

# Eduqas A Level Unit 8A Close Study Products Student Workbook 2024 Exam Onwards Video Games Component 1B Assassin's Creed

This is the Workbook for use with **Edusites Eduqas Set Products UNIT 8B A Level Media Studies**. All of the notes refer to the content of this unit of work. They are designed to help you create a useful set of notes to help you with understanding the ideas covered in this examination, to support you in your Home Learning and be a clear revision aid in your preparations for the final examinations that you are required to take. You need to always keep in mind the examination board Assessment Objectives that your work is to be assessed with.

Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of:

- the theoretical framework of media, contexts of media and their influence on media products and processes.
- Analyse media products using the theoretical framework of media, including in relation to their contexts, to make judgements and draw conclusions.
- Create media products for an intended audience, by applying knowledge and understanding of the theoretical framework of media to communicate meaning.

Create products for intended audience and evaluate communication of meaning

- Demonstrate K&U of theoretical framework – *the Key concepts*
- Contexts of media products & production
- Analyse products by application of the framework/concepts/context

## Lesson 1

### Copyright ©

All rights reserved. Permission granted to reproduce for educational use within the subscribing school only. Copying or lending of any part of this document in any form or by any means to external bodies and / or individuals is prohibited.

### Teacher's Standards

Teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

## Set products

The **Assassin's Creed** franchise set product requires awareness of the **evolution of video games** and the manner in which they **construct their audience**.

The nature of the games and the platforms it is played on need to be researched in terms of the **industry and the way profit is made by convergence** and the wider impact on gamers, in particular the murky area of the effects debate and media violence.

Useful research is into contemporary media institutions and the part played by the acquisition of gaming products as part of global media conglomerates.

The close link between **games** and **audience/players ideologies** is key in helping understanding of the shifting relationship between society and its media products.

A video game franchise is a series of related products following a common theme, set of characters or situations. The games, though seen as standalone products, are part of the same brand but may take place at different times or places. They are linked by being within the same video world.

In terms of video gaming, a franchise is a highly desirable set of products for any institution. They attract a known group of fans/players who require little persuasion to buy each new version of the game. Their often very large audience base minimizes the risk involved in developing and marketing a new product.

The various iterations (versions) of *Pokémon* have grossed over 90 billion dollars. *Call of Duty* franchise has a 17-billion-dollar gross over its various versions.

- *Assassin's Creed* franchise is published by Ubisoft.
- First published in 2007.
- There have been 12 versions of the game, plus spin-offs.
- It is an action adventure, open world game, played from a third person perspective

### Copyright ©

All rights reserved. Permission granted to reproduce for educational use within the subscribing school only. Copying or lending of any part of this document in any form or by any means to external bodies and / or individuals is prohibited.

### Teacher's Standards

Teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

- Each game is set in a historical setting with a new story and time period.
- In 2021 the franchise recorded sales of 155 million units since 2007.
- *Assassin's Creed Valhalla* sold more units in its first week than any other game in the series.
- Many of the games in the back catalogue of the franchise continue to be popular

Released in 2007, the *Assassin's Creed* franchise - authored by the French-Canadian software house Ubisoft - has become one of the most successful gaming franchises ever released:

- 155 million copies of the series have been sold.
- In February 2018, Ubisoft reported sales of £725 million for the third quarter of 2017, nearly a billion dollars for 3 months games sales that covered the release of *Origins*.
- December 2017 the release of the latest in the franchise, *Assassin's Creed: Origins* was selling at over one million copies a week in the run up to Xmas.

Keeping track of the editions is complex, but as of 2023, there have been 12 main releases in the series, with special edition versions taking the number higher.

## Lesson 2

### Assassin's Creed

- As with all the EDUQAS set products, study of the *Assassin's Creed* franchise is a means by which to study the broader ideas and concerns of the QCA Media Framework.
- The set product enables us to explore these ideas in a practical manner. We use examples from the product to illustrate our understanding.
- The video game industry is highly significant in terms of its economic wealth and in its social impact. It can be seen to illustrate some sense of the values of society or sections of society.

#### Copyright ©

All rights reserved. Permission granted to reproduce for educational use within the subscribing school only. Copying or lending of any part of this document in any form or by any means to external bodies and / or individuals is prohibited.

#### Teacher's Standards

Teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

The release of new gaming consoles or new versions of video games from popular franchises are major economic events eclipsing even blockbuster film or music releases.

A study of the strategies used in marketing such products tells us much about the way such products construct their appeal to their target demographic. This in turn tells us much about the values and ideas of this section of society.

Changes in the content and narrative ideas of the *Assassin's Creed* franchise and others such as the *Call of Duty* franchise can indicate changes in the values of society and the way video games can be seen to shape such changes.

The fact that these expensive leisure products sell in vast numbers indicates audience demand for the pleasures offered (Blumler & Katz).

Games software publishing houses are often part of **global media conglomerates** (E.G. *Sony; Lucas Film; Disney*) alongside film industry, TV, music and publishing. This indicates their value as part of a horizontal integration of cultural products.

