actively collects the data of 2.93 billion people around the world and whatever his real role is at any one time, he is the global face of Facebook. This is a level of audience information considered impossible in the broadcast era. What does Facebook do with all that data? First, it sells individual online behaviour en masse to advertisers and, second, it sells to anyone else who might be interested. This is where it gets tricky.

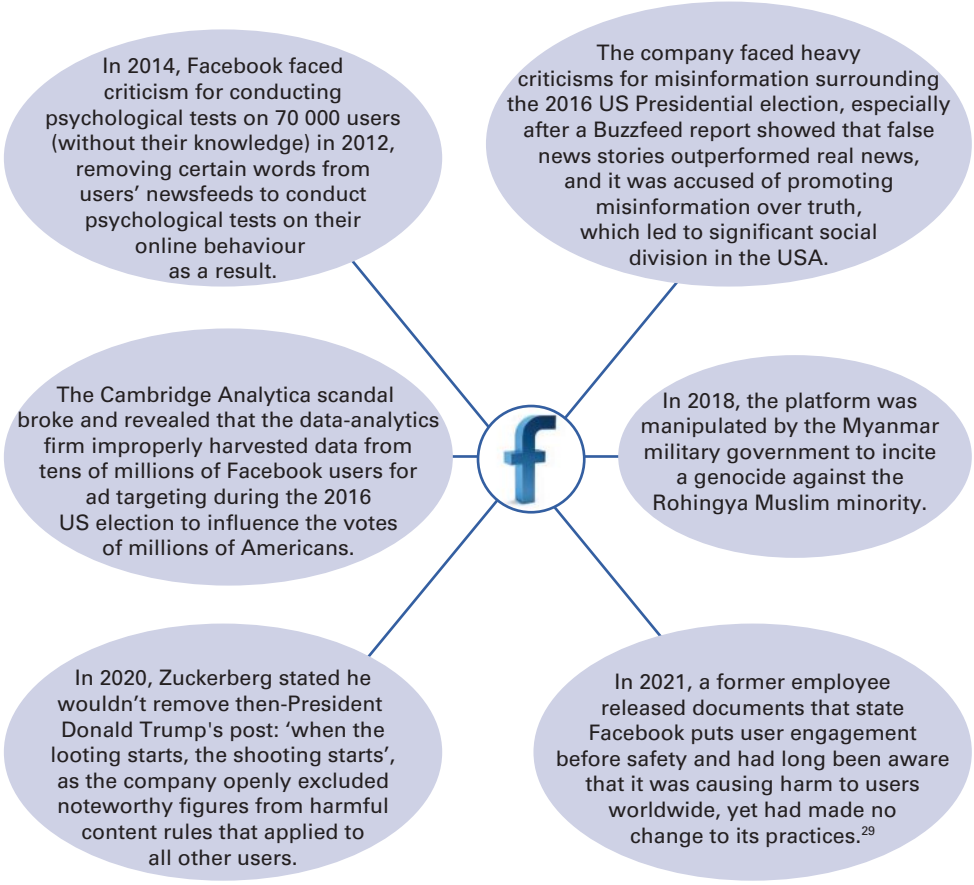


FIGURE 11.40 Facebook controversies over the years

With so much information on what people are doing and thinking online, and a limited understanding from governments around the world about what it was collecting and why, Facebook, like a range of other social media services, went unchecked by media regulators around the world for some time, and, as such, faced a range of controversies that suggested its capacity for control over the audience was immense.

ACTIVITY 11.27

Analysing Facebook

1. Working with a partner, create a timeline of the growth of Facebook from 2005 to today. What have been the most significant changes in the platform?
2. Make a list of all of the companies owned by Meta, the parent company of Facebook. What does this suggest about the control they may be able to wield over audiences considering the data each user would produce?
3. What is Mark Zuckerberg's current role at Meta? Does the one individual still maintain control over the company? What does this tell you about the influence of Meta and Facebook?
4. Working with the same partner, create an infographic for the classroom that explains the reach, control and controversies faced by Facebook and make a judgement about its capacity to wield control over audiences.

Individuals and the media

In the broadcast era of the media, when the few had the power to communicate to the many, it meant that the audience had little agency to interact and respond to media messages. While their leaders would consistently encourage those who lived in democracies to voice their anger with their vote, those who lived under dictatorships experienced more difficult circumstances.

One of the most remarkable changes wrought by Web 2.0 technology has been the capacity for individuals who do not have access to the wealth, connections, technology and influence of major media institutions to create media that reaches and influences a large audience.

Social media and digital media have made the process of wielding audience agency possible. They have allowed minor celebrities to become major, and completely anonymous creators to become household names. When acting alone, they can build personal profiles that become lucrative brands, and when acting as a collective, the audience can force major institutions and governments to carefully consider the control they thought they had.



FIGURE 11.41 Kylie Jenner is one of the world's most followed social media influencers.

AUDIENCE AGENCY: KYLIE JENNER

Kylie Jenner is (at the time of writing) one of the most influential individuals online. Gathering the attention of over 350 million followers on Instagram alone, Jenner has such significant influence over audiences that she can earn up to $1 million per sponsored post. What does this mean? Her reach is so vast, and the engagement from her followers so strong, that companies will pay whatever it takes for Jenner to simply hold, discuss or even promote their product.

So, what does Jenner do to hold such influence? That's complicated. Already a member of the influential Kardashian family, who boast their own enormous social media empire, a star of a reality television show and a recipient of countless deals with fashion and lifestyle brands, Jenner leveraged her membership of this influential clan to build one of the most dominant individual social media profiles on the planet.

Despite her obvious family connections, Jenner has still been able to become a phenomenon of modern media. Through her ability to easily create content, and to connect with her audience on a personal level through their phones, Jenner has become a standalone industry that has reach, influence and control over audiences that broadcast media could only dream of.

In 2022, Kylie Jenner launched another addition to her cosmetics range, this time, a few new shades of her 'lip kit' products. They sold out in mere minutes. In 2022, financial news outlets began to speculate that Jenner had become a billionaire, in no small part due to the relationship between her internet profile and cosmetics brands.[30]

How does one individual do this? How does one person wield the same power as governments and major media institutions? The answer is: through our smartphones. It's probably the same one Jenner has too. Unlike the major media studios of the past where messages were carefully crafted by a team of hundreds for a broad audience, Jenner, like countless other influencers, can speak directly to her audience through her phone to ours. There is an intimacy in social media that cannot be replicated on a cinema or television screen. The audience can comment, interact with other fans in real time and be part of a community.

AUDIENCE AGENCY: GRETA THUNBERG

Greta Thunberg is a climate activist who rose to prominence in her early teens via social media. Native to digital technologies, much of her platform is served by a strong presence on social media and the community she has inspired with other young activists around the world. Like any other influencer, she has the capacity to speak directly to her audience via social media and has inspired other activists to force her platform to the front of social media feeds and broadcast news through hashtags and coordinated student walkouts from school.

Thunberg's social media profile began in August 2018, when aged 15, she began a solo strike outside the Swedish Parliament, protesting about her government's lack of action on climate change. This began a buzz of activity on social media and in the five months after her strike, 588 479 unique Twitter users generated a total of 1 744 446 tweets for 14 months (20 August 2018 – 31 October 2019)[31] specific to her call to action. Thunberg's original method of protest is not dissimilar to any other social activist that had gone before her; however, the leverage of a young, articulate teenager appearing on social media meant she rose to international attention almost overnight. It's no coincidence that her call for other teens to join the protest was spread quickly on social media. Her target audience were met precisely where they use media.



FIGURE 11.42 Greta Thunberg's first strike against the Swedish government began in August 2018 and spread to 71 countries around the world via social media.



FIGURE 11.43 Thunberg speaks at a climate rally in Berlin, Germany, 2021

Thunberg's '*Skolstrejk för klimatet*' (school strike for climate) inspired school students to skip school to protest for greater climate action around the world.

Thunberg posted a single photo on her Instagram and Twitter accounts when her protest began in August 2018. Three days later she posted again, excitedly stating that 'we have 35 followers!'[32] and her profile suddenly exploded online. An open letter she penned to the Swedish government was shared widely across social media. Prominent climate activists, global identities and fellow teens concerned about climate action also shared her name and story, spreading her protest and cause to millions in a matter of days. Former US President Barack Obama mentioned Greta Thunberg in his tweets and received 53 753 re-tweets and 351 716 likes.[33]

By October of that year, she was addressing an audience of 10 000 at a climate summit in Finland, and in December, a speech at the United Nations Climate Summit was watched 9.8 million times when it was uploaded to Facebook.[34]

By March the following year, a million students took part in 2000 marches in 125 cities around the world.

Thunberg and her fellow global activists continue to use social media as a means of promoting and organising climate strikes, specifically designed around skipping school to protest. While she has claimed not to be a leader in any way, her huge global presence at conferences with heads of state lends a face to a global movement. Remarkably, Thunberg did not necessarily seek out the attention like other influencers. Thunberg is a self-confessed introvert. 'Without social media I don't think it would have worked', she stated in 2019. 'I just sat down on a school strike. Now I reach millions of people.'[35]

The remarkable part of Thunberg's story is that she was not necessarily the type of attention seeker that seems to dominate the 'influencer' landscape. Yet social media made it happen as her cause has been taken up by other young leaders in countries all over the world, and social media is the central hub of the movement.

ACTIVITY 11.28

Social activist movements

1. How did Thunberg use social media to spread her message to her target audience around the world?
2. How did the nature of social media amplify her cause beyond her original posts?
3. How do you think the influence of prominent celebrities and world leaders sharing her cause helped create a global movement?
4. Consider other social activist movements you have encountered online. What methods do these movements use to target audiences and gain support?
5. What does Thunberg's story tell you about the capacity for individuals to wield agency and, in turn, control within the media?

AUDIENCE AGENCY: BELLE GIBSON, THE FAKE INFLUENCER

In 2010, an Australian wellness blogger and Melbourne resident, Belle Gibson, rose to fame the world over after claiming that she had won her battle against cancer with good nutrition. Her story captivated audiences worldwide. Her influence drove many to abandon conventional medical treatment.

Like all great internet fairy tales, it wasn't true. Belle Gibson never had cancer in the first place, and her fraud was eventually exposed. However, it was her ability to enchant vulnerable audiences the world over that is worthy of our examination.

The internet has given life to almost any niche interest and hobby. However, in the mid 2010s, the 'wellness' industry found an enormous global following online. Representations of perfect bodies, and happy and healthy individuals with shimmering white teeth dominate social media, and a by-product of this is the growth of influencers promoting physical wellness. On the surface, the pursuit of good wellbeing is a sensible and healthy pursuit; however, the need to stand out in a sea of social media influencers telling us 'What I eat in a day', has led to some of these influencers setting unrealistic expectations for body image, self-esteem and overall health for audiences.

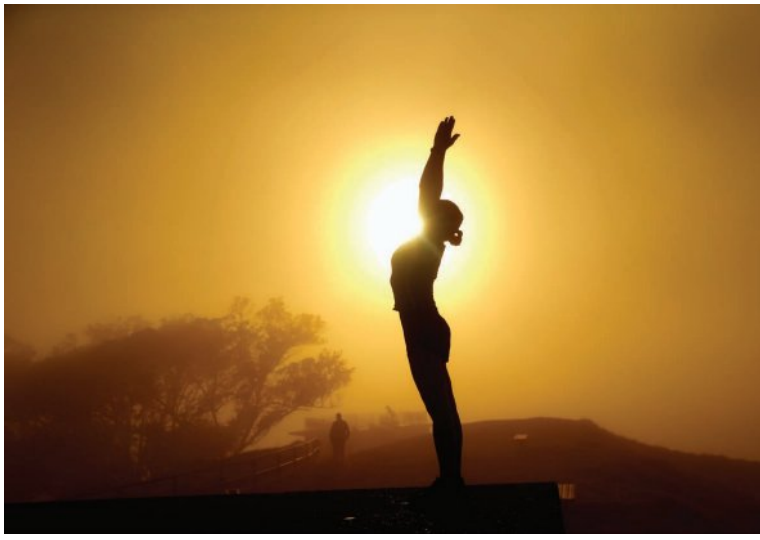


FIGURE 11.44 The wellness industry is a global phenomenon supported by social media influencers.

The concepts of wellness and its links to alternative medicine have existed for decades; however, social media has facilitated the spread of this trend and has evolved into a billion-dollar industry worldwide.[36] Competition for online viewers has led to many wellness influencers promoting dubious remedies, exercise plans and left-field solutions, endangering the health of vulnerable audiences.



FIGURE 11.45 People gather for a group yoga class in Sydney. The wellness industry has created a huge following online.

Personal health is a complex and unique challenge for every individual. Yet the wellness influence world has long been criticised for promoting quick-fix solutions to immediately replicate the perfect image of tanned, athletic and 'happy' representations seen online. Juice cleanses, pseudo-scientific potions and alternative behaviours are promoted across the platform, many of which have not been approved by government medical authorities.

The PSRs many users form with wellness influencers has led to many people ignoring the lack of medical credentials or sound scientific evidence to the contrary. Wellness influencers the world over have



peer reviewed research the process that subjects an author's scholarly work, research or ideas to the scrutiny of others who are experts in the same field (peers) which ensures its academic and scientific quality

leveraged their intimacy with the audience to override years of **peer reviewed research** to offer some questionable solutions to the pursuit of good health. Yet few of these come close to the illusion created by Belle Gibson.

In 2009, 19-year-old Gibson began blogging about her cancer journey. Like all good wellness bloggers, her convincing narrative began to grow a following. After her diagnosis, she followed the standard medical advice to no avail. It didn't seem to be working. She then decided to 'do her own research' and began exploring healthy eating, alternative and natural medicine. To the surprise of a rapidly growing following on social media (over 300 000 on Instagram alone), her cancer symptoms seemed to decline and vanish altogether.[37]

Not only did Gibson claim she was beating cancer, but she was thriving. Across the world, her followers marvelled at her journey, many of whom were fellow cancer sufferers or battling their own chronic conditions. In 2015, Gibson's story had made global news. Inspired, many followers turned their back on medical advice and followed Gibson's growing list of foods, recipes and wellness solutions promoted through her Instagram page, her app (downloaded 200 000 times in the first month) and forthcoming (at the time) cookbook.[38] Gibson was an avid user of Instagram and frequently posted updates on her treatment, recipes and wellness advice, despite not having any medical qualifications. Gibson had created a captivating narrative for her followers; one so inspiring, it created little room for facts.

One Gibson follower, Maxine Ali, saw a solution to her own chronic condition:

> 'Seeing someone like Belle heal themselves made me feel hopeful', she says. 'This was the answer to everything I had been looking for'.

FIGURE 11.46 Former Belle Gibson follower Maxine Ali quoted in *The Irish Times*

How can this happen? it was due to a combination of PSRs and vulnerability. For many of her most dedicated followers, Gibson was able to communicate directly through her social media. For users following her journey, there was hope and Gibson was someone who appeared genuine, relatable and successful. Melbourne woman Kylie Willey was among the vulnerable cancer sufferers who followed Gibson, generating a deep sense of connection. Ditching her chemotherapy treatment for the influencer's diet solutions, Willey became an avid follower claiming she was 'sucked in' by Gibson and using her as a role model.

Willey even commented on one of Gibson's posts and, remarkably, received a reply, which increased the connection Willey felt for Gibson.

The truth was that Gibson never had cancer. The entire persona she had created online and turned into a global business was false. Nor had she donated the proceedings she had promised to cancer charities. It was a scam and Australian authorities were soon on her case to recoup the lost donations and she was charged with breaches of Australian consumer law.[39]

Around the world, Gibson's former followers and family members have since formed support groups to discuss the negative outcomes of Gibson's short, but dangerous, period of influence. While there is no statistical evidence directly linking Gibson's social media account to actual deaths, many family members who lost loved ones to disease after abandoning conventional treatments placed the blame on the wellness blogger. As Kylie Willey pointed out, families 'were angry about the influence she [Gibson] had on people'.

ACTIVITY 11.29

Vulnerable audiences

1 Explain how Belle Gibson built a social media following.
2 Why do you think wellness influencers and the wellness industry have grown so large in recent years?
3 Explain how Belle Gibson's narrative and vulnerable social media audiences create the conditions for PSRs.

Analysing the influence of media and audiences

Take time now to pause and reflect on the case studies you have explored and the range of older and contemporary theories and ideas that have attempted to explain the relationship between media and audiences.

When examining in the table below, all discussed in this chapter thus far, it is important to always consider the following:

1 What are the details of the case study?
2 What 'influence' or 'behaviour' was observed as a result of the case study?
3 What role did the media form play in the claim of influence?
4 What media effects theories exist to potentially explain these claims?
5 What other evidence is there to support, challenge or reject these claims?

DIGITAL LINK

Visit the Interactive textbook for additional case studies on how media institutions in traditional media wield control.

Nixon vs JFK	Lonelygirl15	*Brooklyn 99*	Fyre Festival
Presidential candidate JFK attempted to manipulate the medium of television to influence audiences to vote for him in 1960.	Two aspiring filmmakers created a fake YouTube serial that created a huge following in the early days of the video sharing app.	Fans banded together with the support of celebrities to demand the return of their favourite television show.	An entrepreneur used the power of social media to convince thousands of people to pay for a music festival that never happened.
TAC advertising	**Kylie Jenner**	**Greta Thunberg**	**Belle Gibson**
A Victorian government agency began a decades-long advertising campaign that reduced deaths on the road by 50%	One of the most powerful social media influencers used her reach to sell out a cosmetics line within minutes.	Climate activist Greta Thunberg began a solo protest in 2018 that inspired millions of school students to join her strike.	Wellness influencer Belle Gibson used her global platform to convince audiences to abandon conventional medicine.

11.6 Regulating media and audiences in Australia

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- the regulation of media and audiences in Australia.

The Australian government has an obligation to regulate the media. Media regulation is the process of providing rules and legally binding guidelines that set boundaries around the behaviour of media companies, producers and audiences.

Australia is a democracy that relies on the existence of a variety of voices in our news and entertainment. At the core of this is an effort to ensure that Australian content, and as a result, its media professionals, have a protected space on our screens.

They also have a responsibility to set boundaries on what is and is not acceptable for the community to see, read, hear and participate in. Like all the media theorists and thinkers you have read about thus far, the Australian government is aware of the connection between media content and its potential for influence and the Australian government places responsibility in a range of organisations to maintain a safe, reliable and trustworthy media environment for its citizens.

While the Australian government recognises that adults have the capacity and right to choose what they engage with in the media and where, there are clear and obvious challenges with free access to the internet.

The contemporary media environment creates issues for younger media users, vulnerable audiences and ordinary citizens as the government does not have the capacity to control everything we see and do online. The regulations that govern broadcast-era institutions are being challenged by a rapidly growing and increasingly unregulated environment online.

Your role is to examine how the Australian government regulates the media today; and, considering the nature of large global media institutions, how successful it is in regulating contemporary media.

FIGURE 11.47 The Australian government has an obligation to regulate the media in this country.



FORMS OF REGULATION

Self-regulation: This refers to the belief that media organisations are mature enough to regulate themselves and only produce content that sits within the notion of community standards. This is the most common form of media regulation in Australia and it is used by broadcast media and internet services.

Classification: Classification is legally binding. Classification places 'ratings' on media that classifies the nature of the content and guides the audience to understand what to expect before engaging with it. This allows audiences to make informed decisions about the media they consume.

The Australian Communication and Media Authority (ACMA)

The ACMA is the Australian media watchdog for content on broadcast television, radio, print and online. It exists to hold media institutions publicly accountable and ensure they are actively self-regulating.

Over the years, the ACMA has stepped in to publicly criticise news journalists and broadcasters who overstepped the boundaries of truth and fairness, or radio personalities and television programs that take on-air behaviour too far.

In a media environment where broadcast television is still required to broadcast Australian content 51% of the time, the prevalence of reality television dominates broadcast screens. Australian content is notoriously expensive to produce, and broadcasters are competing with streaming services.

ACTIVITY 11.30

Research task

Kyle Sandilands is an Australian radio and television personality. He has appeared on shows such as Australia's *Big Brother*, *The X-Factor* and *Australia's got Talent*, besides being the regular host of the weekday morning radio program on Sydney's KISS 106.5.

Research the history of Sandilands and his relationship with ACMA. What role is each one attempting to fill in the modern media environment?



FIGURE 11.48 Radio and television presenter Kyle Sandilands has frequently run afoul of the ACMA and his employer's obligation to self-regulate.

By the ACMA's own admission, its ability to monitor all media adequately, especially that which is increasingly consumed by modern audiences, is becoming an overwhelming challenge. In its 2022 report 'What Audiences Want – Audience Expectations for Content Safeguards'[40] it stated that Australian audiences wanted greater protection from the nature of content seen, heard and read in Australian media.



The ACMA's promotion and monitoring of self-regulation is getting difficult to manage due to a range of outdated government regulations, most of which are based on the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* and does not adequately cover the changes that have occurred in Australian media since the arrival of Web 2.0.

> At June 2021, 70% of Australian adults had a smart TV connected to the internet, up from 64% in 2020. Smart TVs … allowing viewers to shift between traditional TV and a variety of live, catch-up, pay-per-view and subscription streaming services … few would realise that content viewed across these different platforms may be subject to different regulatory rules …
>
> … most current codes of practice do not apply to online content … platforms such as Netflix, Stan and Disney+ are currently not subject to regulation applied to broadcasters in Australia.

FIGURE 11.49 ACMA, June 2022, 'What Audiences Want – Audience Expectations for Content Safeguards: A Position Paper for Professional Content Providers, p. 1

In 2022, the status of content quotas and codes of practice was under federal government review, as up to this point, many have argued that an unfair playing field exists.

ACTIVITY 11.31

Research task

1. Research and explain the *Broadcasting Services Act* 1992. What does this legislation cover?
2. What does the ACMA define as its 'Codes of Practice'?
3. Considering what you have already learnt about agency and control, influence and contemporary media, is this legislation still relevant?
4. In 2022, the federal government hinted that elements of this legislation will be reviewed. What, if any, changes have taken place since? What further changes would you suggest to ensure a better regulated media in Australia?
5. Why do broadcast radio and television providers need to push the boundaries of acceptable content in the Australian media environment?
6. Using your response to the previous question, research recent statements from the ACMA. Does it still have the ability to monitor self-regulation?
7. Why does social media pose a challenge to the relevance of the ACMA and media regulation in Australia?

