

LUTHER

(Series 1 Episode 1, 2010)

Factsheet 2 - Media Industries, Audiences & Media Contexts



Acknowledgements

Images	Acknowledgement
All images	BBC

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LUTHER

(Series 1 Episode 1, 2010)

Component 2: Understanding Forms and Products

Focus Areas:

Media Language

Representation

Media Industries

Audiences

Media contexts

PART 1: STARTING POINTS - Media Industries

The nature of media production, including by large organisations, who own the products they produce and by individuals and groups:

There have been significant changes to the television industry in recent years due to the impact of digital technology on the way in which programmes are produced and distributed and how audiences consume them. Audiences have become more fragmented and traditional broadcasters like the BBC must evolve in the ways in which they produce, distribute and market their products.

Luther is a mainstream programme from a popular genre, produced and distributed by the BBC. It has become one of the organisation's flagship programmes, ensuring a loyal audience. The set episode had 6.35 million viewers when it aired in 2010. It was ranked 6 out of 10 programmes for that week, the top four slots being taken by episodes of *EastEnders* and the fifth slot by *Doctor Who*, a successful start for a new programme and testament to the marketing campaign.

The success of *Luther* over the five series is also an example of how the BBC as a mainstream broadcaster, whilst engaging in risk and producing new, innovative programmes, also relies on the repetition of successful formats to secure audiences in an increasingly competitive media landscape.

The programme has relatively high production values for a television series, evident in the choice of locations, the cinematography and the well-established actors including Idris Elba, Saskia Reeves and Indira Varma.

Luther has a wide global distribution: it was previously available on Netflix, is currently (March 2021) available on Amazon Prime and is broadcast on BBC America as well as in over 200 other territories. As part of its global promotional campaign BBC Worldwide released a video to market the series to international buyers featuring a scene from the programme dubbed into different languages (<https://www.youtube.com/watch/BudHdXEyBqM>).

The impact of the increasingly convergent nature of media industries across different platforms:

Whilst *Luther* is broadcast at 9pm each week during a series run, audiences also have the opportunity to access the programme across different platforms and devices. Digital technology also allows audiences to binge-watch the series. The series is also available on DVD.

Before the last series of *Luther*, all the previous series were available to watch on iPlayer encouraging audiences to engage with the brand.

There is also a BBC website dedicated to the programme, and social media platforms.

The importance of different funding models, including government funded, not-for-profit and commercial models:

Television companies operate either a public service or commercial broadcasting model. The BBC is a public service broadcaster, funded by the licence fee, with a remit to inform, educate and entertain, and this influences what is produced. The funding arrangement allows the BBC some aspect of freedom as they are less driven by ratings and profit. Its relative autonomy enables it to offer a diverse range of programming content and crime dramas are an important element of its content and schedule.

The BBC does have an element of governmental control and there is an ongoing discussion centred around the continuation of the licence fee, which is set by the government, with some members unhappy about the BBC's funding model. However, there is considerable support from the public, the arts and entertainment industry and sections of the government for what is seen as the essential role played by the public service broadcaster.

The function and types of regulation in the media:

Television companies and specific channels operate self-regulation through scheduling decisions, the watershed, and announcements at the beginning of programmes giving information about possible areas of offence.

The BBC Board is responsible for ensuring that the BBC fulfils its mission as detailed in the Royal Charter which sets out the BBC's object, mission, and public purposes. It is reviewed and renewed regularly, the current charter began in January 2017 and ends in December 2027.

The BBC is externally regulated by Ofcom which is accountable to Parliament and publishes standards which must be adhered to by

broadcasters. DVD releases of the programme are classified by the BBFC. One of the duties of Ofcom is to examine specific complaints made by listeners about programmes broadcast on channels that it has licenced.

PART 2: STARTING POINTS – Audiences

Luther is produced by the BBC, a public service broadcaster. Audiences will be familiar with BBC content and have an expectation of a quality drama with high production values. The trailer for the programme uses the slogan 'Original British Drama' to appeal to the audience suggesting the BBC's investment in homegrown drama.

Crime drama is a popular genre with audiences and the BBC is known for producing successful programmes in this genre.