As with most media products, the video game has evolved through advances in technology. The drive to be commercially competitive and to meet the surging demand for gaming has driven innovation in video gaming. Audiences now expect complex gameplay and involving narratives showcased by advanced CGI and graphics.

The demand has obvious cost implications – the quality of graphics and of sound and narrative comes with a high price. Gaming development requires hundreds of contributors and massive technological investment.

Being part of an established franchise creates a much more profitable production and distribution model for software publishers. They can market to an established demographic of known fans of the brand as they have an identity that can be built on. For investors, it minimizes risk in a crowded and competitive market.

#### Copyright ©

All rights reserved. Permission granted to reproduce for educational use within the subscribing school only. Copying or lending of any part of this document in any form or by any means to external bodies and / or individuals is prohibited.

#### Teacher's Standards

Teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

UBISOFT with its *Tom Clancy* and *Star Wars* and *Avatar Assassin's Creed* franchises is successful at building such brand identities with offshoots into film and TV.

**Hesmondhalgh** is a key figure in fostering the idea of cultural industries and exploring the forces that drive them and shape their output. When considering which project to finance, media producers must take into consideration the fact that in cultural industries risk is high. This is because of the difficulty in predicting success. Often the issue is that they are investing in a project with a limited opportunity for repeat business unlike industries selling food or clothing. The audience for media products is very much a 'one time' consumer. There is also the fact that the production costs are high with investments requiring millions.

As **Hesmondhalgh** and the research models of **Curran** and **Seaton** have shown, this most often means that media producers look for 'big hits' (the blockbusters) to cover the costs of the many relative financial failures they will have.

***The way of minimising risk is for institutions to rely on investment in repetition through the use of the 'same' or 'familiar' stars, popular genres, safe franchises or repeatable narratives that have proven successful.*** This strategy is what Hesmondhalgh refers to as **formatting**.

*Franchise such as 'Assassin's Creed' create a recognisable brand with known pleasures. This offers the chance to reduce marketing costs; to target marketing more tightly; has a known 'pre-sold' audience; a pool of fans not just players; has known genre pleasures.*

- Video games develop and expand to reflect advances in console and platform technology. The release and success of different versions of consoles such as the *PS4*, *PS5* and the *PS Vita* as well as the *X Box* have all enabled – demanded – that software publishers enhance the capability of their products. These more dynamic and graphically improved games show off the qualities of

#### Copyright ©

All rights reserved. Permission granted to reproduce for educational use within the subscribing school only. Copying or lending of any part of this document in any form or by any means to external bodies and / or individuals is prohibited.

#### Teacher's Standards

Teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

the console making the platform more desirable to consumers as well as enhancing the brand of the game itself. The improved graphics and speed of the PS5 over the PS4 has an impact on audience expectations of gaming experiences. The brands market themselves on their graphics, encouraging purchase of new iterations of the franchise

- The decision to release *Assassin's Creed III: Liberation* on PS Vita was made to enable Ubisoft to secure a share of the increasingly popular mobile gaming market (smart phones, tablets etc.). The *PS Vita* was designed with many features of the modern smart phones (touchscreen, Wi-Fi, 3G and Bluetooth capability).
- The *PS Vita* iteration of such a recognisable franchise can be seen as an attempt to bring high game production values to the mobile gaming market. The game was originally exclusive to the *PS Vita* but was later (2014) released in a modified version other consoles and platforms (*PS3, Xbox 360, Microsoft Windows*)

**Curran and Seaton's** research model indicates that **commercial media companies are concerned with maximising profit and minimising financial risk**. These priorities impact all aspects of media products from what gets made to the representations and ideas they contain.

Media industries continually extend their activities into areas where profits may be made and their existing and new content exploited (e.g. **Ubisoft and the PS Vita**)

One result of conglomerates pursuing profit is that it comes to dominate their output. As an established and highly profitable franchise, *Assassin's Creed* constructs the idea for Ubisoft to feel that making more games in the franchise offers a better 'guarantee' of success than risking a new title or project.

**Curran and Seaton** argue that media products thus come to feel 'all the same'. The result is that audiences may extend the pleasure from different iterations of the game but in reality they now have less choice, a more limited 'type' of game to select.

#### Copyright ©

All rights reserved. Permission granted to reproduce for educational use within the subscribing school only. Copying or lending of any part of this document in any form or by any means to external bodies and / or individuals is prohibited.

#### Teacher's Standards

Teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

Franchises offer the potential to exploit a game brand to the full. The demand for a recognised franchise means that software development houses are not only asked to produce versions for the main domestic console platforms of the PlayStation and X-Box audience, but to produce versions for handheld consoles too.

Once a brand is well-established on a platform with a recognised set of characters or locations, there exists the potential for Special Editions. These are versions of the game offering additional adventures for the game. By offering these expansion packs as new purchases rather than as part of the original game they maximise revenue streams. The drip release enables fresh marketing that keeps the brand franchise in the gamers' minds.

