

Teacher Resource Bank

GCE Media Studies

MEST1: Good Section B answers from the June 2010 series.



Candidate 1 – Question 5

In my case study of music in the media audiences have changed the media output and become more powerful. An example of this is through the broadcast platform. Channels such as NME TV, MTV and VH1 allow audiences to use 'red button' features such as voting for music videos that they wish to be played on the channel. NME TV features a 'chart show' which is entirely voted for by viewers on weekdays, showing how the audience are given power in order to shape media output. However, in less recent years audiences had less power in shaping media output as it was more difficult for audience opinions and views to be shared with producers of media texts. As Web 2.0 evolved, E-media gave audiences more power. NME.com and other music websites allow users to sign up for online accounts, 'rate' photos and videos using a 'star' system and leave comments with their opinions on articles and blogs by NME writers. Users can also join forums and debate certain topics in music, such as bands splitting. NME.com advertises the fact that they 'print the best responses each week.' Comments on blogs, videos or news stories can then be featured on the magazine 'letters' page. Allowing audiences to shape what is contained in the magazine.

However, some aspects of broadcasting do not give audiences this power. DVDs such as 'Live Forever – The Rise and Fall of Britpop' conveys information and entertainment to audiences who seek it by buying the DVD, however the audience is assumed passive as they do not have an opportunity to contribute to the DVD and therefore shape the output.

Conversely more modern DVDs within the past 3 years, particularly those focused on particular musicians, allow fans to have more power. An example is 'The Killers – Live from The Royal Albert Hall' which features fan interviews allowing them to decide what opinions to contribute to the final DVD output as well as deciding their costume and location. Print has not given audiences the same power as new technology has enabled them to have. However Letters Pages in magazines such as NME and Q allow audiences some power in contributing to the output, as well as surveys attached within the magazine, allowing readers to vote for their favourite aspect of the magazine such as 'songs to hear this week', before sending them to the magazine creators, registering their opinion.

E-media has allowed audience power to increase. Sites such as Youtube and Myspace music allow users to listen to songs or watch music videos, as the website counts the number of 'plays' or 'hits' received. This can influence the artist's ideas on which songs and videos generate most interest and therefore which directions best to pursue, examples are Lady GaGa the 'most watched artist on Youtube.' As she has the most 'hits' this can influence artists such as Lady GaGa and alert them to what the consumers want, shaping output that artists have. Songs voted for online at NME.com are also reviewed in the magazine. Qthemusic.com allows magazine readers to submit 'cash for questions' in which they ask their own questions to a music artist, whose interview is featured in the next magazine. These 'comments' therefore give audiences power to shape the eventual output of the magazine and have parts of the magazine tailored to them. However some aspects from all three platforms are less successful at allowing audiences to shape the output. Although Youtube allows active viewers to leave comments with their opinions, most videos are hosted by normal users rather than official record label accounts, meaning that the audience opinions do not reach the creators of the text.

Several music channels such as Q do not feature TV shows voted for by viewers as often as other channels, instead focusing on relevant topics such as 'Confirmed'. This year's festival line-up.' This may still entertain audiences and gratify them however they have less control over what is played. Print advertisements for events such as the Glastonbury festival do not enhance audience power as the audience are assumed to be passive and are told 'Buy your tickets now.' However the BBC1

coverage of Glastonbury festival allows viewers to use 'red button' technology and choose which artist to watch. This is successful as it gives individuals power to watch who they choose without affecting other viewers. By giving audiences this power and freedom to select what they want to watch, the BBC is successful in involving the audience on a more personal level without merely casting a vote.

This supports the idea that audiences are becoming more powerful as the technology development allows audiences to interact and give opinions, shaping what they then consume. Before technology developments audiences were more limited. An example is older music videos such as Michael Jackson's 'Thriller'. The success of the video was down purely to sales of the single, as active audience members, viewers and fans did not have the option to 'rate' the video online or use 'red button' or 'vote' to indicate their opinion and its popularity. It was sales alone which determined the amount of airplay the video would receive – meaning that audiences still had power but it cost money and each individual had less of an impact – for example they could not register a negative opinion as the video.

The increased audience role allows institutions such as NME to cater towards audiences and their preferences, appealing more directly to their fans. This shows how successful institutions have given audiences more power and could be a factor for E-Media gaining more popularity than print or broadcast products.

Candidate 2 - Question 5

My media case study was focused around the entertainment industry in the news, particularly stories about the X Factor, Belle de Jour and the infamous 'JLS crush' in Birmingham. Through my research across the platforms of web, print and broadcast media, I discovered that audience members can become empowered by news media, particularly through the use of User Generated Content, where the audience are responsible for parts of the production of a media product.

For example, the article 'JLS apologise after Birmingham crush' on the website and forum 'Digital Spy' mentioned that footage taken from a camera phone was used to back up points made in the article, demonstrating the way that modern technology has aided the evolution of UGC in the news media. The institution which published the article also encourages audience contribution through the use of blogs or Forums. The rise of UGC has meant that the ability to censor or manipulate the content of the news media has been significantly reduced, so when we take this into consideration, Noam Chomsky's theory of 20% of people being in power within the media and 80% being manipulated by this power is contradicted. Rather than the views, values and ideologies of a few major companies, UGC exposed the audience to the views of the individual.