The Australian Classification Board

The regulation that you are probably most familiar with is classification. This is provided in Australia by a government agency called the Australian Classification Board (ACB) and its role is to examine all literature, film and video game releases within Australia and determine, based on the nature of the content, what age groups should and should not be able to access this content. In a handful of cases, it has banned films and video games from release in Australia for the graphic nature of the sexual or violent content. Larry Clarke's 2002 film *Ken Park* was banned from release in Australia. No one was allowed to see it as the Classification Board deemed the level of sexual content exceeded what it believed the Australian community would accept as appropriate. Film critics David Stratton and Margaret Pomeranz, from the long-running movie review program *The Movie Show*, were apprehended by police when they attempted to have a screening of the film at a Sydney cinema.

The Australian government, which supports the Classification Board and other regulatory bodies, sees a relationship between the media and the control it could potentially have over various audiences. While it recognises that adult audiences should have the right to agency and see, read and participate in killing as many respawning zombies as they want, there are clearly some audiences that it sees as its role to protect.



FIGURE 11.50 Prominent Australian film critics Margaret Pomeranz and David Stratton

The Classification Board reviews:

1. films
2. video games
3. some publications.

The Classification Board considers three important principles when viewing content:

- enabling adults to choose what they read, hear, see and play
- respecting people who may not want to see material they find confronting
- protecting children from inappropriate content.

The board is bound by the *Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995* that:

> requires the Board to consider matters including community standards, the nature of the content and whether it has any artistic or educational value, and who the intended audience is.

The Board uses six elements when making a classification decision:

- themes
- violence
- sex
- language
- drug use
- nudity.

The impact of these elements depends on the frequency and intensity of content and the overall effect.

Impact may be higher where content is:

- detailed
- prolonged
- realistic
- interactive.[41]

Classification is provided using the following ratings, as shown in Table 11.2:

Category	Level of impact
G	Very mild
PG	Mild
M	Moderate
MA 15+	Strong
R 18+	High
RC	Very high

TABLE 11.2 Classification Board ratings

While the Classification Board has banned films for release in their entirety, it is more common, as it is with video games, that elements of the content that may prevent it from gaining classification are removed by the original producer in order to gain a release. In 2011, the horror film *Human Centipede 2* (dir. Tom Six) was released (rated R18+) after 40 seconds was removed that the board deemed to be:

> gratuitous, exploitative and offensive depictions of violence with a very high degree of impact and cruelty which has a high impact.

FIGURE 11.51 SBS Film, 'The Human Centipede Sequel Banned in Oz', *SBS* website, 26 February 2014

In 2018, it also refused classification to the video game *We Happy Few*, which put players in a dystopian version of London where the player needed to a take a drug called 'Joy' which made gameplay easier. Due to the basic requirement to use drugs to proceed through the game, the game was refused classification for being thematically inappropriate.

In each case, there was a clear line between what the Board deems to be a breach of 'community standards'. In the case of *Human Centipede 2*, it was the detailed, prolonged and realistic violence that was removed to allow its release in Australia, whereas in the case of *We Happy Few* drug use was linked to rewards throughout the game, and given that the Board has traditionally taken a dim view of incentivised drug use in video games, the game itself was refused release in Australia outright.

Content that is deemed MA15+ or R18+ has legally binding restrictions about who can view it. For everything else that is given a classification and release in Australia, there is little beyond parental control and responsible videogame store employees standing in between younger audiences and content the Classification Board deems inappropriate. They are merely guidelines.

The key to understanding the classification of media in Australia is based on two ideas:

1. Content that is examined for impact is done so on the assumption that it can have a negative influence or effect on younger audiences.
2. There is a general understanding of what the 'community' deems to be an acceptable 'standard' at any one time.

ACTIVITY 11.32

Reflection

1. Considering what you have learnt about communication theories and effects studies, which ideas do you think underpin the need for media classification in Australia?
2. Why would the Classification Board deem incentivised drug use as a negative experience for video game players?
3. What 'community standards' actually are ebb and flow with time. The horror film The *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (dir. Tobe Hooper) was refused classification in Australia in 1974, but was allowed a release, uncut, in 1984. How do you think community standards have changed in your lifetime?
4. Do you believe that the Classification Board made the right decision around *We Happy Few*? What reasons do you give for your response?

Classification and the future

DEPICTIONS OF GAMBLING IN VIDEO GAMES

The issue of community standards is tricky. Making a sweeping assumption of the entire Australian population's 'standards' is extremely difficult. Nevertheless, the Australian government conducted a broad investigation into community standards in relation to media with the view to compare it with its current classification standards.

The report found that most respondents were less concerned with content within film than they were with video games. While the survey data suggested a consistent acceptance that depictions of violence, sex and drug use should not be seen by audiences below 15 (and usually with an adult present), there was specific concern about depictions of and participation in gambling and gambling-based behaviours in video games.

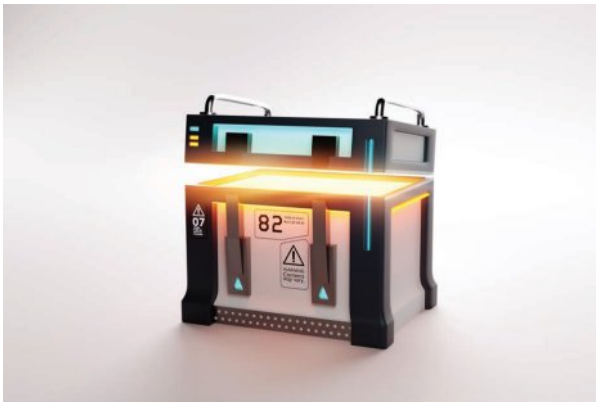


FIGURE 11.52 Loot boxes in video games have been criticised for promoting gambling habits with younger audiences.

LOOT BOXES UNDER REVIEW

In 2022, the Australian government began debating the regulation of video games that employ loot boxes, suggesting they should be restricted to people over the age of 18, giving them an R18+ rating. While the use of micro-transactions within video games to purchase or use loot boxes is not currently regulated, gambling is restricted to anyone under the age of 18 in Australia. Like alcohol, drugs and tobacco, gambling has a long history of causing harm to individuals and families in Australia and, like alcohol and tobacco, has a legal age restriction. However, concern has been building among lawmakers that loot box features promote gambling habits for young gamers.

In 2022, Australian independent parliamentarian Andrew Wilkie put forward a bill to federal parliament for further restrictions and classification for games with loot boxes, stating:

> Many parents might not know that loot boxes feature in games such as Star Wars, Call of Duty, FIFA and even Mario Kart … Indeed, research by the Australian Gaming Council found 62% of the best-selling games contained loot boxes and that all young people surveyed had played a game featuring loot boxes.

FIGURE 11.53 Andrew Wilkie quoted in Zak Thomas-Akoo, 'Australian MP Introduces Bill Banning Loot Boxes for Under-18s', *IGB* website, 29 November 2022

Wilkie continued to state that young gamers who have used loot boxes are more likely to have gambled in the last 12 months and the technology was:

> An insidious gateway to gambling that's being widely used to target our kids … Clearly we cannot continue to let our children be groomed for future gambling in this way.

FIGURE 11.54 Andrew Wilkie quoted in Zak Thomas-Akoo, 'Australian MP Introduces Bill Banning Loot Boxes for Under-18s', *IGB* website, 29 November 2022

ACTIVITY 11.33

Analysis: Gambling and the media

1 Gambling and gambling advertising has long been an issue for the ACMA, sport and television advertising in Australia. However, compare the impact and prevalence of violence in video games available to younger users in Australia to that of gambling. Should they be considered in the same light? Should Australian regulators consider classifying games with loot boxes as R18+? What reasons do you give for your response?

2 What challenges do loot boxes and micro-transactions create for the regulation of media in Australia?

DO CLASSIFICATIONS NEED TO COVER MORE?

In late 2022, a youth-led group , Consent Labs, launched a petition to the Australian Classification Board to add the category of 'consent', or lack thereof, to the list of categories explored by the Board when providing a classification. The group are asking for a 'C' classification to be added to warn audiences of scenes where non-consensual sexual and romantic incidents appear in media texts.

Around Australia 'affirmative consent laws' have been introduced in some states and Consent Labs CEO Angelique Wan stated that:

> From scenes in children's films where women are kissed while they're asleep, to rom-coms where men are tied to a bed and their struggle is played for laughs, or scenes that are depicted as romantic, even though the person says 'no' again and again … perpetuates and normalises lack of consent.

FIGURE 11.55 Consent Labs CEO Angelique Wan quoted in 'Consent Labs Introduces New TV and Film Classification', *Media Week* website, 7 September 2022



FIGURE 11.56 Arguably, in *The Empire Strikes Back* Han Solo (Harrison Ford) first kisses Princess Leia (Carrie Fisher) without consent. Australian advocacy group Consent Labs has stated that many previous media texts have created poor representations of consent in romantic relationships in film.

This creates challenges for media texts made in the past. In *Star Wars: Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back* (1980, dir. Irvin Kershner), Han Solo (Harrison Ford) corners Princess Leia (Carrie Fisher) and pressures her for a kiss. The romantic comedy *Love Actually* (2003, dir. Richard Curtis) features a character being stalked for romantic purposes.

The Consent Labs argues that young Australians are being educated about consent and are yet to see it properly represented on screen, and audiences need to gain an understanding of what consent is, and is not.

During its run, popular streaming series *Game of Thrones* (2011–19) frequently came under fire for its depictions of sex scenes that were non-consensual. While these may play some role within the narrative (and *Game of Thrones* is on television and not covered by the Australian Classification Board), it is a solid example of what Consent Labs is advocating. Its goal is not to remove it from screens, but to provide warnings and classifications so audiences may become more aware of when it is represented in media.

ACTIVITY 11.34

Analysis: Content ratings in Australia

1. Have Australia's community standards changed? What do you think of Consent Labs' petition to add a new category of regulation?
2. If approved, should the 'C' rating be applied to previous film and video game texts? What reasons do you give for your response?
3. What other categories can you consider adding to the current list examined by the Classification Board?
4. Consider how Australia's understanding of mental health, bullying, LGBTQI+ issues and heterosexual gender relationships have evolved over time. How does the constant shift in community standards create issues for the Classification Board and the regulation of media within Australia?

The broader challenges of regulation of media in Australia

Now that you know the role of the ACMA and the Classification Board, it may have occurred to you that they do not necessarily influence much of the media you consume. Most online content you view on social media platforms is not necessarily governed by Australian regulators, and is part of policies, practices and algorithms designed by the tech companies in house, with little regard to specific nations like Australia and their own community standards. More so, many of you may have questioned the existence of regulation in video games with many available online and few barriers to their purchase. Internet piracy has made almost any film available to anyone who can (and still does) work their way around **bit torrent software**. Streaming services provide access to films and television with a wide range of classifications and it does not take audiences long to work their way around them. So how is regulation causing challenges for Australia today?

bit torrent software a peer-to-peer file transfer protocol for sharing large amounts of data over the internet, in which each part of a file downloaded by a user is transferred to other users. Bit torrenting was responsible for a surge of internet media piracy in the 2010s and has since been reduced by the widespread use of streaming services.

13 REASONS WHY

The 2018 Netflix series *13 Reasons Why* created challenges for the Australian government, audiences and the very notion of regulation in Australia. The narrative details the 'reasons' why a teenage girl takes her own life and depicted not only graphic scenes of sexual assault, but a visual depiction of the act of suicide in the original edit of the first series.

Netflix had rated the series 'MA15+' with a warning of 'strong sex scenes and violence'. The series was clearly targeted at teenagers, and while graphic depictions of self-harm and suicide have appeared in many other texts, the issue that brought Australian government intervention was clearly one of inappropriate classification and self-regulation. Netflix was forced to reclassify the series and eventually removed the offending scenes altogether.[42]



FIGURE 11.57 Katherine Langford, who played the character of Hannah Baker in the Netflix original *13 Reasons Why*



FIGURE 11.58 Netflix is one of the world's largest streaming services.

Whenever the issue of mental health and suicide are mentioned in Australian media, the conventional understanding and behaviour is that the media service will provide phone numbers and websites to any audiences who may have concerns about this content, especially those vulnerable audiences who may be significantly affected by the mere mention of the subject. Not only did Netflix not do this in the first instance, it classified the content itself. But how?

In 2015, Netflix was the first major streaming service to come to Australia. Already a huge business in the United States and Europe, the arrival of Netflix meant hours of content was available to Australian audiences (who were briefly the world champions of illegally downloading media content) and began a shift towards streaming for Australian audiences.

In order for Netflix to remain viable and profitable, it struck a deal with the Australian government in 2016 that it would classify 'Netflix Original' television series and films in order to counter internet piracy and allow for releases that coincided with its international dates.

Australians want content when everyone else around the world has access, because if they don't have that access … they might attempt to regain their internet piracy world title. This meant that Netflix could bypass the Classification Board for its original films (this process can take time with the Board) and, like free-to-air broadcasters, classify their television series according to the ACMA codes of practice.

In the 2018 case of *13 Reasons Why*, it got the original classification wrong. The Classification Board reviewed Netflix's original classification and enforced a new descriptor: 'strong suicide themes and sexual violence'.[43] However, as you would know with most streamed television series, many are viewed quickly after their release, and while the data of total viewers is not readily available, it is likely that many of the target audience saw the series soon after its release without adequate warning of its content. Australian child and adolescent psychologist Michael Carr-Gregg stated just after the series was released that most young people who watch *13 Reasons Why* wouldn't be negatively affected, but there is 'definitely a contagion affect' for people with pre-existing mental health conditions.[44]

Jaelea Skehan, director of Australian mental health and suicide prevention group Everymind, stated at the time:

> The reality is, that 13 Reasons Why would not have been shown in its entirety on Australian television without editing, based on our current codes of practice and general standards of agreed practice.

FIGURE 11.59 Jaelea Skehan, Director of the Hunter Institute of Mental Health, '13 Reasons Why Need to Conform to Australian Standards', *Everymind* website, 29 August 2017

Regardless of Netflix's failure to properly classify the original release of season one, or provide the agreed list of support services before and after each episode of *13 Reasons Why* season one, when it was released (this has since been added), it was approved by the Australian government to continue regulating its own original content in 2019.[45]

In 2022, a new Australian government proposed the introduction of Spherex, a US-designed classification tool for streaming services that has been working with the Australian government since 2020 to design a quick and effective classification tool for streaming services in Australia.[46] However, we should always consider the potential for a clash of international and local 'community standards'.

ACTIVITY 11.35

Analysis: The classification of streaming services and *13 Reasons Why*

1. What went wrong with Netflix Australia's original classification of *13 Reasons Why*?
2. Using a communication theory or idea, explain how this content could create challenges for audiences.
3. Why was Netflix granted the right to classify its own content? What dangers might this create for audiences in the future?
4. Consider the balance the Classification Board and ACMA attempt to manage when considering Australian 'community standards'. Will the use of an overseas-developed Spherex classification tool make this situation better or worse? Give reasons for your response.
5. Discuss how the change in methods of production, distribution, consumption or reception of media products has changed the extent of media influence in the Australian context.

REGULATION AND THE NEWS MEDIA

While laws and regulations exist to monitor the behaviour of the media, a new range of problems have emerged thanks to increased audience agency. The reality is, on Web 2.0 services, the overwhelming majority of content is created by the audience and they are not held to the same standards as media organisations. It's simply not possible to monitor the behaviour of every media user in the world, and yet a single comment, post or meme created by an individual could reach millions. If that interaction with the media causes harm, or negative influence, then how is that single user held accountable? In the next part of this chapter, you will explore the challenges this has created for social media organisations and governments; however, you should explore also how audience agency has created challenges for the regulation of media in Australia.



FIGURE 11.60 Dylan Voller attends a rally held on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day at the NSW Supreme Court in Sydney, 2017

For most of you, your lives have been spent online and it wouldn't have been without an uncomfortable incident or two. You may have seen something shocking, or worse, something shocking directed at you. As you will learn, social media companies have poor regulations and safeguards in place to protect individual users, and in the case of a teenager from the Northern Territory, Dylan Voller, it becomes clearer still that few regulations exist to protect individuals from harassment on social media.



FIGURE 11.61 Sister of Dylan Voller, Kirra, holds a sign at an Indigenous rights protest depicting the torture inflicted on her brother in Don Dale detention centre

In 2016, the ABC's *Four Corners*, a current affairs program, aired 'Australia's Shame', which detailed the mistreatment and torture of young offenders in Darwin's Don Dale Youth Detention Centre. The footage showed former inmate Dylan Voller being abused by guards using techniques that were so shocking it sparked a Royal Commission investigation into youth detention in Australia. What followed the screening of 'Australia's Shame' indicates the challenges for the regulation of media in Australia.

Voller is a Ngarrindjeri man from the Northern Territory. When the story aired, it was soon shared by news media outlets around Australia in print and online. News media outlets in Australia rely heavily on social media services like Twitter and Facebook to link readers to their news services and to spark audience engagement, and they allow readers to comment on articles. After each publication posted a link to their reporting on issues highlighted at Don Dale, Voller was subjected to a torrent of racist abuse in the comment sections of some of Australia's biggest news provider's social media accounts.

Rather than go after the social media companies, Voller sued the Australian media publications *The Australian*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Centralian Advocate*, Sky News and 'The Bolt Report'. His legal argument was based on defamation of character on the grounds that the media companies did not moderate their comments sections effectively, which is usually a common practice in the news industry. Voller sued the media companies for the comments, rather than the service providing them themselves.

In March 2022, the case was settled out of court, the terms of which were not made public. This means that Voller dropped his case, and the public can only speculate on the outcome offered to Voller by the media companies in return. However, what was critical in this case was that the Australian High Court had ruled that news media companies could be held legally responsible for comments made by the public on their Facebook pages, not the social media company that allows the comments to exist.[47]

In response, a number of Australian news services increased their moderation efforts, or closed comments on their articles. US outlet *CNN* removed its Australian Facebook presence entirely.

ACTIVITY 11.36

Analysis: The Dylan Voller case

1. Consider Voller's case. Should the media service or social media page bear responsibility for the comments ordinary users make on their pages?
2. What does this case tell you about the power of the Australian government, regulation and existing laws to hold large social media companies accountable for harmful content?
3. Using your response to the previous question, explain why Voller's legal team chose to sue the news companies rather than the larger social media companies.
4. What challenges has this case created for the regulation of media and audiences in Australia?

11.7 Issues of regulation and control of the media

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- the issues and challenges relating to regulation and control of the media.

Regulation and control of the media around the world is one of the greatest challenges of the modern age.

While individual nations like Australia, China and the US can put regulations in place that suit the government of the day, the size, scale, financial and geographic reach of modern media institutions like TikTok, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube make regulation and control a minefield of issues and challenges.

Social media and other internet-based institutions cross national boundaries around the world. The guiding principle of many of these companies is to grow an audience at any cost and the regulation of their content generally comes second.

One of the great challenges created by global media institutions is harmful content. With limited regulation and content uploaded at increasing speeds, the capacity for social media to be abused by individuals, governments and institutions is high. Harmful content, in simple terms, is any content posted that can cause an individual harm or distress. This definition is obviously simplistic; it may help to work as a class to define what this could mean.

ACTIVITY 11.37

Reflection

1. As a class, brainstorm as many examples of what you can define as harmful content. These do not need to be too specific, just use adjectives!
2. As an individual, note down what your classmates have mentioned, that you were unaware caused harm.
3. From the whole list, consider how these can come from individual users, organisations, governments and the social media companies themselves.

bot accounts accounts operated on social media networks, and used to automatically generate messages, advocate ideas, act as a follower of users and as fake accounts to gain followers themselves

fake news false stories that appear to be news, spread on the internet or using other media

bad faith actors individuals and groups who use the media to take advantage of vulnerabilities and fears to create division and distrust in society

On all social media platforms, individuals can report harmful content or lodge complaints, but individual users are very much at the mercy of what these institutions define as 'regulation'. The anonymity of the internet means that an offender can be banned from a service, but simply begin a new account under a different name. This does not even consider the millions of **bot accounts** which are often set up to manipulate, scam or cause other types of harm.

Individuals are also at the mercy of personalised algorithms that guide and personalise what users see.

Governments around the world are grappling with this challenge. Some governments are even using these regulations to their own advantage and bring harm on others. For example:

- *Misinformation:* Misinformation is news and information that is false and is spread on social media, regardless of whether the original author intended to mislead others. Often termed **fake news**, misinformation is a significant challenge for media regulation. The term fake news is itself troubling as it can be used loosely by anyone who encounters information they simply disagree with, and a result is a significant lack of trust in media for audiences. The prevalence of misinformation online, combined with the liberal use of the term fake news, means audiences simply don't know who and what to trust!
- *Disinformation:* Disinformation is news and information on social media that is specifically designed to mislead audiences by spreading fear, uncertainty and doubt. Disinformation can be created by governments, individuals or organisations who are intent on spreading falsehoods, manipulating opinions and, at times, whole countries. The common terms to describe those who spread disinformation is '**bad faith actors**'. Such people seek to spread FUD (fear, uncertainty and doubt).
- *Hate speech:* Hate speech is a specific problem on social media platforms. The United Nations defines hate speech:

> as any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor.

FIGURE 11.62 United Nations, 'Understanding Hate Speech', *UN.org* website



FIGURE 11.63 Hate speech has become a growing problem on social media platforms.

Self-regulation on social media has led to the resurgence of hate speech, or more specifically, racism and discrimination via social media. This has led to specific and damaging consequences around the globe and has provoked questions about the regulation of large social media organisations.

