Audience perceptions of historical authenticity in visual media

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Historical media, in this context the fictive representations of history in television (TV), film and video games, have most commonly been researched in terms of their uses and formal applications in learning contexts such as schools.[1] There is limited empirical research that investigates informal engagements with historical film and television,[2] with the momentous research by Rosenzweig and Thelen carried out in 1995, before the emergence of the widespread use of digital historical games, which were therefore not included in their investigation. Additionally, while their research remains a seminal study for understanding informal historical engagements both with history, and with fictive representations of history, in the twenty-three years since their data was collected, historical media production and consumption practices have changed drastically. Consequently, more up-to-date research is needed to capture these developments.

While Rosenzweig and Thelen investigated the perceived trustworthiness or authenticity of historical film and TV, they did so in relation to other historical practices and activities such as visiting heritage sites or talking with family members, with their study participants classifying these different ways of experiencing the past based on perceptions of their trustworthiness. However, this means that the elements specifically within historical media that contributed to their participants' perceptions of (in)authenticity were not addressed in depth, as their research gave a broad overview of a variety of informal engagements with the past.

The study reported in this chapter aims to address these gaps in the literature by investigating informal engagements with historical media, through comparatively assessing audience and player perceptions of authenticity across three fictive historical media forms (TV, film, games) and also within each media form. The survey was not intended to assess audience perceptions of non-fiction media, such as TV or film documentaries, or those that are purportedly factual like textbooks. By focusing on fictionalized media, this allowed the media forms to be more explicitly comparable given the fictional nature of almost all historical games.

This study investigated a variety of elements of engagement with historical media, such as researching the historical context, discussing it with others in forums or engaging

in other kinds of online activities in reference to all periods of history. However, due to the focus of this volume, only the elements of the research that relate specifically to perceptions of authenticity of the medieval are provided. Despite the survey being inclusive of all historical periods to which the respondents naturally referred, there were nonetheless common trends – regardless of the historical period discussed – when it comes to engaging with fictionalized histories in these informal ways. These trends are thus exemplified in this chapter with data pertaining to receptions of the medieval in fictional TV series, film and games.

As such, the following analysis will add more depth to previous research carried out on this topic and will enhance our understanding of how audiences perceive authenticity as created within contemporary historical visual culture. This chapter presents the results of the study and suggests several apparent trends relating to audience perceptions of authenticity within media addressing the medieval period. Namely: that representations of the Middle Ages in games are typically seen as less authentic than representations in other media formats; that the perceived veracity of material culture has a substantial impact on the perceived authenticity of a piece of media; that the perceived authenticity of media which adapts written work is based substantially on its adherence to the original text; and that media which emphasizes negative aspects of the Middle Ages are more likely to be viewed as authentic.

Authenticity

Where accuracy is often taken to be the objective, agreed-upon facts of the past, authenticity in the context of this research is subjective: an opinion, perception or 'a sense of the genuine'.[3] The very nature of 'authenticity' is an elusive quality[4] in terms of how history is represented. The definition of 'authenticity' is often contested[5] where 'confusion surrounds the nature and use of the concept'.[6] If considering the nature of authenticity in respect to heritage sites, authenticity is not an absolute to be received but 'a social construction to be negotiated'[7] and 'defined in the tourist's own terms'.[8] Yet, what do these terms mean with reference to historical representations in media? What criteria do audiences use to assess the (in)authenticity of different media *forms* and within particular media texts? As with heritage experiences, authenticity must be defined in the audiences' own terms in relation to historical media. This chapter begins to do this by reporting on this research on audience perceptions of authenticity within their historical media engagements.

Research aims

The aims of the research were exploratory, and with reference to authenticity the following research questions emerged:

- Which media form (TV, film, games) do audiences think is the most authentic (if any)?

- Which individual texts and titles within those forms produce perceptions of (in) authenticity?
- Which elements within those texts contribute to these perceptions?

The following sections outline the method of how these questions were implemented within an empirical survey and discuss the study findings in relation to audience's perceptions of authenticity.

