

**(12) Explain how some features of contemporary media are more democratic than others.**

The introduction of contemporary media such as web 2.0 and social networking has caused today's media to become more democratic. The new media has joined the old media platforms like newspapers, television and radio giving citizens greater opportunity to share the opinions and express their thoughts. The medium through which they can most easily do this is documentary, citizen journalism and even fandom. Whilst other mediums like Reality TV allow some levels of audience participation, however it is limited, meaning the medium is not as democratic. Whilst overall the digital divide does threaten the democracy of the earlier mentioned mediums.

With the development and evolution of technology, documentary has become a more accessible medium for regular citizen to communicate their opinions. The compacting of technology like digital cameras and their affordability has enabled citizens to own them as opposed to that technology always being in the hands of big budgeted producers. In addition to the accessibility of recording software, the wealth of editing programmes available such as 'iMovie', 'Windows Movie Maker' or more extensive programmes like 'Sony Vegas' empower and encourage citizens to film and edit their own footage, which is essentially creating documentary. Sites born from web 2.0 like YouTube allow citizens to distribute their creations to huge audiences for free, providing them with a platform they never would have been able to acquire before the introduction of contemporary media.

An example of an individual who did this is Jonathan Caouette. He created his own documentary entitled 'Tarnation' depicting the story of his life and how it was impacted by his mother Renee and her illness. He comprised the film completely of his own accord using his own family photographs, recorded footage, and compiled it all together in 'iMovie'. The film was shown in 22 theatres and grossed approximately \$600,000 which is amazing considering its meagre £200 (approximate) budget. The documentary opened a lot of doors for Caouette in terms of his career as he then went on to direct 'All Tomorrow's Parties,' another documentary consisting of footage captured by the music festival audience.

'Loose Change' is another documentary that was able to be made by cause of the medium democracy. The film portrayed a very controversial opinion of the 9/11 terrorist attackers being a conspiracy. A media text with such a controversial message would never receive the funds to be put into production, and no cinema would ever screen it. Thus, if documentary wasn't such a democratic, accessible medium a documentary like this could've never been made.

Citizen Journalism is an extremely democratic aspect of contemporary media as it empowers citizens to have a voice. As stated in the indymedia mission statement (a site where citizens can post articles for free) 'Indymedia erodes the dividing line between the reporters and reported,' suggesting it aims to challenge Gramsci's theory of Hegemony by allowing and enabling citizens to share their opinions in the way that journalists do. This medium has been severely bettered by the introduction of web 2.0

as (similarly to YouTube for video texts) it gives citizens readers, literally, from all over the world. Web optimist Dan Gillmore thinks citizen journalism is a great thing as it empowers citizens. He acknowledges 'there is this cliché that journalists write the first draft of history; now I think these people are writing it in some ways and that's an important shift.' His quote refers to the development of new media like camera phones and handheld camcorders that give citizens the means to capture life as it occurs. For example, most of the footage of the 9/11 terrorist attacks were caught by tourists on camera, before big news stations. Documentaries like 'Hurricane Katrina: Caught on Camera' are testament to the power of citizens now by cause of contemporary media. Jeff Jarvis also notes, 'We live in the era of news served raw – life is on the record.'

The democratisation of Citizen Journalism can also be interpreted from individuals who have used the medium for their benefit and become an almost 'second-tier' to the news as Alex Bruns suggested citizen journalists should be. For instance online activists like YouTubers Phillip de Franco and Michael Buckley have their own online news shows ('The Phillip de Franco Show' and 'What the Buck' respectively) which draw in millions of viewers daily. 'The Phillip de Franco Show' concentrates on world wide news and American Politics as it develops, whilst 'What the Buck' focuses on celebrity news. More formal online news shows can be found in 'Democracy Now' which also has a big following. Andrew Keen believes that Citizen Journalism isn't democratic as it only offers opinions rather than facts. He argues the audience's role is to engage with news provided for them by professionals. However, I think the prior examples show just how versatile and democratic the medium of Citizen Journalism is due to contemporary media like web 2.0 and the advancements in digital technology.

Fandom is democratic in similar ways to Citizen Journalism. Web 2.0 has empowered citizens to become participants as opposed to just spectators. Media theorist Henry Jenkins acknowledges fans as being 'the most active segment of the media; the one that refuses to just accept what they're given; rather insisting to become full participants.'

The web including social networking sites like 'Facebook' and 'Twitter' allow them to connect with other individuals with similar likes. The same software that enables individuals to make documentaries allows fans to make fan videos which they can share with huge audiences on YouTube. Whereas prior to contemporary media fans wouldn't have been able to do any of this or at least not with such ease. With just the aid of old media if a fan had written a story they could only email it, or send to people they knew. Whereas web 2.0 allows them to share textual creations with millions of sites like fanfiction.net and livejournal.com.

An example of fans who have benefited from the democratisation of fandom brought on by contemporary media is the theatre company 'Starkid' based in Chicago. A play they wrote and performed 'A Very Potter Musical' based on the 'Harry Potter' series went viral. Through the help of YouTube, Facebook and Twitter it acquired mass recognition, accumulating over 60 million views altogether. As such the introduction of contemporary media has really democratised fandom as a medium and brought even more truth to Henry Jenkins belief that:

‘fans are consumers who are also producers, readers who also write, spectators who also participate.’