Facebook and hate speech

Facebook is among the world's most dominant media organisations. Owned by parent company Meta, which also owns Instagram and WhatsApp, Facebook has reach in almost every country on the

planet. While its popularity may be waning for younger users, who have gravitated to Instagram, TikTok, BeReal (or whatever new app you're using now!), Facebook still exists as a dominant force for connection and sharing of information for just under 2.94 billion users.[48]

Data collected in 2022 indicates that Facebook remains a global force:

- 38% of the world's population use Facebook.
- Facebook is the third most visited site in the world, behind Google and YouTube.
- It remains the most popular social media site in Australia.
- Roughly 50% of Facebook users do not speak English.
- American users make up 10% of Facebook's users.
- Its fastest growing audience is over 65 years of age.
- Facebook's revenue increased by over 2000% in 10 years.

As you have already learnt, Facebook's rise has not been without controversy. While it continuously works to make its platform safer for users, there is significant evidence to suggest that Facebook is still struggling to regulate its content, creating global challenges.

In 2018, an undercover reporter infiltrated Facebook's content moderator training to discover:

- Graphic violence, racism and misinformation was kept online as long as it created revenue.
- Moderators were told to ignore users who looked to be younger than 13.
- Facebook did not conduct this moderation itself. Rather, it used a third party company.
- Photos and videos of children being abused were left online for years, despite being reported.

Facebook apologised and pledged to improve its content regulation.[49]



FIGURE 11.64 Facebook has become synonymous with smartphone use across the globe.

In 2021, researchers found that misinformation still gets six times more clicks and shares on Facebook. The study from New York University found that news publishers who were known to spread misinformation were six times more likely to be clicked and shared than other, more trusted news sources.[50] Later in 2021, a former Facebook employee released 'The Facebook Papers', which revealed Facebook dedicated 84% of its effort to tackle misinformation in the United States, leaving 16% for issues in the rest of the world.[51]

For years, Facebook users were able to use an 'angry' emoji to respond to posts, which were given five times more weight than a 'like' in personalised algorithms, which spread misinformation and content that angered users as polarising content was proven to engage users. Facebook has since worked to correct this; however, it was alleged that for many years, Facebook preferenced angry and engaged users over factual information.[52]

FLAGGING HATE SPEECH ON FACEBOOK

What can ordinary users do when faced with hate speech, controversial content and misinformation in their newsfeeds? In short, report it through Facebook's self-regulation 'flagging' features. Unfortunately, Facebook has billions of users, making it difficult to perceive how all complaints and reported content could be addressed in a timely manner.

Fiona R Martin and Aim Sinpeng from the University of Sydney received funding from Facebook to research the impact of hate speech in LBGTQI+ communities in Asia. Their research found that many of the admins of LGBTQI+ pages repeatedly flagged hate speech and harmful comments and found their claims rejected by Facebook. The researchers found that hate speech was worst in areas of Asia where minority languages existed and were not adequately covered by Facebook's detection tools. By comparison, the researchers found significantly less examples in Australia, where Facebook's active moderation and detection tools worked more effectively in English.[53]

ACTIVITY 11.38

Analysis: Hate speech on Facebook

1. What are the challenges created by a social media service as large as Facebook?
2. Why would researchers and critics of Facebook suggest that the service preferences misinformation to engage users?
3. Why would language barriers pose issues for hate speech moderation tools?
4. Compare Facebook's size and global reach with the evidence you have of the challenges created by misinformation and hate speech. What challenges do large social media organisations like Facebook create for the regulation and control of the media on a global scale?

HOW FACEBOOK REGULATES

The challenges to regulate content for a service like Facebook are immense. Like most social media companies, it places the responsibility on the individual user. Facebook sets out its own guidelines and encourages users to abide. Users are also responsible for their own privacy; rather than provide guarantees on overall safety, users are obliged to do much of the regulation for Facebook, by reporting and flagging issues that breach Facebook's 'community standards' policy.

Facebook's community standards cover:

- violence and incitement
- dangerous individuals and organisations
- coordinating harm and promoting harm
- fraud and deception.

It also has standards that monitor:

- child exploitation
- bullying and sexual harassment
- human exploitation
- hate speech
- violent and graphic content
- misinformation
- spam.[54]

FIGURE 11.65 Facebook's Community Standards' Policy, 2023

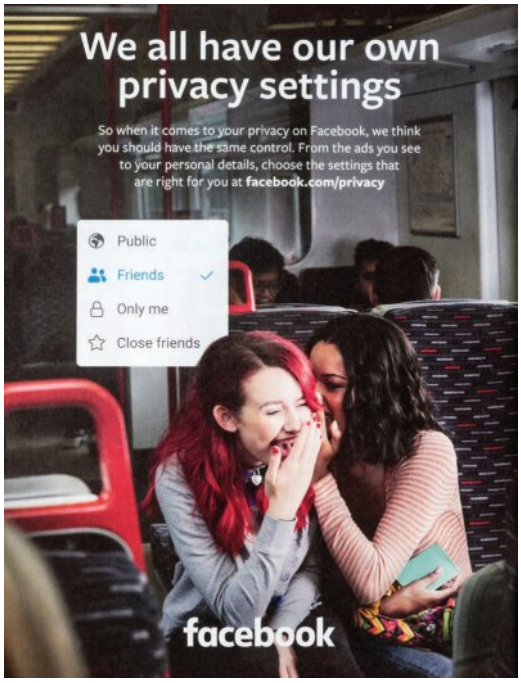


FIGURE 11.66 Facebook encourages users to take responsibility for their own privacy on the platform.

These standards, and procedures around flagging, change and evolve all the time. But how does it work? An individual user can flag content they deem offensive. Facebook already employs artificial intelligence to block key words and content before it is even available online; however, other content is referred to human teams who review content case by case against Facebook's detailed community standards.

ACTIVITY 11.39

Research task

1. Research the most up-to-date processes for Facebook's community standards and flagging features. What success has the platform had in combating misinformation and hate speech?
2. What challenges can you detect that may arise between artificial intelligence and human teams reviewing harmful content? Use evidence from your prior knowledge from this chapter.

FACEBOOK AND MYANMAR

Myanmar is a country nestled between Thailand, China and Bangladesh and has a long and troubled history. Since 1962, the country has faced a mixture of military rule and struggling democracy. Up until 2010, Myanmar did not have access to the internet at all. Up until the mid 2000s, few in the country had access to mobile phones as the military government tightly controlled information, yet access to the internet landed in the nation almost all at once. By 2010, Facebook had entered Myanmar and in order to generate immediate popularity, it offered unmetered data to Myanmar citizens. In a nation of significant poverty, access to Facebook free of data charges meant one thing: Facebook *was* the internet.

In 2021, Facebook was still used by roughly half of the nation's 54 million people.[55]



FIGURE 11.67 Two Buddhist monks check their phones while travelling. In 2010, the internet arrived in Myanmar almost overnight.

In a nation where media censorship was widespread, Facebook appeared as a revolution of information not dissimilar to the early democratic ideals of Web 2.0 in more affluent, democratic nations. However, things did not go as planned for the platform.

The Rohingya genocide

Between 2012 and 2017, violence had been brewing between the Buddhist majority and Rohingya minority in Myanmar. Facebook posts from radical Buddhists had sparked violent attacks when, in 2014, two Muslim men were murdered by a mob who were acting on a viral Facebook post that accused them of attacking a Buddhist girl. The police investigation found the original online accusation had been fabricated.[56] In the years that followed, a torrent of racist abuse based on disinformation on Facebook, directed at Myanmar's Muslims,



FIGURE 11.68 Around 700 000 Rohingya refugees were forced to flee military attacks in Myanmar.

fomented a culture of hatred that spilled into genocide.

In 2016, the Myanmar military (the Tatmadaw) launched a military action against the minority Rohingya Muslims. Over the course of the conflict, ongoing as of 2023, 700 000 people were displaced from their homes, 25 000 were killed and an unknown number of villages were destroyed.[57] The United Nations has since declared the 2016 and 2017 action a genocide.

Amnesty International accused Facebook of creating a filter bubble of hatred in Myanmar.[58] While the prevalence of violent threats and outright racism in Myanmar were driven by personalised algorithms, the *New York Times* claimed that it was driven in part by the Myanmar military itself. Posing as famous sports and popular culture stars, the *NYT* claimed in 2018 that the military launched a coordinated campaign of hundreds of fake and **troll** accounts to stoke hatred. In short, the military were feeding the filter bubble of Myanmar citizens with disinformation with the intention of attacking a minority group.

troll social media accounts who create posts or comments online to 'bait' people

Amnesty has demanded Facebook compensate the Rohingya for the platform's role in the genocide. Hundreds of posts and comments spread disinformation that the minority Muslim group were attempting a takeover of the predominantly Buddhist nation, some of which were openly commented on and spread by the military leadership.[59]

In Amnesty's petition for compensation, it claimed that Facebook had failed to enforce its own community standards in Myanmar, despite warnings at the time, and in quoting a leaked document from 'The Facebook Papers' that dated back to 2019, Amnesty highlighted that Facebook knew its platform was capable of actively creating events such as this. They claimed that they had evidence from a variety of sources suggesting that Facebook knew their 'core product mechanics, such as virality, recommendations, and optimising for engagment' were significant reasons for the proliferation of 'hate speech, divisive political speech, and misinformation' around the globe.

How long Facebook has known remains unclear. Facebook's role in Myanmar in 2017 highlights the challenge for media regulation when large social media organisations and undemocratic societies collide.

What went wrong?

A key challenge for Facebook's community standards flagging feature is the Myanmar language itself. Between 2016–19, most of Myanmar's internet users communicated in the local Zawgyi font, which does not translate well to English.[60] This meant that Facebook's AI moderation tools were never going to adequately detect hate speech.

Despite its effort to enter the country and capture as many users as possible, it was not able to adequately monitor local dialects and flag dangerous content and hate speech. Additionally, most of Facebook's content moderation effort takes place in the USA.

Facebook was willing to provide its service to Myanmar, but arguably did not follow through with local language experts and an awareness of the tensions in Myanmar's complex ethnic and religious society. After banning several Myanmar military leaders and shutting down accounts in 2018, Alex Warofka, a spokesperson for Facebook, admitted:

> … we weren't doing enough to help prevent our platform from being used to foment division and incite offline violence. We agree that we can and should do more.

FIGURE 11.70 Alex Warofka, Product Policy Manager, Meta, 'An Independent Assessment of the Human Rights Impact of Facebook in Myanmar', *Meta* website, 5 November 2018

The Myanmar military have since had a tense relationship with Facebook. The platform has attempted to atone for its mistakes by hiring local experts to help ward off further hate speech in a country that is now heavily reliant on the platform. When violent anti-government protests broke out in 2021, Facebook moved to ban the Tatmadaw altogether from the platform. This is an example of the increasing tension between social media companies and their commitments to freedom of expression versus the power of authoritarian leaders, including the ability to ban platforms from their countries.



FIGURE 11.69 Myanmar information technology volunteers in 2019 assisting mobile phone users in switching from the old Zawgyi font to the 'unicode font', which will mean everything from Wikipedia to Google Maps in Myanmar will be easier to use with a universal code of internet and phone communication.



FIGURE 11.71 The military rulers have often used the armed forces as a means of political and social control in Myanmar.



ACTIVITY 11.40

Analysis: Facebook and Myanmar

1. Explain how Facebook was able to create such a dominant presence in Myanmar.
2. Why would hate speech spread quickly in a nation with little experience of the internet? Use a communication theory in your response.
3. Explain how Facebook's desire for growth has led to inadequate regulation of harmful content and hate speech in nations like Myanmar.
4. Explain the consequences of the Myanmar military's (the Tatmadaw's) manipulation of Facebook.
5. What do 'The Facebook Papers' documents reveal about the platform's prior knowledge of the harm it may have been doing in nations like Myanmar?
6. What challenges do authoritarian governments create for large social media companies and their efforts to regulate content?

ACTIVITY 11.41

SAC practice question

The perceived capacity of media to influence audiences often leads to laws and policies designed to regulate media power.

Analyse issues or challenges in the regulation of the relationship between media and audiences.

Write an extended response using the following structure:

1. Define Facebook and the way it regulates.
2. Define (in detail) the challenge created by Facebook in Myanmar and those created by the Tatmadaw.
3. Define the *consequences* of Facebook's inaction to adequately regulate hate speech.
4. Define the responsibilities and challenges large social media organisations face when enforcing regulation across the globe.

YouTube and conspiracy theories

THE WORLD'S SECOND-LARGEST SEARCH ENGINE

YouTube is the world's largest video-sharing service. It's also the world's second-largest search engine behind its parent company Google. It is also home to un utterly mind-boggling array of content, interests, celebrities and a business ecosystem all of its own. It is only natural that YouTube has a long and troubled history with harmful content. Despite its strict guidelines and effective copyright technology, hours of harmful and dangerous content is uploaded to YouTube every second and, like Facebook, it relies on users to flag and report content when they see it.

Like Facebook's policy, this method of self-regulation creates problems for individuals and governments. Consider the innocence of the children's cartoon *Peppa Pig*. One of the most popular video topics for parents looking to keep their children entertained for a short period, there are a number of live streams of endless *Peppa Pig* on YouTube in almost every language in the world. Sandwiched in between these videos, driven by recommendation algorithms, are a stream of ultra-violent *Peppa Pig* parody videos. Why they exist is hard to determine, as for most users, they are created to generate income from YouTube's advertising, rather than frighten children. Yet these videos are posted with the same tags used for those aimed at children. The obvious result is a traumatising moment for young audiences (and their parents) when one of the offending *Peppa Pig* videos lands in the stream of a vulnerable audience member. While the onus of responsibility must land with the child's parent, these videos are so similar to the real thing that they are difficult to detect. A parent can flag the content, but one would argue that the damage has been done.



FIGURE 11.72 YouTube's self-regulation policy has led to young audiences being exposed to harmful content.

LIFETIMES OF CONTENT

Around 500 hours of content is uploaded to YouTube every minute, making human intervention and regulation impossible. Sophisticated algorithms and AI regulation filters out much of the harmful content in YouTube. However, it is a visual platform and, unlike Facebook or Twitter, text detection is extremely difficult.[61]

Of the two billion active YouTube accounts, 70% of what each user watches is recommended by their personalised algorithm.[62] Worldwide, marketers and advertisers see YouTube as a highly effective platform for targeted advertising – 694 000 hours of video are streamed every minute and its advertising reaches 2.6 billion people a year[63] – and as a result, YouTube is not just extraordinarily profitable, but deeply intertwined with some of the biggest brands and data harvesting companies in the world.

It has not been without its controversies though.



ACTIVITY 11.42

Group research task

In groups of four, choose a YouTube controversy to research and explain how the platform has created challenges for audiences and issues with its own regulation.

- In your response, consider how harmful content is presented to audiences.
- Explain how this content could impact vulnerable audiences.
- Suggest a communication theory that could suggest potential for negative influence.
- Consider how traditional forms of media regulation, like those seen in Australia, would have possibly prevented this content from reaching audiences.

YouTuber Kanghua Ren, aka **ReSet**, was sentenced to 15 months in prison and given a $22 300 fine after he filmed himself handing a homeless man an Oreo filled with toothpaste instead of creme. The judge ruled he had abused the dignity of the homeless man.	In 2017, arguably one of the most famous YouTubers of all time, **Logan Paul**, posted a video featuring a person who had committed suicide in a Japanese forest. Paul was temporarily banned from the platform but allowed to return soon after.	In January 2017, **PewDiePie**, aka Felix Kjellberg, shared videos that included anti-Semitic jokes or Nazi imagery. After the videos went viral, earning PewDiePie serious backlash, the Walt Disney Company cancelled its contract with the YouTuber.	Michael and Heather Martin, aka **DaddyOFive** and **MommyOFive**, shared videos that many argued depicted abuse of their five children. The videos were 'pranks', but they appeared to cause the kids serious distress. In 2017, the pair lost custody of their children.	In 2018, the '**Tide Pod**' challenge took YouTube by storm, encouraging viewers to eat laundry detergent pods. A CNN report remarked that poison control centres in the USA received the same number of calls in 15 days of 2018 that they had received for the entirety of 2017.
In 2014, British YouTuber **Sam Pepper** uploaded a controversial video titled 'Fake Hand Ass Pinch Prank'. Pepper faced claims by many girls of sexual harassment. An open letter of complaint received more than 100 000 signatures.	YouTuber **PayMoney Wubby**'s exposé of fake 'animal rescue videos' highlighted the failure of YouTube's moderation system when he showed how many of the videos were staged and the animals were often abused.	In 2019, popular YouTuber **Brooke Houts** and her dog were run off YouTube after Houts posted a video where she appears to hit, spit on and punch her dog, arguably the bigger star of her channel. Houts left YouTube 24 hours later, but returned in 2022.	In 2020, video game streamer **ImJayStation** was demonetised [loss of earning potential] by YouTube for faking the death of his girlfriend to increase views among his mostly young audience. He was eventually banned from YouTube altogether in 2021.	In 2020, family lifestyle YouTuber **Myka Stauffer** left the platform after it had been revealed that an adopted child was 're-homed' by the YouTuber and her husband after the child's autism proved too difficult to handle and was, at the admission of Stauffer, adopted to increase views.

HOW YOUTUBE REGULATES

YouTubers who will do anything to increase their views is but one element of a wide YouTube ecosystem. The platform has its own community guidelines designed to police content being uploaded with gentle reminders to the uploaders themselves. YouTube's AI moderation can detect some of this content as it is uploaded; however, for the most part, it relies on the goodwill of millions of internet users who upload content every minute.

YouTube's AI moderation works by employing the flagged content from human users and its own moderation teams to teach the machine what is and is not deemed offensive on the platform. Between 2018 and 2021, YouTube claims its AI systems removed 83 million videos that breached its guidelines. Of these videos, most are taken down before they have reached 10 views.[64] However, it is YouTube that determines what these community standards and guidelines are. YouTube only changed its hate speech policy banning neo-Nazis and Holocaust denial in 2019.[65]

Like Facebook and other social media services, YouTube places some of the responsibility for regulation on the users. Its community guidelines begin with:

> The safety of our creators, viewers, and partners is our highest priority. We look to each of you to help us protect this unique and vibrant community. It's important you understand our Community Guidelines, and the role they play in our shared responsibility to keep YouTube safe.

FIGURE 11.73 'Community Guidelines', *YouTube.com*, accessed 7 March 2023

In 2023, YouTube's content policy covered the following:

- spam and deceptive practices
- sensitive content
- violent and dangerous content
- misinformation
- monetisation policies.

Each one has a subset of categories and specific guidelines on how each of these is enforced.

ACTIVITY 11.43

Analysis: YouTube's community guidelines

1. Find YouTube's community guidelines under 'terms' and choose a category and a subset to explore. Using the examples provided by YouTube, explain how specific content can be seen to be in breach of its guidelines.
2. Using one or more examples from the previous activity, explain how these content creators breached YouTube's guidelines.
3. Now compare how these breaches were brought to light. Does YouTube rely on its AI moderation of audiences to regulate its own content?
4. What challenges can you see that may arise from this?



FIGURE 11.74 YouTube is the world's largest video-streaming service.

YouTube's challenges with misinformation and disinformation

Like all social media platforms, YouTube has its challenges regulating misinformation and disinformation. While it has a range of specific policies in place, countless videos promoting conspiracy theories or COVID-19 misinformation have plagued the platform in recent years.

As you have learnt already, platforms like Facebook actively promoted content that would anger users in the past, and a 2018 study by MIT in the USA found that false news stories are 70% more likely to be retweeted on Twitter. It also found that it takes factual news six times longer to reach 1500 people as it does fake news to reach the same number of people.[66]

Clearly, on all social media there is a challenge in regulating and monitoring misinformation and disinformation. JM Berger, an author and researcher who focuses on political extremism (and how it has risen due to disinformation online), claims that advances in digital technology, the internet and increased audience agency have played major roles in this spread.

ACTIVITY 11.44

Research task: Misinformation and the media

Search online for the *Wired* article 'Why the US is Primed for Radicalization', written by Thor Benson in December 2022. Read it closely and pay particular attention to quotes from JM Berger and Arie Kruglanski, a professor of psychology at the University of Maryland. Use what you have learnt to respond to the following questions:

1. What role has social media played in reducing trust and reliability in the media?
2. What does Berger's quote about the transmission of ideas in the past compared to today tell you about the role of gatekeepers in modern media?
3. What does Kruglanski believe is the motivation for people to share conspiracy theories online?
4. Considering what you have learnt about personalised algorithms and surveillance capitalism, why would large social media companies possibly be reluctant to tackle misinformation on their platforms?

YOUTUBE, ALEX JONES AND PIZZAGATE

JM Berger has long focused on the way social media has played a role in *radicalising* ordinary people into believing and supporting extreme ideas. In recent years, the COVID-19 pandemic and periods of economic difficulty have left many people around the world feeling uncertain and powerless, and as a result, gravitating towards extremism. Where do they find this? Online.

Alex Jones is one such social media personality with a history of sharing misinformation and disinformation. In 2022, the families of the victims of the 2012 Sandy Hook School shooting successfully sued Jones for repeatedly spreading the disproven conspiracy theory that the shooting was faked. In 2019, Jones was banned from YouTube, Spotify, Apple podcasts and a range of other social media platforms for spreading falsehoods through his online TV show *InfoWars*.



FIGURE 11.75 Alex Jones is an online TV host, political extremist and conspiracy theorist accused of spreading misinformation and disinformation.

Jones has long claimed his program should never have been taken seriously. However, the creation and production of his conspiracy theories and stories on Sandy Hook led to a horrific campaign of online harassment suffered by the Sandy Hook families. One of the most controversial (there are many) theories that Jones promoted was Pizzagate.

Pizzagate is a disproven conspiracy theory that spread online in 2016 and encouraged one man to drive five hours across the United States to enter a Washington, DC pizza restaurant armed with a machine gun and open fire. The man, eventually arrested after the full restaurant of patrons managed to escape, confessed to entering the restaurant, Comet Pizza, after following the Pizzagate conspiracy on YouTube and other social media sites.



FIGURE 11.76 Comet Pizza in Washington, DC was the site where a gunman opened fire based on the Pizzagate conspiracy theory.

The theory suggested that 2016 US presidential candidate Hillary Clinton and others were running an underground child exploitation ring, under the Comet Pizza restaurant. The offender did not find the supposed underground dungeon but did shoot and destroy a laptop.

YouTube played a significant role in spreading the Pizzagate conspiracy theory. Alex Jones' channels, still on YouTube at the time of the shooting, as well as countless other videos pushing the theory, inspired the shooter to act.



