

# Assessment highlights 2021

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## Film, Television and New Media

### Internal assessment 1

#### Case study investigation

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### Assessment overview

#### Context

Students were provided with information about how multi-platform media tools allow audiences and content producers to interact with one another in real time and across platforms using a range of technologies.

Students were given information about a fictitious entertainment magazine that aims to compile articles about films, television and new media productions written by freelance journalists. In this context, students were asked to prepare a case study for the magazine, focused on how audiences use multi-platform media to participate in and interact with their favourite films.

As a stimulus, students were provided with a list of films regarded as popular or with cult-like followings. Students were also able to choose an alternative film that required teacher approval.

The syllabus conditions outline that the student response should be a written response of 1000–1500 words, with in-text referencing and a bibliography required.

## Task

Students were asked to prepare a case study investigation and compile the information in a written report for publication in a fictitious entertainment magazine.

In the written case study investigation, students were required to:

- identify a multi-platform 'case' (a film or series of films with a popular following or cult-like fan base) and explain the contexts of production for this case
- explain the phenomenon of multi-platform media
- use research to explain the positive and negative impacts of multi-platform media on audiences
- analyse how audience participation is enabled through the institutional and technological characteristics of multi-platform media
- appraise the impact of the chosen multi-platform case on participating audiences.

## Student response

**Note:** The following sample is an unedited authentic student response reproduced with permission. Any images or sources that do not have copyright approval have been redacted from the response. It may contain errors and/or omissions that do not affect its overall match to the characteristics indicated in the top performance levels of the instrument-specific marking guide.

# Case Study Investigation - Cobra Kai

## **Introduction**

Multi-platform media revolves around the ideas for content considered in the context of a wide range of distribution possibilities, such as television, mobile, social media and so on (Doyle, 2016). The new technologies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in relation to the distribution of live and on-demand content has expanded the reach of traditional television viewing allowing for a larger volume of audience participation. Many media institutions, such as SBS, Seven News and A Current Affair, have repositioned their use of multi-platforms to promote their content, using television as an active medium to further enable audience participation through the use of an interactive second screen. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century has given humanity the benefits endless possibilities of the internet, allowing companies to promote content to viewers all around the globe instantaneously and consistently interact with different concepts and ideas. This has been the cause of an increase in competition, with a new technological convergence and digitization on a rapid rise. Prod-users (refers to the modern situation where people can both consume and produce media) no longer need a television to interact with their favourite media and content producers (Stewart, Agnew, Beattie et al, 2019). Digitalisation has facilitated the use of a second screen device, such as a laptop or mobile phone, which has allowed for a dynamic approach in relation to the interactivity of media producers and audience members (Nizam, 2020).

Technological convergence relates to the tendency that as technology changes, different systems evolve towards performing similar tasks at a more efficient level, such as the mobile phone having an in-built GPS system (CRS Reports, 2019). This is relevant to the selected case study, 'Cobra Kai' where an analysis and appraisal of the phenomenon of the multi-platform production will be deeply explored.

## **Contexts of Production**

'Cobra Kai' was initially released in 2018 on YouTube Red and then later expanded to American content platform and production company Netflix in mid-2020, greatly expanding its audience interactivity and participation (Porter, 2020). With a current total of three seasons and a fourth in the works, the rapid expansion of the media phenomenon outlining the show's success hooks audiences into a never-ending addiction in that the franchise is introducing new ways for its audience to interact and participate with the story. The show is a sequel to the underdog production *The Karate Kid*, released in 1984 on an 8 million USO budget, yet the result was a grossing profit of over 90.8 million USO (The Hollywood Reporter Staff, 2015). The reminiscences to early childhood memories for diehard fans of the series brings in a target audience demographic of baby boomers; 40-50-year old's, but the new extension of our upcoming generation further brings in teenage audiences to develop a love for the series, just like most teenagers and young kids had for the original series back in the 80s.

Since its initial beginning in 1984, the show has gained a large popularity and following through its utilisation of participatory culture features, which allows audiences to feel a sense of community within the brand, such as through offering prod-users a range of affordances through building an intense rivalry between two groups of people, *Cobra Kai* and *Miyagi-Do*, encouraging audiences to pick a side. In

addition, the show's unique correspondence with its original, bringing back fan-loved cast members from the original movies, brings a new life to the entire brand, exciting die-hard fans of the show to reunite with their childhood films and characters. With a stable social media presence on a variety of social media sites such as YouTube, Instagram and Twitter, the ignition of excitement within its audience can only continue to grow, and further allows audiences to interact with characters that appear to be very surreal. The show's adaptability to appeal to a variety of technological affordances (offering a wide range of action-based opportunities) in a new, advanced modern era by returning with a television show opposed to a film showcases its uniqueness as an engaging multi-media platform production, and allows for a greater expansion (IGI Global, N.D).

### **Interactive Features**

With the use of interactive technologies, audiences can greatly enhance their experience within the brand. After Netflix released season 3 of *Cobra Kai*, they worked with a few celebrities, such as YouTube star "King Vader", to create comedic, parodied versions of the show's premises. This created more content for audiences to engage with, and allows audience to continue binge watching while waiting for another season. *Cobra Kai*'s Twitter account "Cobra Kai" also further shows clips of the show every single week with engaging captions such as "*In a town where karate is illegal, one Sensei fights back.*" Audiences feel more a part of the show than ever, which can be explained using the uses and gratifications theory (UG). The UG approach to media assists media companies in understanding the behaviours of an audience in relation to media, stating how people use media for their own need. (Communication Theory, N.D). *Cobra Kai* must utilise this approach effectively to develop a strategy to fulfil a deep satisfaction within its consumers to bring audience members binging for more content.