Although still democratic, the medium of reality TV is no way near as democratic as documentary journalism and fandom. It is partially democratic in the way that it encourages audience participation; allowing consumers to vote for real citizens on television on shows like Big Brother, ‘X Factor’ and ‘Afghan Star’. However, as theorist Sue Holmes acknowledges the levels of audience participation are limited as, in the case of ‘Big Brother’ you can only vote for the people who are up for eviction. Whilst in the case of ‘The X Factor’ and ‘American Idol’ the celebrity judges make the final call on who goes and who stays.

In conclusion, contemporary media is extremely democratic. Web 2.0 and the introduction of social networking sites have enabled citizens to create change through mediums of documentary, citizen journalism, fandom and social networking. Through viral advertising on Facebook, virtually unknown band ‘Rage Against The Machine’ were able to beat Joe McElderry and the ‘X Factor’ backed by huge network ITV to the coveted Christmas Number One. The success of the ‘Rage Against The Machine’ campaign derived from the fact that it raised awareness of citizens wanting change, not necessarily that the ‘Rage Against The Machine’ song was better. Similarly, the recent uproar in Egypt was partially begun by Wael Ghonin, a google executive via twitter. He encouraged protests via the site, and he raised huge awareness instantly which led to the necessary changes being made. As such these occurrences highlights that social networking doesn’t just create ‘weak ties’ as Malcolm Gladwell thought, but rather provides evidence for Clay Shirky’s theory:

‘A revolution doesn’t happen when society adopts new tools; it happens when it adopts new behaviours.’

Finally, the democratic values of all of these mediums pale in comparison to the small democratic opportunity posed by reality TV.

**This is a level 4 response. It consistently deals with the complex issue of the relationship between media and democracy and manages to offer contemporary examples throughout. The examples are discussed in the context of appropriate and well-handled theories which are not only understood but also the subject of some critique. Most importantly, the candidate consistently evaluates this critical perspective, rather than offering a one-sided account of how democratic media is. The complex nature of the debate is described articulately.**

**1a) Explain how far your understanding of the conventions of existing media influenced the way you created your own media products. Refer to a range of examples in your answer to show how this understanding developed over time.**

Plan -> Also meant to say music was much improved in A2 as I looked at music specifically in Teen Comedies and replicated the music myself in Garage Band. Creating a much more accurate and specific, original sound than if I'd looked through the web.

In AS media I made a preliminary task and an opening sequence of a fictional film entitled 'Hunting Innocence'. Whilst in A2 media I created a Teaser Trailer for my fictional film 'Spinning Time' and an accompanying poster and magazine cover to promote the same film.

Entering onto the course I wasn't used to the idea of using conventions from media texts. As such getting to grips with this in my AS year was definitely a challenge. As a regular consumer of media texts including television, radio and magazine I knew what I expected from the mediums so that did help when putting myself in the position of producer.

Towards the creation of my opening sequence I worked with a partner to create a thriller film. Together we knew the conventions of a thriller in terms of 'mise en scene, soundtrack and camerawork so we didn't look that extensively into already existing media texts, which is probably why there is a vast improvement in the quality of my A2 production. We did however site the thriller 'Brick' as an influence as we wanted to try and recreate the dull muted colour scheme of that in our own film. We achieved this by filming in dystopic urban landscapes of South East London.

We also knew the convention of thrillers was to follow Sergeis theory of using silence. As such we did use it towards the end of the opening sequence to create a tense atmosphere when Abby finally reaches home, before the non-diegetic sound of Abby's heartbeat begins to build representing her anticipation and fear. Aside from that we used the thriller convention of having quiet acoustic music which we downloaded from a copyright free music website. The rest of the sequence consisted of ambient and diegetic sounds captured when filming.

However, in my A2 project as I was working on my own I was able to consider everything in my own time to different levels of depth. Pauling and Czimentiniyli's theory is that the best ideas spring from the group work as you need to have loads of ideas before you can have one really good idea. However, I found this not to be the case. In AS my partner and I had to compromise on a lot of decision to please us both, whereas working alone in the second year I only had to please myself. Subsequently I was able to produce something I was more interested in, in terms of genre, which ultimately, I think, led to a more successful outcome.

Towards the creation process of 'Spinning Time' I did extensive research into already existing trailers. I browsed teaser trailers on YouTube and IMDB from a variety of different genres before analysing exactly what I wanted in my trailer in terms of genre, structure and mise en scene. This was far more developed than my research in

AS which consisted of watching the opening sequences of just 'Office Space' and 'Brick.'

I decided I wanted to create a voice over for my teaser trailer, complying with conventions of Teen Comedy and specifically 'Chick Flick' trailers like 'Picture This', 'Mean Girls' and 'Not Another Teen Movie'. I wanted the voice over to have the same happy tone but take on the structure of the 'Buried' Teaser trailer voice over, in which the setting, situation and dilemma of the film are presented to the audience, leaving them in anticipation of what happens. I followed through with this convention, filming the voice over on a video camera and extracting the sound in iMovie, before inserting it into the trailer. With my experience of digital technology increased I was able to do this, but I never would've had the confidence to do this in AS Media.

