
AUDIENCE

Audience and Fiction Film



We like to think of ourselves as having *free will*, but when it comes to the **media**, we are more susceptible to influence than we might think.

For example: Consider in what ways we, as an audience, have great power. We can:

- ◆ make a film a **flop** or a **hit** by our *attendance, ticket purchase* and/or *word of mouth*;
- ◆ watch a documentary and *either take action and pass on what we have learned, or rubbish the filmmaker's ideas* to everyone we speak to;
- ◆ dictate the amount of *freedom, access and influence* a newspaper has simply by deciding *which one to buy*;
- ◆ cause a magazine to fold by *not buying it*

↑ 3-D Films were just one of the many innovations developed in the 1950s in an attempt to grow cinema audiences

However, few of the decisions we make are actually made completely freely.

Those **institutions** that we hold so much sway over are well aware of our power, and are desperate to gain our approval.

They are constantly **marketing, advertising, rebranding, persuading** and **manipulating** us into choosing **them** over a competitor.

Audiences are considered in terms of **age, gender, nationality, race, class, geography, political** and **religious** beliefs...

We are never thought of as **individuals** with independent thought, but simply as a **representative** of a particular group.

When studying the media, it vital that you:

- develop an **awareness** of the tricks of the trade that are used to influence an audience;
- examine what it is that you respond to **personally**;
- understand that **others will respond differently** according to their own personal circumstances.

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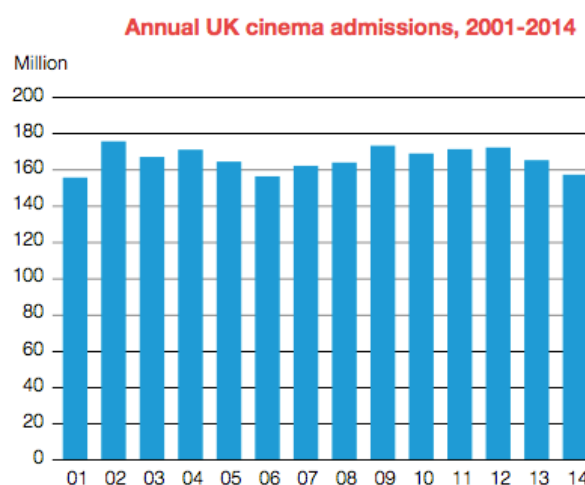
UK cinema admissions in 2014 reached **157.5 million**, which was **down 5%** on 2013.

Threats to cinema admissions include **streaming, home downloads, movie channels** and **cheap DVDs** (which have already seen off the rental store).

It is more important now than ever for film companies to pay attention to what audiences want.

Responding to the perceived demands of an audience can and will have a massive impact on filmmaking.

QUESTION: What examples can you think of where this audience influence can be seen?



Year	Total admissions (million)
2001	155.9
2002	175.9
2003	167.3
2004	171.3
2005	164.7
2006	156.6
2007	162.4
2008	164.2
2009	173.5
2010	169.2
2011	171.6
2012	172.5
2013	165.5
2014	157.5

Source: CAA/Rentrak

Historical Context



Audiences are always changing, as society changes, and what appealed to an audience in 1938 might not appeal to an audience today, in the same way that future audiences might disregard current modern “classics”.

- What makes a “classic” film?
- What do audiences always seem to respond to over the years?

Films might only be relevant to an audience for a brief time.

A film about the British Miner’s Strike during the 1980s will surely only be of interest to those who lived through the time? How about a film set during the Second World War? Why might a film cease to be relevant, and can you imagine any circumstances where a film may become relevant again?

- Can you think of any films that are or are not relevant today? Or which will only be relevant for a while longer?

“Do the Right Thing”, Spike Lee’s searing portrayal of a day in the life of a mixed-race Brooklyn neighbourhood was hugely topical in 1989 thanks to its relevance to real life incidents of racially-motivated police brutality... but does it pack the same punch today?



There are films that do seem to possess an enduring appeal for each new generation of audience, and can rightly hold the title of “classic”.

- What films would you say are real classics?
- What do you think the enduring appeal is of these films?
- Why do these (appear to) remain relevant?

