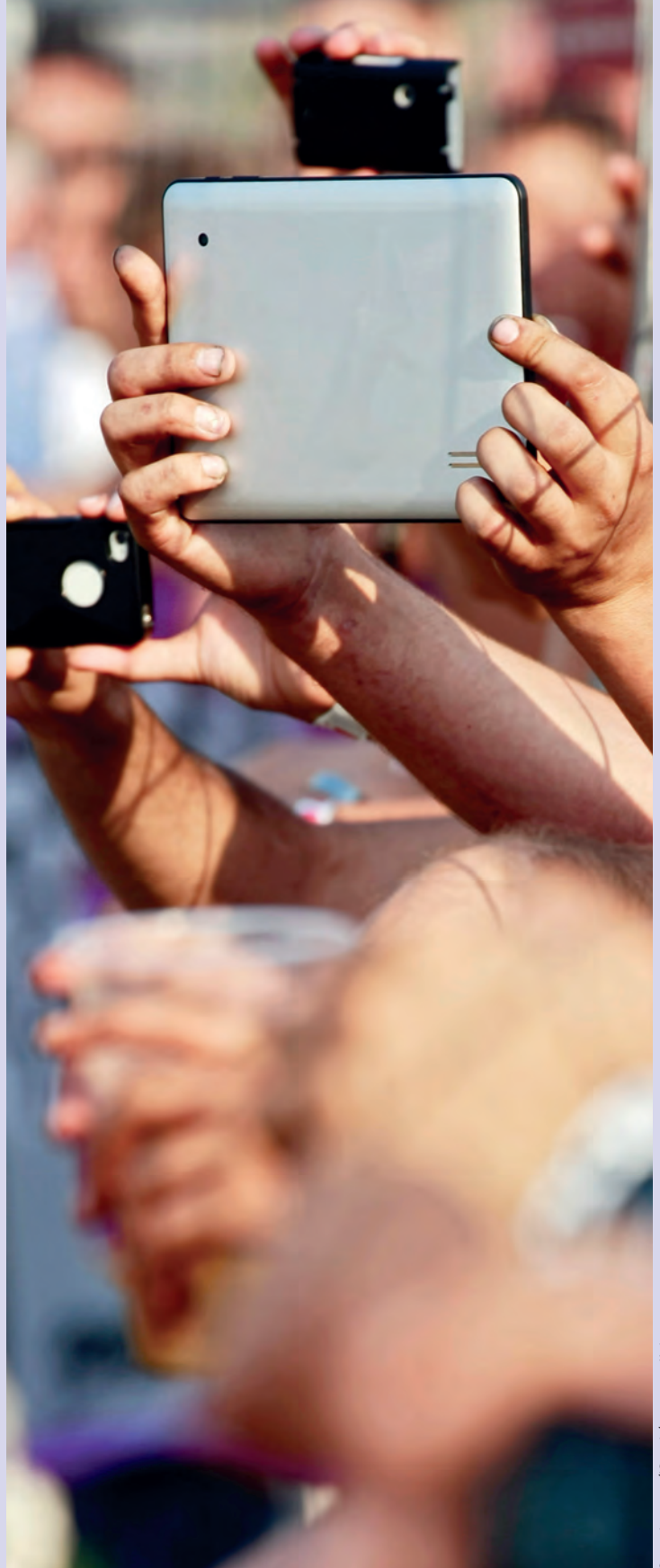


11

Audiences and participation



Getty Images/iStock/supergenjalac

HOW CONTEXTS AND PURPOSES AFFECT PARTICIPATION

Consider an advertisement aimed at women that might have run on a single network channel on prime-time television in the 1960s. The advertisers could count on that ad reaching 80 per cent of all women in the country. Even if only a small percentage of people responded to the ad, the profits were huge.

Today, it is estimated that to reach the same number of people, the ad would have to run on a hundred different media platforms – and that is without taking into account the various ways that audiences can avoid ads these days.

The mass audience has fragmented into a million different groupings and small communities. Fragmentation means that a large mass audience is no longer able to be taken for granted.

Mass audiences still exist. The success of such programs as *Game of Thrones* (R-rated, 2011–) proves that a huge world audience is possible. However, the executives of media organisations have realised that the secret is an engaged audience.

Audience contexts

There are three broad contexts that affect how audiences are able to consume media products: audience availability, structure of the media environment and group viewing.



Figure 11.1 In the 1960s, an ad on a prime-time television show could be expected to reach up to 80 per cent of the population. To get the same effect now, it would need to be on a hundred media platforms.

Availability to consume

Audience availability refers to the time that people have to view media products. People use the media when they have the time and the possibility of access. Most people's lives are busy, and therefore their available time for media consumption is limited.

Often the window of opportunity that people have to view media is more significant as a factor than the type of program. Some studies have shown that people watch at set times of the day. They may choose to download their favourite show at this time, but it is also often the case that they just watch whatever is available at this time.

Viewer availability is usually stable on a day-by-day, week-by-week basis. Availability can depend on work or school commitments, as well as other personal commitments.

Media structure

Whether or not the audience has access to a range of media platforms determines the way that they can use media products. For example, if you are not subscribed to a video-on-demand service, such as Netflix or Stan, you will not be able to access a range of content. In remote areas of Australia, many Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people face limited media choice.

A high-choice media context, such as a city, allows users to actively access a whole range of media platforms. Users can consume their preferred media content quite easily.

Movement across platforms is something that is encouraged by multi-platform media storytelling. **Migratory consumption** is the consumption of media products by starting on one platform and 'migrating' to others. Migratory consumption is encouraged by commercial organisations as a way of encouraging consumers to move to new platforms and different aspects of the story. Participating in migratory consumption is necessary to follow the flow of content across multiple media platforms.

Group contexts

Media consumption is often a social event. Family members and friendship groups often view together. Digital games are often played socially. This context often transforms individual choices about media consumption into what is called 'socially negotiated choice'. If you are consuming media in a group, you may access content that the group prefers, even if it is

not your preference. For example, a sports-oriented person may be convinced to view soap operas if they are in the company of a group who are viewing them. Without this viewing context, they may have chosen to watch sport instead.

The presence of co-viewers has a considerable impact on the viewing patterns of audience members. This is the case even if they would be relatively uninterested in the content when they were in an individual viewing context.

Agency versus control

If you can act as a free agent, then you have **agency**. If you are controlled, then you have no freedom of choice. An important area of investigation in the study of the media is the tension between agency and control. Audience agency versus institutional or technological control has been important in media studies since the 1960s and the work of Marshall McLuhan.

- **Audience agency** is the ability of an audience member to make choices in the selection of content, and the meanings they gain from those choices. For a movie-goer, agency might refer

to their ability to create their own set of ideas about what the movie means to them. For a digital game player, it might refer to the actions they take in the game.

- **Control** refers to the power that is wielded by media producers and technologies over audiences. This may refer to the narrative control that a movie producer has in determining the path of a story. It could also refer to the control that a news organisation has in setting the types of news stories that will appear in the news bulletin. Technological control is exerted over audiences by the design of the technology. There are certain things that it can and cannot do (see chapter 9).

School is a good place to see the tensions between control and agency playing out. The school structures constrain students. There are lots of rules, and students are even told what clothes they can wear. However, students also have agency. They can decide what subjects they study, and how hard they will work. They can wear the uniform in slightly individualised ways, and they can interact with others as individuals. There is a constant tension between agency and control.



Figure 11.2 Schools are the site of tensions between agency and control. Students are free agents to some degree. They can choose subjects (from a list), and they can decide whether or not to work hard. In other respects, there is a high degree of control. The tension between agency and control at school is similar to what happens with audiences and the media.

In the relationship that the audience has with the media, there is a similar tension between agency and control. Audiences have much greater agency today than they did in earlier generations. Movies, television, radio and newspapers in the 20th century did not offer much opportunity for audience agency. The agency available was that required for 'meaning making'. People could make their own meanings around what was screened in front of them, but there was no way they could alter the progression or nature of the story.

In modern times, there is a different tension between agency and control. It is played out in complicated ways as both audiences and institutions battle for agency and control.

- **Agency – illusion or reality?** Many media platforms offer audiences a degree of agency, allowing them to make selections and choices. However, at times this is illusory. The producers are directing audiences by tightly controlling the choices they can make – often for profit.