Australian journalist Van Badham closely followed the case and stated that the offender had frequently binged on YouTube conspiracy theory videos and was swept up in a growing online phenomenon surrounding *#Pizzagate*. Badham insists that bad faith actors had set up bots to promote the hashtag across social media platforms and that the conspiracy theory had been building on fringe websites 4Chan and Reddit (which are notorious for their near total lack of regulation).[67]

The owners of the Washington, DC restaurant, and their staff, had faced months of abusive messages and harassment from a growing army of online conspiracy theorists. Customers posting images from their visits to the restaurant were also being stalked online. The gunman was not the first conspiracy theorist to visit Comet Pizza either. Several others had already entered the restaurant and verbally abused staff. The owners had attempted to contact Twitter, Facebook and YouTube to have the conspiracy theory addressed by the social media platforms, but were ignored.

On 22 November, Reddit shut down the subreddit on Pizzagate due to the countless violent threats to the owners of Pizzagate. There were over 150 000 tweets on the subject that evening. The very next day, Alex Jones published a video on YouTube called 'Pizzagate is real'.[68]

Badham's exhaustive research into the Comet Pizza gunman discovered that he was an avid watcher of Alex Jones and had spent hours 'down the rabbit hole' of the *InfoWars* videos. In one video, shortly before the gunman entered the store, Jones urged his followers to 'investigate it for yourself'. Just weeks later, the gunman did just that.

What followed was an incident that speaks to the dangers of harmful content online as a combination of platforms, some regulated poorly and others like YouTube that preference engagement over regulation, could result in real-world violence and harm. As Badham states:

> What Pizzagate established was that skilful manipulation of social media could manufacture political narratives so compelling they could overwhelm reality.

FIGURE 11.77 Van Badham (2021), *QAnon and On: A Short and Shocking History of Internet Conspiracy Cults*, Hardie Grant Books, p. 141

YouTube has since banned Alex Jones and worked diligently to remove Pizzagate content from its platform. However, as with a dangerous *Peppa Pig* parody video, it occurs long after the potential for influence, harm and negative behaviour has been recognised. Immediately after the arrest of the gunman, followers of the Pizzagate conspiracy theory immediately assumed the gunman was a '**false flag**' and a government operative designed to 'bury the truth'. While Pizzagate still exists online, it has morphed into a much larger and significantly more dangerous conspiracy cult called QAnon.

false flag an act committed with the intent of disguising the actual source of responsibility and pinning blame on another party

ACTIVITY 11.45

Analysis: Social media and radical ideas

1. Evaluate the role of social media in spreading radical and extreme ideas. What other factors could contribute to this?
2. How could vulnerable audiences potentially be affected by the large social media following of personalities like Alex Jones?
3. Analyse the role of parasocial relationships and filter bubbles in the actions of the gunman.
4. Evaluate the role of YouTube's regulation in the Comet Pizza incident.

CONSPIRACY THEORIES AND THE CHALLENGES FOR GOVERNMENTS

On 6 January 2021, thousands of protestors stormed the Capitol Building in Washington, DC in an attempt to stop the certification of US President Joe Biden and overthrow the 2020 US election result. The event is considered one of the darkest in America's long history of democracy and led to copycat events in Brazil in 2023.

The protestors were there for a range of reasons. Most were driven by support for the former President Donald Trump, who had been driving his own conspiracy that a possible 2020 election win had been stolen from him; some were far-right militia groups; and others, including Ashleigh Babbit, a 36-year-old protestor who was fatally shot by police as she stormed the building, were ardent believers in a global conspiracy theory called QAnon.

QAnon was a conspiracy theory made significantly larger thanks to social media. QAnon assumes that a whole group of international leaders or 'elites' are behind a global child exploitation ring. These theories are not new. They are centuries-old myths that have been used by countless bad faith actors to persecute minority groups.

However, social media has amplified them and QAnon became a central focus for believers in global conspiracy cults, those that thought the pandemic and its vaccinations were a global conspiracy, those who followed the stolen election theory, those who think the Earth is flat, those holding on to centuries-old anti-Semitic racism and even those that believe the so-called 'global elites' are lizards!

What made QAnon more dangerous than theories that came before it was that its believers used social media to make violent threats against a range of public figures, split up families and led to the near disruption of the US government itself. In 2019, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) labelled QAnon a domestic terrorist threat.[69]



FIGURE 11.78 Rioters stormed the US Capitol Building on 6 January 2021, in an attempt to overturn the 2020 election results.



FIGURE 11.79 A protestor in a QAnon t-shirt confronts police inside the Capitol Building on 6 January 2021

The theory was born on 4Chan and then gravitated to the darker and completely unregulated 8kun. Both are online message boards where threats of violence, racism, misogyny, homophobia and conspiracy theories run wild. These sites are not widely popular due to the significant level of knowledge required by users to navigate the intricate conventions and language of the message boards. However, it was from here that the QAnon conspiracy spread to Twitter, Facebook and YouTube and back again.

The main issue of concern is not the conspiracy theory itself, which requires significant mental gymnastics to believe, but rather a combination of political and economic uncertainty (especially in the United States during the 2020 election race), a lack of effective regulation of misinformation and disinformation on the biggest social media sites in the world and the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the beginning of 2019, nearly 25% of American adults claimed to get their news from YouTube, rather than traditional news sources.[70] In March 2019, online posts mentioning the QAnon conspiracy theory jumped 700%. Why? We were all at home in lockdown. The beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic was a time of incredible global uncertainty and with little else to do but sit on social media, looking for answers and news on the pandemic, many travelled down the rabbit hole of conspiracy theories. Trust in traditional news media had eroded, as in the early days of the pandemic, few had answers on what the future might hold.

The New York Times' Kevin Roose argued in 2022 that as a media platform, YouTube actually played a big role in moving QAnon from the fringes to the mainstream. It did this by hosting documentaries produced by QAnon followers that 'offered an introductory crash course in the movement's core beliefs'.

Roose's suggestion reflects the reality of the time. YouTube introduced audiences to fringe conspiracy ideas, its personalised algorithms amplified it for those audiences and drove the more vulnerable audiences (amplified again by the pandemic) to fringe websites where regulation of misinformation and disinformation was nearly non-existent.

A 2020 Pew Research Center investigation into the relationship between YouTube, QAnon videos and the 6 January riots at the Capitol Building suggest that YouTube could and should have acted to regulate the dangerous content much earlier:

> Overall, 5% of videos published by the 100 most viewed YouTube news channels at the time of the study included the word 'QAnon'. The vast majority of those mentions came from just a handful of YouTube news channels: 11 of these channels studied produced 80% of the videos mentioning QAnon.

FIGURE 11.80 Pew Research Center, '5 Facts about the QAnon Conspiracy Theories, *Pew Research* website, 16 November 2020

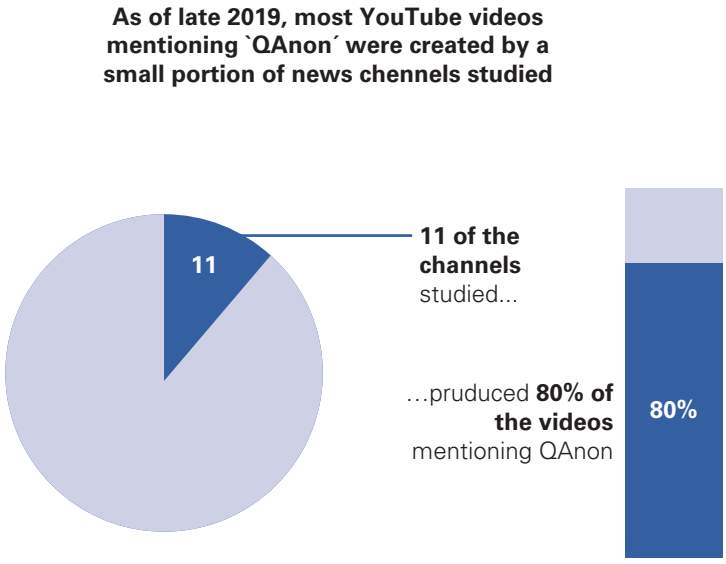


FIGURE 11.81 Source: adapted from the Pew Research Center, '5 Facts about the QAnon Conspiracy Theories', *Pew Research* website, 16 November 2020

YouTube did act after the 2020 election result and the obvious threat posed by the movement, which had grown internationally. If the pandemic had driven people to conspiracy theories, the claims of a 'stolen election' in the wake of the 2020 result made it worse.

Like Facebook and Twitter, YouTube moved to ban QAnon channels, but did not ban the topic altogether, rather removing elements of this type of content from recommendation algorithms.[71] Tens of thousands of videos were removed and it terminated hundreds more channels promoting the conspiracy theory.[72]

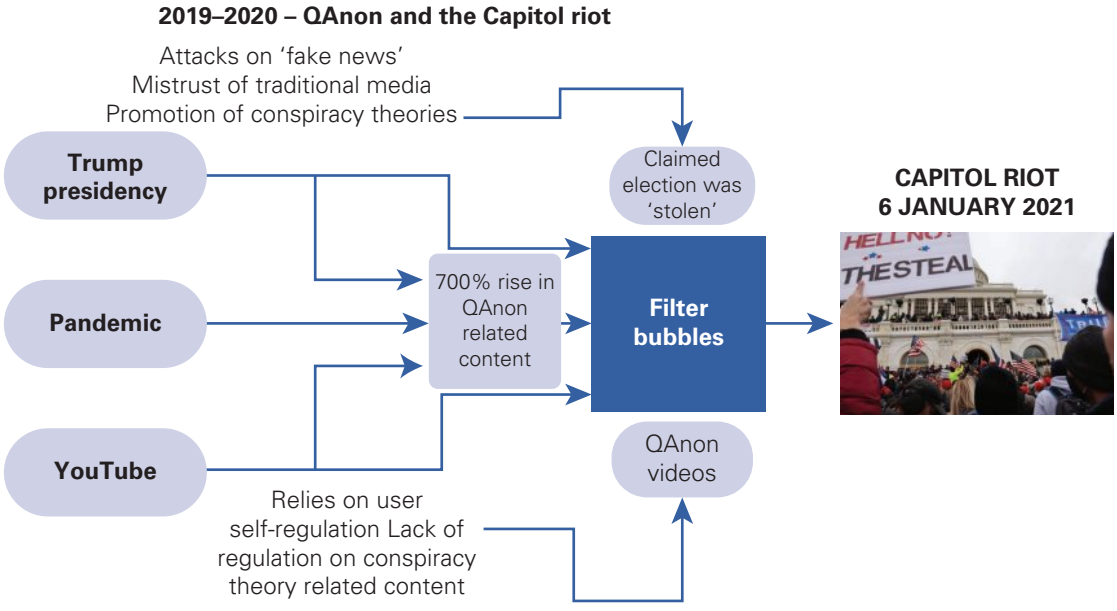


FIGURE 11.82 Thousands of protestors marched on the US Congress Building to stop a vote to confirm the democratic election of Joe Biden. Hundreds broke inside, many of whom were QAnon supporters. This was a direct attempt to overturn democracy.

However, this was mere months before the 6 January riots, and it could be argued that the eventual moderation and regulation of content that was making open and violent threats to prominent individuals was too late. Among the crowd at the Capitol Building riot were hundreds of protesters wearing QAnon merchandise, acting upon months and years of exposure to dangerous online content.

ACTIVITY 11.46

Analysis: Conspiracy theories and the Capitol riot

The day after the Capitol Building riot, Jim Steyer of Common Sense Media stated:

> The violence that we witnessed today in our nation's capital is a direct response to the misinformation, conspiracy theories and hate speech that have been allowed to spread on social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter etc … Social media platforms must be held accountable for their complicity in the destruction of our democracy.

FIGURE 11.83 Jim Steyer quoted in Kari Paul, '"Four Years of Propaganda": Trump Social Media Bans Come Too Late, Experts Say', *The Guardian*, 8 January 2021



FIGURE 11.84 A makeshift gallows was erected outside the Capitol Building to intimidate US politicians during the 6 January riots in Washington, DC.

In addition to this, *Guardian* journalist Kari Paul called on governments to take a more active role in enforcing regulation on social media:

> In the absence of any meaningful regulation, tech companies have had little incentive to regulate their massively profitable platforms (and) curb the spread of falsehoods that produce engagement.

FIGURE 11.85 Kari Paul, '"Four Years of Propaganda": Trump Social Media Bans Come Too Late, Experts Say', *The Guardian*, 8 January 2021

Using the above quotes, respond to the following questions:

1. Explain the role of filter bubbles in spreading conspiracy theories prior to the Capitol Building riots in 2021. What other factors contributed to this event?
2. Explain the challenges to democracy that the spread of dangerous conspiracy theories can and have created.
3. Compare YouTube's existing community guidelines to the nature of conspiracy theory content, and analyse how and where this content could and should have been moderated.
4. What role did surveillance capitalism play in the lack of regulation towards misinformation and disinformation prior to this same event?
5. Explain the challenges in the relationship between governments, audiences, global media institutions and the regulation of harmful media content.

ACTIVITY 11.47

SAC practice question

The perceived capacity of media to influence audiences often leads to laws and policies designed to regulate media power.

Analyse issues or challenges in the regulation of the relationship between media and audiences.

Write an extended response to the following questions:

1. Describe YouTube and the way it regulates.
2. Define (in detail) the challenge created by YouTube and the rise of conspiracy theories.
3. Define the *consequences* of YouTube's inaction in adequately regulating misinformation and disinformation.
4. Define the responsibilities and challenges large social media organisations face when enforcing regulation across the globe.

11.8 Ethical and legal issues in the media

LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of this chapter section, you will have learnt about:

- ethical and legal issues in the media.

Contemporary media is in the midst of a legal and ethical dilemma. While governments and individuals scramble to find their place in the media, and determine what agency and control they truly have, the institutions that dominate media today have created legal and ethical issues that challenge the foundations of society. Surveillance capitalism has become a dominant form of trade as internet user data is spread across more platforms and daily processes than is truly understood. The line separating legal and ethical breaches of the relationship between media stakeholders is not black and white, but multiple shades of grey.

Your goal should be to always clarify that line. With a critical eye, you should be able to see right from wrong and clarify how and when this relationship is showing signs of breaking.

- **Ethical issues:** ethical issues, particularly when examining social media, occur when events and practices become common that are at odds with the accepted community standards of any one community. While not illegal, ethical issues blur the line between right and wrong, acceptable and unacceptable.
- **Legal issues:** When exploring social media, legal issues are more serious. When the laws of individual locations are broken, it creates challenges for authorities to draw a clear line between the free access to communication tools and breaches of existing laws.

There is no better place in the media to explore these legal and ethical issues than popular social media platform, TikTok.



FIGURE 11.86 In 2023, TikTok was the fastest-growing social media app on the planet.



FIGURE 11.87 TikTok dance crazes have driven the popularity of the app and the music industry itself.

What makes TikTok different?

TikTok is fast becoming the world's most popular social media app. At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, TikTok exploded in popularity around the world as millions were locked down at home, looking for a fast, fun and easy way to connect.

Famous for its short, fun and accessible videos, TikTok rose to prominence in 2019 and exploded internationally, creating an entire internet culture of dances, trends and language that is unique to the platform, never mind the internet. TikTok's mission statement is to 'inspire creativity and bring joy'.

Today, TikTok's rise is unprecedented, even in the Web 2.0 era:

- The app has been downloaded more than two billion times.
- There are at least one billion active users each month.
- The average user spends 50 minutes on the app each day, opening it at least eight times.[73]
- TikTok's largest audiences are between 10 and 30 years old.
- Roughly 60% of TikTok's users are female.[74]
- Globally, TikTok users watch 167 million hours of videos on the app in a minute.[75]

TikTok's popularity is hard to quantify in other ways. The influence of trends, songs and language is extensive. If a song becomes attached to a popular dance and trend on the platform it will soon find its way to the top of music sharing sites like Spotify. TikTok has been responsible for helping unknown musicians rocket to international attention and revive classics, such as when a skateboarder sipping cranberry juice brings new life to Fleetwood Mac's 'Dreams'.

Few social media sites or services have experienced the rise and influence of TikTok.

Significantly, TikTok's service works differently to other social media. While Facebook, Instagram and YouTube allow you to determine what you want to read, see and engage with (and, of course, track and feed you more), TikTok takes most of this out of your hands with the 'For You' page. As the home page of the app, 'For You' is an endless stream of content that the app decides is what you want to see based on your behaviour, rather than choices.

There are two significant differences to the way TikTok's algorithm works:

1. It harvests a range of data from the user. From likes, scrolls, engagement time and rewatch counts, TikTok's own privacy statement has stated in the past that it collects 'faceprints' and 'voiceprints' of users, to analyse and improve the algorithm.
2. Few outside of TikTok truly understand how the algorithm works. While there is generally some understanding of the way Facebook, YouTube and others collect data, TikTok's algorithm is not only superior in creating engagement, but largely a mystery to the rest of the tech industry.[76]

ACTIVITY 11.48

TikTok and you

1 As a class, brainstorm and list the vocabulary, dances and trends that are unique to TikTok. How many can you come up with?

2 Are you on TikTok? Consider what the 'For You' page suggests about your own behaviour on the app. What does it know about you?

DATA HARVESTING

TikTok collects more data than any other social media service. Not only does TikTok collect biometric data of your voice and face along with your behaviour on the app, but it can also record your keystrokes when browsing a website you have visited from a link in TikTok. So, if you open a webpage within TikTok's **in-app browser**, it can track everything you click on, scroll through and potentially record passwords and credit card information that you enter in that browser. In 2022, TikTok claimed that this **keylogger** is inactive, but that it even exists means that it can be used without the knowledge of users.[77]



FIGURE 11.88 Billions of connected devices and users have led to investigations into TikTok's data harvesting practices.

A report by a US-Australian cybersecurity company, Internet 2.0 found in 2022 that TikTok is one of the most aggressive collectors of data on the web.

TikTok can collect user contact lists, access calendars, scan hard drives including external ones and geolocate devices on an hourly basis.[78] These settings can be changed by the user, but they are set by default whenever a new user signs up. Internet 2.0's report stated that not only are the settings significantly more intrusive than other social media apps, but also unnecessary:

> In our analysis the TikTok mobile application does not prioritise privacy. Permissions and device information collection are overly intrusive and not necessary for the application to function. … The application can and will run successfully without any of this data being gathered. This leads us to believe that the only reason this information has been gathered is for data harvesting.

FIGURE 11.89 Thomas Perkins et al., 'TikTok Analysis', *Internet 2.0: Military-Grade Cyber Protection*, July 2022

So what's the big deal? Surveillance capitalism has taught us that our behaviour is being tracked across and off the web no matter which service we use, creating data that will be sold on to the benefit of others.

What makes TikTok different is that it is owned by a Chinese-based company with links to the Chinese government. Very little is understood about what the data is collected for beyond advertising, and in the second decade of the 2000s, the Chinese government has begun to assert its authority and power around the world.

in-app browser a browser that acts within an app, allowing the user's behaviour to be easily tracked

keylogger a computer program that records every keystroke made by a computer user



Government officials around the world have expressed deep concern over TikTok's data harvesting practices. Chinese government law dictates that they can request access to the data collected by Chinese tech companies[79] and, as such, many world leaders have become concerned about the intentions of the emerging world superpower and the 'opaque' intentions for the data it collects.

In 2021, the Indian government banned TikTok entirely. In 2023, US politicians renewed concerns over the political threat posed by the collection of so much data from US citizens, banning its use from government-issued devices at the end of 2022.[80]

ACTIVITY 11.49

Analysis: TikTok and data collection

1. Analyse what you have learnt about personalised algorithms, surveillance capitalism and the data collection practices of TikTok. What do you see as the primary purpose of TikTok's data collection?
2. With your answer to the previous question in mind, research recent moves by governments around the world towards the app. How have these changed? What do they tell you about concerns over government interference via data from a social media app?

HOW TIKTOK REGULATES

TikTok's content moderation is among its most controversial elements. While it claims to be an app that inspires 'creativity and joy', it has come under fire over its potential impact on mental health and a perceived suppression of political commentary and protest.

Like the others, TikTok employs a combination of AI and human moderation that responds to many of the same issues as Facebook and YouTube such as:

- safety of minors
- dangerous acts and challenges
- bullying and harassment
- hateful behaviour
- violent and graphic content
- integrity and authenticity.

ACTIVITY 11.50

Research task

1. Research and analyse TikTok's community guidelines page. Using the example of the 'dangerous acts and challenges' heading, explain how, and if, TikTok accurately explains what qualifies as a dangerous act or challenge.
2. Does this description fit or challenge the content you have seen on the service?

ETHICAL ISSUES: SUPPRESSION OF POLITICAL CONTENT

Human moderation is obviously an important element of TikTok's regulation of content; however, this creates challenges when considering the agency users have with the service and the opaque decisions that guide what does and does not get banned from the platform.



FIGURE 11.90 TikTok moderators have claimed that political protests in some of the world's trouble spots are being suppressed by the platform.

TikTok has human teams of moderators based around the world, and in 2021, one of the few former employees to speak out stated that it was taking sides in regional conflicts and banning videos based on the guidelines of superiors. Gadear Ayed is a Londoner of Iraqi origin who was appointed to the 'Israel Team' of TikTok's global moderation efforts. In a period of renewed conflict between Palestinians and Israeli settlers in the troubled region, Ayed has stated that she was instructed to suppress Palestinian protest groups and their accounts under the banner of 'terrorism' stating:

> Accounts were being blocked, videos were being removed, just in order to act like there was nothing going on and silence the Palestinian voice.

FIGURE 11.91 Gadear Ayed quoted in Avani Dias, '"There's Not Enough Brutality": Former TikTok Moderator Says Workers Told to Leave Up "Disturbing" Violence against Palestinians', *Triple J Hack/ABC* website, 9 November 2021

While the conflict in Israel between settlers and Palestinian groups has a long, bloody and difficult history that divides opinion globally, many have suggested that TikTok chose a side. Similarly, in 2020, TikTok was forced to apologise after creators claimed it had suppressed 'Black Lives Matter' and 'GeorgeFloyd' hashtags in the United States.[81]

A report on *Hack*, a current affairs program from the Australian broadcaster Triple J, stated in 2021:

> The Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) conducted the first academic investigation into censorship on TikTok and found hashtags about the mass detention of Uyghurs, Hong Kong protests, LGBTQI and anti-Russian government videos were among those being suppressed.