*Assassin's Creed's* latest full game iteration *Assassin's Creed Valhalla* offers a series of three expansion packs. These packs add-ons offer new adventures. The expansion packs require the gamer to already have purchased the original base game *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla* (around £50 when released in 2020). The marketing of each expansion pack stresses their place in the imaginary world surrounding the franchise. At around £15 each, and released separately over a period of two years, the expansions bridge the gamers desire for new product between the release of *Assassin's Creed Valhalla* in November 2020 and the next full version of *Assassin's Creed franchise* expected in late 2023. They maximize the revenue stream from the base game; they keep the franchise relevant and in the minds of gamers between the full versions; they provide rolling reviews and gaming chat helping the brand appear fresh.

Later in the cycle of release, complete versions are offered containing both the base game and the additional expansion material at an enhanced price. Such material appeals to fans of the franchise, many of whom purchase all versions of the game to get the bonus 'exclusive' adventures these offer.

**Copyright ©**

All rights reserved. Permission granted to reproduce for educational use within the subscribing school only. Copying or lending of any part of this document in any form or by any means to external bodies and / or individuals is prohibited.

**Teacher's Standards**

Teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

## Lesson 3

### Assassin's Creed

#### **Genre is an industrial process:**

- To guarantee **pleasure and meaning for the audience.**
- To **offset financial risks of production** by providing collateral against innovation and difference.
- 

To the production team, genre provides **a proven template for construction of messages and content.**

For marketing, **genre provides assumptions about the audience to be targeted.**

*We must also see genre as an audience focused element. When we go online looking for songs or films we find that all platforms categorise these cultural products according to their 'type'. It is the formula for identifying 'if you enjoyed X then you'll enjoy Y' utilised by all such platforms (Netflix; Spotify; Amazon; Sky etc.) making it easier for the audience to identify those products containing the needs they are looking to satisfy.*

*They offer familiarity, a form of guarantee saying there is a good chance that the consumer will most likely enjoy this product. To the audience, genre identifies a pleasurable and familiar formula providing engagement and understanding. We can see that with a franchise such as Assassin's Creed this is magnified by including the element of fandom and of prior experience of the game series.*

A key element of our study for the examination must be the fact that video games develop and expand to reflect advances in technology.

In the set product of *Assassin's Creed* the decision to release *Assassin's Creed III: Liberation* on PS Vita was to take advantage of the then recognised increasing popularity of mobile gaming. Mobile gaming is gaming played on smart phones and

#### **Copyright ©**

All rights reserved. Permission granted to reproduce for educational use within the subscribing school only. Copying or lending of any part of this document in any form or by any means to external bodies and / or individuals is prohibited.

#### **Teacher's Standards**

Teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.



tablets or on the hand held consoles such as the PS Vita which was designed with many of those features usually associated with smart phones (*touchscreen; Wi-Fi, 3G and Bluetooth capability*).

Ubisoft's development of their franchise can be seen as an attempt to bring advanced production values to mobile gaming. The game was originally exclusive to the PS Vita but was later (2014) released in a modified HD version across a large range of consoles and platforms (including PS3, Xbox 360 and Microsoft Windows).

This drive to make the most of new technology can be seen in the release of games onto new platforms or new versions of consoles. *Assassin's Creed Valhalla* was developed to take advantage of the advances in technology of the new PS5 and X Box consoles. The release of this iteration of the franchise was timed to benefit from the upsurge of demand by gamers for content for these new consoles. *Odyssey* was to move the game into new directions/demands of audience involvement.

Games and gaming continue to advance. As audience demands and expectations increase media institutions see the benefits of extending existing well recognized franchises into these evolving areas rather than trying to devise a new product or brand. These are commercial decisions rather than artistic.

*Assassin's Creed* franchise used *Odyssey* to create a much more immersive gaming experience. The technology of the consoles enabled graphics that constructed far more realistic and explorable worlds so that the world of the game could act like a sandbox.

Encouraging players to spend longer in a game world means;

1. Enhancement of the value and uses of the brand
2. Increased likelihood of the purchase of subsequent iterations

Like any other form, video games utilize genre theory for minimizing their commercial and reputational risks.

#### **Copyright ©**

All rights reserved. Permission granted to reproduce for educational use within the subscribing school only. Copying or lending of any part of this document in any form or by any means to external bodies and / or individuals is prohibited.

#### **Teacher's Standards**

Teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

- What gaming genre codes and conventions are evident in your franchise product?
- Does the game have a backstory? If so how does it engage the audience?
- Consider the central character, how are they presented to appeal to the audience? (*character attributes; representation of gender*)
- How is the audience positioned by the camerawork and editing?
- Analyse the *mise-en-scène*, what is the visual style of the game?
- How is sound used to enhance the audience's experience?
- Can you identify any intertextual references?
- Does the game enable online play? What is the appeal/impact of this for gamers?

## Lesson 4

### Audience

**Uses and Gratifications theory Model** of Bulmer and Katz went against the early ideas of the audience as a passive whole. Their model suggests that audiences in fact take an active role in choosing and using media, that they seek out the products that best fulfil their needs.