- **Hackers subverting control.** Some media users are highly skilled at manipulating the media systems to give themselves more freedom of agency. Mods (modifications) in digital games are an example of this.
- **Different agency.** Some audiences have more agency than others. For example, older audiences may be less proficient with the technology required to exert agency in some digital games. Equally, younger audiences may not have the cultural knowledge and experience to exert agency over multiple subtle meanings with a movie. The socioeconomic and cultural background of an audience can affect its agency. For example, there could be a language barrier or there may be a lack of access to a medium due to the cost of subscription fees.



11.1.2
Subliminal
messages in
songs

11.1 ACTIVITIES

- 1 In small groups, discuss your own experience of the effect of audience contexts on your interactions with the moving-image media.
Explain how each of the contexts might affect your own viewing experience. **Provide examples** of what you might do differently depending on the context.
Analyse a situation where context has affected the media interactions of group members. **Consider** whether there is a pattern in the behaviour of people in that context or similar ones. What similarities and differences can you see with the contexts described in the section on group contexts?
- 2 Survey the class to find out how much time they have available in a typical day to consume moving-image media. Also find out the times most people are available to consume media.
Analyse the information to determine the typical times and duration of availability for an average student. **Interpret** the findings to **make judgements** about the availability for media consumption that the typical teenager has.
Appraise the likely impacts this would have on the potential media consumption patterns of the average student and **draw conclusions** about how media companies could adapt their products accordingly. Present the information to the class.
- 3 **Investigate** the variations in the degrees of agency that might exist for members of different age, social or cultural groupings. Respond to the areas of investigation in the table below.

EXPLAIN	ANALYSE	APPRAISE
Explain how media audiences can be made up of different age, social and cultural groupings. Give information about the three groupings. Provide examples of the ways in which the agency of members of these groups could be affected by circumstances.	Analyse aspects of media agency that are different for each group, examining each and considering the advantages and disadvantages faced by each group. Analyse the strengths and limitations of each group with agency and control as the criteria.	Appraise relative empowerment of each group in relation to their media use, drawing conclusions about the significance of their overall relationship to the media.

- 4 **Appraise** the extent to which the terms and conditions [T&Cs] of a selected media platform allow for either user agency or institutional control. Systematically examine the T&Cs and **make a judgement** about the extent to which they allow user agency. **Interpret** wording of the document to **draw conclusions** about relative power.

USES AND GRATIFICATIONS THEORY

Uses and gratifications theory (UG theory) is about what audiences do *with* media, as opposed to what the media does to audiences. However, the UG approach is an older theory that has come into its own again with the arrival of new media.

Following the disappointments of the effects studies, some researchers in the 1960s and early 1970s (such as Jay Blumler and Elihu Katz) went in a totally different direction. They argued that audiences used the media to satisfy certain basic psychological needs. This shifted the focus from the producer and the text of the media message to the needs of the audience as consumers.

UG and media audiences

Uses and gratifications researchers made the following statements about media audiences:

- **Audiences are active.** Audiences are not just sitting there passively accepting the media. They are using media actively and they are using it to achieve certain personal goals.
- **Audiences have choice.** Which media platform and program is used to achieve a particular gratification is totally up to the audience member.
- **Audiences can get satisfaction anywhere.** The media are in competition with each other and other sources of satisfaction. The audience can use any source of gratification.
- **Audiences have self-awareness.** People understand their own motives when they choose to use the media.
- **Only audiences can judge value.** Even if a program seems to be complete garbage to someone else, an audience member can be watching it for quite worthwhile purposes, such as to de-stress and relax.

Gratification of needs

The uses and gratifications approach argues that the audience uses the media to gratify (or satisfy) certain psychological needs. Blumler and Katz identified four areas in which the audience can achieve gratification:

- 1 **Diversion and escape.** People often seek to relax and escape their personal pressures. The media can help them achieve this goal.

- 2 **Companionship.** The media can enhance personal relationships by giving people something to talk about. For example, laughing about a comedy you and your friends saw on television last night provides social gratification. Interactive television can be more individualised and less social. However, it can also promote shared viewing. Companion apps around live entertainment shows are often designed to promote group interaction. Interaction with the millions of others watching the show can be encouraged.

- 3 **Personal identity.** Audiences can use the media for reasons of personal identity in several ways. People can use their media choices to build up a sense of who they are, and who they are not. For example, teenagers often use their choice of music to build a sense of identity and exclude other music because it does not fit. People can also use the media to find reflections of their own lives. For example, soap-opera viewers often say the shows help them with their own problems. People can also use the media to reinforce their own beliefs.

- 4 **Surveillance or information gathering.** Everybody likes to keep an eye on what is going on around them, partly because knowledge about things will help people accomplish goals. News, weather reports, advertisements, stock reports and music video shows all keep audiences in touch with changes and opportunities. Interactive online sources allow this desire for information to be more selective and discerning.

Further categories of media uses have been added by UG theorist Professor Alan Rubin of Kent State University:

- passing time
- enjoyment
- relaxation
- excitement.

UG studies

Uses and gratifications theory is able to explain why different people respond to media texts in different ways. They are using the text for different purposes.

A simple UG study might undertake the following steps:

- 1 **Establish sample group.** A sample group of media users is established with the aim of finding out why they use a particular media

text. For instance, the study could focus on players of games such as *World of Warcraft* (2004–). Often two or three hypotheses are formed that will be tested on the sample group.

- 2 **Qualitative questionnaires and interviews.** The group would be asked descriptive questions about the preferred reasons they have for using the media text.
- 3 **Quantitative analysis.** Since UG often uses both qualitative and quantitative approaches, typical studies also analyse questionnaire and survey data statistically. For example, a study found that 48 per cent of *World of Warcraft* players sought gratification in the excitement of combat while 44 per cent found satisfaction in the teamwork.



Alamy Stock Photo/Curious Lens Stock Photos

Figure 11.3 Japanese teenagers near Harajuku Station in Tokyo. Uses and gratifications theory says the famous mobile phone culture of teenage girls in Japan has developed because the phone meets the need for companionship, diversion and personal identity.

Strengths and weaknesses of UG theory

Strengths

The strengths of uses and gratifications theory include the following:

- **Active audience.** UG represents a move away from the media having all the power to audiences also having some say in what they will use the media for.
- **Qualitative approach.** By combining interviews and diaries with statistics, UG represents a middle-ground between the two approaches.

Weaknesses

The weaknesses of uses and gratifications theory include the following:

- **Dehumanising.** UG studies reduce the viewer to a set of needs, and the meanings in the text become only gratification. Humans are made of much more than a need for food and social interaction. Needs and desires do not explain everything in life.
- **Ignores media power.** UG theorists have also been blamed for ignoring the complexities of the media's influence and giving all power to the audience. They have not explained how needs can be manipulated by advertising agencies. People are shaped by their society, which is in turn shaped by the media and its advertising.
- **Negative uses.** UG seems to assume that audiences are always finding positive uses for media. It ignores the dysfunctional and anti-social uses that some people put the media to.
- **Best of the worst.** Audiences do not have a lot of power over what media products are produced, so their power to pick and choose texts to suit their needs is limited.

Table 11.1 Audiences can choose particular media platforms and programs to meet particular needs. The power of choice rests with the audience. (An adaptation of a table created by Katz, Gurevitch and Haas.)

AUDIENCE NEED	DESCRIPTION	MEDIA EXAMPLES
Thinking/mental needs	Acquiring information or knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Television news and documentaries • Facebook news feeds • YouTube 'how to' videos
Attitudinal and feeling needs	Emotional release from media use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Movies • Television dramas and comedies • YouTube 'prank videos'
Personal self-help	Enhancing self-esteem or confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YouTube videos and tutorials
Social	Making connections with family/friends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internet • Social media • Video sharing
Tension release	De-stressing, letting go, diversion and escape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YouTube • Television comedy • Movies

UG theory and new media

In the past, audience interaction with moving-image media might have just amounted to pressing the buttons on the remote. Today, in the time of the internet, digital games and smart televisions, the media is much more complex. Audiences can interact in a greater number of ways.

Many studies show that people tend to use new media for many of the same reasons they use traditional media. For instance, the entertainment gratification can be obtained from the cinema, television, digital games or YouTube. Even competition or challenge as a gratification was available in television quiz shows before it became available in digital games.