This brings me to the subject of supply and demand, if Noam Chomsky's theory of 80/20 were to apply, the audience demand would not be as relevant to the news-making process. The story 'Is Cheryl Cole's marriage losing the X-Factor' took up two full pages of the telegraph newspaper in 2009, indicating that the Telegraph may have sacrificed news objectivity in order to fit the demands of the audience. The article bears very little relevance to the lives of the audience, but the popularity of celebrity culture means that Cole is considered a newsworthy figure. The same applies to the 6 minute 'Jedward' interview which features on ITV's morning show GMTV after the twins were voted off of the X Factor, 2009. However, the show is broadcast on ITV, so the interview could be evidence of cross promotion rather than supply and demand, as we see with the Sun's article 'Storm over Lucie Exit', in terms of ownership the Sun is a product of NewsCorp, which has shares in BskyB, who in turn have shares in ITV suggesting that the Sun seeks to promote the X Factor as a newsworthy story which its audience will find interesting because when ITV gains viewers, the NewsCorp benefit, albeit somewhat remotely.

But even though the audience may not be responsible for the subject matter of the news, they often contribute to the content, as in the 'Storm over Lucie Exit' article, which contained extracts from emails sent by readers of the newspaper, the Daily Mirror article '60 teens injured' in JLS crush also used interviews with members of the public to back up points made in the article, thus indicating that rather than being the powerless 80% the audience are a valued part of the news making process.

From a subject matter point of view, the audience of the news media are definitely becoming more empowered with supply and demand having a heavy influence on what is and isn't newsworthy. However, in terms of content, audience contributions, though popular, are often manipulated to fit the ideologies of the institution behind the media publication.

Candidate 3 - Question 5

Lifestyle media is defined by its audience's way of life and consumption of certain products. Topics such as health, beauty, relationships and careers are common feature of lifestyle texts and are often linked to celebrities who are mostly represented as the epitome of success. Lifestyle media, by its very nature is reflective of audiences and as technology progresses media texts include an increasing amount of audience input contributing to a texts overall output.

The print text, Heat Magazine is heavily influenced by stories about celebrity gossip concerning their lives and relationships. In this way, it can be argued that audiences have little power in shaping the text as several of these stories are created free from audience influence. However, a section included in Heat magazine is entitled 'Your celeb stories', for which audiences are encouraged to send in stories and photos via emails and texts. This shows that audiences are part of the production of Heat Magazine and have some power in the shaping of its output. Conversely, the print text Asiana Magazine does not provide nearly as much opportunities for audience input, as it is dominated by advisory articles on topics such as sex and careers. In this way, Asiana supports the hypodermic model theory as audiences are treated as passive and fed information rather than participating in output.

However, Asiana is an example of a lifestyle text which targets a very niche audience of young Asian women and does not represent the role of audiences as well as Heat magazine.

The e-media counterpart of Heat magazine is the website of Heatworld.com, creating a symbolic relationship through which audience participation and input is encouraged. Heatworld provides a multitude of opportunities for audience shaping input, as audiences can vote in polls, comment on articles and join the online forum. In this way, they shape the texts output significantly. The website livingtv.co.uk incorporates the convergent channel 'Liv' which has four sections (Celeb, Style, Popular and Bite Me) which are formed from audience voting on their viewing preferences, meaning they shape output. This is especially true of lifestyle 'e-media' as in order to be popular, it must reflect audience preferences. The 'Liv' channel supports the uses and gratification theory as it provides opportunities for audiences to fulfil their need for information and entertainment. As they fulfil their needs, they also shape output.

The broadcast text, 'Loose Women' prominently uses a common feature of lifestyle media – celebrity. The celebrities which feature are not elected by the audience, however, there is a slot of the show where audiences can email or phone in with any questions for the celebrity guests. This proves that audiences are more powerful in shaping output and is particularly true of lifestyle as it is reality based and therefore encourages live communication. In contrast, the lifestyle show 'Trinny and Susannah: What not to wear' does not offer any opportunities for such audience communication. The programme is more in keeping with Marxist ideas of the upper-class bourgeoisie ruling the lower-class proletariat.

Within the show, two upper-class women are shown as having superior fashion standards and domineeringly direct the usually lower-class women to more attractive dress style.

This is also reflected in its lack of audience involvement which means the views of the audience are oppressed and upper-class views are allowed to dominate, leaving the audience powerless in the shaping of the text.

In conclusion, there are few examples within lifestyle media which show audiences to be powerless in the shaping of output. Both 'Asiana' magazine as a print text and 'Trinny and Susannah: What not to wear' show that that audiences in some cases have no influence in forming output supported by their accordance with the hypodermic model and Marxist ideas. However, the evidence for audiences having power in the shaping of output far outweighs the converse. Heat magazine,

Heatworld.com and 'Loose Women' show how audiences influence large sections of media texts, and livingtv.co.uk in particular, through its support of the Uses and Gratifications theory, show how audiences needs can have a direct influence on media output. The emergence of new technology which leads to convergence like the 'Liv' channel mean audiences do have increasing power in shaping media output and this is especially true of lifestyle media as it consistently aims to mirror the values and preferences of its audience.