#### **Entertainment/escapism/diversion**

This might be seen as the prime motivation for consuming a product. *It is certainly the one that most would see as the reason for their selection. In this, audiences consume media products for enjoyment and to escape from problems or issue in their own daily lives.*

#### **Personal Identity**

Audiences find those whose conduct and values carry similar values to their own. *Consuming such products forms, reshapes or evolves some of their own characteristics and ideas and values. Such impact/need is not one that we articulate and may pass us by as unnoticed – Gerbner's drops of water on stone.*

#### **Copyright ©**

All rights reserved. Permission granted to reproduce for educational use within the subscribing school only. Copying or lending of any part of this document in any form or by any means to external bodies and / or individuals is prohibited.

#### **Teacher's Standards**

Teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

## Integration and social interaction

Media products can produce topics of conversation between people. In discussing these audience ideas are hardened, challenged and either reformed or evolved. We get to see how our own ideas are acceptable to others and help identify our social grouping. Like Personal Identity, this often at a subconscious level – Gerbner strikes again!

## Surveillance (Information and Education)

The user wants to acquire information, knowledge and understanding and may do so by consuming products such news or documentaries or engaging with social media feeds of friends or celebrity influencers.

Neale's model sees media products relying on the intended audience finding pleasure in **difference and repetition** - *recognition of familiar elements and the way those elements are linked in an unfamiliar way or the way that unfamiliar elements might be introduced.*

Genre is a meshing of audience **expectations** and **hypothesis** (*what they believe the product to be about/contain based on prior knowledge of similar products*) which interact with the products during consumption.

Assassin's Creed offers a number of familiar genre pleasures to its audience. One is clearly that of the continuation of the franchise with the familiar elements of gameplay and objectives. It is a first person game based on elements present in others of the genre such as Call of Duty or Red or Dead. There are problems to solve and actions to be performed. There are clear objectives, each with a clearly defined idea of success. The premise of the game is familiar.

There is also the familiarity of an accessible narrative form. The central quest is the same in each iteration enabling gamers to dive straight into the world of the game. However, each iteration evolves a world designed according to the era in which the game is set. Here we have the element of repetition and difference. There are new worlds and characters to enjoy. The franchise is manufactured to hold audience

### Copyright ©

All rights reserved. Permission granted to reproduce for educational use within the subscribing school only. Copying or lending of any part of this document in any form or by any means to external bodies and / or individuals is prohibited.

### Teacher's Standards

Teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

attention by conforming to well established norms yet offering new variations of the experience.

The gamer plays the central figure, the narrative hero, and is able to make decisions that determine that character's success.

The distribution of *the Assassin's Creed* franchise is one that encompasses a range of platforms – console and mobile. It can be seen as a marketing strategy across different platforms to increase gaming consumption. One objective is enticing gamers to adopt different platforms, the encouragement to purchase additional hardware and the adoption of new gaming habits – *mobile gaming enables gamers to pursue their pleasures in more locations and different times.*

Such marketing supports the idea of encouraging new and existing gamers to feel that they could have a more complete gaming experience by using a range of interlinked products, each offering platform exclusive downloadable content. This made possible through convergent technology and encouraging gamer “buy-in” to the value of the exclusive content.

The *Assassin's Creed* franchise has a well-established fan community. With different members sharing their experience and response to the games on convergent platforms the community act as marketing interaction. Fans responses play a role in the future development of the franchise.

**Reception theory** there are preferred, negotiated and oppositional readings. It's all about the way members of the audience might be thought respond to the product.

From this we can make informed assessments of how the target audience might respond to the style, content and tone of the game. How far it might reflect the way members of the target audience are likely to think (most often we can assume that they align in taking the preferred reading).

Clearly, they seek clues in the product from which to hang an interpretation of how they are intended to view the ideas and representations. We assume that as

**Copyright ©**

All rights reserved. Permission granted to reproduce for educational use within the subscribing school only. Copying or lending of any part of this document in any form or by any means to external bodies and / or individuals is prohibited.

**Teacher's Standards**

Teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

purchasers of the product the audience of gamers will tend to the positive in their reception of the games in the franchise. The encouragement to sharing of responses and experiences via social media and forums is important to how the game is then seen as something bigger than 'just a game'. Gamers invest elements of their own identity and self-identity in discussing their understanding of the elements in the narrative or of character motivations.

In 2012 Sony launched the PS Vita across the three key gaming markets – USA, Europe and Japan - in an attempt to exploit the lucrative mobile gaming sector then enjoying increasing success on smart phones and tablets.

The PS Vita was designed with features associated with such devices – *the touchscreen, Wi-Fi, 3G and Bluetooth capability*. The link to special versions of major games – *Call of Duty; Assassin's Creed* etc. were seen as key to the devices success. By 2015 when it was clear that global sales of the device or its games failed to materialise outside of Japan. Ubisoft ceased making games specific to the console.

