

GCSE (9–1)
Teacher Guide

MEDIA STUDIES

J200
For first teaching in 2017

Television: Industry and Audience

Version 1



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PART 1: 1960s TELEVISION

Background to television in the mid-1960s

Television in mid-1960s Britain was scarce. Only three channels were available – BBC1, BBC2 and ITV – and one of those (BBC2) was not available on older television sets. Televisions were expensive, small, unreliable, and black and white. There was no broadcasting for large parts of the day and all television channels closed down at night (playing the national anthem).

'Channel surfing' was far off in the future: changing channels was more difficult than it is today, as it was done manually at the television set and might encourage malfunction. This meant that audiences were much more loyal to particular channels.

Home computing and any technology to record television in the home was the stuff of science fiction. Convergence was yet to occur.

ITV started in 1955, designed to be competition for the BBC's monopoly over television broadcasting and to allow advertising on television for the first time. It quickly gained a large majority of the audience by introducing popular formats such as games shows. So, by 1965 there was competition in the television market, but this competition was very limited by the standards of today. ITV was financially secure as it faced no competition for moving image advertising revenue (except cinema advertising), which meant that this commercial television channel could be highly regulated.





Television industries in the mid-60s

Ownership, funding and regulation

Television in 1960s Britain was provided by a cosy duopoly of ITV and the BBC. Neither was part of an international media conglomerate. The BBC was and is a public corporation governed by Royal Charter and funded by licence-fee payers. ITV was a network of regional television companies who competed with each other to provide programmes for the channel and provided some regional content for their transmission area. The production company behind *The Avengers* – ABC – for example, held the weekend franchise for the midlands and the north. These companies were not allowed to merge (until after 1990) and their British ownership was controlled by their regulator, the Independent Television Authority (ITA).

An ITV franchise was described by one ITV boss as a 'licence to print money' due to the monopoly it offered on television advertising to a region. Thus, ITV was highly profitable and could afford larger budgets than the BBC. This profitability allowed the ITA to insist on strict public service broadcasting (PSB) requirements and meant that there was little resistance from ITV in meeting them. The schedules regularly include PSB fare such as: single dramas, educational programmes, children's programmes, Arts programmes, news and current affairs documentaries, classical music performances, religious programmes, original dramas, and current affairs revues. The BBC was self-regulating – a function carried out by a board of governors appointed from 'the great and the good', a group

defined by those in power (in 1965, of the nine Governors, there was one 'Lord', four 'Sirs' and one 'Dame').

'Global' TV

World television markets were dominated by US programmes, which could be sold abroad for much less than the cost of producing original programming, but British television production was protected by the rules of public service broadcasting that limited the proportion of foreign content.

For example, ABC's programming for Saturday November 27 1965 included the American science fiction series *Lost in Space* at 7.25pm, but this is the only foreign programming that day. The schedule reached its climax with *The Avengers* at 9.05pm.

British television did compete on the world market, with prestige productions such as *The Avengers* being sold to many countries overseas (90 countries by 1969). A lucrative deal with the American Broadcasting Company (reportedly \$2 million) required the fourth series of *The Avengers* to be shot on film and allowed high production values for television of that era. Previous series were very studio bound, as was conventional for television of that era, and so appear to be very 'stagey' by contemporary standards. Videotape editing was a difficult and costly process so most television was mixed live, with mistakes and fluffed lines left uncorrected. Many programmes were lost as expensive videotape was re-used for new programmes. Shooting on film for a higher budget enabled more sophisticated camerawork, greater use of locations, more controlled editing and a more sophisticated soundtrack, with a through-composed score. The fifth series of *The Avengers* in 1966 was filmed in colour, even though the programmes could only be shown in monochrome on ITV. Producing for an



international market with a higher budget raised the prestige of television productions such as *The Avengers*, productions that had been looked down on as inferior to film as an art form. This may be seen as the start of the process that led to some contemporary long form television dramas gaining higher critical and artistic status than some feature films. The budget for series 4 of *The Avengers* was reportedly £56,000 per show. For comparison, *The Ipcress File* – a major British spy film from the same year – had a production budget of £309,000.