Method and instruments

An online survey was created with Bristol Online Surveys (BOS) with the purpose of exploring audiences' perceptions of historical media. The survey consisted of twenty questions, a mix of single- and multiple-choice, Likert-scale questions, and four free text answers. The nature and content of each question will be given in due course. The survey was distributed online via social media and academic mailing lists, adopting a convenience sampling approach. As such, the authors make no claims about the generalizability of the findings to the wider population as no sampling stratification took place. However, over half of respondents were British, and a quarter were from the United States or Canada, so the survey may perhaps provide findings from a particularly Western, Anglo-centric perspective. The survey was active for a period of three weeks, and after this time had accrued 621 respondents.

The gender balance was around 51 per cent female to 49 per cent male, with the breakdown of respondents by age and gender given in Table 5.1. Although females aged fifty and over and men aged between eighteen and thirty-nine who play historical games were over-represented in the data, there were no significant differences in the findings based on the age or gender of the respondents.

The free text data was analysed using a thematic approach,[9] meaning the analysis was not grounded in an existing theoretical framework, allowing themes to be identified from within the data itself. Themes were identified by fundamentality and frequency,[10] that is themes that were considered to be important by the researchers or those that had

Table 5.1 Demographic of Survey Respondents by Gender and Age

	What is your age?					
What is your gender?	18–29	30–39	40–49	50+	Prefer not to say	Totals
Male	86	115	57	34	1	293
Female	75	89	58	96	2	320
Other	0	0	0	1	1	2
Prefer not to say	2	0	1	0	1	4
No answer	1	1	0	0	0	2
Totals	164	205	116	131	5	621

Question	Response count
17	621
17.a	619

a high number of references from the respondents. A colleague outside the research team checked the data for inter-rater reliability, where the discussion from the cross-coding allowed for some themes to be amalgamated on the basis of our joint reflections.

Approach to assessing authenticity

Respondents were asked for the extent of their agreement with certain statements, in the form of four-point Likert questions. A four-point (as opposed to a five, or seven) Likert was used as Leung[11] found there were no differences between four-, five-, six- and eleven-pointed Likert scales in terms of mean, standard deviation, correlation, reliability or factor analysis. Furthermore, a neutral point also means people with low motivation when completing a survey are more likely to select this option when it does not truly replicate their feeling.[12] For these reasons, a four-point Likert-scale question was implemented for Q13: 'How authentic are the historical representations in each of the media forms, in your opinion?' Respondents were asked to comparatively rate historical film, TV and games on a four-point Likert scale. This was in terms of whether they perceived each form as a whole to be 'Authentic', 'Somewhat authentic', 'Somewhat inauthentic' or 'Inauthentic', though participants were given the option not to answer this question through the use of the phrase 'I don't partake in this media' at the end of the Likert row. All responses for each medium were converted to percentages of the total respondents for that medium in order to make the findings comparable, as different numbers of respondents answered the question relating to historical television ($n = 604$) , film ($n = 612$) and games ($n = 402$) respectively.

There were also four free text answers: two asking respondents which historical media they enjoyed and why (Qs 7 and 12) and two asking respondents what media texts, or aspects of media texts, they found to be authentic (Q14) and inauthentic (Q15) correspondingly. These free-text questions were clearly marked as optional, so not all respondents answered these questions. Thus, Q13 gave an overview of the respondents' perceptions of authenticity across media forms, where the aspects within individual media *texts* that produce those perceptions were gathered from the free text responses (Qs 7, 12, 14, 15).

Findings and discussion

For reasons of clarity and pragmatism, the findings and discussion will be considered together. This is a discussion of general trends found in the data relating to historical TV and film, as the player perceptions of authenticity with reference to historical games, discussed elsewhere,[13] are only included here where productive comparisons can be made between media forms. This section has two parts: the first specifically addresses the elements within the survey relating to perceived authenticity across media forms; the second focuses on aspects within the forms of TV and film, and how these contribute to audiences' perceptions of (in)authenticity. These aspects are material culture, authenticity as fidelity to written texts, sanitized history and negativity bias and the importance of historical authenticity to audiences.