The fact that the iteration used on the PS Vita, *Assassin's Creed: Liberation*, featured a strong female character was linked to research indicating that **whilst console gaming remained male dominated at over 70% of gamers being male, game play on mobile devices such as phones and tablets and the Wii was similarly dominated by women. In 2014 61% of all USA mobile gamers were female.**

## Lesson 5

### Fandom

**Uses and Gratifications theory Model** suggests that audiences take an active role in choosing and using media, seeking out products that best fulfil their needs.

Wiki websites offer content and approaches that target satisfying a variety of needs. The key focus is on being part of a community with shared interest moving beyond being just a player into the need to share ideas and to increase immersion in the world of the game.

#### Copyright ©

All rights reserved. Permission granted to reproduce for educational use within the subscribing school only. Copying or lending of any part of this document in any form or by any means to external bodies and / or individuals is prohibited.

#### Teacher's Standards

Teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

The sense of identity or tribalism (Maffesoli) is present in the clear values and identities that cater to gamers' search for social and personal identity. The sites offer a view of the world of the game and of social reality itself.

The obvious sense of surveillance lies in subject matter that can inform social interactions. The sense of being aware of ideas and values in circulation in the community may reinforce identity.

Video games provide information and ideas about ways of living which are actively integrated into gamers relationships and lifestyles.

This is achieved through the manner in which particular characters actions, ideas, and beliefs act to refine our own identity. This is supplemented by the 'influencer' actions of participation in gaming communities where ideas of confirmation bias might seem to help shape attitudes.

*This concept of **constructed identity** is similar to **Bandura's** social learning theory that argues children adopt behaviour from role models in media products. We become the product of the media we engage with.*

**End of audience:** One of the key ideas about modern media is that of the audience ability to 'speak back' to media producers. Changes in technology have had a profound effect on the relations between the media and its audience. Interactions between audience and product play a vital role in shaping media and is an important part of audience expectation.

- Audiences **no longer passive** – wanting to share and comment; media no longer washes over audiences.
- Audiences **expect** to be able to share likes and comments and **to interact with products** and other audience members.

#### Copyright ©

All rights reserved. Permission granted to reproduce for educational use within the subscribing school only. Copying or lending of any part of this document in any form or by any means to external bodies and / or individuals is prohibited.

#### Teacher's Standards

Teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

- The ability to use social media to ‘speak back’ to producers offers greater **power to the audience to shape products** and to influence how they are understood.

For the gaming industry, social media has become a valuable tool to construct and hail its audience. Material such as screen shots and trailers are posted to social media to generate expectation and to shape the conversation around a brand franchise such as Assassin’s Creed. The social media platforms of Instagram and twitter perpetuate what marketing started, keeping the franchise relevant and fresh. Discussions on fan sites of the meanings of games – their events and character arcs generate huge interest in the product and stimulate revenue streams including merchandise and licensed products such as action figures or Tee shirts.

**Fandom:** fans are groups of devoted followers who actively engage with media products to construct meanings and interpretations beyond the original message. Audiences see products as a disposable commodity, fans see them as essential elements of their social life and identity.

Fans construct an interactive relationship between the producer and audience actively participating in the reception of a product and its development and understanding.

- The reception of a product is intense and immersive.
- Fandoms encourage viewer activism – to ‘Talk back’.
- They are interpretive community - products are dissected and discussed to discover their true meaning.
- There are traditions of cultural production and interaction – cultural poaching.
- Alternative social communities are formed as fandoms connect and collaborate.

Fan culture – often referred to as **Fandom** - describes social communities built around the shared enjoyment of a particular aspect of popular culture - *books, movies, TV shows, bands, sports or sports teams, etc.* A good example might be the original

#### Copyright ©

All rights reserved. Permission granted to reproduce for educational use within the subscribing school only. Copying or lending of any part of this document in any form or by any means to external bodies and / or individuals is prohibited.

#### Teacher’s Standards

Teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

fandom of Star Trek, the trekkies, or those of Harry Potter who frequently engage in cosplay.

Fandom is an example of what are called participatory cultures - fans acting not only as consumers but also as producers and creators of creative media. Though most fan cultures such as those of sports teams or celebrities or bands and performers have many of the key elements of fandom, it is in the participatory culture of media products – *films, TV shows, novels, video gaming* - where creative expression and artistic production is encouraged by its participants.

Jenkins defined a participatory culture as having five key elements:

1. Has low barriers to artistic expression and communal engagement.
2. Supportive of creating and sharing creations with others
3. A form of mentorship in which experienced fans pass knowledge to novices.
4. A belief that such contributions matter
5. Social connection between members supportive of all fans opinions and contributions
6. Fandom constructs communities in which fans can express themselves and, in doing so, construct media spaces that enable the critique of the mainstream product with its conventional and often prescriptive ideas of gender, sexuality, ethnicity etc. promoted by media institutions as the inevitable consequence of their prioritising pursuit of economic gain. (Curran & Seaton)
7. Jenkins sees Fandom as a form of cultural resistance. Fan created products such as fan-fiction and fan-videos often explore themes and aspects of the source material of interest to minority or female-dominated sections of the fan community, often going beyond the stories the male-dominated media industry is interested in or willing to tell. He suggests that “*fandom’s very existence represents a critique of conventional forms of consumer culture*” providing “*a space within which fans may articulate their specific concerns*”

**Copyright ©**

All rights reserved. Permission granted to reproduce for educational use within the subscribing school only. Copying or lending of any part of this document in any form or by any means to external bodies and / or individuals is prohibited.

