Assassin's Creed Cover

Key & Terms

PEGI - Pan-European Game Information
The regulators for all videogames

AS - Assassin's Creed

VSC - Video Standards Council
Age ratings from PEGI are issued by the VSC

VGC - Video Games Chronicle
They published "code of practice" and "memberships" to make sure games are sold according to law- this is to ensure under 18s don't purchase the game, but this is hard to prevent digitally.

Citizen-based regulation
A regulatory system that outlines a civic role for the media, achieved by setting quotas for public service programming and by closely monitoring content so that it doesn't cause harm or offense.

Bold writing indicates an importance to the information,
italics represents information that will likely gain you further marks but isn't necessarily important information.
Superscript indicates a recap of a theory or extra/specific information on something specific.

Product Context

The Assassin's Creed **franchise is published by Ubisoft** and encompasses *12 incarnations of the game, plus spin-offs.*
It is an *action-adventure, open-world game, played from a third person perspective. Each game is set in a historical setting with a new story and time period.*
In **2021 the franchise recorded sales of 155 million units since its introduction in 2007**.
This was helped by the launch of Assassin's Creed **Valhalla in 2020, which sold more units in its first week than any other game in the series.**
However, games in the back *catalogue of the franchise continue to grow popular.*

Sources

Source 1: WJEC's own factsheet on the Assassin's Creed franchise.
http://resource.download.wjec.co.uk.s3-eu--west-1.amazonaws.com/vtc/2016-17/16--17_1-28/Assassin%27s%20Creed%20Fa-ctsheet%20-%20Updated%202021.pdf
Source 2: "Essential Media Theory" - this article covers Livingstone and Lunt and applies it to AS: Liberation. Can be found in the Industry section, where I apply it to Valhalla instead.
https://www.essentialmediatheory.com/ap-ply-theory/9lcd/Livingstone-and-Lunt/As-sassin%27s-Creed#::text=Assassin%27s-%20Creed%20exemplifies%20the%20in-dustry,can%20easily%20access%20probl-ematic%20material.

Boy was gathering info on Valhalla hard.

Bandura / Bobo doll experiment

Video: http://youtu.be/6lYsmt9qUVI

This for the audience theory for Bandura. It would be especially useful to you to reference the bobo doll experiment in your answer if you have an audience question.

Fanart example (Jenkin's Fandom theory)

by EACV Designs.
When talking about Jenkin's Fandom theory, you can address how fans may participate in communities by making fanart of their favourite characters, such as this fanart of Eivor by EACV Designs.

Link to their website/art: https://eacvdesign-s.com/eivor

Cosplay example (Jenkin's Fandom theory)

megabethbob on DeviantArt.
When writing about Jenkin's Fandom theory, you can talk about how fans may participate in communities by dressing up as characters from the game, such as how megabethbob from DeviantArt cosplayed as Eivor.

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Industry

-- ECONOMIC CONTEXT --
Unlike other media industries such as newspapers, magazines, TV, etc, the **videogame industry is rapidly expanding.**
The **release of new gaming technology or games from popular franchises can be major economic events**, and host big marketing campaigns, with their trailers reaching millions of views upon upload.
Video games are **culturally and financially significant** across three major terriroties (Japan, Europe and the USA).
In 2021, the **value of the global videogames market was estimated to be $138.4 billion**, increasing from *$52.8 billion in 2012.*
Mobile gaming is the fastest growing area of videogames.
Other strategies, in addition to game sales are employed to increase revenue including production and distribution models.
Ownership is another significant element related to the financial success of a games franchise.
-- HISTORICAL CONTEXT --
Video games are a **relatively new media form**, they've had **exponential growth since the 1970s** with other *rapid technological developments.*
There's a **construction of the new "gamer"** and the **difficulty of regulating or monitoring the impact of such a fast-paced industry.**
-- PROCESS OF PRODUCTION, DISTRIBUTION AND CIRCULATION --
and how they shape media products

Video games' **production techniques have evolved and become increasingly innovative** as the industry has become **more competitive and the demands for games has increased.**

Industry (cont)

AC being part of a franchise allows a **production model that both increases economic viability and establishes a brand identity** for the audience- most gamers know AC either by playing it, watching clips or just by hearing about it.
Advances in technology have shaped video games, by the inclusion of more complex gameplay, highly developed graphics and advanced CGI.
In terms of production, the games in the franchise are part of a **multinational development** which is typical of game production in larger studios such as Ubisoft.
-- RECENT TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGES AND HOW IT APPLIES TO THE PRODUCTION, DISTRIBUTION AND CIRCULATION OF AC:V --
Video games **develop and expand to reflect advances in technology.** The decision to release **Assassin's Creed: Valhalla on platforms such as the Xbox Series X and PlayStation 5 was to keep up and synchronise its release to these next-evolution consoles.**
This doesn't mean it didn't release on older generations of consoles- it **released on all consoles that aren't quite outdated yet**, such as the Xbox One, Playstation 4, and also released for Google Stadia during its short time (2019-2023), etc.
That being said, the implementation to Google Stadia was to branch out to the (previously stated) increasingly popular mobile gaming platforms before his discontinuation in Jan 2023.
The release of this game, as part of a well-known and popular franchise, may be seen as **an attempt to bring high game production values to the burgeoning new mobile gaming arena.**

