

Answering a 20 MARK QUESTION ON ZOELLA AND AUDIENCE APPEAL

Answers in the higher bands must:

- demonstrate the drawing together of areas of knowledge, skills and/or understanding from across the full course of study
- show extended responses that demonstrate the ability to construct and develop a line of reasoning that is coherent, relevant, sustained and logically structured. If answers do not demonstrate both of these then they must not be awarded marks in the highest band (i.e. the maximum mark should be 15). If they do not demonstrate either, they must not be awarded a mark in the top two bands (i.e. the maximum mark should be 10). Responses could cover the following aspects of the theoretical framework:
 - How choice of elements of media language influences meaning in media products
 - The relationship between technology and media products
 - The codes and conventions of media language
 - Intertextuality
 - The ways in which the media re-present the world and construct versions of reality
 - Representation of social groups and ideas and the use of stereotypes
 - How representations convey particular viewpoints, messages, values and beliefs, which may be reinforced across a wide range of media products.
 - How representations reflect the social, historical and cultural contexts in which they were produced.
 - The impact of the increasingly convergent nature of media industries across different platforms and different national settings.
 - Theoretical perspectives on audiences
 - Uses and Gratifications theory
 - How audiences may respond to and interpret media products.
 - The ways in which people's media practices are connected to their identity, including their sense of actual and desired self.
 - The social, cultural and political significance of media products.

With reference to Zoella:

- The extent of an individual's success can be easily seen by the number of followers/subscribers/hits/likes on social media sites. Zoella is certainly successful in terms of attracting an online audience. Her YouTube channels have over 11 million subscribers and have been viewed over 900 million times. This information can be useful in showing the overall appeal of Zoella but it does not show that these people are young. The assumption might be that they are because of the general demographic
- Social media enables the creation of shared social networks, which reinforces the appeal and reach of individuals. The use of frequent intertextual references ensures that the stars and fans of social

media build a shared lexicon and understanding of the world that is being inhabited/shared and can create a sense of familiarity. Most of Zoella's friends are also vloggers; all of them appearing on each other's vlogs. This shared intimacy creates a social network of attractive and interesting people who reveal their life and times together.

- In terms of Uses and Gratifications, audiences are looking for information, relaxation, diversion and companionship. Social media sites can be seen to fulfill all of these audience goals by providing interesting and informative content, the opportunity to 'switch-off' from real life and be distracted. The additional opportunity to interact with other users heightens the sense of companionship that could be created by other media products. Zoella provides opportunities for all of these recognised audience goals by offering: o information about make-up, clothes/trends and fashion, relationships o her videos are very easy to watch and do not require a high level of engagement with the audience so clearly offer an opportunity to relax o the videos are engaging and provide an easy diversion and distraction from other concerns in life – they offer escapism for viewers o the chatty, close-up style of the videos and the personal nature of some of the content provides a sense of companionship for viewers – they create a sense of friendship and shared experience o the opportunity to interact with other viewers/readers All of these are likely to be very appealing and interesting to a young audience and, as they are likely to be familiar with the format this supports the idea that social media sites have helped a new type of celebrity to build a huge audience of young fans. However, the topics that Zoella covers are likely to be of interest to older viewers/readers. Additionally, audiences of all ages are motivated by the same desires in terms of the media they consume (information, distraction, companionship etc.) so Zoella could equally appeal to an older audience. Also as Zoella dispenses sought-after advice on, for example, applying makeup, matching clothes and choosing accessories as well, occasionally, as relationship advice that would likely appeal to a large fan base regardless of how it was dispensed and without the use of social media sites.

- Social media sites offer the sense of being part of a group and sees the audience cast in the role of active rather than passive consumer – either as part of the circle represented in the content or as a part of the fan base. An analysis of Zoella supports this – she appears friendly and approachable and some of her content includes her friends and family which makes you feel like part of the group and there is ample opportunity to interact with other fans. Again, however, this is appealing to a broad age range of media users and is not isolated to the young. Additionally, there are many ways in which fans can feel like they are part of a community that are not dependent on social media sites (music and sports fans, for example, have often formed real life friendships as a result of their shared interest before social media sites existed).

- The fans roles as active consumers can help to shape the nature of the output on social media sites and this helps to make them feel more involved – Zoella will often reference her fans and what they like and say that is why she is making a particular type of video/producing particular content. However, it could be argued that this has always been the case and that the only real difference between social media sites and more conventional media formats is that customer feedback is more immediate – it has, however, always been sought through, for example, focus groups.

- People's media practices are connected to their identities and social media sites create an opportunity for celebrities to show their audiences that they are 'real' and just like them which, in turn, can increase their appeal as they show young fans that it is normal to struggle with the problems they might encounter. Zoella is careful to produce videos that show the balance of fantasy and reality, for example, there are videos where she is dressed nicely with full make-up on and there are others where she is wearing no make-up and talks about her issues with anxiety. However, it could be argued that celebrities have, for a long time and without the use of social media sites,

exposed a range of vulnerabilities to their fans and that the context of Zoella's various sites could easily appeal to audiences from a broad age range, focusing as she does on issues with her skin and her anxiety.

- Social media sites are often seen as the domain of young people and the age exclusivity of YouTube is likely to appeal to a young audience therefore it is the perfect domain for vloggers such as Zoella; it is unlikely they will have to share this interest with their parents. However, as more people are becoming digitally literate, even more content is appearing on sites like YouTube and the internet is getting easier and cheaper to access from anywhere, it could be argued that this age exclusivity is not actually a factor as anyone could find the content and may find it entertaining.

- The accessibility of multi-platform online products (via mobile phone, tablets, computers and television), the 24/7 availability of media content is not reliant on the social media aspect. However, without YouTube Zoella would not have been able to launch her career and may not have been able to find a more traditional route to stardom. It could be argued, however, that stars have always been able to build huge audiences via other media forms and social media sites are not really that much more effective than other media forms. The social and cultural context is one in which the popularity of online vloggers such as Zoella matches that of the most successful music, sport, film or television celebrities especially in pre-teen and teenage age groups. It could be argued that she doesn't have any more of an audience than other celebrities do and that her success isn't necessarily dependent on social media sites. Answers in higher bands must draw together knowledge and understanding from the course as a whole by referring to, for example:

- The significance of vlogging as a cultural phenomenon amongst, primarily, youth audiences
- The genre conventions of vlogs, particularly the 'authenticity' of low budget production and including the expected setting of Zoella's home
- The relationship between vloggers and advertisers or sponsors
- The way in which vloggers such as Zoella construct reality and how this is done in order to present a narrative to the audience
- The appeal of celebrity vloggers in relation to the appeal of celebrities created by traditional media institutions and forms
- The social and cultural significance of the increase in the number and popularity of vlogs
- How vlogs reflect the viewpoints and beliefs of the target audience and how this can attract new viewers and/or cause controversy.