However, the way people reach for their mobile phones as soon as their plane has landed suggests there are new and urgent needs. Surveying the internet for reviews before buying online purchases or before seeing a movie suggests that people need to seek the opinions of others. Looking at Google Street View to get an understanding of a landmark site before visiting it also suggests a need to take a look around in a virtual sense. **Augmented reality** technology seems to suggest a need to experience the world and understand it in more enhanced ways.



Getty Images/BraunS

Figure 11.4 As soon as the plane lands, out come the mobile phones and devices. Mobility is one gratification gained from new media. Identity enhancement is another. Applications such as Instagram can allow users to build and enhance their public identity.

Some researchers have isolated more specific uses and gratifications gained from new media. Shyam Sundar and Anthony Limperos say the new media gratifications are based on the affordances (see page 244) of the new media technologies:

- **Platform or modality gratification.** The platform of a technology can let us satisfy different needs. For example, **virtual reality** may make us feel as if we really are there experiencing something for ourselves. Moving-image media generally make us feel as though we have greater realism because we tend to trust our vision over other senses. A platform, such as a new mobile phone, can also make us feel 'cool'.
- **Agency or 'being in control' gratifications.** Users can be in control of the new media experience much more than with traditional media. This can make users feel that they have real individual power or agency to do their own thing. Such feelings can fulfil multiple needs, such as the need to be a leader, to build communities, to be creative or to tailor things to suit the individual.
- **Interactivity gratifications.** Interactivity usually means intense engagement with the content. It fulfils a need to be actively doing things, and to influence how something looks or works.
- **Navigability gratifications.** Feeling as though you can move through a space and browse one thing and then another gives users a sense of **navigability**. This enhances the sense of play in an environment. A sense of play factors into the need to escape or just enjoy pleasure.

11.2 ACTIVITIES

- 1 Explain** how two selected media platforms provide you with particular gratifications. **Provide examples to illustrate** your explanation. Share your explanation with someone else in the class and compare their explanation with yours.
- 2** Conduct a mini UG study on the audience interaction with a traditional or new media platform. Provide both a qualitative (interview-based) and quantitative (numbers- or percentage-based) investigation. Develop five quantitative questions you can ask survey respondents about their use of media and the gratifications they get from it. These should be 'yes/no' questions, or questions asking about ratings on a scale. Develop five qualitative questions that require survey respondents to make a longer written or verbal response (like interview questions). Use a colour-coding system to highlight areas of similarity in the qualitative interview responses and then respond to the areas of activity in the following table.

EXPLAIN	ANALYSE	APPRAISE
<p>Explain the survey information about the purpose and conditions, including sample questions.</p> <p>Explain the respondents, including information about age ranges, gender, etc.</p>	<p>Analyse responses, examining each and considering any patterns you can see.</p> <p>Interpret the gratifications using both quantitative and qualitative responses as constituent parts of the survey.</p> <p>Express quantitative results as percentages.</p>	<p>Appraise the degree to which respondents use particular media for particular uses and gratifications. Interpret the significance of these gratifications in the range of overall reasons people use the media.</p>

FANS AND PARTICIPATION

Sometimes being a **fan** is a bit like being a little crazy. We decide to dress up, scream out for our favourite team, fly thousands of kilometres to see our favourite band, or follow our superheroes across every major media platform available.

Hollywood has often turned the camera back onto fans who love movies, music or sports, and have made movies about the fans. Examples include *Fanboys* (2009), *Galaxy Quest* (1999) and *Trek Nation* (2011).

Everyone knows someone who is a fan of something – music fans, sports fans, cult-movie fans, game fans, television or video program fans. Even though they are intense, the way they operate can tell us about audiences and participation in general. In an attempt to explain audience activity, academic studies of fans emerged in the 1990s.

The word 'fan' originally came from the word 'fanatic', which describes a person filled with excessive or even irrational enthusiasm. It is often associated with political causes or extreme religious beliefs. It can even have connotations of possession. Nowadays the contracted term 'fan' has come to mean an enthusiast or someone who is highly

engaged. It is a much more playful term than the word it originated from. The term also suggests loyalty to the game, text, character or imaginative world of attachment.

Fandom is the world of the fan community, but it can also mean the state or condition of being a fan. Sometimes the term is used to suggest a collection, community or a subculture of fans.

Media fans

Media fans are highly devoted audience members who often extend their involvement into a network of other areas. For example, they may follow a narrative beyond the first text into a range of other texts on different media platforms. They may co-create additions or 'spoofs' of the text. They may also spend lots of money on merchandise.

Sociologists Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst argue that the media fan is different from other media users because of their relatively heavy media use. Fans also tend to be intensely focused on a particular text, character or world. Ordinary consumers may also be heavy media consumers, but they are less discriminating or focused.

'Whilst the fan can be read in the context of fanaticism and zealotry, many of the behaviours associated with media fandom are comparable to loyalty, a significant indicator of engagement.'

Dr Emma Beddows, Swinburne University

Fans can be made up of the following categories:

- **Fans versus cultists.** **Cultists** are followers of cult texts, characters or objects. As such, they can be considered as a variety of fan. They are considered to be more discriminating and more refined than ordinary fans. Cultists are usually more organised than fans and often have specialised support materials such as websites and cult literature. Cultists can often have their own networks, and often meet person-to-person in larger organised gatherings.
- **Anti-fans.** The anti-fans are those who strongly dislike a media text, genre or character. Anti-fans (a term coined by cultural studies associate professor Jonathan Gray) might consider it to be 'inane, stupid, morally bankrupt and/or

aesthetic drivel'. If the fan is positively charged, the anti-fan is negatively charged. Some of them even form 'hate-sites'. Anti-fans may not interact with the media product very much, but they have constructed a very strong view of what they dislike about it. Their emotional reactions are important in understanding how audiences respond to and interact with media.

- **Fans as active interpreters.** Fans are the best example of active audience members that there is. They make meaning that often extends the media product they interact with. However, even though they are enabled by the media, they are also constrained by it. All of the restrictions of media technology and media institutions apply to fans as much as to anyone else.

Table 11.2 The range of media users from the most heavily engaged to the most oppositional. This continuum is based on the work of sociologists Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst, and cultural studies associate professor Jonathon Gray. Gray argues that those who hate a media product are just as worthy of study as those who love it. Each of them tells us something about the emotional involvement of the audience in media.

	THE CULTIST	THE FAN	THE NON-FAN/ORDINARY USER	THE ANTI-FAN USER
MEDIA USE	Heavy but specialised	Heavy	Variable but distracted at times	Variable levels
TEXT, CHARACTER OR IMAGINATIVE WORLD	Very discriminating reasons for fandom	Attached but not so discriminating	Flows in and out of relating	Distant from the media product

The history of fandom

Beatlemania

Beatlemania is often seen as one of the first examples of the arrival of the phenomenon of the fan. Thousands of fans, often female, gathered in screaming crowds everywhere The Beatles went. The fanaticism of their reactions and the huge number of fans led John Lennon to famously say in 1966, 'We're more popular than Jesus.'

Television was a huge factor in the rise of Beatlemania. Fans could see the band perform. Visuals

allowed fans to focus and develop attachments to individual band members. The development of radio transistors allowed the large radio consoles of the 1950s to become small and portable. This was also a factor in Beatlemania. Teenagers took the portable radios into their bedrooms to listen to Top 40 music away from their parents. At that time, televisions were not available to teenagers in their bedrooms as there was usually only one in the house. However, The Beatles would make television appearances on family music and variety shows, and teenagers would rush from their bedrooms to watch.

'The news footage shows police lines straining against crowds of hundreds of young women ... the girls' faces are twisted with desperation or, in some cases, shining with what seems to be an inner light ...'

Barbara Ehrenreich, Elizabeth Hess and Gloria Jacobs



NewsPix/News Ltd

Figure 11.5 Fans of The Beatles at Festival Hall Brisbane, June 1964. The fan response around The Beatles was unprecedented. The mainstream public and the media were shocked and expressed concern about the behaviour of the young. The extremity of feeling ensured that Beatlemania would be an important phenomenon in the history of fandom.

Science fiction

The emergence of science-fiction fandom in the mid-1960s is seen as the beginnings of media program fandom. *Star Trek* (1967) was one of the first examples. The show wasn't especially popular in the ratings, but it had a very strong fan base. The first fan magazine (also called fanzine or 'zine') was *Spockanalia*, established in 1967.