Perceptions of authenticity across historical media forms

Respondents were asked how authentic they perceived the three media forms (TV, film, game) in terms of how they represented history (Q13) and their responses to each media form were compared (Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1 highlights that, although no media form was considered definitively to be 'authentic', 59.7 per cent of respondents considered historical TV shows to be 'somewhat authentic'. Where historical film was comparable to historical TV in the 'somewhat authentic' band with 53.6 per cent, only 39 per cent of respondents perceived historical games as 'somewhat authentic'. This trend was inverted in relation to *in*authenticity. 58.6 per cent of the respondents answered that they perceived historical games as inauthentic (24.1 per cent) or somewhat inauthentic (34.5 per cent), compared with only 24.2 per cent (5.3 per cent inauthentic; 28.9 per cent somewhat inauthentic) answering this way in relation to historical TV. Historical film fell between the two at 41.8 per cent (9.6 per cent inauthentic; 32.2 per cent somewhat inauthentic). In terms of perceived inauthenticity, there was a steady increase in terms of degrees of perceived inauthenticity with reference to historical games; with historical TV there was a steady decrease in perceived inauthenticity. The inversion of this was true in relation to perceived authenticity.

These findings indicate that overall, while not considered wholly authentic by any stretch, historical TV was considered the most authentic of the three media forms for representing history. This was followed by film, and games were considered the least authentic media form for historical representation. Some of the reasons that TV and film were considered the more authentic media are discussed in detail in the next sections, though it is worth noting two things here. First, respondents sometimes highlighted in the free text answers that film could be considered inauthentic due to
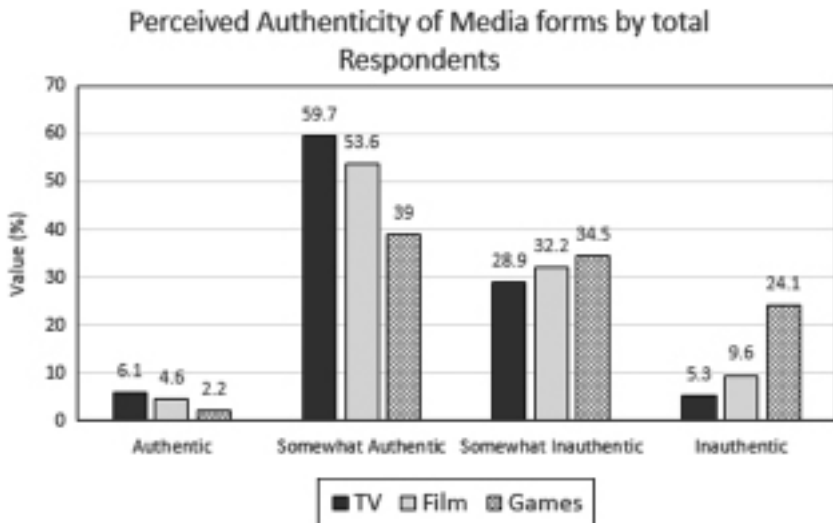

Figure 5.1 Perceptions of historical authenticity across media forms with % adjustments.

narrative compression, where a story is condensed into a shorter version outlining the fundamental features or events.[14] From this, we can infer that the shorter running time of film in comparison to TV series, and the resulting narrative compression, could account for film being perceived as slightly less authentic than TV. Second, TV far more than film or games is used to relay factual information to viewers in documentaries, live broadcastings or the news. It could be suggested that due to TV's different status as a 'factual' information provider in comparison with the other media forms, perhaps the respondents felt TV drama was more authentic because of this association. These, however, are merely suggestions, and a more comprehensive overview of the qualitative data is covered in subsequent sections.

Broadly speaking, games were considered to be less authentic by the respondents due to the interactive nature of the form. The necessity of having to balance historical authenticity with enjoyable gameplay was seen to distort the historical representation, as the actions taken by the player were not seen to accurately represent the actions available to the historical agent(s). The pressures of the game form, due to the form's interactive nature, was seen to have a greater effect on the authenticity of the historical content represented, in comparison with the associated formal pressures of TV and film.[15]

More in-depth findings relating to historical games have been discussed elsewhere.[16] The next section addresses audience perceptions of authenticity within historical film and television in more detail.

Perceptions of authenticity within historical film and TV

Understanding why respondents who engaged with historical TV and film answered Q13 in these ways requires analysis and discussion of responses to the free text questions (Qs7, 12, 14, 15). These questions specifically asked participants about their enjoyment of these media (Q7,12), their perceptions of the (in)authenticity of media texts (Q14, 15) and particular aspects within those media texts that contributed to these perceptions.