FIGURE 11.92 Avani Dias, '"There's Not Enough Brutality": Former TikTok Moderator Says Workers Told to Leave Up "Disturbing" Violence against Palestinians', *Triple J Hack/ABC* website, 9 November 2021



FIGURE 11.93 While much of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement began and was driven by social media, TikTok has been criticised for suppressing the hashtag and related posts in 2020.



ETHICAL ISSUES: COLLECTION OF BIOMETRIC DATA

While we may willingly give up our privacy through data, the unique imprint of faces and voices is apparently being recorded by TikTok. According to Dr Niels Wouters and Professor Jeannie Paterson of the University of Melbourne:

> These biometrics are unique and personal digital replicas of appearance, behaviour and expression. They are comparable to fingerprints as they can help others identify, surveil and profile people of interest.

FIGURE 11.94 Dr Niels Wouters and Professor Jeannie Paterson, '*TikTok* Captures your Face', *Pursuit*, Uni Melb website

In early 2021, TikTok paid $92 million in the USA to settle a case that alleged TikTok had improperly used facial and voice recognition data. The details of the case were never heard as TikTok's legal team preferred to avoid a court case.[82] While TikTok has often denied that this data collection takes place, in 2023, its privacy policy states that it 'may' collect images of your face and body, descriptions of your physical attributes and summaries of the words spoken in your 'User Content'.

In short, if you post to TikTok, data on your face and voice are collected and stored. Aside from the basic privacy concerns, Wouters and Paterson of Melbourne University claim a greater problem exists:

deep fake videos a deceptively realistic but fake piece of media created by altering existing video or audio material

> 'What if data security is breached? Suddenly your identity and biometrics may be harnessed by criminals that create **deep fake videos** that could be used to blackmail, extort and cyberbully.'[83]

FIGURE 11.95 Dr Niels Wouters and Professor Jeannie Paterson, 'TikTok Captures your Face', Pursuit, Uni Melb website

Wouters and Paterson argue further that the reasons behind the collection of biometric data by TikTok are unknown. Where does this data really go? What is it used for? Interestingly, TikTok does not collect biometric data in the UK and European Union, where governments are already discussing a ban on facial recognition technology in public spaces.[84] Adults are free to decide if their data is shared or not. However, TikTok is facing several legal threats in the European Union for the collection of data on underage users without adequate consent.

The ethical question is, should an app be able to collect so much data that our lives are no longer private before we are legally able to make a decision for ourselves?

ETHICAL ISSUES: NEGATIVE IMPACTS – VULNERABLE AUDIENCES

In the midst of the COVID-19 lockdowns, the Australian eating disorder support group The Butterfly Foundation claimed that social media was having an increasingly damaging effect on young users. The long-running trend of videos, couched in the 'wellness' genre of social media, called 'What I eat in a day', was having an adverse effect on the health of young Australians.

When considering the power of the TikTok 'For You' algorithm and the sheer volume of the data it collects on users, this was of grave concern as The Butterfly Foundation were discovering links between these videos and darker, more concerning content that was encouraging eating disorders . In a May 2020 statement to the ABC, The Butterfly Foundation claimed that as bad as it is to see potentially harmful content being created and shared on TikTok, the platform's algorithm makes it even more dangerous for certain audiences.

For example, users with eating disorders may be influenced by such behaviours themselves and make negative comparisons to the original videos.[85]

While TikTok's community guidelines claim to ban dangerous hashtags and remove this content, The Butterfly Foundation found that this information was available and hidden in coded language to avoid **shadowbanning**.

shadowbanning a punishment where social media platforms remove a user's ability to post, but does not remove their account

An ABC *Four Corners* investigation in 2021 found one Australia user who was hospitalised with an eating disorder had been encouraged in part by her TikTok algorithm and existing vulnerabilities. The teenager, 'Claire', stated that it took almost two months of work with her psychologists to actively re-engineer her TikTok algorithm (un-following pages and actively working to follow others) to remove the harmful content, and yet the content would still reappear in her feed while she was in recovery.[86]

In response to the allegations made by *Four Corners*, TikTok stated that they don't share content that promotes eating disorders and that when 'a user searches for terms related to these issues' they are redirected instead to locally-based support helplines like The Butterfly Foundation.

The ethical question is around TikTok's appeal and targeting a youth audience. Given the volume of content uploaded each minute and its quick and easily digestible content (especially through a smartphone), it's not possible for TikTok to monitor all of the content all of the time, yet should TikTok be available to such a young audience?



FIGURE 11.96 Users and investigators have claimed that TikTok's algorithm creates challenges for individual users and shadowbanning of content.

ETHICAL ISSUES: SHADOWBANNING AND DISCRIMINATION

An issue that has plagued TikTok since its beginnings is the suggestion that it actively shadowbans specific content (such as the BLM movement) and discriminates against specific user groups. The same *Four Corners* investigation claimed that users with disabilities and those with African heritage frequently find their content either moderated or suppressed by TikTok with little explanation.[87] This is a claim that TikTok has also denied.

Shadowbanning does not remove a user from the platform, but effectively stops the content from being shared, so the user may not be immediately aware of the shadowban. In 2020, TikTok was accused of shadowbanning LGBTQI+ content. An investigation by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute in 2020 found that TikTok was applying laws from countries where LGBTQI+ people face legal restrictions to others where they were not, such as Australia. In short, the hashtag #gay written in the languages of countries where LGBTQI+ people face jailtime were being suppressed globally,[88] restricting the access of people to reach an audience where their voices are legal and celebrated.

African American creators have long accused the platform of shadowbanning black creators. America's black creators are a significant contributor to the culture of TikTok globally and have claimed that trends and dances that originated from black creators were not being recognised and attributed as their original posts were being suppressed. Why? Some have suggested that AI content moderation has been blamed for misappropriating the word 'black' and other tags used by black creators as hate speech.[89] Twenty-three-year-old TikTok creator

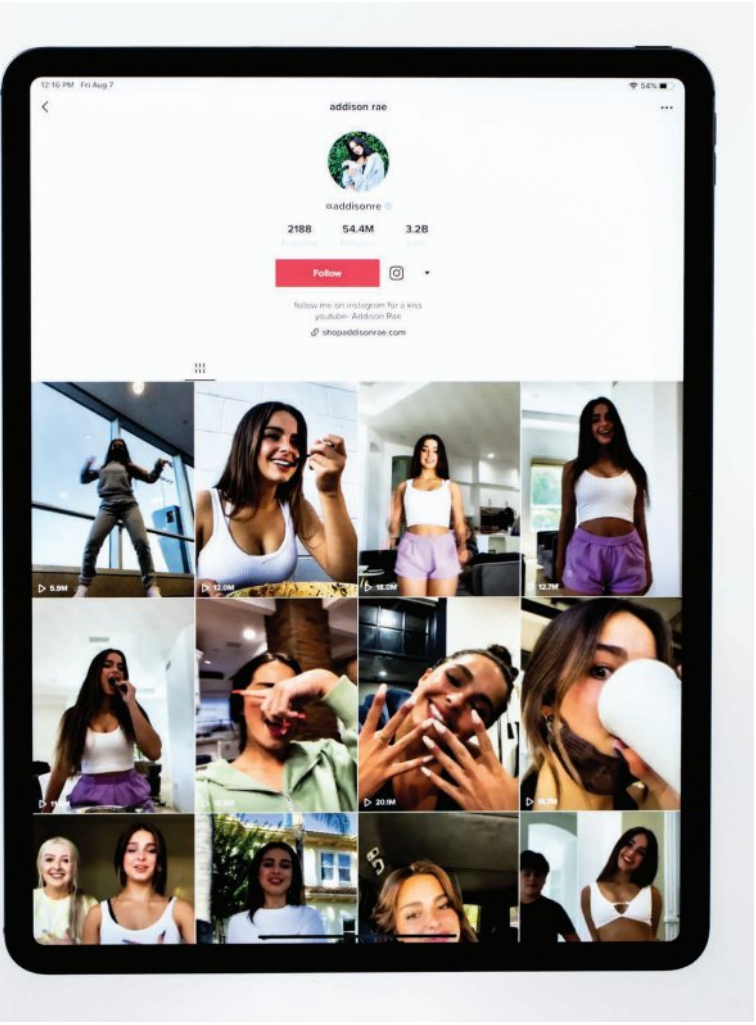


FIGURE 11.97 Addison Rae was accused of performing TikTok dances created in the African American TikTok community without attributing their source.

Ziggy Tyler ran an experiment in a 2021 post that prevented him from typing the word 'Black'. It did, however, allow him to type in phrases such as 'pro white', 'neo Nazi' and 'anti-semite'.[90]

Others seem to find their posts suppressed without explanation, as there is a limited appeal process within TikTok to explain why posts are suppressed.[91]

Many of those who have faced shadowbans have claimed that there is a bias within the algorithm that leads to the suppression of black creators as more globally popular creators like Addison Rae perform dances created by African American creators, creating more views and engagement. In 2021, this alleged bias, fed by consistent claims of black creators being shadowbanned with no explanation, led to the #BlackTikTokStrike, where thousands of African American dance choreographers refused to post dance content, forcing TikTok to issue a public apology.[92]

The ethical issue here surrounds the purported bias that appears to be built in to the recommendation algorithm and AI content moderation, which TikTok has apologised for and attempted to address. However, what issues may this create in the future that we are, so far, unaware of?

LEGAL ISSUES: DANGEROUS PRODUCTS AND TRENDS

In late 2022, TikTok announced that it had begun banning content labelled with the hashtag #sunburntchallenge, where users were posting images of their sunburn. After the hashtag had over 200 million views, TikTok was publicly criticised by the Melanoma Institute of Australia in a **National Press Club** address, and in reply began tagging related videos with advice to dissuade users from engaging in the trend. Joint medical director of the Melanoma Institute, Professor Richard Scolyer, stated that:

National Press Club an association of Australian journalists and media professionals that host debates, discussions and speeches

> TikTok picked up the phone days after the Press Club address and said 'we want to work with you to change this' … the result is they're banning a hashtag that we highlighted as promoting dangerous behaviour – the sunburnt challenge.

FIGURE 11.98 Professor Richard Scolyer quoted in Garry Maddox, 'Australians are Obsessed': TikTok Announces Ban on Tanning Videos', *The Sydney Morning Herald* website, 1 December 2022

However, the hashtag had already reached a huge audience. The Melanoma Institute projects that 16 000 people could die from melanoma-related illnesses by 2030 if action is not taken.

Furthermore, in 2022, the Australian Therapeutic Goods Administration warned that a dangerous medication known as Melanotan or 'The Barbie Drug' was being promoted by influencers as a fast way to develop a tan. The TGA states that the drug should only be prescribed by a doctor in rare cases and one of the versions promoted by influencers had not even been given approval in late 2022 and its misuse could have fatal consequences.[93] In response, Tik Tok removed over 600 000 videos mentioning the product. Australian public liability lawyer Lily Boskovski said:

> Social media platforms, such as TikTok and Instagram, should have an ethical obligation to provide information that's accurate and doesn't harm young people who can be so easily influenced to buy an unregulated product so quickly online.

FIGURE 11.99 Lawyer Lily Boskovski quoted in Andrew Taylor, 'TikTokers Using Genetic Disorder Drug for the Side Effects of Tanning, Weight Loss', *The Sydney Morning Herald* website, 6 November 2022

The potential legal issues for TikTok here are endless and do not start or end with tanning products. However, we must be aware of the potential influence of TikTok, its personalised algorithms and filter bubbles created by multiple sources promoting a dangerous product, which may lead to dangerous and potentially fatal side effects. If a user comes to harm from the promotion of a dangerous product or trend, TikTok may be indirectly violating laws in countries all over the world.

LEGAL ISSUES: SOFT POWER AND DATA COLLECTION

On an international and political scale, Tik Tok has been creating several legal challenges around the world. As discussed earlier, several countries have become concerned about the link between TikTok's data collection and its links to the Chinese government. Many have expressed concerns that it is a danger to national security.

The relationship between TikTok and governments is a tricky one. Prominent TikTok creators had met with the US government to encourage people to vaccinate during the COVID-19 pandemic and did the same again when US President Joe Biden met with a similar group to encourage them to promote the United States' strategic goals at the beginning of the Ukraine–Russia conflict in 2021. While governments are all too aware of the potential for influence TikTok holds, many are reluctant to engage with the platform directly over concerns about data safety.

Concern that TikTok is in some way a tool of a foreign government to gather data has been an issue for some time. The app actively suppresses content that is critical of issues within China; however, pro-Chinese news content is actively promoted. Some have claimed that it is a tool of '**soft power**' that is allowing the Chinese government to assert its influence around the globe. However, this is nothing new. For example, the USA has long used popular culture, especially film, to promote American values to the world. The classic film *Casablanca* (1942, dir. Michael Curtiz) was funded by the US government to influence US opinions about Nazi Germany and gain support for the war.[94]

soft power a persuasive approach to international relations, typically involving the use of economic or cultural influence

If this link between TikTok and the Chinese government were to be proven, it could create legal problems for nations around the world, whose citizens are active users of the app. As mentioned, it is already banned in India outright; however, it is the data-collection practices that may lead many nations to challenge the legality of TikTok in the first place.

In 2021, a claim was filed on behalf of millions of children in the UK and European Union against TikTok over the collection of data on millions of minors without their consent, and it is currently facing a potential £27 million fine. While TikTok has vowed to fight the case and may not be inconvenienced by the fine, it sets an important precedent about the legality of TikTok's data collection around the world.[95]

ACTIVITY 11.51

Research task

1 Carefully examine all legal and ethical issues surrounding TikTok. Research the current status of these issues for the social media platform. What has changed? What has stayed the same?
2 What are the ethical concerns that TikTok has created?
3 What are the legal concerns? How are they different to the ethical issues?
4 What challenges do you see created by TikTok's AI moderation? Why would ethical issues arise when human moderation is absent?
5 Is shadowbanning an ethical solution to harmful content? What reasons do you give for your response?
6 Should an app be able to collect so much data that our lives are already known by the app before we are legally able to make the decision for ourselves?
7 TikTok maintains its age limit is capped at 13 years old; however, given the nature of content available, should TikTok be available to such a young audience? What reasons do you give for your response?
8 What issues could the accidental bias of AI moderation create for future users?
9 Research recent trends with moderation and regulation on TikTok. What steps have been made to improve their regulation?

ACTIVITY 11.52

SAC practice question

Evaluate the extent to which one or more ethical or legal issues have an impact on governments and audiences. (10 marks)

In your response, you must consider:

- One ethical issue
- One legal issue
- How these issues create challenges for all media stakeholders.

FIGURE 11.100 Data collection is a contentious issue





CHAPTER REVIEW

Summing it all up

The media are now in a constant state of change. When one idea is understood, another appears to take its place and further confound audiences, creators and the media institutions that provide them. Since the dawn of media, theorists have worked to make sense of the way the media can or cannot influence the behaviour of audiences. The arrival of Web 2.0 media sent most of these theorists scrambling to understand a new world where the audience suddenly had control over the means of creating content, audiences and influence themselves. So much has been made of this change in agency and control that it's often hard to see that in the place of broadcast media institutions have come a new group of social media companies that hold the key to our data, our ideas and behaviours.

The new media environment has led to new theories of media influence. Is it the audience that guides attention, or these new media forms that have created new ways of dictating control? This has created challenges for the Australian government, which has worked to meet this new media environment with regulations that seem to have not yet matched the pace of media growth.

Those who once held the keys to the gate of information have handed them over to a bigger and more powerful group of gatekeepers who hold, share, trade and manipulate the data audiences create online to keep them online for longer than the owners of broadcast media could ever consider. With this power, they have turned it into a valuable trade.

Along the way, these new social media giants have been followed by controversy for prefacing growth over ethics, for prefacing user attention over user safety and, at worst, abusing their power. On a small scale, this seems insignificant; on a larger scale, it has contributed to genocide and threats to democracy around the world. As comedian Bo Burnham stated: 'they are attempting to colonise every minute of your life'.

Revision questions

1 **Define** the terms 'agency' and 'control' in relation to the media.
2 **Define** an example where the media or the audience were able wield influence and control. In your response, **define** the extent of influence and possible explanations to support the example.
3 **Explain** the rationale for regulating the media in Australia. In your response, define the challenges that can result from these forms of regulation with a clear example.
4 The media and audiences have experienced a dynamic and changing relationship over time. **Explain** how changes in technologies and the ways audience consume media products have blurred the lines between agency and control.
5 **Explain** how Australian regulatory practices were challenged by Netflix's *13 Reasons Why*.
6 **Explain** how the relationship between the audience and the media has changed over time.
7 **Evaluate** the legal and ethical challenges created by emerging media platforms. In your response, refer to the following:
   a the impact on governments
   b the impact on the individual.



8 Compare and contrast the control wielded by the Kardashians, Belle Gibson, Billy McFarland, Greta Thunberg and Soulja Boy. How did they leverage the media to alter audience behaviour? In your response, use a media effects theory to **explain** their impact.
9 What are the challenges created by personalised algorithms and surveillance capitalism?
10 **Explain** how Facebook and YouTube have created challenges for audiences around the world.
11 **Define** the legal and ethical issues created by TikTok.

Practice assessment question

1 Explain the changing relationship between media and audiences. In your response, refer to:
   - **a** an example of the way broadcast media could control messages
   - **b** an example of the way new media technologies have challenged the power of broadcast media
   - **c** an example of the way new media audiences have been able to influence messages and alter intended messages from governments and institutions.

2 Define and analyse the influence of both media and audiences. In your response, refer to:
   - **a** old and new theories of media influence
   - **b** examples of the way governments, media institutions, individuals and audiences have been able to wield agency and control.

3 Explain how media is used by globalised media institutions, governments and individuals. In your response, use one example where the influence has been visible in a positive or negative way.
4 Regulation of the media in Australia has become increasingly challenging. Explain how the Australian government is attempting to keep pace with the growth of new media technologies and the challenges created by this evolving media environment.
5 Regulation of the media has become more challenging on a global scale in recent years. In years gone by, gatekeepers helped regulate the relationship between the media and audiences. Using a range of contemporary examples, define the challenges for the regulation of media today. In your response, include the following:
   - **a** A detailed description of contemporary media institutions.
   - **b** The role of media institutions in regulating and distributing content.
   - **c** The consequences for governments and individuals as a result of this regulation.

6 New media institutions have raised a number of challenging legal and ethical issues. Using a case study covered in this chapter, explain how audiences are challenged by both legal and ethical issues in the media.

Digital content

- Access the Interactive Textbook via Cambridge GO to access a downloadable Success Criteria checklist, digital quizzes and additional digital content for this chapter.

Glossary

ABC Australian Broadcasting Corporation

active audience experiences that allow for and are sometimes built on audience interaction

acts the traditional dramatic segments in films and stage plays

ad-lib an acting style where the performer delivers lines without any preparation or scripting

agency the capacity to interact with media messages and make free choices

American Dream the ideal by which equality of opportunity is available to any American, allowing the highest aspirations and goals to be achieved

analogue media that was produced on physical material like film which degraded over time

anchoring the process of attaching a meaning to an image through the use of text

antagonist a character opposed to the hero/main character/protagonist; usually a villain whose actions create the dramatic conflict and tension

anthropomorphic a literary device that assigns human characteristics to non-human entities like animals or inanimate objects

appointment television programming that audiences are obliged to watch at the time of its original broadcast

archival footage stock footage that has been shot prior to a specific media product's production

artificial intelligence (AI) computer systems able to perform tasks normally requiring human intelligence, such as visual perception, speech recognition, decision-making and translation between languages

atomised the process of media audiences breaking into more and more specific categories of interest

Australian Royal Commission a government-funded public inquiry. In Australia, royal commissions are the highest form of inquiry on matters of public importance.