Reaching different audiences

The BBC was slowly weaned away from its stuffy 'Auntie' image by the rigours of competition with ITV. However, channel loyalty tended to split on class lines, with ITV seen as the more working class channel – at a time when, with the rise of youth culture, it was suddenly 'cool' to be working class – and the BBC seen as more middle class. Thus the BBC's flagship drama of the mid 1960s, *The Forsyte Saga*, was a serialisation of a set of novels by Galsworthy, a Nobel prize-winning British author. In comparison, ITV series such as *The Avengers* appeared much more daring, youthful, irreverent and sexy.

The regional nature of ITV production further added to the differentiation. The BBC remained very London-centric, whereas ITV included production centres in the north (Granada/ABC) and midlands (ATV/ABC) as well as London (Associated Rediffusion/ATV). Granada Television, in particular, developed a distinctively northern identity in opposition to the southern establishment, whereas ATV and ABC retained large production facilities in London. Hence, the ABC studios used for *The Avengers* were in Borehamwood, Hertfordshire and most exterior shots were from London and the home counties.

Television audiences in the mid-60s

Targetting audiences

Both BBC1 and ITV were aimed at mass audiences – both aiming to attract viewers to the channel for the evening's viewing in expectation that they would remain for the whole evening. For this reason, broadcast flow was important:

audiences should be led through a series of genres and formats to provide a rounded evening's viewing. BBC2 was the exception to this television rule – it was self-consciously niche and might address a series of different audiences across one evening's schedule. Programmes such as *The Avengers* allowed 'tent pole' scheduling – where the evening's viewing was held up by key popular shows.

The series format dominated 1960 television. Narratives that resolved every episode were well suited to a channel-loyal audience with no recording facilities. Audiences could miss individual episodes of a series and still follow their favourite series, which would be harder with a serial narrative. There was less need to try to win loyalty to individual programmes by deploying ongoing serial narratives, as with contemporary long form television dramas, due to the lack of competition in this era.

Television audiences were expected to be 'light-users' before prime time – busy doing things around the house. Weekdays on ITV in 1965 opened with the daytime soap *Crossroads* at 4.20, followed by children's programmes then adult programmes making fewer demands of audiences. 7.30 was assumed to be the time that families would sit down to watch television together in a sustained fashion, thus *Coronation Street* was scheduled for 7.30 to launch an evening of ITV viewing. The watershed at 9pm – introduced in 1964 – allowed for more adult programming, such as *The Avengers*. ITV shut down at about midnight, by which time it was assumed that audiences would be in bed. One nice example of these assumptions about audiences is the fact that ITV closed down on a Sunday at noon to allow time for family Sunday lunches.

It would prove to be more difficult to make assumptions about international audiences. The change in Steed's character in *The Avengers* to fit international stereotypes about English gentlemen proved to be successful, but the use of eroticised imagery – for example, of Emma Peel wearing fetish clothing – caused several episodes to be cut in America and reportedly 'lost' the Midwest audience. However, the programme was the first British series to be screened on primetime network



television in the US and achieved a 28% audience share in 1966.

The mid-1960s saw fierce debates about ‘permissiveness’ in society and on television. This was a time of rapid social change, exemplified by a ‘generation gap’ between a wartime generation celebrating the values of duty and perseverance and a younger generation celebrating values of freedom, spontaneity, and consumption. ‘Permissiveness’ was seen as lowering moral standards and coarsening language by its critics, as freeing society from outdated and oppressive taboos by its proponents. Programmes such as *The Avengers* were in the forefront of such debate and reflected the desire of television professionals to push the social and artistic boundaries of their times. The success of the programme suggests that audiences found that this met their uses and gratifications.

