

G325 June 2010

Section A 42/50

Section B - Collective Identity - 48/50

Total 90/100

Examiner's Comments

1a The candidate writes clearly about how they researched audience demographics, conventions and existing market trends. They discuss their research into *Kerrang*, *NME* and *Q* with specific examples of how this research informed what they did. They accompany this with evaluative views, with hindsight, on how they might have made more of a semiotic approach. Professional practice is discussed in terms of audience research and industry research extends into an email interview with a newspaper editor. However no detail is offered on how this informed production so the mark for examples and e/a/a is lowered accordingly. Skills development is a constant theme of the answer.

1b The candidate immediately defines genre, gives examples and then describes their own intention to challenge conventions. Fiske is quoted and genre is then set up as open to debate – hardly any candidates did this. Later, Richard Jenkins on identity is utilised and in both cases these ideas are immediately related to the candidates' own production work. Finally a speculation (perhaps tokenistic, but still reflective) that they '*could, however have experimented with postmodern bricolage and pastiche in order to blur genre boundaries and create a more immersive experience*' ensures full marks for terminology at this level (in conjunction with the aforementioned citations).

6 Discussing the representation of women in both contemporary and historical media, the candidate uses the ideas (accurately referenced) of Buckingham, Gauntlett and Adorno along with Mulvey and Butler and throughout the answer s/he is in command of this theory and constantly applies it to relevant examples – Nuts magazine, Cosmopolitan and an older reference to Tomb Raider for historical context. Structuralist and queer theory are comfortably handled later and Adorno is even referred to as a 'quasi-Marxist'. This highly theoretical approach is only ONE way of accessing level 4 and other candidates will get there with different approaches but in this case the requirements for a deep understanding of media theory and relevant application to contemporary media along with personal engagement and fluency are all met securely.

Candidate Answer

1a)

Research is essential during the construction of media texts. It allows you to identify audience demographics, conventions, existing market trends and more. I feel that with the transition from my Foundation Portfolio to my Advanced Portfolio, my skills and ability to conduct effective research have developed considerably.

For my Foundation Portfolio I produced pages for a music magazine- the front cover, contents page, and a double-page feature spread. My research was limited and this is reflected in the quality of my final product.

I undertook basic market research by identifying existing magazines of the specific genre I had chosen (Indie music) such as 'Kerrang!', NME and Q.

These were analysed for recurring codes and conventions which I could note in my production blog and later adapt or challenge in the production stage. Although this was useful, in hindsight now my ability has developed I could have performed a semiotic analysis of the key conventions; or analysed the real texts in greater textual detail for more than simply common conventions. This would have ensured a much more effective final product, based on both producer creativity and market research; rather than just what I felt was best.

In addition to this I used the internet to carry out research into target audience – demographics of readers of existing media texts and how I could use these to refine my target audience and further identify their wants and expectations. This is something I feel I could have built upon considerably. It is secondary research; I missed the opportunity to carry out primary audience feedback in the form of questionnaires and similar to gain first-hand opinions of my target audience.

The level of research and uses for it during my Advanced Portfolio however represents a clear increase in ability and a development of skills.

For my audience research this time, I distributed questionnaires locally to identify audience demographics, readership statistics for local newspapers (my task was to produce the first 2 pages of a local newspaper) and audience requirements from a new local newspaper.

With the results of this primary research I created bar charts so trends could easily be identified.

Focus Groups also played a major role in my research. I decided that this time, constant audience feedback and further research during the construction stage would improve the overall effectiveness of my final product. From my target audience I selected 10 people to become part of a focus group, which I would then present with potential fonts, layouts, images and other micro-elements for feedback; showing how I have considered primary research more.

In addition to this, for my Advanced Portfolio I also analysed existing media texts of the same genre as with my Foundation Portfolio.

However this time I performed a full semiotic analysis on the front covers of existing newspapers using Roland Barthe's levels of signification, therefore enabling myself to identify how real media texts target their audiences and draw attention from a semiotic approach.

When compared with my basic textual analysis at AS; the semiotic approach used in addition to a more complex textual analysis at A2 demonstrates a development of my skills and an increased knowledge in the importance of research into real media texts.