Auteur Theory theory of filmmaking in which the director is viewed as the major creative force in a motion picture

B film a cheaply produced film, often shorter than a more prestigious and bigger-budgeted 'A' picture, shown as the second part of a double-feature, produced by the Big Five studios and smaller independents such as Republic Pictures

bad faith actors individuals and groups who use the media to take advantage of vulnerabilities and fears to create division and distrust in society

battle royale game an online multiplayer video game genre that blends last-one-standing gameplay with survival, exploration and scavenging elements

Big Five studios the five major Hollywood studios that produced the bulk of films seen in cinemas: MGM, Paramount Pictures, RKO, 20th Century Fox and Warner Bros

binge watching the practice of watching multiple episodes of a television program in rapid succession

bit torrent software a peer-to-peer file transfer protocol for sharing large amounts of data over the internet, in which each part of a file downloaded by a user is transferred to other users. Bit torrenting was responsible for a surge of internet media piracy in the 2010s and has since been reduced by the widespread use of streaming services.

bot accounts accounts operated on social media networks, and used to automatically generate messages, advocate ideas, act as a follower of users and as fake accounts to gain followers themselves

bots autonomous, non-human identity on the internet or another network that can interact with users

breaking the fourth wall a performance convention in which an invisible, imaginary wall separates actors from the audience and is broken when the actor converses directly with the audience

broadcast era a period of time in the 20th century where media was owned by a small number of wealthy individuals and companies and had significant control over the media audiences consumed

capitalism an economic and political system in which a country's trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit

CGI Computer Generated Image created by software or special effects for film

Chaebols wealthy extended families that have significant influence over South Korean finance and politics

chiaroscuro in art this means the contrast between areas of light and darkness in an image

cinema vérité a style of filmmaking characterised by realistic, typically documentary films, which avoid artificiality and artistic effect and are generally made with simple equipment

claymation a method of film animation using adjustable clay figures and stop-motion photography

cliff-hanger ending a dramatic and exciting ending to an episode of a serial, leaving the audience in suspense and anxious not to miss the next episode

codec the format of a completed video project

Cold War the state of hostility that existed between the Soviet bloc countries and the Western powers from 1945 to 1990

confessional videos a popular trend in the early days of Web 2.0, where ordinary users would detail their day-to-day lives to internet audiences

connotative the meaning that the audience attaches to the people, objects and things we see in the image

conservatorship a court order that appoints someone to oversee the financial affairs of a minor or a person who is declared legally incapacitated

conspiracy theories a belief that an event or situation is the result of a secret plan made by powerful people

construction the process by which a media text is shaped

consumption the way audiences react to and read media narratives based on their personal and cultural experiences

control media that has the power to influence

converged technology technology that at one time was unrelated to others that appears integrated with those others on the same device

copyrighted the exclusive legal rights to a media product that protects it from being copied and shared without the permission of the original creator

cosplay the practice of dressing up as a character from a film, book or video game

counterculture movement a social movement of the late 1960s which sought to challenge traditional norms and create a new, more inclusive and progressive society

crowd sourced enlisting the services of a large number of people, either paid or unpaid, typically via the internet

curated media content that has been gathered and collected by users for a specific audience

decipher to understand or interpret

deconstructed simplified or stripped back; reduced

deep fake videos a deceptively realistic but fake piece of media created by altering existing video or audio material

democratisation the action of making something accessible to everyone

denouement a French term that refers to the unravelling of storylines to draw the narrative to a conclusion

diegetic within the world of the story or narrative; from the Greek term *diegesis* (meaning 'recounted story')

digital media that is transmitted through binary code of 1s and 0s that is transmitted through electric cables or wi-fi

digital literacy the ability for users to skilfully and confidently use digital tools and navigate between them

disinformation news that is deliberately incorrect in order to create confusion, often referred to as 'fake news'

distribution the process of releasing a media product to audiences, either via a cinema, television broadcast or streaming release

ISBN 978-1-009-36510-9 Hoban et al
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Photocopying is restricted under law and this material must not be transferred to another party.

dolly the apparatus used to move a camera during the shot

dolly zoom aka '*Vertigo* Effect'; an in-camera effect that appears to undermine normal visual perception. The effect is achieved by using a zoom lens to adjust the angle of view (often referred to as field of view, or FOV) while the camera dollies (moves) towards or away from the subject in such a way as to keep the subject the same size in the frame throughout.

dominant ideologies the attitudes, beliefs, values and morals shared by the majority of the people in a given society

doxxed the practice of publishing private and identifying information about a particular individual on the internet, typically with malicious intention

Dreaming stories the First Nations oral tradition of passing down cultural knowledge and beliefs through storytelling, including creation, social rules and regulations, ethics and morality

embedded narratives scripted narrative elements that are embedded throughout a game to form the background story

emergent narratives the story is not designed by developers. It is constructed by the player, through their (inter)actions and explorations, while often influenced by any number of (game-specific) random factors that each game features.

e-sports large-scale competitions between individuals and groups of video game players

Eurocentric reflecting a tendency to interpret the world in terms of European or Anglo-American values and experiences to the exclusion of a wider view of the world

exploitation pictures films that are characterised by their use of sensational or controversial subject matter to attract audiences

exposition a scriptwriter's method of giving background information to the audience about the characters and setting of the story

fake news false stories that appear to be news, spread on the internet or using other media

false flag an act committed with the intent of disguising the actual source of responsibility and pinning blame on another party

fandom the fans of a particular person, team or fictional series that can be regarded collectively as a community or subculture

feature length a narrative that is over 90 minutes long

feedback loop the process of creating media messages, the reading and presentation of a response in the audience and the reaction of the original creator of the message

filter bubbles a situation in which an internet user encounters only information and opinions that conform with and reinforce their own beliefs, caused by algorithms that personalise an individual's online experience

final cut the final edited version of a film, approved by the director and producer

free to air television stations and broadcasts that are received through a free transmission of a digital signal to audiences

freeze frame a single frame forming a motionless image from a film or videotape

gatekeepers individuals or groups within media broadcast companies who shaped, crafted and decided which media messages and ideas would be available to media audiences

Gen Z short for Generation Z, this is the generation reaching adulthood in the second decade of the 21st century, perceived as being familiar with the internet from a very young age

genre a way to categorise different types of stories, characters and plot structures

GPS technology Global Positioning System technology that can pinpoint an individual object or person's location anywhere on Earth

handheld shot camera shots created without the stability of a tripod

harmful content media content that can cause harm or negative influence for audiences

hashtag the symbol on a telephone keypad (#) used on social media platforms like Twitter and Instagram to group comments and contributions to common online conversations

hate speech abusive or threatening speech or writing that expresses prejudice on the basis of ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or similar grounds

heightened naturalism to exaggerate natural features in order to create a dramatic (or comedic) effect

historical and cultural context the historical context refers to the time and place in which the artist created the artwork. The cultural context refers to the artistic, environmental, economic, social, technological, political or religious climate of the time that may have influenced the artist.

homogeneous consisting of parts or people that are similar to each other or are of the same type

iconic signs pictorial symbols for a word or phrase

impartiality the equal treatment of all sides of a debate or issue

in-app browser a browser that acts within an app, allowing the user's behaviour to be easily tracked

index signs society's symbolic meanings behind certain objects, colours, expressions, etc., which help us understand representations

institution an established and regulated organisation that owns and produces many different media products and systems

intended audience the group of people for which a media product is designed

internet a global computer network providing a variety of information and communication facilities that relies on interconnected networks

internet piracy the practice of downloading and distributing copyrighted works digitally without permission

keylogger a computer program that records every keystroke made by a computer user

'Korean Wave' (*Hallyu*) the growing popularity of all things Korean, from fashion and film to music and cuisine, that grew from the 1990s onwards

level-up the process of upgrading the skills and capabilities of a player or character in a video game

Limewire a peer-to-peer file sharing app that began in 2000 and was credited with enabling the video and music piracy trend

loot box a consumable item within a game which can be redeemed to receive a randomised selection of further items

Mabo native title decision was the first in an Australian court that recognised the traditional ownership of native land, after a constitutional challenge to the High Court brought by Eddie Mabo. It was a landmark decision that legally recognised the ownership of land by Indigenous groups.

machine learning the use and development of computer systems that are able to learn and adapt without following explicit instructions

machinima an animated film created using an old or obsolete video game engine

mass communication sharing information on a large scale to a wide range of people

means of production the ability to afford, maintain and broadcast mass media

media codes technical, written or symbolic codes used by the author to create representations

media conventions when media codes are used in ways that help an audience understand a representation

media forms refer to technological means and channels by which the media is created, produced, distributed, consumed and read. These include film, television, radio, magazine, podcast, website or app.

media production what the Units 3 & 4 student will produce for their SAT

media products consumable media, such as literature, film, television or games

mediated a long process of audience and media interaction that determines what common codes and conventions are used to create meanings that are commonly understood

memes an image, video, piece of text, etc., typically humorous in nature, that is copied and spread rapidly by internet users, often with slight variations

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metaverse, the a virtual-reality space in which users can interact with a computer-generated environment and other users

mise en scene literally, 'put in the scene' (French), refers to all the theatrical elements necessary in composing a scene to be filmed: props, sets, lighting, sound effects, costumes, make-up and actors' placement (blocking)

misinformation factually incorrect news

mockumentary a television program or film which takes the form of a serious documentary in order to satirise its subject

mod the ability to modify or redesign elements of a video game

montage an edited sequence in a film that compresses story time, usually to show the development of a character, most often accompanied by non-diegetic music

moral panic an instance of public anxiety or alarm in response to a problem regarded as threatening the moral standards of society.

narrative story structure

National Press Club an association of Australian journalists and media professionals that hosts debates, discussions and speeches

negative space the areas of space not seen within the frame

neoliberalism a political approach that favours free-market capitalism, deregulation and reduction in government spending

non-diegetic outside the world of the narrative

OECD the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development is an intergovernmental organisation with 38 member countries, founded in 1961 to stimulate economic progress and world trade

omission what was chosen to be excluded

outrage algorithms algorithms that promote content that inspire anger

participatory culture a culture in which private individuals do not act as consumers only, but also as contributors or producers

passive audience experiences that do not allow for audience interaction with a media message

pay to play video games that require users to pay a subscription to play or to level-up skills and abilities within a game

peer reviewed research the process that subjects an author's scholarly work, research or ideas to the scrutiny of others who are experts in the same field (peers) which ensures its academic and scientific quality

peer to peer a means for individual users on the internet to share files across a network

personalised algorithms sets of code that observe your digital habits and predict your next choices

perspective the person from whose point of view the story is being told

platform games two-dimensional video games where users work between levels and platforms across a screen and the goal is determined by the game

polarisation the shift of political attitudes away from the centre, towards ideological extremes of the right and left created, in part, by media outlets

principal photography the phase of film production in which the movie is filmed, with actors on set and cameras rolling

production the process of producing a media product on set, using media technologies and specified roles

production design set of written and visual documents that detail the stages of production of a proposed product (written in Unit 3) that the student will realise in Unit 4

protagonist the main character in a story or a play

purpose the intention of the author

Q&A post a social media post made by an influencer or celebrity that asks followers to post questions with the intention of answering them directly

rabbit hole a term to describe the internet's capacity to suck users into an extremely engrossing and time-consuming topic

rear projection a filmmaking technique in which an image is projected onto the back of a translucent screen, creating a reflected image that can be viewed from the front – think of those clichéd driving scenes where the steering doesn't seem to match the moving background

reception the physical way we engage with media texts

reception context the place and context where and how an audience engages with a text

remixing the process of combining, editing and altering existing media forms and texts

reparatory cinemas cinemas that program classic and cult films

representation the ways in which the media portrays particular groups, communities, experiences, ideas or topics from a particular ideological or value perspective

rough cut the first version of a film after preliminary editing

sandbox a video game that provides the player with creativity to interact with it, usually without any predetermined goal, or with a goal that the player sets for themselves

SAT (School-assessed Task) the major production for VCE Media Units 3 & 4

SBS Special Broadcasting Corporation

screen real estate relating to how much space an object takes up on the screen

selection what was chosen to be included

sepia a reddish-brown colour associated particularly with monochrome photographs

shadowbanning a punishment where social media platforms remove a user's ability to post, but does not remove their account

showrunner the person who has overall creative authority and management responsibility for a television program

skins the appearance of a player's avatar within a game

social media websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking

soft power a persuasive approach to international relations, typically involving the use of economic or cultural influence

Spaghetti Western a Western film made cheaply in Europe by an Italian director

sponsored post any social media that includes the paid promotion of a product or service

stakeholders governments, institutions and audiences that all have a vested interest in the media

stereotype an overly simplistic representation

sub-plots secondary storylines that exist within narratives to add to, and sometimes are involved in, the main storyline

surrealist a 20th-century avant-garde movement in art and literature which sought to release the creative potential of the unconscious mind

symbols a sign, shape or object that is used to represent something else

tabloid media a popular style of largely sensationalist journalism, which takes its name from the tabloid newspaper format: a small-sized newspaper or magazine

the internet of things the interconnection via the internet of computing devices embedded in everyday objects, enabling them to send and receive data

three-act structure the traditional dramatic structure of most fictional narrative films

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tracking shot where the camera follows along with moving action, usually when the camera is mounted on tracks that allow for smooth movement

troll social media accounts who create posts or comments online to 'bait' people

Twitch a social media platform popular among video game players and streamers

unboxing the social media trend of videoing the taking of new products out of their boxes

voice-over narration non-diegetic production technique where the voice of a character or narrator is used off screen to inform the audience

Web 2.0 the second stage of development of the internet, characterised especially by the change from static web pages to dynamic or user-generated content and the growth of social media

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Interview with *Gold* co-writer, Polly Smyth

I started working in the film industry about 18 years ago. I wanted to be a costume designer but had no background in design, so I started at the very bottom.

I always wanted to tell my own stories and while I was able to explore my creativity in costume, I was ultimately creating someone else's vision. I always wanted to write. Ultimately, I wanted to see my story, not read it.



FIGURE 3.66A *Gold* co-writer Polly Smyth

DEVELOPING THE IDEA

Often creative endeavours start with a conversation over coffee. *Gold*, Anthony's and my first feature film together, started as a conversation about the state of the world.

With *Gold*, we initially decided that we wanted to come up with a very simple script, one that could be shot in one location with very few cast members. It is hard to get a big film financed and we wanted to create something we could do on a small budget with Anthony playing one of the roles.

I'm a big planner when it comes to writing, I like to map everything out perfectly before I start (three acts, themes, etc). I learnt this in my novel-writing studies. Anthony likes to get that first draft done and then finesse the themes and structure afterwards. We found a happy medium with *Gold*. We mapped out the basic storyline verbally and then we wrote a very basic treatment.

A treatment is a document that presents the story idea of your film before writing the entire script. Often treatments are submitted for funding. We submitted ours to Screen Australia and received a small grant to write the first draft. We then took turns writing each scene. Anthony would look over my pages and I his, and we would write and edit each other's work as we went along.

It took us roughly four months to hash out a first draft. From there we submitted it to Film Victoria for development money. We were accepted and they allocated us a script-editor to work on the second and third draft. This process of redrafting took about a year. When working with an editor, you don't just hand them your work to edit, you have long discussions about the themes, the characters and how best to serve your story. This was incredibly beneficial.

Starting the script was the hardest part. Staring at that blank page felt overwhelming. I still take some time to get started on new projects. My advice to any scriptwriters is to remember that the first draft is always rubbish. It's a building block on which your story will evolve.

THE INFLUENCE OF AUSTRALIAN STORIES

We were influenced by Australian stories, both fiction and non-fiction.

Anthony was in a film called *The Rover*, which we both loved and drew inspiration from. The sparseness of both the story and the characterisation appealed to us, but also the ambiguity in terms of the world that was created. There was also very little extraneous exposition in the script, which I very much admired.

Wake in Fright we looked at, but more for its unyielding tension as opposed to the actual story. What is so masterful about that script is how it infuses the landscape into the story and makes it a part of the drama. We referenced that quite often in our initial discussions.

As far as the actual story and what we looked at for references, we looked more to the state of the world and how our planet is in crisis. We were also very interested to show how as humans, we are all guilty of watching others suffer with indifference, just as 'Man Two' does in this film. We discussed how many people disengage with world events when they become too much, and how all of us purchase things even when we know how they were produced came at a human cost. These ideas felt universal, as opposed to just Australian.

We did, however, refer to Australia's history and its stories of colonialism and violence towards the custodians of this land, the Aboriginal people. This resonated with the themes in *Gold* and is why we created the Strangers in our script who were there to protect the land.

There is a rich pool of filmic resources to draw from when it comes to Australian history. Films like *Rabbit Proof-Fence*, *Charlie's Country*, *Sweet Country*, *The Nightingale*, *Ten Canoes*. The list is long.

I am very much a fan of 'show don't tell'. It isn't easy. It comes with the redrafting as your first draft always over-explains everything. We began with every character divulging their back story and the main character 'Man One' explaining exactly why he was there and why he needed the gold so desperately. In doing so, we found the script became weighed down with so much detail that the powerful and simplistic themes felt diluted. When we took it all out and left silence and just air for the story to hang upon, we found room for subtle and unsettling characterisations to surface.

Basically, our characters were scarier and more beguiling because we didn't know their motives. It was an unnerving choice and one we knew would only work in the hands of a great lead actor. We were very lucky that Zac Efron took a chance on us, but in many ways, we took a chance on him as this isn't his usual type of role. With such sparsity in the script and so few people for him to bounce off, we had to rely so much on his singular and internalised performance. The viewer sees Man One's pain without fully knowing the extent of his desperation.

We chose to make the location ambiguous for two reasons: creatively we wanted to tell a universal story. The themes were big, and the story was almost allegorical in a way. And we didn't want our film to be set anywhere so we made huge efforts to generalise everything. We mixed up the cast's accents, we saturated the grade, and made sure it didn't look Australian. We had multilingual signage and we made sure the flora and fauna didn't stick out as quintessentially Australian.

As Australian filmmakers we wanted to make something that wasn't too parochial. We wanted it to hold its own on an international stage. This isn't to say Australian stories don't find their audiences overseas, we just wanted to tell a story that wouldn't pigeonhole us. I am a big fan of foreign films and admire those who make cinema that can be seen and related to by anyone, anywhere.

On a cynical level, it was much easier to market this film with Zac Efron as an American. America isn't as open to foreign films as the rest of the world, they often just remake them. It was important to us that Zac was appealing to that very big audience.

CHALLENGES ON SET

Shooting *Gold* during a pandemic was the most challenging thing I have ever done. We shot the film in Leigh Creek in the height of the 2020 pandemic. We lived in Melbourne and were beholden to the strictest lockdown in the world. Our heads of department were from all different cities in Australia and Zac Efron

was then based in Byron Bay. We had to appeal to the South Australian state government and the South Australian Film Corp to get permission to fly all our cast and crew into South Australia despite the travel bans in place. We had to quarantine everyone and then work and live in a virtual bubble in the middle of the desert for eight weeks pre-production and a 6-week shoot.



FIGURE 3.66B Polly on set with her co-writer Anthony Hayes

We were shooting in spring and had serious time restrictions as our film couldn't shoot into the hotter months. It simply gets too hot out there. This is not unique to the pandemic; any film shooting in the Australian desert can only shoot at certain times of the year, but with the pandemic's restrictions, it just meant we had no flexibility. It took such a mammoth effort to get everyone there and when it came to anyone getting sick or needing to leave and come back, it just wasn't feasible. Crews who were used to going home on weekends and seeing their families were unable to do so. This made it hard for those connected to the film's cast and crew.

The weather did get the better of us. It was unseasonably hot. We had to shut down the shoot twice. Once, because of a sandstorm, and once because the ground became too hot to stand on. This meant we had to return and reshoot a few scenes at a later date and go through the same rigid COVID conditions, including quarantine.

Zac Efron was heading back to the USA after *Gold* and it would have been impossible to get him back into Australia to do reshoots after we wrapped. Luckily, our reshoots didn't involve him and were mainly the dogs in the final scenes. If we were not in the middle of a pandemic, we would have opted to get Zac back for a couple of shots.

In terms of props and costumes, we had to be overly prepared as it wasn't as simple as driving back to Adelaide and grabbing anything extra. This was a real challenge as a film shoot is an ever-changing puzzle that requires things to be brought in at the last minute. Our crew went above and beyond with their preparation. *Gold* was a challenge I will never forget.

SHOOTING IN THE AUSTRALIAN OUTBACK

The heat. The heat was unbearable at times. Zac Efron was incredible. He spent weeks on end in the sweltering heat. I think it helped his characterisation as he was truly feeling the pain of his character 'Man One'. The flies. The flies were relentless. Zac had flies crawling over him every day. The crew had fly nets. He did not.

The phone reception was basically non-existent. We had satellite phones for essential calls. In some ways not having access to the outside world was great in that we just got on with the job at hand, but it was also very isolating.

Shooting any film in the desert comes with inherent challenges because we didn't want to leave any footprint. Our film is about the desecration of natural resources, so it was very important to us that we didn't ruin anything out there. This is something we took very seriously, and I think we left that beautiful place just as we found it.

RELEASING THE FILM TO STREAMING SERVICES

Streaming services like Stan, Netflix, Amazon, etc. have a huge pool of funds to pour into both local and international productions. Stan contributed a large portion of the initial funding.

Funding a film requires a dance between casting someone who can attract investment and having enough backing to attract the actor in the first place. We were very lucky in that Zac came on board before Stan. He read and liked the script and took a leap of faith with me, a new writer and Anthony, an established actor, but only a second-time director. When you have a name like Zac Efron, doors open. Stan were very interested in *Gold* when Zac became attached.

Stan appealed to us because we were still able to sell the film internationally in every other world territory. In Australia, *Gold* is exclusive to Stan, but worldwide it was released in cinemas and is now available on Apple, Amazon, etc.

In today's current filmmaking climate, it not easy to get bums on seats in cinemas. The likelihood is that your film will be up against a huge franchise. It is more likely people will see a film like *Gold* if they can switch on their TV and be presented with a quality cinema experience at home.

Conversely, statistically the predominant population who go to smaller boutique cinemas where *Gold* would have been screened are women aged 50+. Our film tested well with young males between the ages of 18–35. That demographic generally watch larger superhero films at the cinema and watch local content at home on streamers like Stan.

The Stan marketing budget for *Gold* was sizeable. We were on every billboard and bus stop in Australia. We were advertised during the summer cricket matches and the Australian Open tennis. If I'm honest, I think that worked against us in the initial weeks of release as the advertising was very big and action-packed and *Gold* is actually a very slight, slow-paced and perhaps more arthouse film than the Stan viewers were expecting. We received a lot of negative feedback on the Stan socials with people claiming the film was 'nothing like the trailer', which in truth, it wasn't. In every other part of the world and on film sites in Australia we received positive reviews, so I think it's important to look at how your film is marketed. This isn't to say we didn't appreciate the promotion; I just think it is pertinent to acknowledge that not all publicity is good publicity, contrary to popular belief.

WHAT HAPPENED AFTER RELEASE

Two things happened. We sold *Gold* to different territories worldwide.

The cinemas that screened *Gold* sent a portion of their ticket sales back to us and that profit was divided between producers and investors. We were paid a wage to write the film but as producers we received an additional portion of profits made.

As it rolls out in each territory, various press agencies around the world make contact and you do a fair number of interviews. As the writer, your input here is minimal as most publications wanted to talk to the lead actor or the director.

Secondly, professionally, as a writer, after release, I had to strike while the iron was hot and use the publicity of *Gold* to try and secure funding for another script. This wasn't easy. I'm still a new writer. I think I am lucky as I have been in the industry for so long and I know the right people to get my work in front of, but with every new script you are essentially starting all over again.

I'm currently writing my first solo script and am also developing a TV show with Anthony and two other writers. None of this would be happening without *Gold*. *Gold* was my stepping-stone. *Gold* took nearly four years to make from start to finish. It was a long and arduous process. I'm very proud of it.



The characteristics of new media audiences: The history of media effects

Media analysists have attempted to explain the relationship between the media and its audience since mass media began in the 20th century. This period saw the invention and colossal growth of broadcast media. Unfortunately, the technological advances that contributed to the communication explosion also allowed for the development of war machines and unparalleled ultra-violent armed conflict, and led to two world wars and many other regional conflicts, including the Korean and Vietnam wars.