TASK

Consider yourself as an audience member, and your own viewing habits and expectations. Answer the following questions as fully as you can.

- **How often do you go to the cinema? Which ones to you go to? Why?**
- **How often do you watch new films (to you)? What influences your choice of new films to watch?**
- **What are your favourite films right now? What is it that appeals to you about these films?**
- **What were your favourite films when you were younger? Have your tastes changed? Why do you think that is?**



TASK: INVESTIGATION

1. Find out what the most successful/popular films and genres were for a particular decade (any from the 1920s through to the 2000s)...
2. Then do a brief bit of historical research into the main world events and issues in society from that decade...
3. Can you identify any connections between the films and the social issues?
4. Are any of those films still as popular today? Why/why not? Are their social issues still relevant?
5. Compare your findings with others in the class. Which decade created the most “classics”? Why do you think that is?
6. Are there any social issues that continue to be relevant over the years?

CHOICE

Cinema branches decide what films to show, and so there are geographical limitations on what film one can go to see in person. More films are now available **online** through services like **Netflix**, **Amazon Instant Video**, and **Sky Movies**, but there are fewer available in retailers .

And what about people from different cultures? Is there a wide selection of **Bollywood** films available in cinemas or online for example?

Whatever it is that ideally we want to see, eventually *we can only choose from what is made available to us*. **What problems does this create?**



Tasks

(You do get a choice which ones you do! 😊)

There are 5 different tasks on this page and the next one. You are to choose 2 that you will complete.

TASK 1:

What are the biggest influences on your viewing habits and why?

List the last five films you watched, and explain in detail:

- where you heard about them
- why you chose them
- what you thought of them

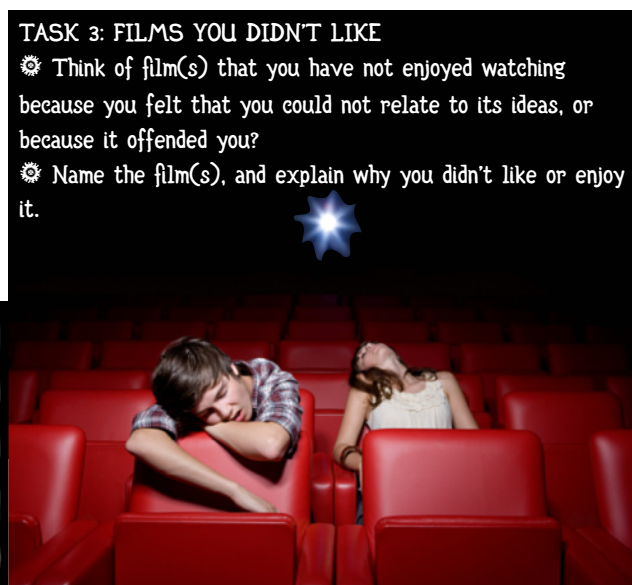
TASK 3: FILMS YOU DIDN'T LIKE

⚙️ Think of film(s) that you have not enjoyed watching because you felt that you could not relate to its ideas, or because it offended you?

⚙️ Name the film(s), and explain why you didn't like or enjoy it.

TASK 2: EXTERNAL INVESTIGATION

- Create a survey to find out why people chose the film they have just seen at the cinema.
- Go to the local cinema and get some answers from the public.
- Find out from the manager why the cinema chose the films that are currently showing.