Industry (cont)

The most **recent games in the franchise have introduced cross-generational gaming**, enabling data to be transferred from earlier generation consoles and cross-play and progression carrying progress between different platforms.
The **opportunities to distribute and circulate games and to distribute additional content have been expanded, leading to increased revenue for the franchise.**
The **games themselves have also developed in-line with the changes in technology.**
*For example, Assassin's Creed Odyssey (*even though it isn't the set product*) offered a more immersive experience for players than previous games.*
In 2021 it was announced that the new game to be released in the franchise, Assassin's Creed Infinity, inspired by the success of games like Fortnite, would be a fully live service game. *This would expand the franchise and enable the games to time jump and include multiple historical settings rather than the single setting of the existing games. This would also ensure the longevity of the franchise and the ability to add new content rather than launching a completely new game.*
As of May 2023, nothing has been added to this statement.
-- REGULATORY FRAMEWORK AND ROLE OF REGULATION IN GLOBAL PDC --
Videogame **regulation differs around the world but is becoming standardised across many European countries.**
In the UK *until July 2012, videogames had been regulated by the BBFC*. They are now **largely regulated by the Video Standards Council (VGC) applying the PEGI system.**

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Industry (cont)

The PEGI system can be discussed in terms of its process (age ratings as well as visual descriptors of content) and also its attempt to harmonise.
The protection of children is also something to be considered with the development of technology - **digital purchases have poor verification for if a customer is old enough to buy a product yet.**
Some platforms that are heavily involved in digital media (such as YouTube) are starting to implement more safe age verification methods such as proving age via credit cards or passport, but we're yet to see that be applied to most videogames, especially mainstream ones.
Currently, the most verification you can get when buying games 18+ off big platforms such as Steam, or Ubisoft Connect, is just verifying your age (which can be faked, as there's no proof required to verify your age), so children buying games 18+ has a high chance of happening.
This makes **PEGI relatively ineffective when buying games online, as you don't need to prove your age.**
-- IMPACT OF DIGITALLY CONVERGENT MEDIA PLATFORMS ON MEDIA PRODUCTION, DISTRIBUTION AND CIRCULATION, INCLUDING INDIVIDUAL PRODUCERS --
The use of **convergence has developed further across the most recent games in the franchise.**
This is significant in terms of promotion/marketing and circulation and facilitates the development and re-release of games incorporating more complex elements.
The convergence between social media platforms **promotes gamer engagement and identification with the game across the fan community.**

Industry (cont)

Digital convergence is important to Ubisoft as an individual producer in a competitive market, it also benefits fans as individual producers of game content, for example through **gameplay videos.**
However, there are some **possible risks including piracy and leaked content.**
-- APPLYING THEORY --
Livingstone and Lunt - Regulation
^(1) the idea that there is an underlying struggle in recent UK regulation policy between the need to further interests of citizens (by offering protection from harmful or offensive material) and the need to further the interests of consumers (by ensuring choice, value for money, and market competition). (2) the idea that the increasing power of global media corporations, together with the rise of convergent media technologies and transformations in the production, distribution and marketing of digital media, have placed traditional approaches to media regulation at risk.^.
Assassin's Creed exemplifies the **industry--friendly, consumer-orientated approach to videogame regulation**, whilst **also highlighting the underlying problems** that such an approach presents, in terms of the ease with which **vulnerable audiences can easily access problematic material**. source: #2
Ubisoft self-certify content using the PEGI age rating system, and Valhalla achieved 18 as a result, due to its **very strong content, infliction of severe pain + injury, strong language, detailed description of criminal techniques, glamorising of gambling, in-game purchases and graphic violence.**

Industry (cont)

It is clear that a robust regulatory code exists- one that seeks principally to protect vulnerable audiences, but as Livingstone and Lunt's research suggests, the effectiveness of that industry-driven system is problematic.
Hesmondhalgh - Cultural Industries
^(1) the idea that cultural industry companies try to minimise risk and maximise audiences through vertical and horizontal integration, and by formatting their cultural products (e.g. through use of stars, genres and serials). (2) the idea that the largest companies or conglomerates now operate across a number of different cultural industries. (3) the idea that the radical potential of the internet has been contained to some extent by its partial incorporation into a large, profit-orientated set of cultural industries.^. The videogames industry is **designed to make a profit, as they operate in a competitive market.** One of the **ways they minimise risk is through genre-formatting**, this is evident in the AC franchise.
The marketing of a new game **uses audience recognition of the game and the brand as part of the franchise. Audiences therefore know what to expect.**
The **sequel formula** of the franchise model **gives audiences clues of what to expect, but enough differences through themes and settings to ensure anticipation and buzz around the launch of a new game.****

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Industry (cont)

The videogames industry is dominated by large multi-national conglomerates. Ubisoft is the fifth largest videogame company but is now also in competition with tech companies including Facebook, Google and Amazon who have recently become major players in the games industry backed by huge financial reserves.