I carried out further primary research for the Advanced Portfolio using digital technology by e-mailing the editors of existing real newspapers enquiring about how to effectively capture an audience's imagination and what constructs a successful local newspaper. This I believed would provide vital primary research, giving me an insight into the construction

process in the contemporary newspaper industry which I could then apply to my own production. This would have created an effective final product if I had used it at AS as I did at A2, and arguably contributes to the skills development that led to my A2 product being much more effective.

In conclusion with the progression from Foundation to Advanced Portfolios, my use of primary research as opposed to secondary and adaption of more complex research techniques highlights a development of my skills and offers an explanation as to why my final A2 product was a deal more successful than AS.

EAA 8

EG 8

T 3

(19)

1b)

Genre is the placement of media texts into categories for identification based on conventions, style, and their general form. Genres can be fairly fixed and stable, for example, 'Action' or can become blurred and undergo postmodern bricolage to end up a new sub-genre for example 'Action-comedy'. Genre is important when producing a media text in order to be able to direct a text at an audience, and for this audience to be able to identify the text's form.

As part of my Foundation Portfolio I produced 4 pages of an Indie Music magazine. Genre was particularly crucial for this production.

I chose to challenge the traditional convention of 'specialising' to sub-genres with my genre of magazine: constructing it around the Indie genre in general rather than the sub-genre of Indie-Rock or similar which can be identified in similar real media texts such as 'Kerrang!'. This generalised adaption of a broad and solid genre allowed for a wider target audience, and increased opportunity to creatively experiment with codes and conventions from the construction of genre.

Codes and conventions are elements of a media text that we as an audience expect to see in a particular genre; those we use to identify it. Whether the view is taken that an audience have broadly similar expectations or John Fiske's view that "there is no audience, only individuals with varying tastes" is adapted; codes and conventions are crucial for consumers to identify genre.

On the front page I conformed to the convention of having a large image of the featured artist. Although her clothing represents her as fairly understood (arguably a challenge of convention for this genre) they still in terms of colour and form have semiotic connotations of the Indie sub-culture; allowing consumers an easy link by which to identify genre.

Research showed me that real media texts such as NME in this genre tend to write in a linear narrative, with restrictive language in an informal style. This is a key convention of the genre, and is one I chose to develop during the construction of my Foundation Portfolio by writing in an informal, almost 'chatty style'. This, despite being appealing to my target audience, further represents my production as being of the Indie music magazine genre.

Crucially, it creates a representation of the Indie genre as youthful, reinforcing the dominant myth that Indie is somehow the 'genre of the younger generation'. The connotations of the genre can be effective, giving the sub-culture a sense of identity which they may feel they need – as Richard Jenkins said in 1966, "Without it [identity], social life is unimaginable." I have therefore used genre here to construct identity, allowing a sub-culture comprising mainly of my target audience to relate to the product more as a direct result of its genre. On close analysis I feel that I have used genre effectively. My use of codes and conventions allowed me to effectively construct and incorporate genre into my

magazine so it can easily be identified as a result of genre categorisation. I could however have experimented with postmodern bricolage and pastiche in order to blur traditional genre boundaries and create a more innovative final product as a result. However mainly, I feel my construction of genre is effective, and that my consideration of escapism as a form of consumption (Uses and Gratifications) that led to the consideration in turn of identity being represented by genre allowed me to use the concept of genre to a great degree to create a solid, effective and appealing final product for the Foundation Portfolio.

EAA 10

EG 8

T 5

(23)

Section A Total 42/50

Section B Question 6 Media and Collective Identity

For A2 I have studied the representation of women in both contemporary and historical media. As David Buckingham noted in 2008, “identity is fluid and changeable” – and arguably the identity of women in recent times has changed, some may argue it has become more mediated.

Identity itself refers to who we actually are, the construction of ourselves – perhaps even the representation of ourselves and our social groups that we as media consumers wish to have. While many such as Buckingham and Gauntlett champion the fact that we create and construct our own identities; others such as Theodore Adorno see identity as something pushed upon us by the mass media, that we have no alternative but to take the dominant identities we are exposed to “something is offered for all so that none may escape,” he writes in explanation of this fact. Adorno therefore argues that our identities are becoming increasingly mediated – that is, that they are influenced by the mass media, inherent identities are weak and influenced by the media around us.