It is understandable that the media effects theories that were developed associated the media with this violence. Governments had, for example, used radio very effectively to disseminate propaganda in World War II. National audiences were seen as passive subjects easily persuaded to join the war effort. The question of cause and effect became a question about media influence: could the media incite an audience to do things against its own will?

Initial theories about media effects, such as the Bullet Theory (see below), were based on anecdotal evidence and subjective assumptions. However, later attempts to verify 'vulnerable audience' theories using laboratory experiments contained their own levels of bias. The famous Bobo Doll Experiment, for example, 'proved' that children were affected by media violence using a blow-up doll. It is now used as an example of how not to conduct experiments! As the century progressed and media research did become more sophisticated, it was eventually realised that individual audience members possess a range of characteristics and responses that differentiate them within their cohort. The notion of 'audience' was deconstructed and decentred. Studies about our relationship with the media moved away from simple linear models (see Shannon-Weaver model below) to allow for much more nuanced non-linear connections.

In the post-broadcast era, sociologists and political theorists are still concerned about media effects on audiences, but the landscape has shifted considerably since the distinction between audiences and producers has become blurred. Media research has become very sophisticated in tracking how information data is used and shared by audiences and media producers. It is the patterns of use, and misuse of our media interactions that are now of core concern. Before examining these theories in detail, let's have a quick look at some of the 'legacy' theories where audiences and the media were treated as completely separate entities.

BULLET THEORY (ALSO MAGIC BULLET; HYPODERMIC NEEDLE MODEL)

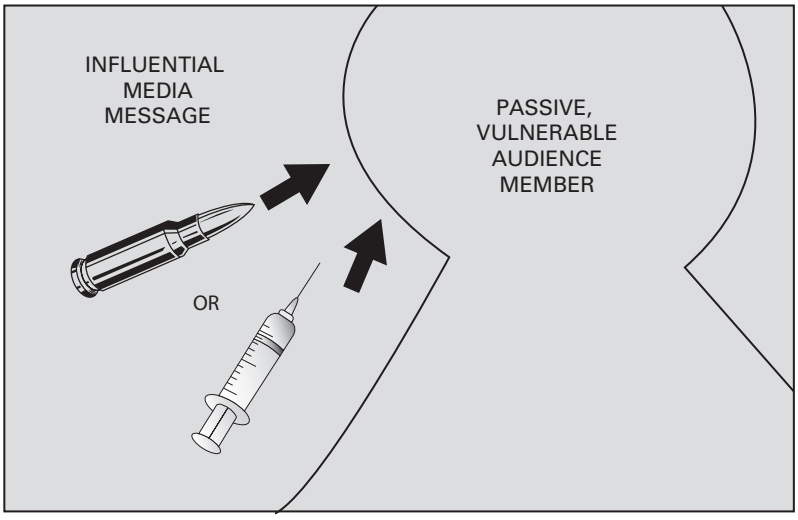


FIGURE 6.26A Bullet Theory was a linear and simplified model of how media is consumed by audiences.

The Bullet Theory proposed that the media could send influential messages directly into passive audiences who were powerless to resist their force of persuasion (hence, the bullet or needle analogy). It was developed from political views after World War II that governments and corporations could direct and misuse information to control suggestable populations. The theory did not rely on empirical evidence and did not take into account the audience's own opinions or experience. The audience was considered passive and vulnerable. It was a simple, easy-to-understand linear model. The idea that audiences could have their own agency did not yet exist. The theory did not take into account the coercive control and direct effect regimes had over their populations through instruments of government such as police and social security, which is a more rational explanation for peoples' behaviour of the time. This early theory is now completely disregarded by those who study the media today.

TWO-STEP FLOW

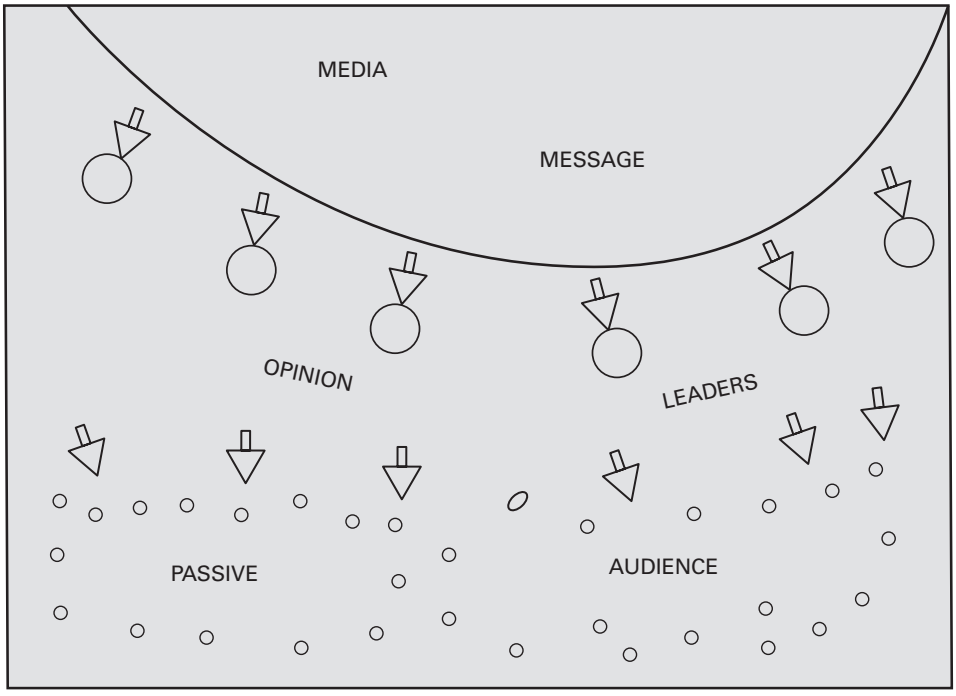


FIGURE 6.26B The Two-Step-Flow Theory argued that media messages were consumed first by 'opinion leaders' who then passed the messages onto the passive masses.

At the end of World War II, researchers began looking for more reliable empirical evidence of the media's direct influence. The People's Choice study focused on the process of decision-making during US presidential election campaigns. The Two-Step Flow Theory was developed from this research and the idea that media messages were first discussed among 'opinion leaders' then flowed to others in the audience (principally newspapers at the time). Opinion leaders were considered to be more engaged and active in developing their understanding of certain topics (particularly politics). These opinions were then amplified through social rather than media networks.

The Two-Step Flow Theory still relied on the idea that most audience members were passive and open to persuasion, and it did not account for the media intervention after initial opinion leader reception, or indeed why audiences would respond to opinion leaders' messages instead of initial media messages. It did, however, open up questioning about the nature of information flow, and lead to further development, including more complex Multistep Flow models.



Flow theory is still referenced today when considering 'influencers' on social media. An influencer is a social media user known for their knowledge and expertise on a specific topic, who posts regularly and generally has a large following of people who pay close attention to their views. They are different to the old opinion leaders in that their information can reach further audiences through a variety of media platforms.

REINFORCEMENT AND AGENDA SETTING

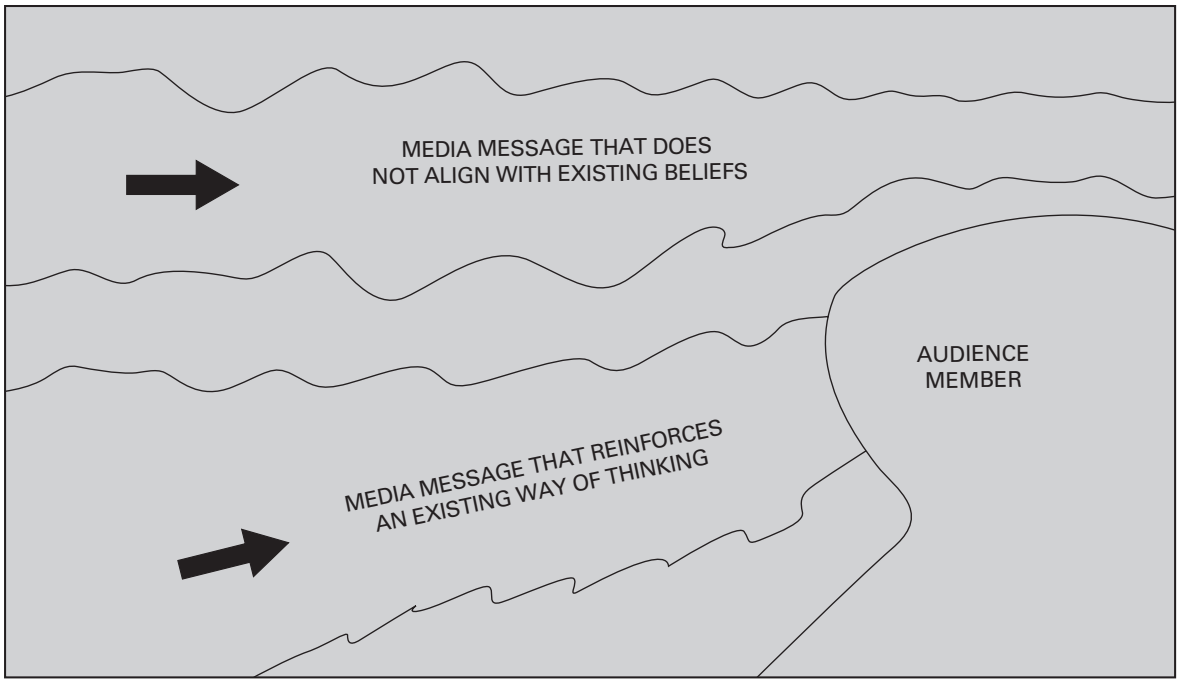


FIGURE 6.26C Reinforcement and Agenda Setting theories suggested that audiences are 'active' enough to accept media messages which align with their personal beliefs and reject those that don't. The theory downplayed the power of the media to challenge and move people enough to change their minds.

In the 1960s, Reinforcement Theory recognised that while the media communicates a variety of information and opinion to audiences, its effect is limited to reinforcing existing opinions and views, not changing them. If audiences encounter media products that are opposed to their views, then they tend to reject them. People do not like to have their opinions challenged or be told their beliefs are wrong. They do like to be validated and use the media to support the beliefs which have come from a variety of trusted sources – family, education, peers, as well as personal experience.

The theory was adapted from Selective Exposure theory in psychology and is now more commonly known as 'confirmation bias'. It might explain why audiences choose one news channel over another, or why social media often erupts into highly polarised debates about certain 'hot' topics.

It doesn't account, however, for the possibility that new ideas can be developed, adopted and popularised by media. The fact that an idea can go 'viral' suggests that there is an audience for original thought that is yet to be bogged down by bias.

Agenda Setting Theory in the 1970s also concluded that media influence was limited. It found that the media, particularly TV news, did not influence audiences regarding what to think, but it could influence what to think about. Setting the agenda for public discourse was less about deliberate persuasion than it was about limiting information. Television news broadcasts were expected not just to report the news, but to capture

audiences for the network's other programming. News needed to be eye-catching and entertaining. Shocking and sensational stories were favoured over intricately detailed and nuanced ones. The theory became less relevant as cable gave audiences a much broader choice of 'hard' or 'soft' news sources. The theory does raise questions, however, about the quality of 'news' we consume today.

USES AND GRATIFICATIONS (UGT)

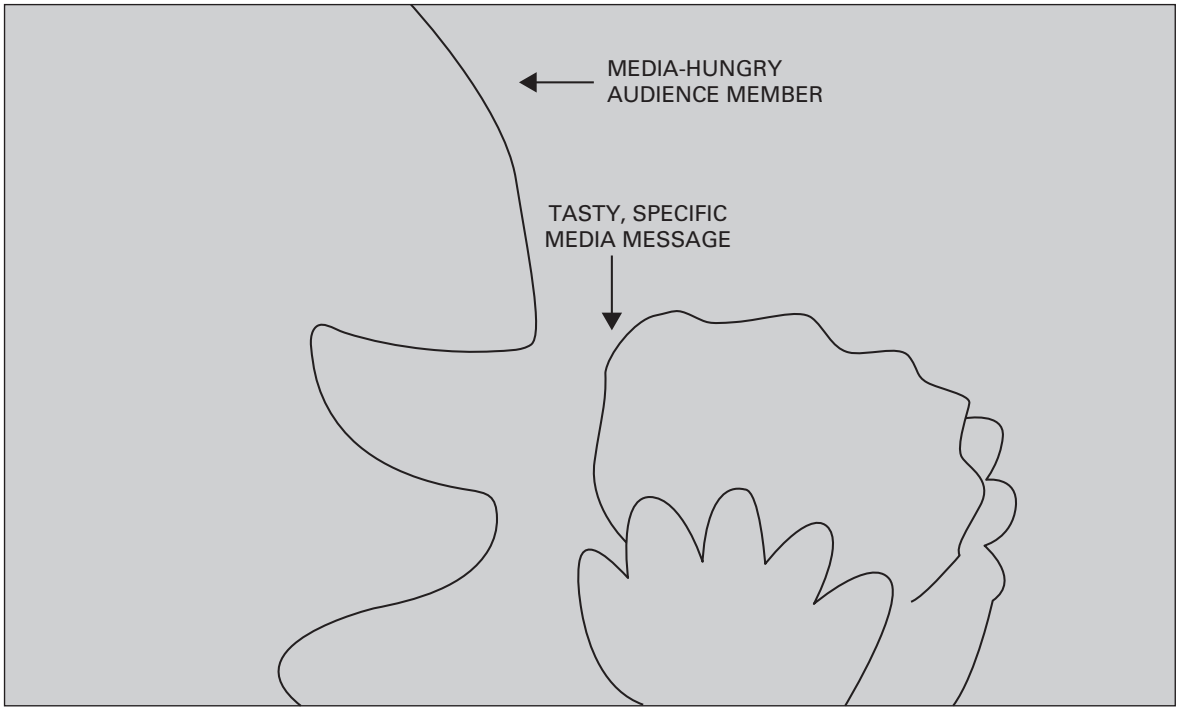


FIGURE 6.26D Uses and Gratifications Theory posited that active audiences used the passive media messages as they saw fit, not taking into account the fact that people don't always consume media with any great agenda in mind.

Uses and Gratifications Theory was a concept that turned the media–audience relationship on its head. According to this theory, the media was just another component of the demand and supply chain. Audiences were seen to make choices on the basis of their personal needs; they use the media like any other product. It asked, 'What do people do with the media?', not the other way round. The media was assumed to fulfil a functional purpose in the life of the audience.

Uses and Gratifications researchers gathered a great deal of data about media usage. Marketing research measured consumer-led choice and the effectiveness of advertising. Its methods complemented those of media research. This might be one of its shortcomings. UGT might over-emphasise audience selectivity in the media–audience relationship. Sometimes audiences consume media without much thought. How often have you checked for updates out of pure habit? The theory had nothing to say about unintended effects, either. An audience might well choose what media messages it consumes, but it might not be fully informed about its choices. Eating junk food is a matter of choice, not good sense. You choose to use social media, but has it changed you without you knowing it?



CULTIVATION

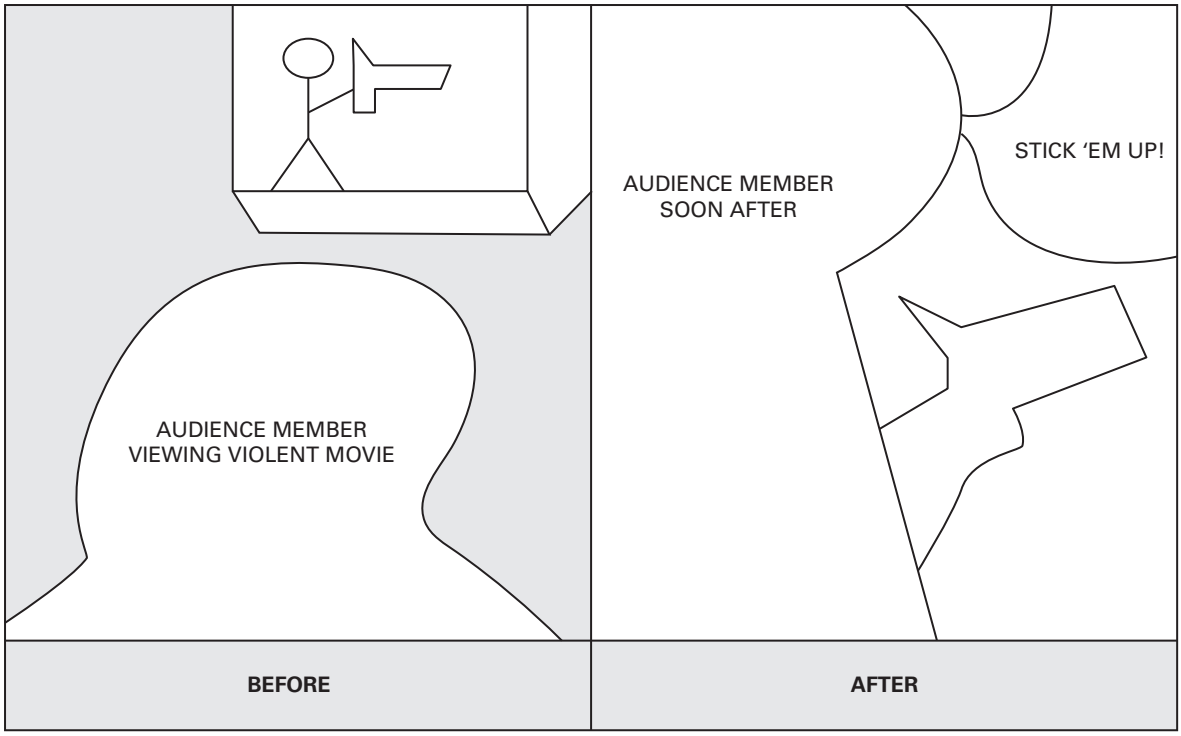


FIGURE 6.26E Cultivation Theory linked the consumption of certain types of media over long periods of time with broad demographic patterns, such as increases in violent behaviour. It assumed audiences were passive and media creators held a lot of power.

Cultivation Theory was a response to the massive consumption of broadcast television in the second half of the 20th century. By the 1970s, questions were being asked about TV's influence on alcohol and tobacco consumption, its portrayals of violence and its links to changing sexual morality. TV's potential effects on children were of primary concern. Cultivation Theory concluded that audiences could develop false notions of reality, depending on their level of exposure to television. Correlation studies compared the viewing habits of audiences over long periods of time, some taking up to 20 years.

These unique studies showed that audiences who were exposed to a particular type of TV product were vulnerable to influence. For example, an audience with a preference for violent TV was likely to exhibit some form of violent tendencies in time. The conclusion was that constant exposure to the media cultivated, in the long term, distorted values and beliefs in some audiences. The theory addressed public concerns about rising violence and lowering moral standards in society. Its findings were welcomed by governments who were under pressure from religious and other sectional interest groups to censor the media.

Critics of Cultivation Theory said its definitions of media violence were too broad, that cartoon violence, for example, should not be taken as a serious influence on real violence. And why was it possible for members from the same family to respond differently to media influence? The notion of 'difference' was a continuing focus of philosophy and social theory, which in turn influenced media theory and ideas about the active audience. Cultivation Theory, with its focus on demographics and broad definitions of effects, could not account for individual interpretations of media messages and the multitude of audience responses to them.

NEW AUDIENCE RESEARCH AND RECEPTION THEORY

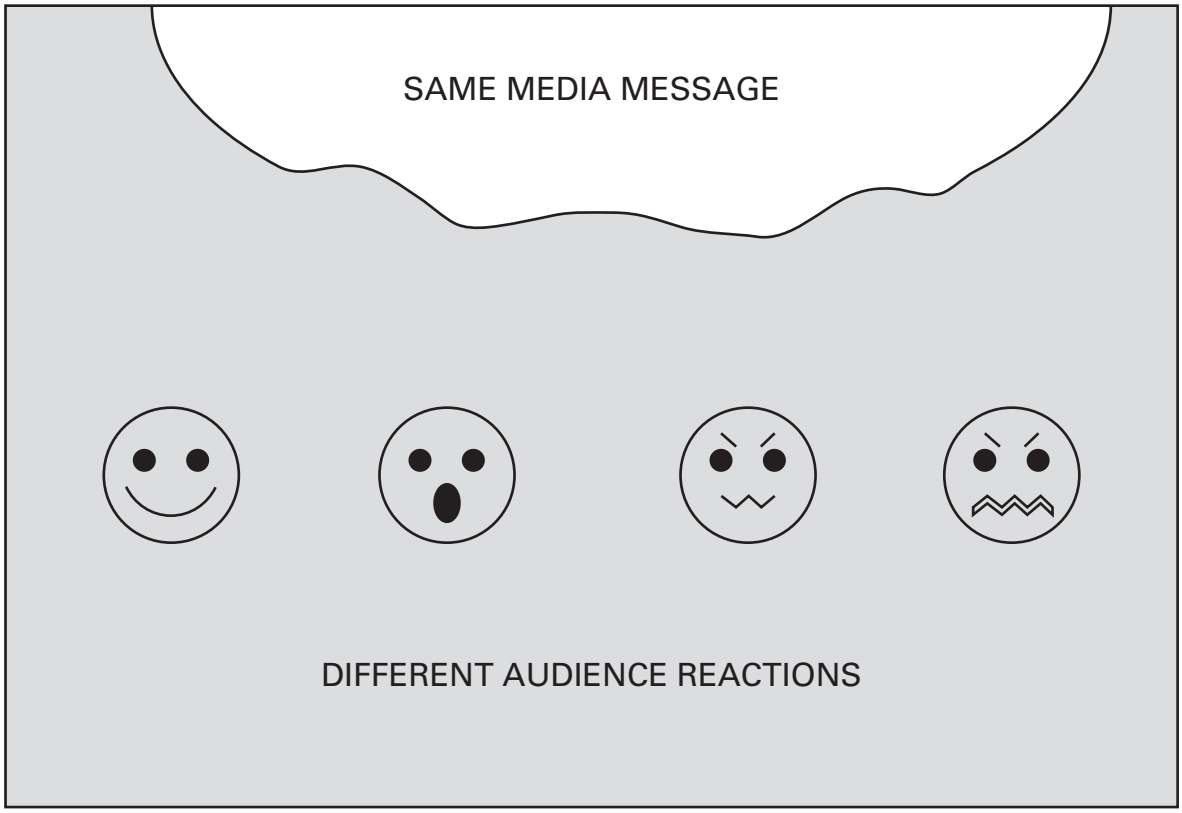


FIGURE 6.26F New Audience Theory and Reception Theory focused on the agency of the individual media consumer. It acknowledged that each of us employs a lifetime of different experiences to 'read' or 'decode' a media message, and can respond very differently to the same thing.

