

Representation analysis of magazines

REVISED

You may be asked to perform a representation analysis in Question 4. You could be asked to analyse representations generally or in relation to specific groups such as musicians, gender, race and ethnicity, age and so on, or even to events and ideas. The group would need to be present clearly on the front cover for you to be asked to analyse it.

Representation analysis includes:

- how the producers have chosen to construct a version of reality that represents events, social groups and ideas to fit their purposes
- how and why stereotypes have been used (e.g. to enable quick interpretation); this includes anti-stereotyping (also known as counter-stereotyping)
- which social groups are under-represented or misrepresented
- the messages and values conveyed and the issues addressed
- how these representations reflect their social/cultural contexts.

If we take the *Mojo* extract as an example:

How the producers have chosen to construct a version of reality that represents events, social groups and ideas to fit their purposes	<i>Mojo</i> wishes to attract a target audience that shares its reverence for 'classic rock' so constructs a version of reality that represents musicians as authentic heroes, striving for excellence, e.g. in the photo of Ray Davies looking towards the heavens framed by a black background
How and why stereotypes have been used	The selection of a cover photograph of a young, white male may be to fit the stereotype of rock musicians. There is an anti-stereotypical positive representation of older people as popular musicians, e.g. the artist from CSNY on the front cover – this may reflect the anti-ageism of an older audience.
Which social groups are under-represented or misrepresented	The front cover represents only white male musicians in photographs under-representing females and musicians of colour.
The messages and values conveyed and the issues addressed	The front cover associates musicians with quest, danger and struggle, celebrating the values associated with rock music of 'living fast and dying young'.
How these representations reflect their social/cultural contexts	The representations reflect the dominance of celebrity culture in society. They reflect the continuing significance of a 1960s generation who developed popular music in a period of social upheaval.

Read the Exam practice Question 4 on page 86 again and answer the question yourself in five minutes. Look at the full sample response below.

This front cover of *Mojo* magazine fits the stereotype of rock musicians as serious artists who grapple with serious themes. Language such as 'Arise! Ray Davies' and use of the term 'legends' suggests a reverence towards the musicians that fits the purpose of the magazine's producers – to sell a celebration of 'classic rock' to fans of the genre.

The way they are represented associates musicians with quest, danger and struggle in a way that fits this stereotype. For example, the 'black and white photograph of a young Ray Davies looking towards the heavens combined with the cover line 'Rock's dark knight on surviving the Kinks and saving his soul' connotes a spiritual quest. Language use such as 'their

year of living dangerously', 'KLF burn again', 'the torment of ...' again connotes danger and struggle. This is all done in an ironic way in order to avoid appearing too self-important.

The selection of white male musicians as front cover images fits the mostly white stereotype of rock musicians. However, positive representations of older people as rock musicians may be seen as an anti-stereotype, e.g. the artist from CSNY dominates the frame in a way that suggests he has power and authority. By contrast, the selection of an old photograph of Ray Davies in his youth to may suggest a stereotypical preference for youthful images of rock musicians.

This is a Level 3 answer (4–5 marks) as it is:

- a sophisticated analysis of relevant aspects of the extract
- a highly relevant response to the question, demonstrated by full focus on how media representations are used in the extract.

It would probably gain full marks because it meets all the marking criteria fully (not because it is a perfect answer).

Now read the Exam practice Question 5 on page 86 again and answer the question yourself in 15 minutes. A full sample response is laid out below.

There are a number of differences in the use of media language in the two magazine extracts. Colour is used differently: the use of neon pink in *We Love Pop* connotes playfulness and femininity, whereas the use of black in *Mojo* connotes seriousness and authenticity. The cluttered layout of *We Love Pop* with a range of images and little column alignment contrasts with the more ordered layout in *Mojo*, dominated by one large central image and aligned columns. The *We Love Pop* layout connotes fullness and variety, *Mojo*'s layout connotes order and sophistication. The relative demotion of the masthead on *We Love Pop* contrasts with the banner masthead of *Mojo*, suggesting that the *Mojo* brand is to be treated with more respect. The highly stylised typography in *We Love Pop* (e.g. the dripping 'Love Sucks') connotes a silliness that is the opposite of the more conventional typography in *Mojo*. The more informal language use suggesting commonality of experience in *We Love Pop* (e.g. 'decode his Snapchat', 'Crush Cringes & Dating Disasters') links to the hybridity of the magazine – both music and lifestyle – whereas the use of language in *Mojo* to suggest the speaker's different experience (e.g. 'Society tried to extinguish me') fits the music magazine genre. The photographs are very different: there are many conventionally lit photographs in *We Love Pop*, making it look like a scrapbook, but one main, chiaroscuro lit, photograph in *Mojo*, giving it a more artistic feel.

Despite these differences there are a number of similarities in the two extracts, such as: both feature a range of musicians on the front cover, either in cover lines or images; both use language to try to create an inclusive mode of address, addressing an audience of music fans. These are generic conventions of the music magazine. Both use a range of sans serif fonts – this is a style decision rather than a generic convention. Both have

mastheads at the top of the page and cover lines – these are common features to all magazines and not due to genre.

In conclusion, there are many differences and some similarities. Some similarities are due to genre conventions, but the differences between the two front covers far outweigh these similarities. However, some of these differences may be due to generic hybridity – the use of lifestyle magazine conventions in *We Love Pop*. Some of the differences may be due to the difference in the genres of music being covered – *We Love Pop* can be seen to follow the conventions of the pop music magazine sub-genre, whereas *Mojo* follows the conventions of the rock music magazine sub-genre. This means that the differences can be due to genre conventions as well as the similarities.

This answer would gain a Level 3 mark (11–15 marks) because:

- it is a sophisticated analysis of relevant examples of media language used in *We Love Pop* and *Mojo* supported by two or more detailed examples
- a clear judgement and conclusion is reached and is fully supported by the analysis.

It would probably gain full marks because it meets all the marking criteria fully (even though it is not a perfect answer).

Now test yourself

TESTED ☐

- 1 State whether this is an example of a serif or sans serif font: F
- 2 State one connotation of this kind of font.
- 3 State whether this is an example of a serif or sans serif font: F
- 4 State one connotation of this kind of font.
- 5 Name three social/cultural contexts used in this chapter.
- 6 Define 'intertextuality'.
- 7 Define 'generic hybridity'.

Answers on p. 134

How to prepare for the exam

- Practise analysing and comparing music magazine front covers in terms of media language and representations. Analyse one or two inside pages from *Mojo* as well.
- Compare the media language in a wide range of music magazines to that in *Mojo*, e.g. jazz, folk, classical, hip hop and pop music magazines.