**Teacher’s Standards**

Teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.



*about sexuality, gender, racism, colonialism, militarism, and forced conformity” (Jenkins: 1992).*

Fandom is seen to have originated with Star Trek fandom in the 1960s. At the time, *Trekkies* shared their creations through conventions or fanzines – self-published magazines distributed at conventions or shared between fans. The arrival of the Internet allowed fan culture to be both far more widespread, breaking down geographical barriers and also to be much more accessible.

Jenkins in his essay *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture* contrasts participatory culture with consumer culture, suggesting that fans poach from popular media, appropriating ideas from the text and rereading them in creative ways for their own uses. One theory of popular culture holds that media institutions (*TV networks, software games houses, film studios*) put their emphasis on profit rather than quality and is part of the wider hegemony used to spread dominant ideologies. Jenkins puts forward the theory that in Fandom, those actively engaged in participatory culture, rather than being “*cultural dupes, social misfits, and mindless consumers,*” can be far better understood as “*active producers and manipulators of meaning*” (Jenkins 1992)

## Lesson 6

### Regulation

Consider the impact of convergence and diversification in media on regulatory practices. New technology opens up new opportunities and arguably new risks that complicate regulation.

- Should industries self-regulate?
- Should individuals be empowered to make their own decisions about the products?
- How might regulation become problematic where individuals lack the required media literacy to make informed decisions?

#### Copyright ©

All rights reserved. Permission granted to reproduce for educational use within the subscribing school only. Copying or lending of any part of this document in any form or by any means to external bodies and / or individuals is prohibited.

#### Teacher’s Standards

Teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

- How can the consumer-based and citizen-based regulatory model be applied to the video games industry?

**Media regulation is simply about protection.** The idea that the state has an obligation to ensure it protects its more vulnerable members from harm.

In terms of video gaming this has come to be seen as a matter of age, the need to take action to ensure young children are not exposed to images of violence or sexuality whilst playing video games.

- The key issue for gaming has been the additional fact that video gaming is not simply 'watching'. The gamer is an active participant. The gamer is most often the one committing the violent act.
- Gaming is an immersive experience; the gamer is encouraged to feel the 'reality' or the 'truth' of the world of the game thus intensifying the experience of any violence or aggression.
- Gaming encourages gamers to keep playing for many hours. It is not a short immersion as in say a film's 90 minutes or TV show's 60 minutes. Repeated and constant exposure are key elements in media influence on our lives.
- The game's encourage identity with the characters.
- Online gaming encourages sense of community, sharing the experience and normalising it.
- Debates about declining morality in society increase pressures to act.
- The idea of moral panics drives concerns.

**Media regulation is simply about protection.** The idea that the state has an obligation to ensure it protects its more vulnerable members from harm.

In terms of video gaming this has come to be seen as a matter of age, the need to take action to ensure young children are not exposed to images of violence or sexuality whilst playing video games.

**Copyright ©**

All rights reserved. Permission granted to reproduce for educational use within the subscribing school only. Copying or lending of any part of this document in any form or by any means to external bodies and / or individuals is prohibited.

**Teacher's Standards**

Teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

- The idea that legislation inhibits freedom of the individual.
- Legislation is crude, based on age. There are those in society more than capable of dealing with such issues whatever their age. Conversely such a rule leaves others who will always be vulnerable no matter their chronological age.
- Regulation inhibits evolution of the industry – narratives and characters are compromised.
- Audiences need to be able to decide for themselves.
- Audiences need to be presented with such issues if they are to develop their own personal moral codes rather than having them imposed and meaning nothing to them.
- Freedom to choose is an essential part of any democracy. Regulation weakens the democratic idea.
- The convergence of platforms and technology make regulation impossible to enforce.
- Global markets render regulation useless.

**Moral panic** a *'condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests.'*

In the first stage claims are exaggerated and distorted; in the second a terrible outcome is predicted if action is not taken (e.g., *legislating around video 'nasties' in the 1980s*); in the third stage problems are symbolised as in associating the term 'rocker' or 'video nasties' with the threat.

Later, Cohen defined five stages of moral panic:

1. Something or someone is defined as a threat to values or interests
2. This threat is depicted in an easily recognisable form by the media
3. There is a rapid build-up of public concern
4. There is a response from authorities or opinion makers
5. The panic recedes or results in social changes

**Copyright ©**

All rights reserved. Permission granted to reproduce for educational use within the subscribing school only. Copying or lending of any part of this document in any form or by any means to external bodies and / or individuals is prohibited.

**Teacher's Standards**

Teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

Since the middle of the Twentieth Century, age ratings have been applied to developing elements of creative media products – initially films, then videos, music, DVDs, computer games. The purpose of ratings is to assure concerned adults that the content has been viewed and judged morally and emotionally appropriate to the age of the audience.