In the late 1960s, fans of the television show *Star Trek* showed the extent of their power. When the show was threatened with 'the axe' (cancellation) in 1968, fans began a 'Save *Star Trek*' letter-writing campaign. The studios were flooded with thousands of letters, and the show was renewed for another season.

When the first *Star Wars* film came out in 1977, it drew in a huge new fanbase and also took fans from *Star Trek*. The first of the science-fiction movie conventions was also held at this time. The first of the *Doctor Who* fan clubs were established at this time as well. The first Australian *Doctor Who* fan club was established in 1976. The fans set up the club to pressure the ABC to cancel its plan to axe the show.

Internet era

The arrival of the internet in the 1990s really set up media fandom. Discussion groups sprang up, and fans were able to set up databases and fandom archives. The *Forever Knight* (1992–96) fan club set

up the first online mailing list in 1992. Many fans worked at university computers to set up databases because most home computers were not connected online at the time.

The late 1990s was the time when fans got organised online. Membership of fan clubs grew dramatically. Fans no longer had to meet at conventions to talk to each other. People could simply use search engines to find their favourite show and join available mailing lists or investigate the archives. The internet also gave the English-speaking world access to Japanese fandoms around anime. One of the most important fandoms to emerge at this time was around *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003).

In the 2000s, the *Harry Potter* franchise delivered a whole new set of fans. The first movie was *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (2001). *The Lord of the Rings* franchise also established a huge new fanbase. Personalised blogging technology started to replace the mailing lists of the earlier internet. Digital video and editing software began to allow fans to easily create their own tribute videos. YouTube's launch in 2005 gave a space to homage videos.



Alamy Stock Photo/RGR Collection

Figure 11.6 *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003), the television series created by Joss Whedon, led to one of the most important new fandoms that developed in the late 1990s. At that time, access to the internet became more widespread. Fans could meet online instead of having to travel long distances to major conventions. Databases and program archives helped fans engage in new ways.

Fans and engagement

Fans are loyal devotees. This high level of engagement makes them useful for study as an entry point into understandings about how all media users engage.

What are fans?

Generally, fans are considered to be:

- **Knowledge experts.** Fans accumulate vast amounts of knowledge about their favourite media texts. The depth of knowledge is what separates them from ordinary viewers. Sometimes their attention to detail is greater than that of the original producers. Fans often pick up small continuity errors, inconsistencies in character and so on. Fans have strong opinions and may think directors of later movies in a series have strayed from the spirit of a franchise. For example, some fans of the *Star Wars* franchise gave a cool reception to *The Last Jedi* (2017) on the basis of disagreements about the back-stories of characters and straying from the ethos of the franchise's narrative universe. Being able to demonstrate all this knowledge is part of what makes being a fan enjoyable. Fan knowledge is somewhat like academic knowledge.
- **Activists.** Sometimes fans become activists and begin campaigns aimed at saving their favourite programs or changing the nature of them in some way. Perhaps they don't like the way a certain character is developing, or maybe they want a certain type of story to be featured. Fan activism indicates that fans have a high degree of ownership of the text.
- **Co-creators.** Fans have often been the producers of their own media. In earlier times, these took the form of fanzines or newsletters. These days, fans are capable of more sophisticated media productions such as websites, databases and tribute videos. In a sense, a proportion of the early multi-platform work was produced by fans.
- **Socialisers.** Fandom often results in membership of a community of other fans. Online discussion forums and conventions provide ways for fans to meet each other and discuss their interests with like-minded people. Cosplay (costume dress-up) has become an important part of the social aspect of fandom.
- **Commodity consumers.** Substantial investments in merchandise are often made by fans. Indeed, fans are a prime target for the commercial interests of the media. Fans invest both time and money in their favourite stories. Their identities as fans can often be tied up in the selections of merchandise they buy. Fans with a lot of money will often use it to buy unique and rare collectibles.
- **Multi-platform media users.** Because fans are highly engaged and highly invested, they are more likely to 'migrate' to other platforms in search of extra story experiences. Media companies are keen to promote this loyalty as it provides access to far greater profits.



Getty Images/AFP/Roslan Rahman

Figure 11.7 Zombie movie fans at a 'Zombie Walk'. Fandom is often a highly social activity. It can also involve activism, whether to save a popular program, or even to raise funds for worthy causes outside of fandom.

11.3 ACTIVITIES

- 1 **Explain** the rise of Beatlemania in more detail, providing information about the role of the media in helping to create the phenomenon.
- 2 **Explain** the background factors behind the rise of the fan movement around *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003). **Identify** some of the social factors that could have contributed to the interest in the program. **Provide information** about how the Buffy fandom was assisted by developments in the media.
- 3 **Explain** how fans can also be co-creators. **Identify** some examples to **clarify** and **illustrate** the concept of fan co-creation. **Appraise** the **significance** of these creations for both the fans and the producers of the original media product.
- 4 **Construct** a timeline showing the rise of media fandom beginning in the 1950s and continuing to the present day. **Systematically arrange** each major development in the history of fandom. Illustrate the timeline with images from significant events.
- 5 Survey a group of people you know who would fit into the category of fans of a particular media product. Devise some interview questions to test whether they have any involvement around the main areas of fan activities – as knowledge experts, activists, co-creators, socialisers and consumers. Also devise a question testing their use of multi-platform media associated with the original media product.
Respond to the areas of investigation in the following table.

EXPLAIN	ANALYSE	APPRAISE
<p>Explain the survey information about the purpose and conditions, including sample questions.</p> <p>Explain the respondents, including information about age ranges, gender, etc.</p>	<p>Analyse fan involvement in each of the areas of fandom, considering results in percentages for each constituent part of the survey.</p> <p>Provide a discussion, interpreting their responses and examining the level of involvement in each area of fandom.</p>	<p>Appraise results by drawing conclusions around the significance of each area of fandom to the group of people who make up your survey respondents.</p>

AUDIENCES AND PARTICIPATION IN MULTI-PLATFORM MEDIA

Users of multi-platform media arrived on the scene at a particular moment when technology and new industry approaches have come together. It is much easier than it ever has been to switch between platforms or to involve yourself in fan activities.

Multi-platform consumption is the ‘dedicated consumption of a narrative across multiple story worlds’, says Emma Beddows of Swinburne University in Melbourne. Users are people who involve themselves actively in the content and communicate with others who are spread out around the world. Users are often highly digitally literate and migrate from one platform to another.

The world of multi-platform media is a great place for users, but it can also be a chance for large commercial enterprises to exploit consumers. Participation is often highly structured by the companies. It is a means of ensuring that audience members add to company profits. Users become commodities that can be exploited when they upload

their own content to company sites or when they create identities using company properties. Users also become audiences to be sold to advertisers.

However, multi-platform media do encourage new ways of using media. They encourage users to actively seek out ways of participating with the text. It gives users some degree of control.

Features of the multi-platform experience

The multi-platform media experience has the following features, suggests Beddows:

- **Requires effort.** A narrative in the cinema just happens on the screen, no matter what you are doing in your seats. However, a multi-platform media product requires the users to shift platforms and follow their text around to different places. The user is important in the construction of meaning. Multi-platform media requires users to put in the effort of the physical and mental movement between platforms, and also requires users to actively assemble all the parts of the story in their heads.

- **Is expansionary or additive.** More and more content can be added to multi-platform media texts. Different but connected stories can unfold on different platforms. Details of characters' lives can be played out on separate platforms while still remaining part of the one whole story.
- **Has gaps.** Missing pieces of a story, or extra details that have to be pieced together, are spaces that must be closed by users. Gaps in the story plots, with the details filled in on different platforms, are what invite interaction and participation from users, according to Beddows. However, it is often the case that the users are not in control of these gaps. It is the copyright holder (usually a big company) that holds the power to influence the story structure.
- **Has multiple entry points.** Users enter multi-platform texts at any one of a number of different points. It might be via television, cinema or first via a digital game. The type of entry point often depends on the user's level of engagement, according to multi-platform specialist, designer and writer Christy Dena of the University of Melbourne. Extra entry points could include fan sites, forums, fan databases or even just Google.

The original creators and copyright holders (often a large media company) will not have complete control over all these entry points, says Dena. The *Pokémon* franchise is an example where the creators have set up multiple entry points based on the age of the users.

The Matrix film franchise was one of the first successful multi-platform texts involving a major movie. It offered the original movie, web comics, a computer game, an anime and a massively multi-player online role-playing game (MMORPG). It is unknown where different fans made their first entry. For example, some fans may have played the game *Enter the Matrix* (2003) and never seen the film.