Some information is taken from the Assassin's Creed Franchise factsheet that would've been dated for when WJEC did Liberation rather than Valhalla, but I've tried making it apply to Valhalla instead.

Audience

-- SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT --
Considering videogames in relation to how they reflect society is a useful way of exploring them in terms of social and cultural significance. The **representation of female characters, underrepresentation of women in videogame development and an assumed minority of female video game players are areas that could be explored.**
The AC franchise has made **adaptations over the different versions of the game to address changes in society and culture and audience expectations**. There are examples of **female protagonists in the later games**. (You could consider whether they **subvert or reinforce expectations of female characters** in games and **how audiences might respond to this**).
-- HOW PRODUCERS TARGET, ATTRACT, REACH, ADDRESS AND POTENTIALLY CONSTRUCT AN AUDIENCE --
The **brand identity of AC is a key strategy for targeting audiences. A fan community already exists and gaming audiences have a preconceived idea of what to expect from a game in this franchise. This will be used in the marketing of a new game.**

Audience (cont)

As a result of developments in technology, the games are distributed across a range of different media platforms which facilitate the targeting of diverse audiences.
Games in the franchise **may attract audiences through creating a sense of identity**, for example through identification with **characters in the game or interacting with online fan communities.**
Games producers **construct audiences through the decisions they make about characters, narratives and gameplay.** For example, AC:V offers players a **choice between playing as a male or female character**, Eivor (they're both named Eivor), allowing **different interpretations of the narrative.**
Games in this franchise have broadened their appeal by, for example, the inclusion of female protagonists and different historical settings.
-- INTERRELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES AND PATTERNS OF CONSUMPTION AND RESPONSE --
The **distribution of games in the franchise across different platforms is a strategy to increase audience consumption**. This might be also considered as an **attempt to draw gamers from different platforms to purchase additional hardware and adopt new gaming habits.**
Gamers might be being **encouraged to have a more complete or satisfying experience by using a range of interlinked products that offer exclusive downloadable content.** *This is only made possible through convergent technology and gamer "buy-in" to the value of the exclusive content.*

Audience (cont)

The **franchise has a well-established fan community enhanced by digital convergent platforms facilitating interaction and responses to the game to be shared.** *Fans can play a role in the future development of the franchise.*
-- DIFFERENT AUDIENCE INTERPRETATIONS MAY REFLECT SOCIAL/CULTURAL CIRCUMSTANCES --
The **unique interactive and escapist experience** provided by videogames **influences interpretations** as *gamers are part of a fan community made up of participants from diverse social and cultural backgrounds.*
Players may also make choices about videogames selecting those that **reflect aspects of their identity**, for example in relation to the AC franchise, **those that feature a female avatar, or take place in a particular historical setting that is of interest to the gamer.**
-- APPLYING THEORY --
Bandura - Media effects
Theory recap: (1) the idea that the media can implant ideas in the mind of the audience directly. (2) the idea that audiences acquire attitudes, emotional responses and new styles of conduct through modelling. (3) the idea that media representations of transgressive behaviour such as violence or physical aggression can lead audiences members to imitate forms of behaviour.

Several games in the franchise have received an 18 rating from PEGI due to largely violent content.
Bandura's arguments about observation and imitation (+ vicarious consequences) may lead to audiences repeating the behaviour/violence seen in the game (Bobo Doll Experiment).

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Audience (cont)

It's been hugely discussed that videogames have a negative impact in the way that people behave, specifically children, specifically 2019 saw the height of this argument and it became a meme on the internet due to the (arguably) absurd nature of it.

Jenkins - Fandom

Theory recap: (1) the idea that fans are active participants in the construction and circulation of textual meanings. (2) the idea that fans appropriate texts and read them in ways that are not fully authorised by the media producers ('textual poaching') (3) the idea that fans construct their social and cultural identities through borrowing and inflecting mass culture images, and are part of a participatory culture that has a vital social dimension.

Videogames **offer social experiences (online multiplayer options) as well as communities outside of the core game experience.**

The **fans may be passionate exponents of a game or the harshest critics** and can often **impact the development of games directly** (not a game, but look at how influential the backlash was for the first Sonic movie trailer was that it changed the Sonic movie entirely- you shouldn't use this example in your answer but it helps me remember what the theory is).

The **development in videogames technology have expanded the ways in which fans can interact with the games producers and the fan community, creating a participatory culture.**

Videogames are interactive, enabling fans to construct their identities through the participatory online experience and the roleplaying environment.

AC was painful to write for, but it was even more painful to find information for.

I hope that there will be more information *specifically* for Valhalla in the future, as the WJEC exam board was too lazy to write specialised information for students about it.

GL media students if not

Eivor (female ver.)

As opposed to the male version on the game cover.

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