The PEGI system was introduced in 2003 to act as a unified European system. The code is part of the regulation of the industry that all software houses are obliged to comply with.

In the UK, 43 % of the population aged between 16 and 49 describe themselves as ‘active gamers’ (defined as playing games on a console, handheld or PC).

While most games (49%) are suitable for players of all ages there are many that are only suitable for young teenagers with are some games (4%) judged to be appropriate only for adults over the age of 18.

Accordingly, a PEGI 7 game is only suitable for those aged seven and above and a PEGI 18 game is only suitable for adults aged eighteen and above. The PEGI rating considers the age suitability of a game, not the level of difficulty.

**Social Learning Theory** suggests that observation and modelling play a primary role in how and why people learn.

The importance of Social Learning Theory lies in the idea that this means that children copy behaviour and identification through TV and media consumption as much as through direct real-life experiences. It is part of the argument for censoring access to certain media products

In video gaming, the argument is that gamers are not just observing but are directing behaviour and actions. In this sense they experience an enhanced and extremely powerful unsupervised learning experience that shapes their real-world ideas and behaviour. The introduction of the PEGI system for video games is very much based on the ideas of Bandura’s research model.

In Edusites Unit 10 Core Media Industry we look in detail at aspects of media regulation, the codes that shape media output and reception and the theoretical

**Copyright ©**

All rights reserved. Permission granted to reproduce for educational use within the subscribing school only. Copying or lending of any part of this document in any form or by any means to external bodies and / or individuals is prohibited.

**Teacher’s Standards**

Teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

models on which these are based or those that challenge such regulations. Here, we must establish a simple framework for researching Assassin's Creed franchise products knowing that in our final revision work we will return to these products with an evolved understanding.

Media regulation has always been controversial. At the most basic level, it assumes state intervention, which in its application limits freedom of expression and the right to communication.

### **Issues impacting aspects of media policymaking and regulation:**

- Globalization reducing the power of the individual state to intervene.
- Technological convergence.
- Structural changes in increased privatisation, increasing commercialization, independent production houses, industry consolidation in conglomerates with tentacles in many platforms.
- media deregulation (*the relaxation of codes for broadcasting; introduction of 'light touch' regulatory frameworks*)

### **Silverstone Media and Morality: On the Rise of the Mediaopolis**

Global media are central to the moral future of civilisation. The **media have a profound significance for the way in which the world is understood** and without a clear understanding of that significance or a means to construct effective models of the way in which the media go about their daily business, we are likely to see an erosion in the capacity of human beings to understand and respect each other. Consider the impact of this on those whom we see and hear only in their mediation in such products.

Gerbner's **cultivation theory** found these media products repeatedly expose the audience to ideas and behaviours. The constant repetition of ideas and behaviours and their consequences for the characters in the shows are absorbed by the audience and shaped their beliefs.

It is best compared to the idea of water dripping on a rock, over time the rock will be slowly eroded and changed.

#### **Copyright ©**

All rights reserved. Permission granted to reproduce for educational use within the subscribing school only. Copying or lending of any part of this document in any form or by any means to external bodies and / or individuals is prohibited.

#### **Teacher's Standards**

Teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

Exposure to modern media encourages standardised roles and behaviours - long term users of media are more likely to develop and portray the attitudes and outlooks contained in the products they engage with.

AC can be seen to be a compressed exposure of this idea to its audience with the intention of making them think of its impact in society. The video bombards us with the range of images that are a staple of modern media – films, adverts, magazines, music videos etc. The video shows the destructive impact of these. The men become watchers of women in a disturbing manner. Women are reduced to fearful awareness that they are the subject of such male voyeurism and the risk of violent attack.

We might even think of it as emphasising Gerbner's idea of Mean World Syndrome – exposure to images of violence creating a fearful view of the world that undermines our sense of security and paralyses our willingness to take any action.

For the most part, games in the franchise receive an 18 PEGI rating, mainly for violent content. As such, we are brought up against the ideas behind regulation – that there are groups in society judged to be vulnerable and who need protection from such content. That we select this separation as one based on age is founded on no real compelling evidence, it is an arbitrary decision such as the age to vote, for sexual independence or the age to drink.

There is evidence that video games are powerful as they are far more immersive, players must actively commit to decisions and actions – for example in *Assassin's Creed III: Liberation* the player can opt for stealth or to kill. The arguments here centre on whether such immersion is more likely to lead to a desensitisation to violence or, in fact, to lessen such impulses compared to passively viewing a film or TV programme. You should refer to the so-called **Bobo Doll Experiment** and the arguments put forward around those findings

#### Copyright ©

All rights reserved. Permission granted to reproduce for educational use within the subscribing school only. Copying or lending of any part of this document in any form or by any means to external bodies and / or individuals is prohibited.