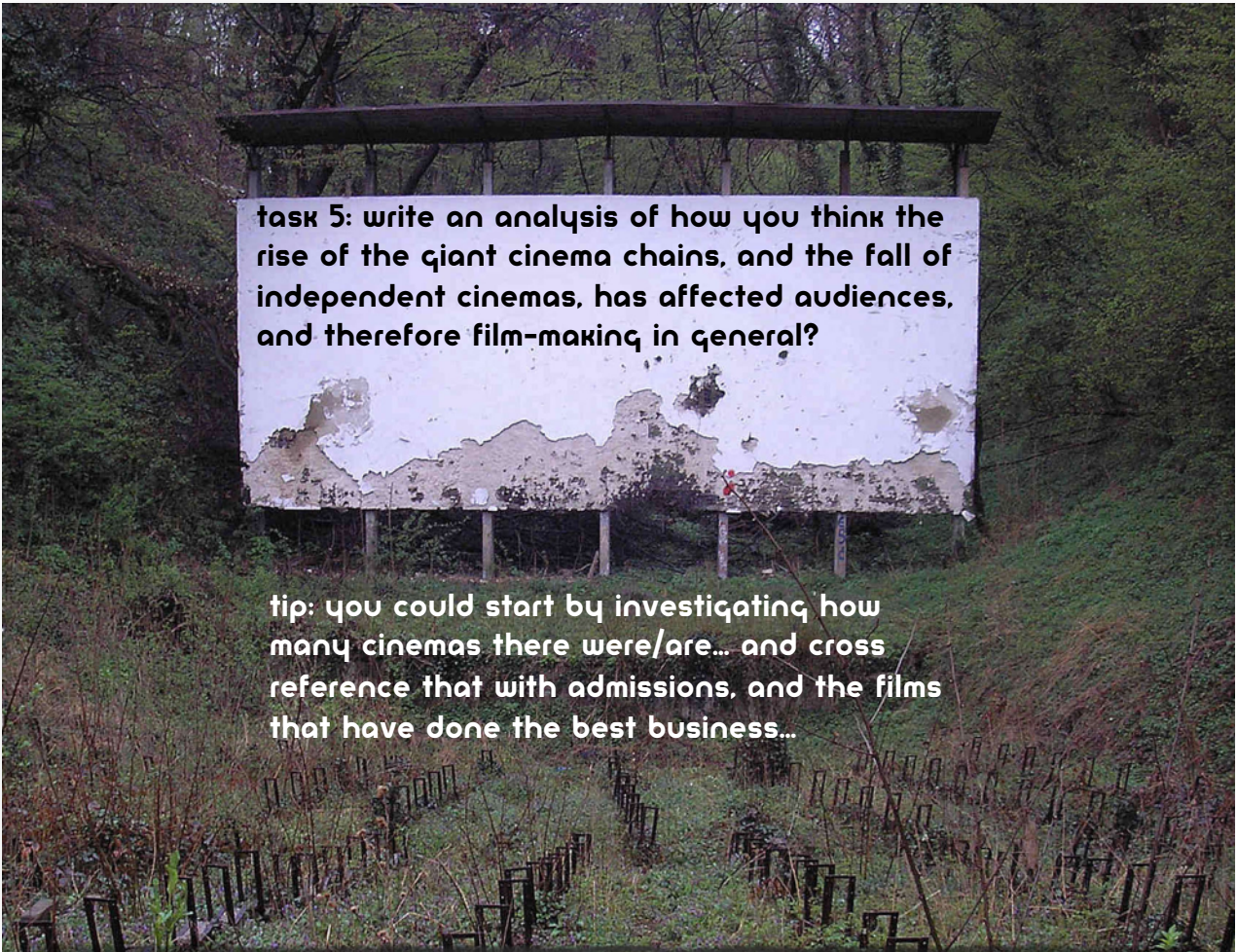
TASK 4: WORLD CINEMA

1. Find out what the current film listings are for cinemas (*preferably part of the same chain*) in *Perth, London*, and **at least** three different places worldwide.
2. They should be different in terms of size as well as geography (*for example, a small town in the USA, Tokyo, a modern city in Europe, etc.*)
3. Compare your findings and create a presentation that identifies any patterns in your findings.

TIP: Investigate the places you chose. Can you match up the popularity of certain films with the type of place it is?

You could consider whether:

- There is a high percentage of **youth** in the population;
- It is a very **religious** place (and if so, what religion it is);
- People are working above or below the **poverty** line;
- What type of **businesses** dominate the area;
- It is a very **modern** place or quite **old-fashioned**.



task 5: write an analysis of how you think the rise of the giant cinema chains, and the fall of independent cinemas, has affected audiences, and therefore film-making in general?

tip: you could start by investigating how many cinemas there were/are... and cross reference that with admissions, and the films that have done the best business...

MARKETING

One of the biggest expenditures for a film company is the **marketing** of a film.