Appraising the audience's use of multi-platform media

Good multi-platform media experiences invite the user into multiple linked stories that exist as part of an overall story universe, according to Henry Jenkins, Provost Professor at the University of Southern California.

Beddows suggests that multi-platform media audiences can be examined in three ways: entry points, mode of engagement and level of engagement.

1 Entry points

The design of entry points into the story world is a major part of the process of building a multi-platform experience.

The selection of a point of entry empowers the audience because they can consume the story in the way they want to. This also means they have the choice of engaging with it on one platform only. They may only go as far as one aspect of the story and go no further than their initial point of contact.

Age-related entry points are a common approach to large franchise multi-platform productions, such as those centred on blockbuster films. For example, a movie could have a PG classification, yet its partner digital game could be rated M. Different age ranges have access to different technologies.

Since it is the user who chooses the entry point, they have the power to construct their own view of the story world based on the platform they are most familiar with.

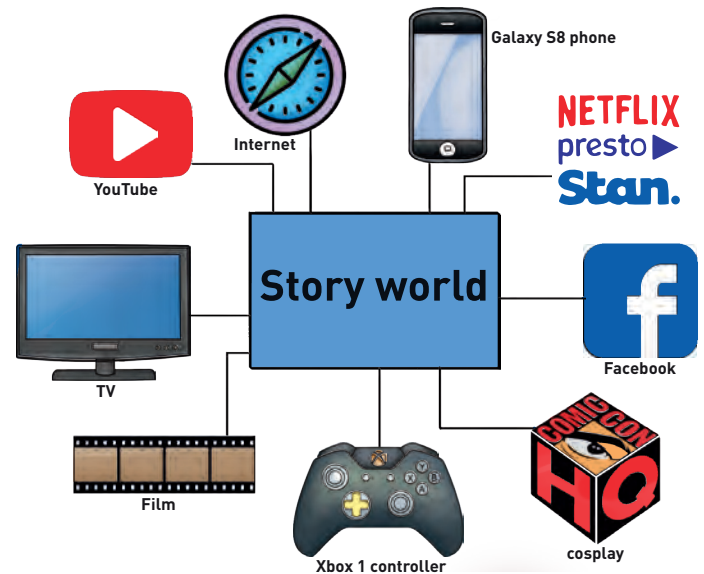


Figure 11.8 Audience members can choose the entry point into a story world based on their preferred platform. Writers and designers have to be aware that most users will not stray far from the initial entry point. They can also enter by any point without reference to the story on other platforms.

2 Mode of engagement or participation

People often have a preference for a particular mode of engagement. They may prefer something that offers them a high degree of control, such as a digital game, or something that offers a low degree of control but allows them to sit back and have the story roll over them, such as a movie.

Movies (at the cinema or delivered on other platforms), television programs and short videos involve the viewer in a whole range of mental activities as they interpret meaning. Emotional responses, such as laughter or joy, come with that. Viewers may also experience actual physical responses, such as increased heart rate or even small jumping reactions. Regardless of their response, the film or video continues to play.

Digital games only proceed if the user engages with the computer and interacts with it in a physical and mental way. Games are dependent on the actions of the audience and their decision-making processes.

Audiences are not necessarily comfortable moving from one kind of engagement to the other. Alternatively, they may want some of the emotional engagement they get from the cinema to be extended to high-control platforms such as games.

3 Level of engagement or participation

The media industries are in a period of unprecedented change. As audiences become fragmented, they become much smaller for individual media products. Many in the industry see that profits can be improved if audiences are more engaged. They are hoping that engaged audiences may be much more valuable than large mass audiences.

Engagement is a process that can take place across a range of different platforms and media texts, including fan texts and discussion forums. Engagement with media can be defined as the depth and nature of a user's investment in a media product. A user's engagement is the sum total of their behaviours, attitudes and desires in relation to a media product.

Engagement can be described as connectedness – a relationship of varying intensity. Connectedness is based on the degree to which a media product is involved in the user's personal and social experiences. It can also be expressed as a relationship to a media product that can be shown in a range of behaviours and attitudes, says Beddows.

According to Beddows, appraising engagement can be done by placing users' responses on a scale for each of the following: loyalty, attentive consumption, media literacy, participation and activities beyond the text.

- **Loyalty.** Loyalty is a form of commitment. For audiences, it involves returning regularly to media products. It also suggests discrimination on the basis of personal taste. Loyalty is very important in multi-platform media because users are required to migrate across several different media platforms.
- **Attentive consumption.** Consumption, says specialist in media engagement Ivan Askwith, can be 'passive monitoring, rapt immersion, and everything in between'. He suggests that attentiveness can be measured by asking users to recall details of the story afterwards.
- **Media literacy.** The ability to operate, code and decode media is referred to as media literacy (see page 300). Media literacy is important because the lack of it can prevent audiences from moving across platforms. For example, if someone cannot play digital games, they will not migrate from the video or film platforms.
- **Participation.** Actively participating is something that people have to want to do. However, the platform must allow interactivity as well. Participation is voluntary, and interactivity is often built into the technology.
- **Activities beyond the main text.** Activities that are based on the media product but are not actually consuming the product are considered to be activities beyond the text. Cosplay is an example; participants may have dressed up for a convention, but they are not necessarily consuming the text at the same time.

Table 11.3 Tiers of involvement in multi-platform media, by Cameron Cliff of Queensland University of Technology.

TIERS OF INVOLVEMENT	DESCRIPTION
Low	These audience members engage briefly. They are too busy or uninterested to invest much time.
Medium	These audience members invest some time and energy to interact with others or find additional platforms.
High	These audience members drive conversation and seek out, share or curate extra content on available platforms.

Source: With permission Dr Cameron Cliff

11.4 ACTIVITIES

- 1 Select a well-known existing media product or narrative franchise that has a strong multi-platform presence. Use your knowledge and information from research to respond to the areas of activity in the following table.

SYMBOLISE	CONSTRUCT	APPRAISE
Symbolise the multiple entry points on different platforms that the media product has, using a diagram to represent the information.	Construct a narrative plan of the product, systematically assembling the elements of the story. Construct a series of 'break out' points on the plan where there are gaps in the story encouraging movement to another platform.	Appraise the relative success of the full suite of multi-platform media, systematically examining box office data and interpreting the audience statistics.

- 2 In pairs, discuss your preferred mode of engagement with a multi-platform story. **Explain** your preferred mode and provide an example as to how you have used it. **Compare** your preferred mode to that of your partner.
- 3 **Construct** from your imagination a proposal for a possible multi-platform story. **Explain** the audience entry points and any gaps in the story that encourage movement across to other platforms. **Symbolise** the multi-platform aspects of the story in a diagram. **Construct** a narrative plan showing how elements of the story are told to audiences across different platforms. **Construct** proposals for three ways that audiences can interact with the story.
- 4 **Appraise** the level of engagement an audience member has with a multi-platform product, **making judgements** using the areas of engagement outlined by Emma Beddows (see page 270): loyalty, attentive consumption, media literacy, participation and activities beyond the text.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION – INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS

The real products of the media are audiences, who are then marketed to advertisers. The texts are just the bait to attract the unsuspecting population. However, participation in the moving-image media can be affected by membership of audience groupings or demographic characteristics.

The term 'demographics' is derived from the Greek words *demos* meaning 'people' and *graphie* meaning 'writing'. **Demography** is the study of human populations and their characteristics. In the media, 'demographics' refers to the characteristics of target audiences.

The media accumulate vast amounts of data about who consumes their products. Profiles of audiences include details of their income, education level, lifestyle, marital status and age. The media even know how many households have cats rather than dogs. The audience profile is used to convince advertisers that they will be targeting the right kind of audience. Advertisers pay a lot of money for a high-income audience, even if it is only small, whereas low-income audiences are worthwhile only if they are purchased in bulk quantities.



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Figure 11.9 Audiences can be targeted by demography. Media executives divide the audience into distinct groups based on their characteristics. Media products are then constructed to appeal to the targeted groups.

Demographic groups

Media organisations have built up 'people maps' of the population, based on factors such as social class, age, sex, education, religion, family size and so on. Advertisers use these people maps to target their ads. To find the target audience, the advertiser then matches the ad data and statistics with the media organisation's data. Of course, the data must be kept up to date. Advertisers' people maps are constantly changing as society changes and audiences shift.