Material culture: Authenticity and the 'look' of the past

By far the most prevalent trend in the data was the respondents' focus on the represented material culture. For TV and film, this was in terms of the emphasis upon the tangible artefacts, in particular costumes, props and sets. There were 185 references to authentic representations of material culture within the data from 138 unique respondents, by far the most references to any data theme.[17] Respondents talked about a variety of different media texts representing different historical periods. With specific reference to *Wolf Hall,*[18] a fictionalized historical novel later adapted for television, describing Thomas Cromwell's rise to power between 1500 and 1535 CE, three respondents stated:

Wolf Hall [has] [. . .] realistic props and costumes. (British female, 50+, Q14)

> *Wolf Hall* [has] [. . .] very accurate costumes and settings (though giving a particular interpretation of their motivations, which may or may not have been accurate). (British female, 18–29, Q14)

> [The] [. . .] interpretations of characters aside, the setting was detailed and accurate. (British female, 18–29, Q14).

While primarily highlighting the focus on material culture when judging authenticity, the latter two pieces of data point to the nuances of audience interpretation of what an 'authentic representation' can be. While costuming, props or sets can be considered authentic, other aspects such as character interpretation might at the same time be seen as inauthentic. This was echoed in more general terms by other respondents:

> I feel that nearly every piece of media that I've seen that's allegedly based on history is inauthentic – though I often find costuming to be good. (Scottish Female, 18-29, Q14)

What the data here implies is that often, even if the media text as a whole is considered to be inauthentic, respondents are still able to pick out individual elements that they consider to be authentic – such as the costumes.

This focus on material culture is also something that has been found in the literature, in that authenticity in visual media is '[m]ost frequently . . . a matter of the "look" of the past, or rather "the period look," "period props," and "period costume"'.[19] This explicitly relates to emphasis on material culture in the findings of this study, both in terms of the increased frequency of references to this theme, as well as the specific types of material culture to which they referred. Indeed, the fact that material culture did seem to be the measure of authenticity in these media for many of the respondents may be unsurprising given that material culture is often used as the 'primary data for developing inferences about cultural, social, and other types of history'.[20] These visual media are a popular form of history, thus these respondents used the representations of material culture to gauge authenticity in a similar way as they would with other histories.

This is also the case if we turn to how authenticity is perceived to be conveyed in real-life historical contexts such as heritage experiences, as it is similarly the material artefacts that visitors are most likely to cite as authentic in empirical studies of visitor perceptions of authenticity.[21] This seems to imply that authenticity is often judged by the same criteria – the authenticity of material culture – regardless of whether the viewer is judging something actually historical at a heritage site, or something that is a reconstruction or representation of something historical, as in film and TV. This echoes other research which states that '[o]fferings can be seen as authentic by referring to other offerings already perceived as real'.[22] In terms of film and TV, this would suggest that if a representation of an artefact (a costume for example) refers earnestly to an artefact that is, or is already seen to be, authentic (genuine period clothing), then it will be considered to be authentic due to this perceived fidelity.

These conceptualizations of authenticity as fidelity and referentiality in relation to material culture were also found in the data relating to other aspects of historical representations in film and TV, with specific reference to written texts.

Authenticity as fidelity to written texts

Some respondents made explicit comparisons between the historical narratives represented in TV and film with those seen in written texts. Again, with specific reference to *Wolf Hall* some respondents stated:

> *Wolf Hall* [is authentic] – because of the extensive research undertaken by the original author (Hilary Mantel). (Australian female, 50+, Q14)

> *Wolf Hall* [is authentic because it's] – based on a book into which a lot of historical research had gone. (British female, 50+, Q14)

These participants make specific judgements on the authenticity of the *Wolf Hall* television drama, which are based upon the perceived authenticity of the *Wolf Hall* novel.[23] As the respondents perceive the TV show to be a faithful adaptation of the 'authentic' historical novel, the TV show is seen to be authentic due to this perceived fidelity.