Uses and gratifications

Personal identity

Television audiences in the 1960s were much more loyal to particular channels than contemporary audiences and used this loyalty in part to construct a sense of social identity. An ITV viewer might see themselves as more ‘down-to-earth’ and less ‘stuck-up’ than a BBC viewer; a BBC viewer might see themselves as more ‘cultured’ and ‘better educated’ than an ITV viewer, for example. These distinctions reflected a social context in which class was still an important part of people’s identity and sense of belonging. Shows such as *The Avengers* offered an opportunity to identify with role models by offering heroes who reflected their 1960s contexts: Steed representing a debonair English gentleman who nonetheless had a lightness of touch that enabled him to team up with Emma Peel; Peel representing the embodiment of ‘Swinging London’ in her self-confident sexuality and savoir-faire.

Social interaction and integration

Television was more important in the 1960s because of its very scarcity. The fact that there would only be (at most) one screen in the house meant that whole households would watch together or not at all. Programmes that offered unusual and interesting representations, such as *The Avengers* would generate discussion the next day amongst an audience that could be sure there was a high likelihood that many others would have seen the same programme. Audiences that used television as a substitute for real-life social interaction would find these needs met by the recurrence of familiar characters, in the case of *The Avengers* a familiar central pairing with a slightly enigmatic relationship to retain audience interest. Series such as *The Avengers* were also important in communicating a sense of Britishness to the country and to the world.

Entertainment

Audiences were much more naive about television in the 1960s, a naivety that offered utopian pleasures – television could represent a magical world of plenty into which audiences could escape. This escapism was most evident in game shows and talent contests, but drama series such as *The Avengers* would also offer escapism through their representation of a world of competence, sophistication, humour, and a heavy hint of sexual tension and eroticism. The dominant drama narrative form of the time was the series – a format offering new beginnings every week, familiar characters with whom audiences could identify, and narrative resolution at the end of each episode. As a typical drama series, *The Avengers* offered an entertaining combination of repetition and difference with a new Proppian villain very week for the central pairing to fight against – the two sometimes swapping the ‘damsel in distress’ role – with familiar signposts along the way (e.g. the programme usually ended with the pair driving away from the scene of their triumph). Spy dramas were a familiar and perhaps dominant genre in the 1960s, both in television and film and suave, sophisticated and hyper-competent





characters such as Steed and Peel will have been entertainingly familiar to audiences used to *Bond* films and American TV spy series such as *The Man from Uncle*.

Surveillance

The information function of television was carried primarily by documentaries and current affairs programming and perhaps social realist drama, but even entertainment-focused drama series could offer a sense of looking in to an inaccessible world – in the case of *The Avengers*, the glamorous world of the upper middle classes and the world of espionage that featured so heavily in the 1960s news, even though the programme has a strong element of pastiche rather than social realism.

Audience response and interpretation

Much contemporary response to 1960s television drama may be influenced by the cult status that has accrued to programmes such as *The Avengers* – in such a case the obvious technical limitations of the historical programme (e.g. the use of monochrome), the effect of changing conventions (e.g. of television actors' performance), and the elements of representation that reflect its 1960s context (e.g. the implication of the viewer in the overt sexism of Steed smacking Peel's bottom) may become part of its charm. Alternatively, the way the programme reflects its time in terms of both media language and representation may create an alienating effect for modern audiences.

PART 2: TELEVISION IN THE 2010s

Background to Television in the 2010s

Television in 2010s Britain is plentiful. A multitude of television channels broadcast 24 hours a day and more is available via online streaming. Technological convergence means that television is available on television sets, games consoles, tablets and mobile phones.