Demographics of generations

Different **generations** have different experiences of life. These experiences affect participation in the

media. Media executives have divided the audience into generation categories based on their year of birth, as shown in Table 11.4.

Table 11.4 Western audience categories based on year of birth

GENERATION	BIRTH DATE*	SIGNIFICANT MEDIA	DEMOGRAPHIC AND PSYCHOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS
'Greatest' Generation	1901–23	Newspapers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People born at the turn of the 20th century. • Fought in the Second World War and kept the home front going. • Rebuilt society and industry after the war. • Seen as being used to hardship and sacrifice.
Silent Generation	1924–44	Radio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People born between the two world wars, but too young to fight in the Second World War. • Experienced the Great Depression as children. • Seen as often conventional, fatalistic, hardworking, expecting disappointment.
Baby Boomers	1945–64	Television	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People born after the Second World War as soldiers came home and established families. • First to grow up with television. • Came of age in the 1960s and 1970s. • Some were part of the 1960–70s counter-culture and hippie movement. • Many became more conservative in middle age. • Tend to think of themselves as a special generation, different to those before them.
Generation X	1965–81	MTV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People born after the Baby Boomers and often seen as living in their shadow. • Lived through periods of recession and restructuring in western economies. • Often had significant periods of unemployment in their youth. • First generation to experience parents' divorce on a large scale. • Sometimes divided into sub-groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baby busters 1965–79 • MTV generation 1975–80
Generation Y	1982–95	The internet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People born into Baby Boomer families and came of age around the turn of the 21st century (therefore sometimes called 'Millennials'). • As the children of Baby Boomers, sometimes called 'Echo Boomers'. • First generation to grow up with computers, the internet and digital communication. • As a media audience, they are more segmented.
Generation Z	1996–2010	Smart phones	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People born after Generation Y and even more used to technology. • Grew up with smartphones, video games and the internet. • Often said to be technology obsessed. • Very segmented media interests and are used to diversity. • Very highly educated.
Generation Alpha	2011–	?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The most technologically literate generation. • As a whole, the most affluent.

*Different demographers use different cut-off dates for the generations. Even some of the more obvious generational starting points are debated. For example, not all demographers agree that the end of the Second World War is the start of the Baby Boomer generation: some say 1943 and others say 1947. For various reasons, the cut-off dates for all subsequent generations are equally debatable.



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Figure 11.10 *Oh My God* sculpture by Lucy Vader at 'Sculpture by the Sea' festival, Cottesloe Beach, Perth. 'OMG' is one of the favourite sayings of Generation Z – the generation who grew up with the smartphone. Generation Z is the most highly educated generation yet. It is also the one with the most segmented media tastes.

Demographics of social class

Money talks, as far as advertisers are concerned, and the most desirable audience is the audience with the most cash. Spending power can also affect the degree of participation in the media. Generally, high-income households participate in media more often than low-income households. Accordingly, advertisers have devised a scale of relative spending power.

- **A-households** are successful upper-level professionals or businesspeople. They include doctors, lawyers and company executives (including television and advertising executives). Only 2 per cent of the population fall into this category.
- **B-households** are below the top echelon but are still well off. They include university lecturers, pharmacists and directors of small companies. These households comprise about 11 per cent of the population.
- **C-households** are of the lower-middle-class and make up around 23 per cent of the population. They include tradespeople, various white-collar workers and the owners of small businesses. Owing to skills shortages and taxation concessions to small business, many C-households now have real incomes that are considerably higher than A- and B-households. Advertisers of luxury goods, such as BMW cars, have begun targeting C-households as well.
- **D-households** are general clerical staff, apprentices, and skilled and semi-skilled workers.

- **E-households** include manual workers such as labourers, traffic wardens, factory workers and truck drivers.
- **FG-households** are people receiving welfare payments, including the unemployed and retired pensioners.



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Figure 11.11 The seven ages of man, starting with infancy and ending in old age. The ages of man are outlined in Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*. Jaques in Act II Scene VII begins the monologue with the famous phrase 'All the world's a stage ...' Age group is one aspect of audience demography and has an impact on media participation.

Cultural demographics

Membership of cultural groupings can affect media participation. Minority groups and Indigenous peoples may be affected in two main ways.

- 1 **Minority cultural groups may see themselves less in the media.** Media portrayals of members of minority cultural groups can be less than the actual percentage composition of the population.
- 2 **Minority cultural groups may have less access to media participation,** or they may experience technical or language barriers that reduce their participation.

Research shows that people from minority cultural groups watch more closely and identify with media personalities and characters who are members of their own group. For example, US research shows that African-American viewers respond more favourably and have better memory recall when advertisements feature other African-Americans.

Digital media have made it much easier for cultural minorities to make connections with each other in Australia. This has allowed them to communicate their interests and also to build identities. They may use digital platforms in unique ways. For example, specialised media platforms may provide spaces to exhibit media products in other languages.

Media convergence can affect the way cultural minority groups find themselves in relation to the media. For instance, traditional media may

under-represent them. However, they could find that an alternative media platform may be created that allows them more engagement.

Conflicting points of view or ideological positions can be framed between mainstream media platforms and platforms aimed at cultural minorities. The group member has to negotiate different linguistic and ideological zones. In many ways there is an increased media ‘mobility’. This can require a higher level of media or technical literacy. There may also be increased inter-generational conflict for group members. Older generations may be more connected to the traditional ways of doing things.

According to Myria Georgiou of the London School of Economics, cultural minority groups use traditional and new media in three main ways:

1 **Media for seeing the self.** Cultural groups use media platforms in ways that enable them

to see themselves represented. For example, they may view Indigenous-produced narratives and more strongly identify with the protagonist.

2 **Media to link with their communities.**

Maintaining links with the home community or the Indigenous community is an important aspect of cultural minority participation in media.

3 **Media to link multicultural to the mainstream.** Since many members of cultural minorities negotiate a variety of media platforms, they may feel they belong to both the minority culture and the mainstream culture. This is a complex citizenship.

11.5 ACTIVITIES

1 Advertisers group people according to their socioeconomic status. There are six demographic groups commonly referred to in advertising (see ‘Demographics of social class’ in this section). Watch some television commercials and assign each to one of the six categories.

Explain the factors that influenced your decision and **identify** some of the features that allowed you to make that decision.

Analyse the features you identified and **interpret** them in relation to their appeal to the target audience.

2 List television shows and films that you think would appeal to the generations from Baby Boomer onwards.

Explain why you think the texts appeal to the audience.

Construct the idea for a proposal for a new television show or film to appeal to one of the generations (not your own). Pitch your idea to the class.

3 Select a minority cultural group that you know or are interested in. Use your knowledge and information from research to respond to the areas of activity in the following table.

SYMBOLISE	ANALYSE	APPRAISE
Symbolise the range of media platforms available to members of this group, choosing one that fulfils each of the three ways media are used by cultural minority groups.	Analyse the range of programming available on the platform that is special to the cultural group. Examine program options across a week. Consider how it compares to a mainstream platform.	Appraise the degree to which participation by the minority cultural group may require greater media literacy. Draw conclusions based on enquiry into the range of media platforms available to the group. Make a judgement about the significance of any obstacles to participation faced by the group.

EMERGING INTERACTIVE MOVING-IMAGE MEDIA

Televisions are becoming smarter and more interactive. Multi-platform programs have audiences engaging with a variety of screens from television, to the computer to the smartphone.

Emerging interactive media products combine all of these developments into a range of new experiences for audiences:

- **Social television.** Taking advantage of the ‘liveness’ of television, social television is the combination of social media and television. Viewers share their experience of the show with each other. Millions of people tune into

live television shows and use social media such as Twitter or Facebook to participate in discussions, live voting or so-called second-screen activities.

- **Second screen.** The act of engaging with television on two separate screens at once is called **second-screen television**. Audiences watch a television screen and also hold a second screen, such as a smartphone or tablet. They use the second screen to interact with specialised apps or multi-platform content associated with the main program. Second screen can be thought of as a kind of concentrated multi-tasking.

For media organisations, social television and second-screen activities offer the chance to lure viewers to their programs. The new algorithms available on social media also allow the media institutions to collect information about audiences.