Luther aims to reach a wide audience and appeals to both men and women due to its diverse range of characters. The 9pm scheduling time is a popular slot for the BBC's highest rated shows and placing it after the watershed highlights the adult content.

Whilst the BBC target audience for the programme is 25-40, the fact that it also appeared on Netflix suggests a younger, 16-25 year-old, target audience who are more likely to binge watch the series.

The ways in which media organisations target audiences:

- The use of teaser and longer trailers introduced the character of Luther to audiences and established an enigma around his character.
- The high production values obvious from the marketing material including the use of recognisable stars and the expectations related to the BBC branding.
- The introduction of enigmatic characters to intrigue audiences including Luther, but also Alice who became very popular. The BBC website for the programme included

'Postcards from Alice' encouraging audiences to engage with the character's story world.

- The creation of other interactive and online features which extend the world of the programme including 'Ripley's Video Diary' which involves the audience by creating a backstory around Luther. The blog from the writer Neil Cross gives an insight into the process of creating the programme and the BBC Writer's room allows audiences to read programme scripts.



The role of media technologies in reaching and identifying audiences, and in audience consumption and usage:

- Changes and developments in technology have had an impact upon the way in which audiences access, consume and respond to media products. Audiences now have a range of content to choose from on a range of different platforms to suit their needs and lifestyle.
- *Luther*, as well as being available to watch on BBC, BBC iPlayer and Amazon Prime, also has a website where audiences can access extra information and videos related to the programme.
- The programme can also reach audiences through social media sites including Twitter and Facebook which also allows the BBC to review audience reactions to characters and storylines.

Theoretical perspectives on audience: Blumler and Katz's Uses and Gratifications theory:

There are several theories that have been written to explore the relationship between audiences and media products. The Uses and Gratifications theory was one of the first to suggest that audiences can be active consumers of the media and seek out and use different media products in order to satisfy a need and to experience different pleasures including:

- **Entertainment/diversion:** audiences watch some media products including crime dramas to escape from everyday life into a fictional world that absorbs their interest. *Luther* is an inverted detective story and audiences may also gain pleasure from picking up clues and trying to solve the crime along with the detective. Audiences may recognise the conventions of the genre in the programme and will predict certain outcomes, experiencing pleasure when they are correct in their assumptions. *Luther* involves the audience from the beginning by placing them in a privileged spectator position regarding the outcome of the chase and Henry Madsen at the start and the relationship between Luther and Alice. Audiences may also be attracted to the actors who are popular, for example Idris Elba, Ruth Wilson and Saskia Reeves. Luther is an enigmatic character who does not display the typical characteristics of his role and this may add to his appeal 'When I type the end of any series I immediately start to miss him' (Neil Cross, writer of *Luther* www.bbc.co.uk).



- **Information/education:** crime dramas can give audiences an insight into another area of society with which they may not be familiar, in *Luther* this is the police procedures.
- **Social interaction:** this pleasure has been enhanced by developments in technology. Audiences watch episodes of *Luther* and at the same time interact with friends and family on social media. As there are long gaps between series of *Luther* the first and following series become examples of water-cooler television and as such are discussed by audiences in anticipation of their broadcast and during the series run.
- **Personal identity:** the programme may appeal to the audience because they relate to a character or a particular situation.

PART 3: STARTING POINTS – Media Contexts

The specification requires learners to develop their understanding of relevant contexts of media and their influence on the product.

Social and Cultural contexts

How *Luther* reflects the society and culture of the time in which it was made through its

representations, themes, values, and messages.

Consider:

- How the representations of women in *Luther* challenge typical representations in crime drama illustrating how the genre has developed over time and been informed by cultural influences.
- How theme of the representation of evil and the role of the villain offers a more contemporary view of society.
- How Luther's character reflects the time in which the programme was made. Consider the similarities he has with Regan and Carter in *The Sweeney* and the ways in which is he different.
- How the programme addresses the under representation and misrepresentation of ethnic diversity in television crime dramas.
- How *Luther* be said to have cultural links to the film noir genre and American procedural crime dramas. Consider the codes of clothing, the cinematography in key scenes and the role of the femme fatale.
- The similarities and differences in the way in which London is represented in *The Sweeney* and *Luther* and how settings and locations have a social and cultural significance.