The plentiful nature of television means that channel loyalty is extremely low, except for highly niche channels that address a specialised audience. Channel surfing is routine for broadcast television and content is streamed as individual programmes or 'box sets' of series. This means that branding of programmes is crucial – audiences must recognise each programme as a brand in the same way as they do for films. This requires television channels to rely on tested television brands or to heavily promote their new programmes, which need to be 'saleable' – to have some element (stars, production values, narrative) that provides a 'reason why' for the audience to tune in. Continuity announcements desperately try to keep viewers interested as programme end credits roll promoting the following programmes and cross-promoting similar programmes elsewhere in their stable of channels. Audience 'hooks' at the opening of each programme are vital to entice viewers not to change channel. Channels increasingly rely on popular flagship programmes to support their branding as a channel. The development of long form television drama reflects this need for high quality flagship programming – the serial narratives of these dramas is designed to encourage loyalty to the programme as audiences must follow every episode. The ready availability of recordings enables viewers to catch up on demand.

The highly competitive nature of television has consequences for regulation. Regulators in the analogue world could offer access to the very limited television channels in exchange for demanding public service broadcasting (PSB) requirements such as original programming, a mix of genres including less popular religious, arts, and informational programming, news in prime time, and so on. Regulators in the digital world have much less power over commercial channels and none over online streaming if the company is based overseas (e.g. Netflix).

Television industries in the 2010s

Ownership, funding and regulation

Television in 2010s Britain is provided by a wide range of industries:

- publically-owned PSB television providers (BBC, C4)
- commercially-owned PSB television providers (ITV, C5)
- commercially-owned non-PSB television providers (e.g. Sky, Sony, Viacom, Disney)
- foreign state-owned providers (e.g. those for Russia Today, Al Jazeera)
- commercial streaming-only services (e.g. Amazon, Netflix).

Much television is provided by international media conglomerates. *Cuffs*, for example, was produced by *Tiger Aspect Productions*, a successful 'independent' production company which is part of a group (Endemol Shine Productions) currently 50% owned by 21st Century Fox. This media conglomerate owns, wholly or in part:

- 20th Century Fox film studio
- Fox News
- 20th Century Fox television
- Sky UK/Ireland/Deutschland/Italia/Amstrad
- Fox Digital Entertainment
- Fox Music
- Endemol Shine.

The BBC is a public corporation governed by a Royal Charter (available online) which is currently reviewed every 11 years – a period chosen so it is out of sync with the electoral cycle to militate against politicising the renewal. The role of the BBC is, however, subject to political debate. Its funding – by the compulsory licence fee – is seen by many to be old-fashioned, especially in an age when many people access television online. Many on the right wing of politics are instinctively averse to state monopolies and wish to see the more popular areas of the BBC privatised to introduce the rigours of the free market. They also complain of a systematic liberal bias in the content of the BBC, as might be seen, for example, in the deliberate inclusiveness of *Cuffs*, with its gay and Muslim police officers. Politicians have suggested other sources of funding for the BBC, pay-per-view or subscription, for example, but the licence fee has survived as it guarantees the BBC an income while minimising the risk of state interference (though the government does set the level of the fee, which gives it a great deal of indirect control).

The BBC was self-regulating when *Cuffs* was produced. This changed in 2017 when Ofcom took over the responsibility for regulating the BBC, bringing it in line with the other television and radio channels. Ofcom define public service broadcasting (PSB) and ensure that all the PSB broadcasters – all BBC



channels and the main channels for ITV, C4, S4C, and C5 follow these purposes and characteristics:

PSB purposes:

- Informing our understanding of the world
- Stimulating knowledge and learning
- Reflecting the UK's cultural identity
- Representing diversity and alternative viewpoints

PSB characteristics

- High quality
- Original
- Innovative
- Challenging
- Widely available
- Distinctive

Source: https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/103924/psb-annual-report-2017.pdf

Ofcom also define the watershed – the period before 9pm and after 5.30am when programmes containing material unsuitable for children cannot be shown – this includes sexual content, violence, graphic or disturbing imagery and swearing. This means that programmes such as *Cuffs* have to be very careful about their content, which might be seen to reduce the realism of the programme as, for example, the criminals avoid swearing.

