POPULAR CULTURE CONCEPT FOCUS: IDENTITY, VALUES, COMMODIFICATION AND COMMERCIALISATION

HSC Depth Study – Popular Culture

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Syllabus Content

The nature of popular culture

Students develop an understanding of the nature of popular culture by examining the FOUR distinguishing characteristics:

- associated with commercial products and paraphernalia:
- demand develops and expands due to media, marketing and dissemination processes
- achieves widespread consumer access:
- broad access is assisted by media and communication technologies

Contemporary context (needs to be integrated across the Depth Study)

The following points are to be integrated across the study of Popular Culture:

- use examples drawn from contemporary society

Syllabus Outcomes

H9  applies complex course language and concepts appropriate for a range of audiences and contexts
H2  explains the development of personal, social and cultural identity

Related concepts

Identity, values, commercialisation, commodification, consumption, change

Rationale

The following resource aims to provide students with a focused insight into the concepts of identity, values, commercialisation and commodification of popular culture. Activities contained within the article allow students to apply their understanding the relevant key concepts to the contemporary context through examples.
POPULAR CULTURE CONCEPT FOCUS: IDENTITY, VALUES, COMMODIFICATION AND COMMERCIALISATION

Popular Culture Concept Focus: Identity and Values

identity  The sense of self. This can be viewed from the personal, social and cultural levels. Identity is formed over a period of time and is the result of interactions at the micro, meso and macro levels of society. An identity has dimensions or layers that create a sense of inclusion in a group or culture. Contributing factors to one's identity may include gender, sexuality, family, class, ethnicity, beliefs, social status, group membership and national pride.

values  Deeply held ideas and beliefs that guide our thinking, language and behaviour. Differences in values exist among groups of people in society and are a part of one's culture. Values can be challenged.


The popular culture you choose to interact with (and which ones you reject), both reflect and shape your identity. They reflect your values, age, ethnic background, gender, sexuality and more. How you interact with popular culture also gives an indication into your location, socio-economic status, and generation. Think about how you consume music compared to how your parents do. You might be more likely to discover new artists by watching their videos on YouTube or using music sharing applications like Spotify. You might prefer to buy music digitally and listen to songs as separate tracks rather than as whole albums. Your parents on the other hand might prefer CDs and will find out about new artists by hearing them on the radio.


When viewing the resource consider:
- What are some of the continuities and changes in music and television across each generation?
- What role have technologies played in changing the ways each generation interacts with popular cultures?
- Discuss with your class what you think the values and social identity of each generation could be? What is this influenced by? i.e. think about the relationship between social/political/economic events and popular culture.

Activity: Tracking your own consumption of popular culture

This task requires you to keep a log of how you access popular culture.

1. Data capture

You need to design a data-recording sheet that will allow you to track and monitor your consumption over 1 week.

Choose a popular culture that you regularly consume. Music, magazines, a particular genre of television show, or a particular type of online community/site/forum/blog are all good choices. In choosing your popular culture, make sure it meets the four characteristics. Your aim is to record the following:
- Time spent
- Money spent
- Method of consumption (online, radio, print etc)
2. Analysis

After recording your consumption for 1 week, analyse your results. Aim to produce figures/graphs that show the total number of hours and money spent, and the consumption methods shown as a percentage or pie chart.

Next, answer the following questions using your results:

1. Identify patterns in your consumption. Are there any correlations with other activities happening in your week?
2. Compare your results with a classmate. Identify similarities and differences. Identify possible reasons for the similarities and/or differences.
3. How does your consumption of popular culture reflect your values and identity (micro world)?
4. How does your consumption of popular culture reflect society’s beliefs/values/norms (macro world)?

Concept Focus: Commodification and Commercialisation

**commodification**
A social process by which an item is turned into a commodity in readiness to be traded. The process relies on marketing strategies with the aim of producing a perceived value in the item.

**commercialisation**
The process of adding value to an idea, product or commodity with the aim of selling it and making a profit. Commercialisation is about preparing the item for sale and making money from it. The success of commercialisation often relies on marketing and advertising.

**commodity**
A marketable item or consumer object that can be supplied because there is a demand and that can be purchased through economic exchange.


Popular culture can be viewed as the commodification of culture. That is, it is a way to make money or profit from a cultural interest. There are many cultural activities that are NOT regarded as popular culture because they haven not been commodified. For example, generally speaking, no one is making a profit from community sport, a club that meets weekly to play board games or a group that practices traditional Vietnamese dance in their local town hall.

One of the defining characteristics of popular culture is that it is associated with commercial products and paraphernalia. This means that is has undergone commercialisation resulting in products or commodities that are assigned value and can bought and sold through the process of commodification.

Commodification is a key concept in Marxist theory. It is essential to the development and maintenance of a capitalist system. The term commodity refers to both the value a good or service has to the user and the ‘exchange value’ it has within a capitalist marketplace. Once a good or service has been assigned value (commodified), it can then be introduced to the market as a product. This is known as commercialisation. In reality, the two processes are difficult to distinguish.

Consider the example of the popular culture of professional sport. Historically (pre-1960s), many sports were played for leisure and community bonding, rather than profit. Clubs existed to structure competitions and to cover basic costs for players and match takings (tickets) were the main form of

**Think About…Commercialisation:**
When the sponsor’s logo is bigger than the team’s logo!

*See the jersey of popular NRL or Football teams.*
income for sporting clubs and were enough to sustain the clubs and their running costs. The introduction of televised sporting matches saw attendance at matches drop as sport became a spectacle people could watch at home. Rules were changed to make the games faster and easier to watch.

By the late 1960s, match attendance at many sports declined significantly. Income from gate tickets alone could no longer fund the running costs of clubs. Broadcast rights for certain sports gained new value as match attendance declined further in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. The rights to broadcast matches became valued (commodification). Clubs were forced to seek new sources of income to sustain themselves. Corporate sponsorship increased to provide income directly to clubs and teams began to be marketed to attract ever bigger audiences (commercialisation). Power shifted from the fans and players to sponsors and broadcasters.

Activity: Commercisation and Commodification

Select one popular culture that you actively engage with and/or ‘follow’. Research its history. Try to identify the point where it went from being a leisure, entertainment or artistic cultural pursuit into a commodity. When did someone start to make a profit from it?

Next, identify the processes of the popular culture’s commercialisation. How was it brought to market? Who marketed it?

Finally, using examples from the popular culture you have researched, write a short (200-300 word) response to the following exam-style question:

With reference to ONE popular culture, distinguish between the concepts of commodification and commercialisation.