In A2 media the mise en scene of my trailer was considered in more detail than in the AS. In 'Hunting Innocence' we dressed Abby using only Barthes' theory of connotations and denotations as a guide. Her red coat was to suggest danger, whilst the rucksack and art portfolios were to suggest her academia. Whereas in 'Spinning Time' I focussed much more on dressing protagonist Myles in accordance to pre-established conventions. I drew influence from 'Mean Girls' in which the girls dressed fashionably and predominantly in pink. I used this convention by dressing Myles fashionably, but also challenged the stereotype by not having her in pink and revealing attire as this would present her to be like the 'plastics' of 'Mean Girls' which her character is not intended to be.

My set design was another heavily considered aspect. It was based on 'Freaky Friday' and the design of protagonist Anna's room. In her room there are pictures on the wall, and CD's and books on display. As such I made these props visible to suggest aspects of Myle's character and personality. Comedy 'Ramona and Beezus' also influenced set design and lighting as I wanted to replicate the happy atmosphere presented in its cinematic trailer. I did so by filling the room with bright props, dressing myles in bright clothes and scheduling filming for sunny days to achieve high lighting – as I didn't have the means to create it artificially. In AS media we filmed predominantly outside and so could not change the appearance of our locations, as such not using any real media conventions.

In conclusion in AS media my partner did not use many specific conventions of media products. Rather we worked with the general vague things we knew about the thriller genre from being audiences. Whereas in A2 media I immersed myself in the idea of producing. Extensively researching and analyzing the form of a teaser trailer and drawing influences from a wide range of existing media texts.

**This is a clear level 4, excellent response which meets all of the level 4 criteria. Progression over time is described and evaluated with specific and well-used examples – of real media conventions and creative decisions made that were informed by understanding of those. Two kinds of theory are deployed – institutional techniques which have become conventional over time, and media theory which accounts for the conventional nature of meaning and its reception.**

**1b) Analyse one of your coursework productions in relation to the concept of audience.**

‘Spinning Time’ was the teaser trailer I made in A2 media and is what I will be analysing in terms of genre.

‘Spinning Time’ is a teen comedy about a teenage girl who has a watch that can control time. As such it is aimed at teenage girls who can relate and identify with the protagonist. Subsequently my target audience is girls aged between eleven and nineteen.

I catered for this audience, firstly by presenting a relatable protagonist in Myles Brown. She is a student dedicated to her work, though also a bit lazy as depicted by her hesitance to get out of bed the trailers beginning. The film was intended to be a Disney family film and as such ‘Funmi Buriamoh’ the actress playing Myles Brown is the new up and coming teen star like Selena Gomez in ‘Ramona and Beezus’. As such the casting of Buriamoh would be an aspect to draw in the target audience.

My target audience are predominantly fans of popular music – energetic, exciting, like stuff from the top 40. Chick flicks which are the sub genre of films that cater to my audience feature this kind of music throughout teaser trailers and the film. As such I complied with the conventions of Chick Flicks by incorporating this kind of music to entice my target audience.

I was in no way trying to create moral panic with my film. It’s Disney-esque video was highly considered during its creating, empowering it to be the kind of film the family can see together.

I think that there are many uses and gratifications to ‘Spinning Time’. The positive portrayal of an Afro-Caribbean teen is not something that is often seen in big-budgeted Hollywood films/ As such it breaks stereotypes and challenges conventions, and subsequently some preconceptions regarding the demographic. Additionally it provides the target audience with a new role model to look up to and possibly use as reinforcement for their personal values and beliefs – as Myles is quite a positive character.

The preferred reading of ‘Spinning Time’ is that audiences will wish they were in Myles position; having a watch that could control time as it would make life more exciting, easy and generally more fun. Having the instant opportunity to rewind time and do things over again (like a test for example) would eliminate the universal fear of making mistakes. I think eroding that fear would generally make people happier and less self conscious.

However, an oppositional reading to the film could be that Myles is too lazy and selfish to be using such an amazing gift for lazy personal gain reasons – like catching a bus. The audience may expect Myles to do something much more meaningful like prevent deaths or wars.

In conclusion I provided for my target audience in a number of ways (including music, casting, mise en scene to give the happy Disney-esque vibe and plot) during the creation of ‘Spinning Time’. The piece is for entertainment as opposed to creating

moral panic, and hopefully offers audience members the opportunity for self discovery and social integration through discussing what they'd do if they had a time controlling watch.

**This is a level 3 response. Some elements are proficient and some are competent.**

**Proficient – the ability to select one piece of work and to relate it to theories of audience / effects such as moral panics and preferred readings (though these are not attributed to Cohen or Hall / Morley).**

**Competent – the examples are clear and the theoretical analysis is straightforward – in this sense the understanding of audiences' reading the text is insufficient for the higher mark level.**