This was a recurring theme within the data, where there were ninety-two specific references (from seventy-one unique respondents) to a work of historical film or television being seen as authentic due to its perceived allegiance to a written work that was also seen as authentic. This does not include references from the respondents who talked about plot, storyline or narrative divergences in non-explicit terms. Although in some of the cases where explicit references to specific written texts were evident, the citing of primary or secondary historical sources were in fact a rarity. These seventy-one respondents overwhelmingly referred to historical novels that are fictive works, such as *Wolf Hall* or *The White Queen*[24] (set during the War of the Roses in the fifteenth century), and also non-medieval examples such as *I Claudius*[25] (set in ancient Rome) when they made comparative judgments about the authenticity of visual historical media. With the references to these historical novels, (in this data at least) the respondents did not question the authenticity of the written texts. This could indicate that there was an implicit assumption by the respondents of the novels being authentic and reliable – despite the fictionalized aspects of these works. This was even the case with film and TV adaptations based on written texts that, in terms of historical figures, events or narratives, were entirely fictional, as in this respondent's statement below:

> I would have to pick the Austen or Bronte BBC TV adaptations [as being authentic]. They reach a high level of authenticity and manage to stay close to the original material. (British female, 30–39, Q14)

Although this particular quote does not allude to a representation of medieval culture, it nonetheless demonstrates two important findings relating to this theme. First, it reiterates how authenticity is perceived to be created through the perceived fidelity of visual media to a written text – as evident from the data above. Second, and perhaps crucially, this respondent is referencing a fictional text, yet still perceives that the TV adaptations are authentic due to being seen as faithful adaptations of the fictive source material. Of course, part of this perception could be that respondents

felt the media text authentically represented the contemporary society or social setting, rather than actual historical figure or events. Though what does seem to be clear when all the nuanced inferences from respondents are taken into account is that the written word, regardless of how fictional the content is, is seen to possess a historical authority and is thus seen to be the most authentic means by which history can be conveyed.

As Rosenstone suggests, this idea is 'a long time practice which has come to be carved in stone – the notion that a truthful past can only be told in words on the page'.[26] Even when respondents are aware that a written history is a fictionalized account, it appears that its form as a written document is more akin in spirit to the academic study of (written) history, and consequently considered more trustworthy,[27] and thus more authentic. Therefore, using Pine & Gilmore's earlier terminology, as TV and film adaptations of historical fiction refer faithfully to the 'offering' of a written text already perceived as real, they are themselves considered more authentic through this referentiality.

TV versions of historical fiction seem more prevalent than their film counterparts, perhaps in part due to the easier task of adapting the work without having to so drastically compress a book's narrative into two hours. This could be another reason as to why historical TV was considered more authentic than film, and film more so than games, where fidelity to a written work is not a particularly relevant aspect.

Sanitized histories and negativity bias

The final theme relating to the perceived (in)authenticity of historical representations seen in film and TV is the data that suggests *in*authentic media sanitize, whitewash or 'Hollywoodize' history. Conversely, authentic media are seen to portray the opposite: the negative, upsetting, or even 'dirty' aspects of the past that highlight the difficulties faced by historical agents. In this way, these conceptions form two halves of the same coin: something that is evident within the data outlined in the following. There were eighty-four references to the idea of whitewashing, or the negative opposite, from fifty-seven unique respondents. Some respondents talked in general terms about these aspects of (in)authenticity within historical representations, such as the following respondent:

> I feel that most historical media whitewashes or changes history in order to make it appeal to more people. (Scottish female, 18–29, Q14)

The implicit assumption here is that people are more likely to engage with and enjoy a particular text if the content does not make them uncomfortable or represent any aspect of history that could be challenging to the viewer. Although the previous quote is a broad statement relating to historical media in general, other respondents were more specific about the particular aspects of historical representations that contribute to this perception of an inauthentic, sanitized history. With reference to *The Last Kingdom*,[28] a fictional TV series set in Saxon England in the ninth century, two respondents noted:

[P]eople [are] too healthy and clean in *The Last Kingdom*, the Cornish princess was way too glamourous, riding around in finery and managed to keep her hair and makeup perfect even on the battlefield. (Male, 40–49, Q15)

Films and TV rarely depict just how horrific fighting would have been - *The Last Kingdom* gets an honourable mention as the final battle does show some pretty gruesome fight scenes, but on the whole fights are depicted as being relatively bloodless and painless. (British male, 18–29, Q15)