The BBC has extra PSB requirements, written into its Royal Charter, because of its distinctive funding. These largely reflect those above, but include the purpose: 'to reflect the UK, its culture and values to the world'. The BBC World Service and BBC Worldwide have a major role in this purpose.

The BBC has to simultaneously provide 'distinctively' PSB content while remaining popular enough to justify charging everyone the licence fee. It attempts to do this in television by offering a stable of channels which offer between them both mass entertainment and quality PSB programming:

- BBC1 as a mass audience channel for all the 'unites and inspires the nation with high quality programmes across a range of genres'
- BBC2 as a niche channel that offers 'programmes of depth and substance'
- BBC4 as a niche channel that 'aims to be British television's most intellectually and culturally enriching channel'
- CBBC as a niche channel for 6 to 12 year olds
- CBeebies as a niche channel for those under 6
- BBC Three as a niche, innovative, online only channel aimed at '16 year olds to 30-somethings'.

Many BBC programmes are now made by independent television production companies. These have been an important part of British television since the advent of Channel 4, which was designed to encourage independent production (production by companies other than the BBC or ITV companies) by setting up the channel as a contractor rather than a producer. Many BBC programmes are now



¹ http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/about/how_we_govern/2016/charter.pdf



produced by 'independents' – this name is still used though, as we have seen, companies such as *Tiger Aspect Productions* may be owned by multinational media conglomerates. The BBC encourages competition for producing its programmes partly in response to political criticism of its existence as a state monopoly.

Media producers

Tiger Aspect and Cuffs

Tiger Aspect productions has a long track record in both comedy and quality drama: *Fortitude*, *Peaky Blinders*, *Benidorm*, *Ripper Street*, *Bad Education*, *Robin Hood*, *The Vicar of Dibley*, *Gimme, Gimme, Gimme*, *Murphy's Law*. They also have a track record in documentaries with the *Ross Kemp on Gangs* series. The BBC wanted a programme to replace *Waterloo Road*, a social realist serial drama set in a school with an ensemble cast, whose audiences were declining. The slot – 8pm Wednesday – was pre-watershed prime time, so required family-friendly mass entertainment and was the one day when the schedule was not held up by *Eastenders*, putting extra pressure on the programme to deliver large audiences. *Cuffs* offered the possibility of reproducing the success of *The Bill*, a pre-watershed police drama that had been the mainstay of the ITV early evening schedules for many years. *Cuffs* offered the same combination of a soap-opera style ensemble cast (eight main characters) in a character-led narrative with a mix of humour and serious drama, in a similar mould to the BBC's successful serial hospital dramas – *Casualty* and *Holby City*. The creator of the show, Julie Greary, had previously worked on relationship dramas such as *Coronation Street*, *Prisoners' Wives* and *Secret Diary of a Call Girl*. Experience had taught the BBC that it was easier to develop a new serial drama in a popular genre such as police or medical drama than it was to develop a successful new soap opera – the holy grail of television schedulers. However, *The Bill* had been discontinued some years previously

and the norm in current television is for police and crime dramas to be post-watershed, more hard-hitting, and less 'soapy'.

Original dramas are very expensive television, much more expensive than programmes such as *The Great British Bake Off* that dominated the 2016 BARB viewing statistics, with 16 million viewers watching the final.

International audiences and co-productions are very important to flagship television. Programmes such as *Planet Earth* are very saleable overseas and the content is not very culture-specific. Programmes such as *Cuffs*, however, are primarily designed for British audiences.

Cuffs was cancelled after the first series despite reasonable if not sparkling viewing figures - 4.2 million viewers for first episode, a low of 2.5 million, and 3.15 million viewers for the final episode. The cancellation may have been because these figures didn't justify the expense, because the BBC was facing Charter renewal and political calls for greater distinctiveness, which populist programmes such as *Cuffs* would not fit, or because the programme appeared to fall between two stools, being neither comfort viewing nor appointment television, but trying to combine elements of both.