#### Teacher's Standards

Teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

**Livingstone & Lunt:** *the needs of a citizen conflict with the needs of the consumer because protection can limit freedom. (laws that prevent all of us from doing things that might only possibly harm very few of us)*

In a nutshell: **Regulating media to protect citizens from harmful content limits freedom of expression.**

In their research *Media Regulation* Livingstone and Lunt argue that the developments in technology that have led to the increasing convergence of media systems, platforms, and day to day media activities mean that the challenge for regulators should be “to facilitate rather than curb the resultant creativity, the diversity of forms and purposes, the symbiotic relation between community media and the culture of everyday life...”

**Douglas Gentile** is often referenced in relation to the impact of video gaming. The idea that violence in video games **desensitises** gamers to the impact of violence in real life, making them more aggressive and more prone to resorting to violence to resolve issues.

*In fact, Gentile emphasizes that high exposure to media violence is just one risk factor for increased aggression, neither deserving special concern nor dismissal among other risk factors. What makes it different from the others is that it's the one that is most easy for parents to control.*

*"Most of the risk factors for aggression are really hard to change. You can't easily change whether your child has previously been in a fight or bullied. What makes this [media violence] different is that it's actually fairly easy to control compared to most of the other risk factors. But how it acts as a risk factor is exactly the same as all others. It's not the biggest, it's not the smallest, it's actually right there in the middle of the pack."*

*Gentile found that although the effect of media violence exposure on a child's later aggression is underestimated, it is the combination of risk factors that is crucial in predicting future aggression in young people.*

#### Copyright ©

All rights reserved. Permission granted to reproduce for educational use within the subscribing school only. Copying or lending of any part of this document in any form or by any means to external bodies and / or individuals is prohibited.

#### Teacher's Standards

Teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

## Lesson 7

### Contexts

Considering video games in relation to how they reflect society is a useful way of exploring them in terms of social and cultural significance. The representation of female characters, under-representation of women in video game development and an assumed minority of female video games players are areas that could be explored. The Assassin's Creed franchise has made adaptations over the different versions of the game to address changes in society and culture and audience expectations. There are examples of female protagonists in the later games (Aveline and Kassandra). Consider whether they subvert or reinforce expectations of female characters in games and how audiences may respond to this.

**Ideology** is a world view, a system of values, attitudes, and beliefs which an individual, group or society holds to be true or important. They are shared ideas of a society about how society should function.

Ideologies are promoted by important social institutions such as the media. Those most often applied are called dominant or **Hegemonic** ideologies.

Dominant ideologies are mainstream beliefs accepted in our day-to-day lives. According to **Barthes** they have become '*natural, common sense*'. What he calls **myths**.

**Dominant ideologies** include beliefs about *gender roles, the economy, social institutions such as marriage etc.*

Assassin's Creed franchise products on the surface use gender tropes as symbolic intertextual references to construct familiar patterns of meaning connections.

The evolution of the female characters in the game and the choices presented to gamers reflect the changes in society such as the third wave feminism and the fourth wave of metoo movement. In doing so the game aligns itself with changing societal norms and sustains a position of relevance and acceptance for the brand as well as attracting the growing numbers of female gamers.

#### Copyright ©

All rights reserved. Permission granted to reproduce for educational use within the subscribing school only. Copying or lending of any part of this document in any form or by any means to external bodies and / or individuals is prohibited.

#### Teacher's Standards

Teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.



**Domestication Theory:** the idea that innovation is 'tamed' or appropriated by its users.

Roger Silverstone describes four steps that technology goes through when being adapted into peoples' lives:

- New technologies are **integrated** into everyday life and adapted to daily practices (**Appropriation**)
- **The user and their environment change and adapt** accordingly to fit the technology. (**Objectification**)
- These adaptations **feedback into innovation processes** in industry, shaping the next generation of technologies and services. (**Incorporation**)
- The way that the **technology represents status and culture** of a household. (**Conversion**)

The theory was developed by Silverstone to help understand the adoption and use of new media technologies by households.

*We might see this model overlaps and incorporates ideas of Shirky; Hesmondhalgh; Curran & Seaton; Barthes.*

Nancy Baym evolves Silverstone's model, considering the spread of technology into the domestic/personal environment, identifying three stages

1. Marvellous and strange
2. Creation of greatness and horror
3. Invisible

In her book she says these can also be thought of as

1. Euphoria
2. Moral panic
3. Domestication

**Copyright ©**

All rights reserved. Permission granted to reproduce for educational use within the subscribing school only. Copying or lending of any part of this document in any form or by any means to external bodies and / or individuals is prohibited.

**Teacher's Standards**

Teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

The example she gives is the introduction of video games into society. Initially, there was **a euphoric response to video games, a technology with potential** to improve hand, eye, and brain co-ordination of the young. Soon, **moral panic set in - a fear of violence, addiction, and social isolation**. Lastly, **the domestication of video games with acceptance of the technology** as an ordinary and everyday part of society with games developed to be played by adults

Her book **Personal Connections in the Digital Age** outlines a model exploring how modern technologies are reconfiguring our identities and personal relationships.

**Copyright ©**

All rights reserved. Permission granted to reproduce for educational use within the subscribing school only. Copying or lending of any part of this document in any form or by any means to external bodies and / or individuals is prohibited.

**Teacher's Standards**

Teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.