There are four predominant reasons big media institutions use social media to build interactivity:

- 1 **Promotional.** Social media interactivity helps to create public awareness of the show. It also helps to create a sense of an event around the program.
- 2 **Emotional engagement.** Activity on Twitter or Facebook encourages people to be emotionally invested in the show. It encourages conversations among audience members. It allows audiences to become connected to the people on the program.
- 3 **Practical purposes.** Social media provides a practical means of allow audiences to vote. It is the means by which audiences can connect to the shows via the internet.
- 4 **Communicative.** Social media lets communication happen. It allows audiences to express opinions, even if they are not altering the course of the program.

Interactive entertainment shows

Perhaps the most successful of the emerging interactive media products are those from the entertainment and reality TV genres. Quizzes, music shows and talent quests have always been a magnet for audience discussion. It has proved easy to get audiences to interact with these programs. When they do interact, audience members often feel passionate, and part of a shared national experience as the show leads up to its finale.

Smartphones and social media platforms seem to work together with entertainment television as partners. The two screens in conjunction create a good chance for media companies to improve audience engagement.

Reality TV

Big Brother (2001–2014) was one of the most significant milestones in the development of interactive moving-image media. The show was a reality television program set in a house on the Gold Coast. Housemates vied with each other to be the last remaining housemate. They were filmed 24 hours a day, and the footage was edited ready for prime-time viewing each evening. Audiences were able to interact through telephone voting, or in later series via phone apps and social media. The audience also became part of the production and they were regularly seen holding up banners giving their opinions.

Producers of reality television attract audiences by offering fairly structured narratives. The stories are structured by careful editing. Sometimes they offer the chance that audiences can disrupt these stories by surprise voting or live audience protests.

Talent quests

Singing talent quest shows have also been at the forefront of audience interactivity. Shows such as *The Voice* (2012–) use audience interactivity as a way of increasing engagement, and therefore profits. Executives try to create a sense of a national event with the programs so that people will feel the need to be involved.

Talent quest shows offer the audience at least some ability to influence the outcome of the show. Low-influence interactivity, such as quizzes, is often offered on talent quest programs. Tweets and discussions are also low-influence activities. Some shows offer higher levels of interactivity through voting and polls. These can influence the progress of the judging. Apps can allow audiences to vote and see the results of the voting in real time. These results are also posted on screen in the shows.

Often there are postings to YouTube so that fans can watch reruns of performances. Key moments in the show are commonly posted within hours of the live performances.

Interactive documentaries

Documentaries are a powerful way of engaging with the world. They provide perspectives on the issues facing the world by presenting facts about a subject using real events, persons and places. They stimulate audiences to take action, and force political change. Pioneer documentary-maker John Grierson defined a documentary as the creative treatment of actuality (or reality).

Linear or traditional documentaries are now joined by **interactive documentaries**, thanks to changes in technology. Interactive documentaries are not simply a new style of linear documentary but are now considered to be an entirely new art form.

An interactive documentary is a one that is usually delivered over the internet and uses interactivity as central to the audience experience. If it was ever shown on traditional television, it would lose many of its basic elements. Interactive documentaries examine the real world by using digital interactive technologies.

According to film academic Sandra Gaudenzi, there are three main approaches to interactive documentaries: user-controlled, immersive and co-created.

- 1 **User-controlled.** Interactive documentaries where the user can control what elements they see, and how the story progresses, are the most common type. An example is *Journey to the End of Coal* (2008), which tells the stories of Chinese coal miners sacrificing themselves to their nation's economic progress. The user is placed in the role of an investigator. The documentary operates along the same principles as **choose your own adventure stories**.
- 2 **Immersive.** Some interactive documentaries use augmented reality or virtual reality to place the user into the world of the story. **Immersion** shifts the experience of the user into something much deeper. For example, immersion into the world of a refugee in a camp can be a heightened emotional experience. The audience member moves from being an eyewitness via television to being an actual participant via virtual reality.
- 3 **Co-created.** Users can contribute to some interactive documentaries, uploading video or images from their mobile phones. Ridley Scott and Kevin MacDonald used YouTubers to contribute video content for the movie *Life in a Day* (2010). Other co-created products

ask participants to submit shots to a video that is already live on the website. An example of this is *The Johnny Cash Project* (2007–). Others ask users to contribute to a questionnaire or provide information for a database. For example, the French interactive documentary *Génération Quoi?* ('What?') built into the interactive program a 143-question survey that almost 230 000 users filled in as they participated in the documentary. As a result, the portrait of a generation that the documentary presented was changing all the time as more data was added. An Australian example of a co-created documentary is

Big Stories Small Towns (2010), which showcases



Figure 11.12 *Refugee Republic* (2015) is an interactive documentary about life in a Syrian refugee camp in northern Iraq. It uses a mix of drawings, photography and video to give users an insight into life in the camp. *Refugee Republic* is an example of an interactive documentary with user-controlled story progression – like the choose your own adventure stories.

both filmmaker and community-made footage.

Features of interactive documentaries

Interactive documentaries have existed in experimental form since the 1980s. However, the growth of social media and the opportunities for participation that have come out of the internet, have led to a huge growth in the genre.

Interactive documentaries have two main features:

- 1 **Modular.** A traditional linear documentary is like one single unit. An interactive documentary is composed of separate linked parts that allow users to choose their own path. These can be thought of as separate modules of files. Each file of images and videos is independent, and capable of being reached from other files by hypertext links. The user makes their own pathway through the information.

2 **Variable.** Once a traditional documentary has been edited, it cannot be changed – its form is fixed. An interactive documentary can change and evolve as users change the order of the files or add material of their own. Each experience of it can be different, depending on how the algorithms match the data.

Designing for interactive documentary

Navigation is very important in the design of the interactive documentary. Navigation is created by designing the links between the different files and working out possible pathways a user might take. For an interactive documentary, the hyperlink is the equivalent of the cut in traditional film editing.

Interactive documentary designers may consider the following steps in creating the navigation:

- graph the structure of the ideas that are available for the user to explore
- group similar concepts so that users can link to them easily from related ideas

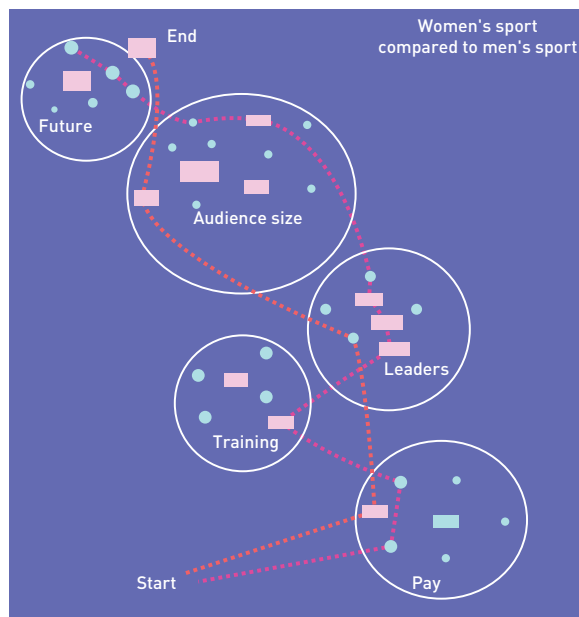


Figure 11.13 A 'map' of an interactive documentary about women's sport and the aim of future parity with men's sport. The documentary video files are grouped into broad content areas. Large files are represented by squares, smaller ones by dots. Files on similar topic areas are grouped together and allocated the same colour. For instance all video interviews and commentary on the differences between what male and female sports stars can earn are grouped in one area. Users can choose to just view one file, several files or they can elect to view none of them, moving on to one of the other topic areas. The dotted lines represent the pathways of two different users.

- enable users to take new pathways or shortcuts of their own making.

Navigation can be presented to the user in quite simple ways. Audiences can be connected to the ideas in the documentary in ways that allow them to choose their reactions, or to contrast feelings with cold facts. For example, one interactive documentary showed a user interface that looked like two parallel bumpy or wavy lines – like cardiograms. These were like two separate climax mountains for the story. One represented the emotions and reactions to events felt by families, and the other represented the cold hard facts of the officials and military and the official version of the story. Moving a cursor from one line to the other allowed the user to contrast the two, accessing both feelings and facts.

Information and its organisation is vital to interactive documentary. The shooting ratio of a documentary can be quite high. It can rise to 50:1 or more (which means the filmmaker may shoot 50 hours of footage from which the editor produces a 1-hour documentary). Filmmakers often say their best material ended up on the cutting-room floor. This information can be accommodated in an interactive documentary; however, it still must be organised and coherent.