Leading to its release, *Cobra Kai* began with two instances of the utilisation of participatory culture. A 2007 music video for the song *Sweep the Leg* by *No More Kings* stars William Zabka as Johnny Lawrence, and features multiple references to *The Karate Kid*, such as the use of the quote "sweep the leg", where Sensei, John Kreese, instructs Lawrence to perform an unethical attack on protagonist Daniel Larusso, played by Ralph Macchio. The music video also showcases every main male character from the original movie expect for Mr. Miyagi, played by Pat Morita, who passed away in 2005. Additionally, in 2013, Ralph Macchio and William Zabka made guest appearances in an episode of *How I Met Your Mother*, titled *The Bro Mitzvah*. The episode features multiple references to *The Karate Kid*, where main character Barney shouts that he hates Larusso and that Johnny was the real hero of *The Karate Kid*. Johnny, hiding as a clown for the entire episode, reveals himself at the end and is shown wearing a *Cobra Kai* Karate Gi. These media productions exemplified early attempts at a multi-platform distribution, and although it didn't yet have the same technological affordances that the brand now has, it built a strong foundation for the show and reminded audiences of its existence, almost 30 years later.

The modern-day era features highly competitive pop-culture gaming standards. Developed by Flux Game Studio, the video game *Cobra Kai: The Karate Kid Saga Continues* was released in October of 2020, to follow the growing trend of video games (IMDb, 2021). Its genre features a side-scrolling beat 'em-up style video game, where prod-users are able to interact with their favourite characters from the television series by choosing a character to control and fight other characters from the series. Figure 1 shows that audience members are able to pick which dojo they want to play as throughout the game's campaign. This further enables participatory culture through the media as prod-users where prod-users are both consumers and producers of the brand. Video-games, in relation to prod-users, provide more flexibility in how consumers interact with the brand compared to other platforms such as Twitter and YouTube, as audiences are enabled with the opportunity to create their own storylines, control characters from the show and interact with the location of the show. This highlights the shows success through its availability of technological affordances to its viewers.

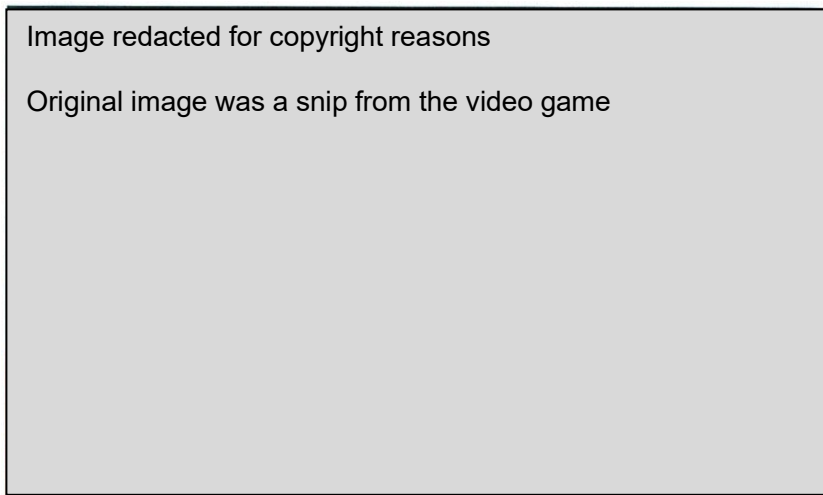


Figure 1: Audiences are given the option of picking which dojo they represent for the campaign

### **Appraisal**

Featuring stereotypical characters around a plotline that greatly references *The Karate Kid* released in 1984, young audiences can feel a sense of connection through the characters as they can relate to their experiences (e.g. growing up as a teenager, getting into fights) and older audiences and die-hard fans feel nostalgia as their favourite characters from the film are now grown up. *Cobra Kai* has successfully transformed its original 80s plotline into a successful, modern-day sequel through the use of technological convergence. Digitalisation has allowed for the use of a second screen for audience engagement with the brand across multiple platforms, no longer requiring the use of a television. Audiences are now able to receive daily content from the brand through the use of social media sites such as YouTube and Twitter (e.g. producers posting clips of the show with satirical captions).

It is clearly evident that the effective utilisation of multiple platforms since its re-launch of the *Cobra Kai* series in 2018 has broadened its appeal to a wider audience and new generation. Its use of the UG theory has further assisted in the producers understanding its viewers behaviours, enabling them to use the best marketing strategy possible. The producers have successfully used the technique of transmedia storytelling, increasing its participatory culture through video games, film, television and social media sites to increase audience participation and build a strong community. Its unique target audience demographic; late teens/young adults and 40-50-year-old baby boomers of the original 1984 film has been the result of its

successful use of a range of different technological affordances. *Cobra Kai* is a clear example of how to completely reform an older brand into a modern-day era, and completely hook audiences into a non-stop binge for the shows content.

## **References**

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