- **Producers** have made a huge investment in each film that they back, and therefore they need to at least make back the same amount of money spent – plus a profit
- They will not take any chances in terms of getting the **audience** they want and need, and will do whatever they can to ensure that the film is presented to the public in the best way possible.
- They use a distribution company - such as **Paramount, Miramax, MGM** or **20th Century Fox** - to run the marketing campaign.

TASK: MARKETING

You have a choice of two tasks. Both require considerable research and writing.

MARKETING TASK 01: INVESTIGATION

Choose **any film**, and carry out an in-depth study into its marketing campaign.

You could consider:

- teaser trailers
- posters
- TV spots
- press kits
- cinema trailers
- print advertising
- merchandising
- promotional materials

At the end of your investigation, assess the film's **reviews** and **box-office takings**, and to what extent the marketing campaign contributed to the film's overall success.

SUPPORT:

You will find **lots** of information to help you by looking closely at the left hand side of a film's entry at **IMDB.com**

MARKETING TASK 02: PRESS KIT

You are to create a **press kit** for a feature film (real, or imaginary)

You will be shown some examples and encouraged to investigate others.

Your kit should be made available in either **printed** or **EPK** format.

SUPPORT:

You will be given a (very basic!) template you can use, and also access to a number of printed and EPK examples. In addition, there are several websites that will give you advice, tips, and materials you can use. One excellent starting point might be the Raindance Film Festival guidance:

<http://www.raindance.org/7-essentials-for-a-press-kit/>

MARKETING

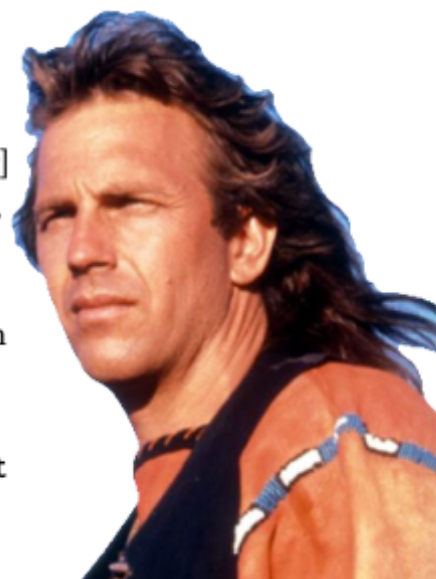
In order to get the biggest audience possible, companies show the film to **test audiences** and ask them to fill in a questionnaire afterwards with their responses to the film.

This gives the test audience a huge amount of power.

- **What are the up and down sides of this process?**

[Back then, a **test screening** of the film prompted audiences to beg] not to kill the wolf ... Well, I understand, but bad things have to happen. That's real. There's death in *Bambi*. That's real.

Kevin Costner taking about *Dances With Wolves* (dir. Kevin Costner, USA, 1990)



EXTENSION TASKS/ REVISION PROMPTS

1. Films have regularly been accused of being corruptive and dangerous, but there have never been any proven links despite the studies that have been carried out. Filmmakers deliberately manipulate an audience to get a particular short-term emotional response, and often succeed. Also, consider the fact that audiences nowadays can view films over and over. So could films conceivably influence the audience's long-term behaviour at all?
2. Given that home viewing is on the increase, which is harder to monitor and regulate, is it time for the rules on censorship to be revisited? Should there be changes made in film certification, and if so, what?
3. Investigate what is most popular right now in terms of films/genres/stars/certificates. Has there been a rise or fall in original films rather than sequels/remakes? Are there any noticeable changes when you compare this to three years ago? Ten years ago? Are there any patterns or omissions that strike you as interesting? Can you make any connections to societal issues of the time?
4. Interview someone you know who is different to you in terms of age/gender/beliefs/ circumstances/ etc. Ask them about their viewing habits, such as their response to last few films watched. Ask them how they chose their films, what their response to them was, what their favourite film/decade/genre is, and so on.
5. Investigate the changes within playhouses over the past 60 years or so. Find out about: attendance; costs; owners; relationships with film companies; size and appearance of buildings; the food and drink available; choice of films available; growth of multiplex; drive-ins; independent cinemas; etc.
6. Producers have to consider what audiences will respond to when casting films. Choose five different actors and assess what kind of audience each one would appeal to and why.