Space or informational room is like time in a traditional documentary. A linear documentary only has the inevitable moving forward of time as the user experiences the program prepared by the editor.

Benefits and limitations for audiences

An obvious audience benefit of interactive documentaries is that users can follow their own interests and choose to investigate events as they see fit. In many ways, this puts them in the shoes of the original filmmaker or editor. They can make their own construction of the meaning. As a result, they may feel that their involvement is much more immersive and experiential.

However, this has limits. Audience members can only construct meaning out of the footage the filmmaker has provided. This is the case with traditional documentaries as well, but the capacity to make your own sense of the information is present in interactive documentaries to a much greater degree. It transforms the audience into 'doers' and 'makers' rather than 'receivers'.

Potentially, this makes the audience more powerful.

Because interactive documentaries often use modules of information (separate files that make up parts of the whole), it can be up to the user to piece all this together into a unified understanding. This has benefits in that the user can assemble their own understanding and is more likely to remember and incorporate the experience. However, a disadvantage is that users may never assemble the whole. Their understanding may be limited to brief whistle-stops along the navigation pathway.

Traditional documentaries are more likely to offer viewers the chance to interrogate evidence and be guided towards reaching a point of view. With an interactive documentary, it may be more a case of being able to establish dialogues. Linear narratives allow the filmmaker to express a point of view, argues Arnau Gifreu, an interactive documentary specialist. In contrast, interactive documentaries are better at creating a debate, Gifreu says. The audience is more likely to feel that there are multiple perspectives. However, any sense of 'truth' may be considerably watered down.

Interactive films

An **interactive film** is a participatory experience that follows the 'choose your own adventure' style of storytelling where a viewer can make decisions that affect the outcome of the story. These sorts of experiences have existed since the 1980s with the development of LaserDisc technologies (precursor to DVDs and Blu-ray discs). However, these interactive movies were usually considered to be part of the gaming world instead of a cinematic experience.

The 1992 interactive film *I'm Your Man* required participating cinemas to spend thousands of dollars retrofitting their chairs with joysticks and buttons so that audience members could make decisions along the way. The 20-minute experience was met with mixed reviews – teenagers seemed to love it, but not so much the adults in the audience. One major criticism was that audience members would run around the theatre and press the buttons of empty seats, thus skewing the 'vote'. Overall, the 'interfilm' experience was considered gimmicky.

Some of the interactive films of this era were later released on DVDs that could be 'played' at home, but mostly this concept was merged into video game experiences. The video game

company Telltale Games has successfully used this formula to create narrative experiences around established media products such as *The Walking Dead* (2010–) and *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014).

Interactive films as a group cinematic experience did not really take off in popularity in the 1990s as their creators had hoped. Fast-forward 25 years and the use of smartphones to 'vote' on decisions could see a new wave of cinematic interactive films being produced.



Alamy Stock Photo/Atlaspix

Figure 11.14 The interactive film *the Late Shift* (2016) marketed itself as 'the world's first cinematic interactive movie'. It provides audience members with 180 decision points and has 4 hours of total footage. During a cinema screening, audiences interact with the film by using a smartphone app to collectively decide on a course of action for the protagonist.

Augmented reality (AR)

Augmented reality (AR) is when technology is used to superimpose images or video over a view of the real world. Participants can engage in AR experiences via a device (such as a smartphone) with a camera to view the world and a screen to display the augmented world. This means that an AR experience can still be a social one as participants are not 'blocked off' from others as they would be if wearing a virtual reality headset.

Pokémon Go (2016) is an AR game where players 'capture' Pokémon characters in real-life locations (using a phone's GPS technology) before training them up to battle those of other players. According to Guinness World Records, the game was a global phenomenon and topped the download charts in 70 countries in its first month of release. Compared with other video game experiences, *Pokémon Go* was visible to

the general public and made news headlines as swarms of players converged at particular locations to ‘catch them all’.

The Whole Story (2017) is an app that combines augmented reality with history to add virtual statues of notable women alongside existing physical (male) statues. Users can take photos next to these virtual statues and share them on social media to celebrate the achievements of women such as Marie Curie, Nina Simone and Amelia Earhart. The crowd-sourced app and website encourage users around the world to add to the project by creating and uploading their own virtual statues. The creator then ‘anchors’ the statue to a particular location on the map.



Getty Images/Donald Iain Smith

Figure 11.15 Holograms are no longer just science fiction, but are now possible through augmented reality technologies. In 2017, tech company 8i released an app called ‘Holo’ where users can record video or take photos of themselves interacting with the hologram. To create the holograms, 8i uses an array of cameras to record ‘volumetric video’ that can be viewed from any angle and inserted in AR or VR situations.

Virtual reality (VR)

With a virtual reality (VR) experience, by wearing a headset a person’s view of the real world is replaced by a simulated environment that can be photorealistic or computer-generated. Compared with traditional media that presents one view, virtual reality allows a user to move around a scene and engage with multiple perspectives. A VR user is in the centre of the experience and not just an observer, which raises questions about the ethics of storytelling with VR.

The language of VR storytelling needs to be different from that of traditional media as there is no **fourth wall** between the viewer/participant and the action. The traditional framing choices in television and film don’t have quite the same effect on audiences in a VR storytelling setting. For example, in a slapstick-style comedy film, someone falling down is often humorous. However, if a character falls down right next to you in a VR experience, you may have a different empathetic response and it is not funny anymore. Similarly, viewers are used to seeing a couple kissing on television framed in a close-up shot – however, being that close to a couple kissing in a virtual world (or in real life) could be weird and uncomfortable.

A virtual world where people can spend their work and leisure time is the dream of Philip Rosedale, CEO of High Fidelity. Rosedale’s online role-playing game *Second Life* (2006) showed the potential of users interacting in an open digital world. With developments in VR technologies, Rosedale believes the idea behind *Second Life*, of ‘living’ in an open simulated environment, is finally going to be fully realised.



Image of Inside Manus created by SUTU and provided courtesy of Hoodlum and Chemical Media TV (c) 2018

Figure 11.16 A screenshot from the interactive VR documentary *Inside Manus*, created by Hoodlum, Cutting Edge and SBS. Audiences are taken behind the fences to experience first-hand accounts from three detainees from the Manus Island detention centre. The documentary experience features an ink-and-wash style hand-drawn world. There are also recordings from the detainees, so the story is told in their own words and voices.

‘A book works through an inner monologue, you read what a character thinks. In a film, you understand a character through his actions. And in VR, I think you understand the story more through how *you* feel in a situation.’

Saschka Unseld, head of Oculus Story Studio

11.6 ACTIVITIES

- 1 **Identify** a narrative VR experience.

Analyse whether the viewer/user is positioned as an observer or participant. **Examine** whether the user can interact with the world, and whether the characters in the story seem to 'acknowledge' the user.

Analyse the positive and negatives of current audiences experiencing an interactive film in a cinema compared with a solo viewing at home.

Appraise the user experience of the *Pokémon Go* (2016) phenomenon by considering any limitations to participation, and the benefits or disadvantages for players engaging with the game.

- 2 Sandra Gaudenzi has identified three main approaches to interactive documentaries. Find online an example of each type.

Explain the factors that influenced your selection of chapters, **identifying** some of the features that allowed you to make that decision.

Analyse the features you identified and **interpret** them in relation to their appeal to the target audience.

Construct a pathway plan for an interactive documentary about an aspect of life at your school. Suggest potential video footage to be shown at different node points along the pathway. **Arrange** some alternative video footage at each point that will allow different choices to be made. **Design** into the pathway a shortcut link at each node point that will take the users to later stages in the documentary.

- 3 Participate in an interactive documentary, **exploring** the range of pathways available and **engaging** in opportunities for immersion or co-creation. Respond to the areas of activity in the following table.

EXPLAIN	ANALYSE	APPRAISE
<p>Explain how interactive documentary users can have a range of choices available to them. Give information about the way the files are arranged. Provide examples of the ways in which the documentary allows multiple pathways and shortcuts.</p>	<p>Analyse information structures in the documentary, examining each and considering the relevance of each to the central theme of the documentary.</p>	<p>Appraise the benefits and limitations for audience members of participation in this interactive documentary, drawing conclusions about the significance of the interactivity in comparison with linear documentaries.</p>