Television audiences

Targetting audiences and technologies

Television audiences in the 2010s are much more segmented than those in the 1960s. While BBC1 and ITV remain mass audience channels, the size of these 'mass' audiences is much smaller than before multi-channel television. Both the BBC and ITV offer channels that target specific audiences – such as CBeebies, CBBC, BBC4 – as well as their mass audience channels. A hierarchy of television channels is emerging, comprising mass audience channels, channels aimed at

specific audiences (e.g. E4, Movies for Men, Nickleodeon), and channels offering specific genres (e.g. the Horror channel, shopping channels, Comedy Central).

Audiences in the 2010s have a variety of means of accessing television – live on television, recorded on PVRs and streaming online. This means that audiences have increasing choice and control over their viewing and scheduling is losing its previously all-powerful grip over television viewing. However, at the time *Cuffs* was transmitted in 2015 the majority (81%) of all television viewing was still watching linear television as scheduled, with the other 19% shared between recorded (12%) and streamed (7%) content. So the Wednesday 8pm scheduling for *Cuffs*, for example, was still significant – it meant that *Cuffs* needed to try to offer a diverse audience a range of characters in the hope that they could identify with some of them. It also meant that the darker content expected of a police drama had to be balanced with lighter, family-friendly fare.

Changes in social and cultural contexts mean that television audiences expect diverse representations in their television programmes. In multicultural and post-feminist Britain it would seem unusual to have a solely white male ensemble cast, whereas in the 1960s any deviation from this would have been noticed. The presence of a gay character who is not defined by his sexuality in *Cuffs*, for example, reflects the BBC's assumption that audiences would not find this representation unsettling. By contrast, a sympathetic 1960s documentary on gay life felt it necessary to warn the viewers that many would find 'disgusting' some innocuous shots of gay men dancing in a room.

Uses and gratification

Personal identity

Television series with ensemble casts, such as *Cuffs*, do not offer simple hero and villain roles that enable identification with role models. However, audiences might identify with the values celebrated by the programme, such as public order, professional teamwork, comradeship, and dedication to duty in the face of public indifference, or might choose favourites as role models from among the ensemble cast.

Social interaction and integration

Television series with ensemble casts, such as *Cuffs*, offer audiences a team, or substitute family, towards whom they can adopt a 'mother' role – forgiving the characters' weaknesses, admiring their achievements, and hoping for the best for them. This offers particular pleasures for those who use television as a substitute for real life interaction. Opportunities for discussion of programmes with others are more limited in an age of fragmented television viewing, but the more hard-hitting storylines in shows such as *Cuffs* may lead to such discussions. Family-friendly shows allow those families that still watch television together to do so.

Entertainment

Programmes that represent a self-contained fictional world offer escapism to viewers – either social realist or fantastic worlds both work well in this respect. *Cuffs* offers the fictional world of a coherent police team and their disparate off-duty



activities. In addition, the show offers: comedy, suspense and action, some elements of spectacle and attractive actors.

Surveillance

The information function of television is carried primarily by documentaries and current affairs programming but social realist drama such as *Cuffs* offer a sense of informing the viewer about aspects of society with which they are not familiar, such as police work.

Active audiences/audience response and interpretation

Television audiences, though still relatively passive, are more active than in the 1960s. Apart from the readiness to switch channels, the phenomenon of 'second screening' – commenting on social media while watching linear television – allows far greater audience feedback and interactivity. This is considered a major factor in the survival of scheduling on linear television channels in the age of video on demand. Second screening, together with the success of programming such as sport and talent shows relying on audience votes, encourages 'live' viewing.

One example of different interpretations and audience activity is the fact that a petition to save *Cuffs* on Change.org gained about 12,000 supporters, with comments such as: 'CUFFS IS THE BEST THING TO HAPPEN ON TV! I love it so much! I actually cried when it ended.' This was after the second series was cancelled following average viewing figures and some less than positive reviews. The fan campaign following the cancellation trended on Twitter.



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