‘Nuts’ magazine is a stereotypical ‘lad’s mag’, aimed at 18-24 year old males. In an analysis of the 19-25th March 2010 issue I performed the content analysis and it proves interesting with regards to representation of women. Images of semi-naked females in suggestive poses represent women as victims of symbiotic annihilation. They are portrayed as merely objects of sexual pleasure for men – the images have been constructed, as Laura Mulvey would argue with her theory of the Male Gaze, solely with the male consumers in mind, who using the Uses and Gratifications Model are consuming the text for sexual pleasure. Most significant here, however, is the so-called Mirror Effect of Mulvey’s Male Gaze.

This states that women themselves consuming the images will apply the Male Gaze, and see the female in the image in a sense of what Baudrillard would call hyperreality, assuming the idea that this representation is ‘how women should be’ and in turn they should construct their identities similarly in order to appeal to males – after all women are the subdominant group in an apparent patriarchal society. Identity therefore has become mediated in this situation as Adorno says. The “culture industry” that is the mass media has imposed a dominant representation onto a collective group; who have felt pressured to adapt it as part of their collective identity.

In the 2001 film “Lara Croft: Tomb Raider”, Lara Croft, the main female character is represented as fairly masculine (stereotypically masculine) in terms of her choice of

clothing, body language and manner. All of these micro-elements construct her identity. However, throughout the film, we also see Croft use what can be considered the concept of femininity to her advantage, flirting with male characters and wearing stereotypically feminine clothes towards the final scenes.

In terms of her character's identity this supports Buckingham's aforementioned assumption that "identity is fluid and changeable" but also conforms to Queer Theory. Queer Theory is widely recognized in Judith Butler's 1990 book 'Gender Trouble' and states that the genders male and female are just as much the product of representation as the concepts of masculinity and femininity. She calls for a blurring of boundaries between genders and their stereotypical identities and calls for the media to celebrate such diversity. As a character, Croft arguably has blurred the boundaries displaying traits of both male and female behaviour.

If Adorno's assertions are applied here it can be argued that again the dominant identity of women as sly, untrustworthy and in need of patriarchal dominance is being applied through Croft's deviant use of fronting identity to her advantage.

However some could argue that the prominence of Queer Theory does not encourage the mediation of female identity instead it encourages dominant representations to be characterized and boundaries to be blurred – implying greater personal control over identity as advocated by John Fiske and David Buckingham rather than mediated identities.

Cosmopolitan is a magazine aimed at females around 30+. In all ways it can be said that pragmatically the magazine pushes femininity as an identity for itself, with stereotypically female colours and text styles. In turn, the feminine identity of the magazine is applied as a representation of the readers, further suggesting a mediation of women's identity. The magazine focuses heavily on beauty and fitness, reinforcing the dominant ideology of the "ideal" women that women should aspire to a fixed concept of beauty.

As an example in the April 2010 issue a large image of Holly Willoughby (celebrity) features on the cover. Although unlike Nuts magazine, she is wearing fairly covering clothing and lacks cosmetic make-up, it is interesting to note that her clothing is white in colour – Ferdinand de Saussure would note that this has semiotic significance using his semiotic theory and Roland Barthe's levels of signification, we can identify that white has connotations of innocence and weakness. Therefore this represents her as innocent and weak – reinforcing dominant patriarchal representations of women. Due to her status as a celebrity, her level of influence is great. In herself she is a semiotic symbol of success and affluence, so those who take inspiration from her will take this constructed innocence and weakness and apply it to their own identities. This is a clear example of the mediation of identity. It suggests a passive audience, influenced by the mass media as Adorno and other quasi-Marxists would suggest.

It can be seen therefore, that as post modernists say, we live in a media saturated society. We are surrounded by signs which cannot be ignored. Women in the media are often represented as varying, whether it be as sexual objects for the pleasure of males; or as innocent, as 'stay at home' housewives as suggested in 2008's film Hancock. Here, despite possessing stereotypically male strength and 'superpowers', the lead female aspires to be a housewife – reinforcing the sub-dominant representation of women. Either way however women are often the victims of mediation. The theories of consumption and construction of identity from theorists such as Adorno and Mulvey clearly show that despite

the specific representations, one common identity is 'forced' upon women in the media – a subdominant social group living in a patriarchal society. Identity is constructed using this as a basis; and even media texts which challenge this representation and encourage Queer Theory diversity are still arguably mediating identity with their influence. Identity is fluid and changeable and can be individually constructed as Gauntlett and Buckingham state. But arguable, the mass media are, and have, mediated the identity of women in contemporary society.

EAA 20

EG 18

T 10

(48)