New Audience Research of the 1980s surveyed the responses of carefully selected and specific audiences to the same media messages. What emerged was a rich and varied picture of audiences having a complex array of preferences that had been overlooked in previous research. Information was gathered about individuals' cultural and ethnic backgrounds, family relationships and political views.

These highly differentiated audiences were asked for detailed feedback on their own experience of media products, such as TV current affairs and 'soap operas'. The result was a new way of understanding the media–audience relationship. By surveying groups such as business managers, trade unionists, university arts students and black college students, researchers found that different audiences structured their own understanding of television programs. They reinterpreted meaning according to their own beliefs and influences.

Reception Theories such as Encoding Decoding (E/D) explained New Audience Research discoveries. Audiences 'read' media product messages and 'decoded' them differently. It divided audiences' readings of media products into categories: dominant reading, negotiated reading and oppositional reading.

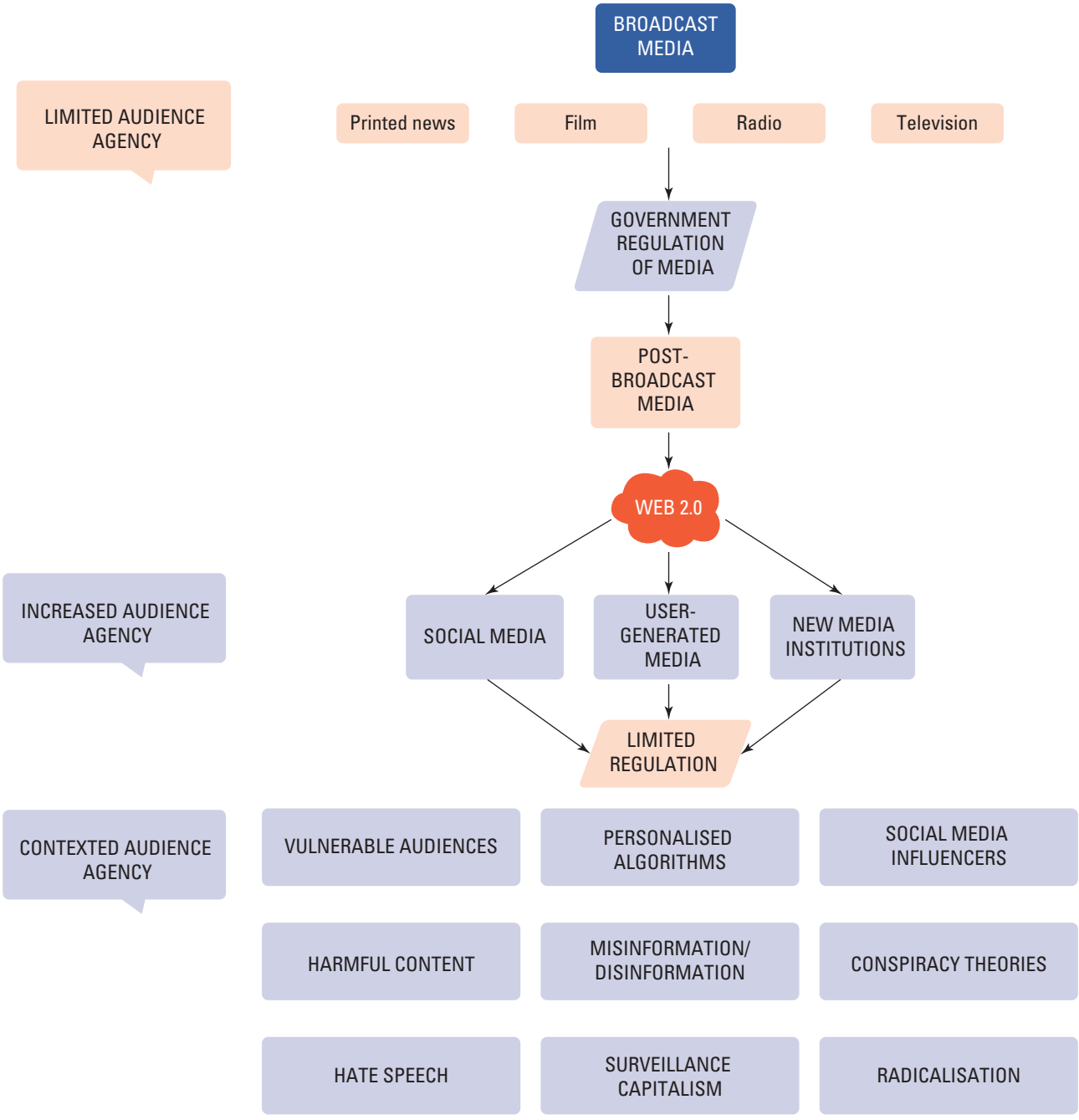
The fact that New Audience Research used long and highly detailed surveys meant that it could not be verified using quantitative methods. Its conclusions were of great interest but there were doubts about its usefulness, especially to the media industry. The idea of the 'open text' is, however, valuable to audiences empowering them to reinterpret the messages they receive. Understanding texts from different viewpoints has provided a fresh take on the way audiences interact with the media.



The flow of agency and control

What you have learnt about the media so far will change. Modern media is constantly in a state of evolution. To keep up with this study, it is important to think about each of the Key Knowledge components of the Study Design and how and where to apply your knowledge. This chapter will allow you to build the knowledge to understand each topic, but to apply it too. You will probably find as you move through the study that new case studies that apply to the Key Knowledge will arrive each day, week and month to challenge your understanding of the modern media world of agency and control.

In the graphic below, you can think about the way media has evolved over time, and how and where you will apply new ideas, topics and knowledge. This will be one of the most valuable and enriching elements of your study of Media.



This unit of study will provide you with an understanding of how the media dominated the lives of audiences prior to the invention of the internet. Many theorists examined the way a small group of media owners and producers had the capacity to influence the behaviour of large audiences. These studies were always contested, and there is no definitive answer to the role of media in influencing behaviour; however, what was clear is that the audience had little agency within the media as there was a limited capacity for audiences to 'feed back' their reactions and opinions to media creators.

A central element of this diagram is focused on the *post-broadcast* era and the invention of Web 2.0, which opened access to the internet and the means of production and distribution to audiences the world over. The obvious result, which would be most familiar to you, is the capacity for audiences to not only provide feedback to the media, but also to actively participate in the media production and distribution process. If you have a smartphone, you can create media content. This has been enabled by the rise of social media, the content we as participants in the media create, and the large media institutions that facilitate this process.

You will explore the challenges of media regulation. Governments are often tasked with providing legal and ethical frameworks that regulate media content to protect vulnerable audiences and maintain an acceptable level of community standards. You will explore the way the Australian government attempts to regulate the media in Australia and reflect on the challenges created by large social media organisations whose relaxed regulatory practices create issues both in Australia and around the world.

At the foot of the chart, you will find a significant focus of your study. The phrase 'contested audience agency' is used to describe an era that has forced us to question the value of the internet in modern media. The internet was thought to provide the ultimate media forum of democracy and free speech. Instead, it has created a range of challenges that resembles a video game 'final boss' that constantly evolves to outwit the player. Yes, audiences have agency, but at what cost? The global media institutions that create this environment harvest and monetise our every move, click and behaviour, turning our online lives into '*surveillance capitalism*' and, in turn, wield greater control over what audiences see, do, think and, eventually, act upon.

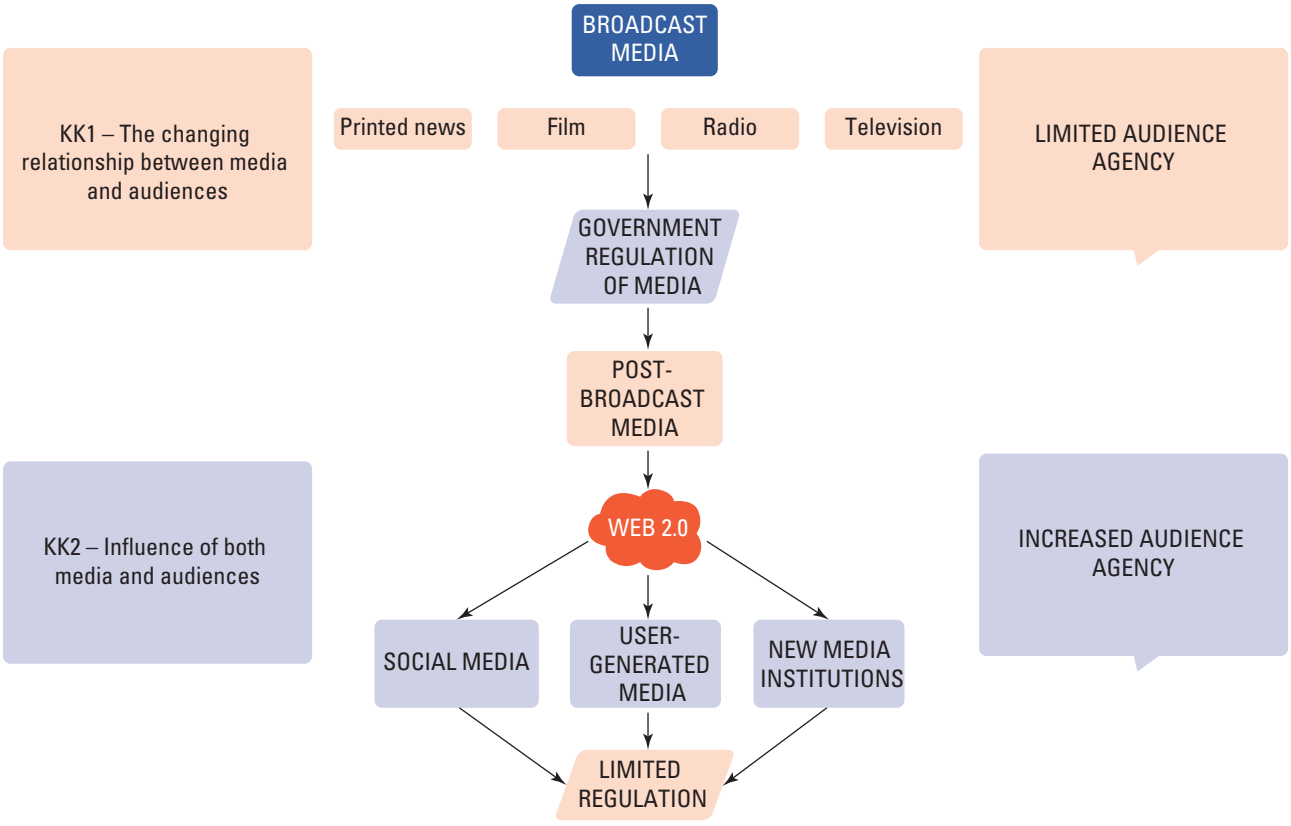
The new media environment needs fresh eyes and fresh ideas to unpack the way audiences are controlled and influenced and whether they still have the agency that was promised in the digital age.



KEY KNOWLEDGE OF THE UNIT

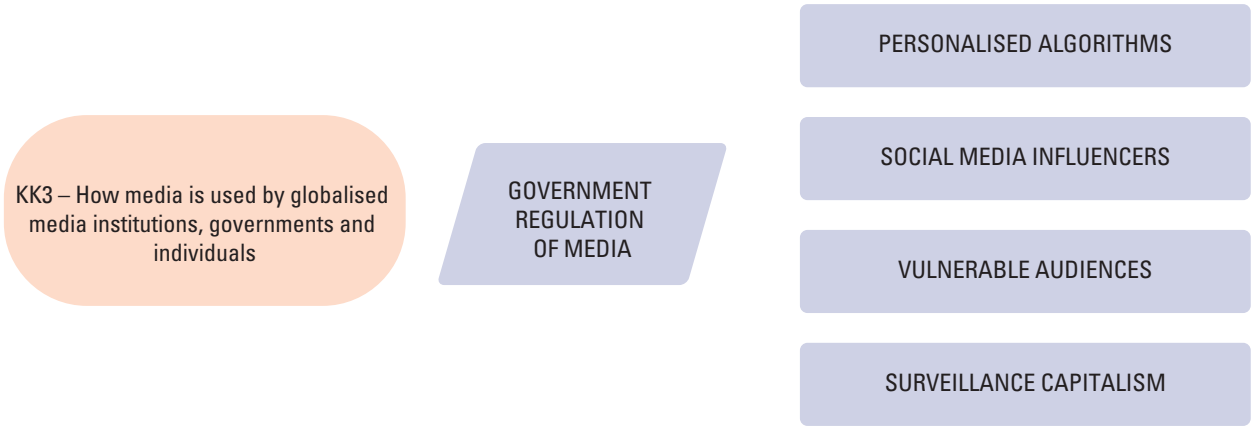
KK1: THE CHANGING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE MEDIA AND AUDIENCES

KK2: THE INFLUENCE OF BOTH MEDIA AND AUDIENCES



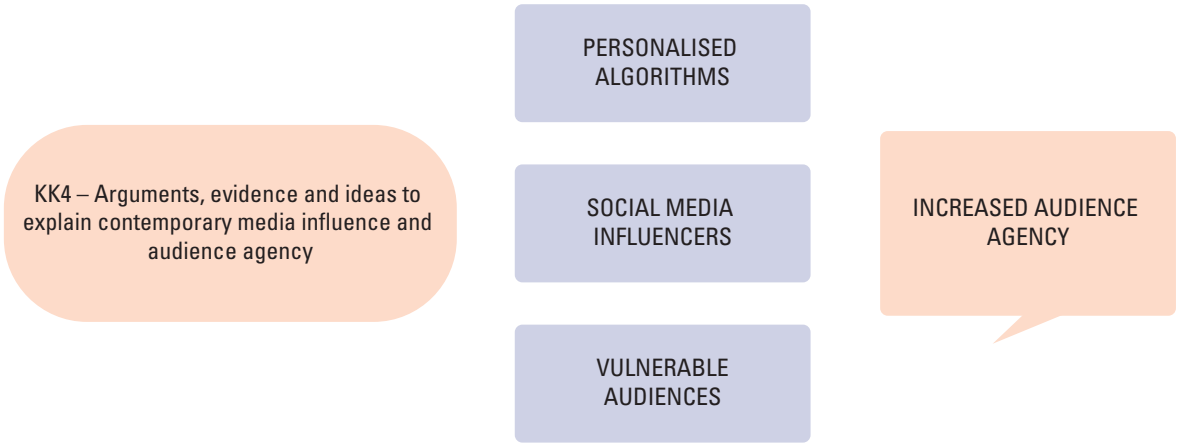
In the first two Key Knowledge dot points, you will explore the way the media has evolved over the past century and examine the way the internet has changed the agency experienced by audiences. Critical to the first element of this study will be to explore the role regulation played in dominating what audiences saw and did with the media and how we can measure 'influence' in the past, present and future. You will explore the way media influence was measured during the broadcast era and explore the role audience agency played in these assumptions.

KK3: HOW MEDIA IS USED BY GLOBALISED MEDIA INSTITUTIONS, GOVERNMENTS AND INDIVIDUALS



This Key Knowledge will help you understand the mechanics of modern media and how it is used by globalised media institutions, governments and individuals. You will explore the challenges that exist between efforts of governments to regulate media content and protect vulnerable audiences and the efforts of globalised media institutions to use personalised algorithms to dominate the eyeballs and clicks of users the world over. You will consider the broad and individual impact of surveillance capitalism on the modern media environment.

KK4: ARGUMENTS, EVIDENCE AND IDEAS TO EXPLAIN CONTEMPORARY MEDIA INFLUENCE AND AUDIENCE AGENCY



This Key Knowledge will expand your understanding of the way contemporary media can potentially influence the behaviour of audiences *and* the media itself. You will explore the contemporary media thinkers have begun to explain the way modern media can influence audience behaviour, but also the way in which the audience has begun to exercise control and agency. You will explore the impact of personalised algorithms, the influence of individuals and groups in online spaces and the impact that this can potentially have on vulnerable audiences.

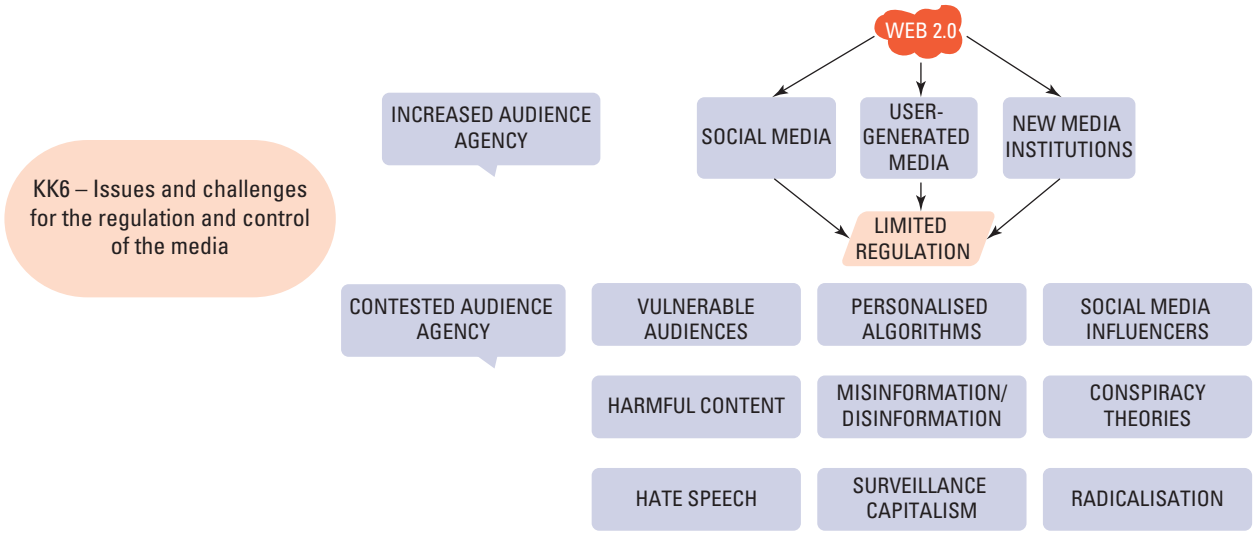


KK5: THE REGULATION OF MEDIA AND AUDIENCES IN AUSTRALIA



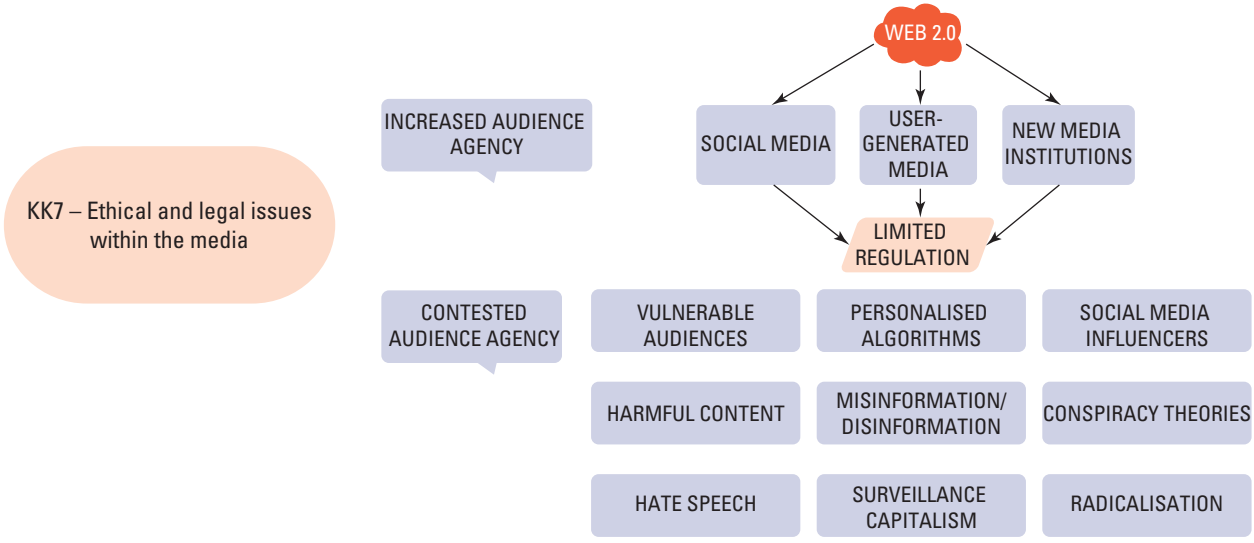
This Key Knowledge will help you understand the way that media in Australia has traditionally been regulated, and how these methods could be considered outdated and at odds with a modern media environment. You will understand the challenges created by large global media companies for the Australian government and difficulties it faces in protecting vulnerable audiences in the face of the limited regulatory practices of large social media companies.

KK6: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE REGULATION AND CONTROL OF THE MEDIA



This Key Knowledge will help you explore the challenges created by these same global media companies on a much broader scale. Unlike the previous KK, you are able to explore these issues for a range of nations and settings around the world. By exploring the relationship between increased audience agency and the social media platforms that facilitate it, you will build a strong understanding of the implications for audiences, governments and these institutions themselves as the issues explored can have a significant and lasting impact on modern society.

KK7: ETHICAL AND LEGAL ISSUES WITHIN THE MEDIA



In this final Key Knowledge, you will explore a specific case study that unpacks the grey area between the legal and ethical challenges created by modern media. While many of the issues you will explore create ethical dilemmas for audiences, you will be asked to consider how and when consequences – like a lack of privacy, data harvesting and harmful content – become legal issues and a challenge for audiences and governments around the world.

Endnotes

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ISBN 978-1-009-36510-9 Hoban et al
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