These respondents make reference to the same text but come to different conclusions about the authenticity of different aspects of the representation. On the one hand, the first respondent considers the particular representation of the Cornish princess *inauthentic*, due to the fact that characters appear 'too healthy and clean', or even too aesthetically presentable given the context (in this case, a battlefield). On the other hand, the second respondent while stating that historical drama rarely shows how 'horrific' fighting would have been (as an indication of their inauthenticity) that *The Last Kingdom* does so, and in this way is more authentic than other media texts. This respondent is not asserting he perceives *The Last Kingdom* to be authentic overall, only that he perceives its depiction of 'gruesome fight scenes' to be an authentic aspect. As well as highlighting how the very nature of authenticity is subjective and nuanced, these pieces of data demonstrate that respondents, generally speaking, viewed inauthentic media as sanitizing or whitewashing history, and authentic media as representing the horror, gore or dirtiness of the past. This was something that was echoed by responses referring to different media titles, such as *Vikings*.[29] This TV series is inspired by the saga of the Viking Ragnar Lothbrok, and begins with the invasion of Lindisfarne at the end of the eighth century CE by Norsemen. In regard to this media, respondents stated:

Vikings – not sure about the historical content but they all look historically grubby and smelly! (British female, 30–39, Q12)

The representation of battle in [. . .] [*Vikings*] also brings new realistic realms of horror and gore. (British female, 18–29, Q14)

The first data reflects the respondent's expectation of what the past was like: she imagines the people of the past would have looked dirty and dishevelled, so when the representation in *Vikings* conforms to this conjecture, she considers this authentic as it confirms her existing belief. In addition to emphasizing how the depiction of negative aspects of history produces the perception of authenticity in these representations, this reiterates the authors' view of the nature of authenticity, in that it can be achieved without a viewer having historical context or backing upon which to base assumptions about the (in)authenticity of media texts.

The second piece of data is in some ways similar to that of the previous respondent in relation to *The Last Kingdom* yet offers a different perspective. Where the former respondent stated that media texts do not tend to show the gruesomeness of battle (and thus perceives them as inauthentic), the latter, in relation to *Vikings*, explicitly equates

horror and gore with the representation's perceived realism. Although 'realistic' cannot be equated with 'authentic', it appears that this particular respondent is using it in this way given that Q14 asked what historical media was found to be authentic, and why.

In conjunction with the data from the other respondents in relation to this theme, this data as a whole provides empirical evidence for this trend: representations are perceived as authentic if they portray the negative aspects of the past, and they are perceived as inauthentic if they appear to whitewash, or sanitize these histories. While the examples given here relate to visual elements of the historical representations, respondents also cited the types of narratives portrayed as contributing to their perceived (in)authenticity: tragic narratives were considered to be more authentic than the triumphant, 'Hollywoodized' narratives. Blockbuster historical film tends to gravitate towards the latter type of narrative, which implies this could influence the respondent's judging historical film to be less authentic than TV.

This 'negativity bias' is a key finding in relation to the histories represented in popular media and is something that has been seen to occur elsewhere. Negativity bias is the phenomenon 'whereby humans tend to put more emphasis on negative than positive information in their feelings and judgments'.[30] The concept of negativity bias is most often applied in empirical studies relating to perceptions of political broadcasts and media such as the news, in which those eliciting negative emotions (e.g. sadness, disgust, shame) are perceived to be more authentic, or truthful, than those eliciting positive emotions (such as happiness).[31] In light of the findings reported in this chapter, it appears that historical representations in popular media are prone to the same negativity bias in terms of audience judgements of authenticity: not so much '"sad, but true" – as the every-day aphorism implies – but possibly "sad, thus true"'.[32] It is not just perceptions of authenticity that are affected by negative emotions, as studies have found that 'negative affect predicted learning'[33] and that 'negative mood actually induced greater attitude change'.[34] Although the elements of learning investigated by these researchers have not been discussed in this chapter, it is significant to note that there is a thematic correlation between the perceived authenticity of a media representation, its inclusion of negative themes and the learning outcomes occurring through engagement with said media representation. This is an avenue for further exploration, also in relation to a perceived lack of authenticity in digital games, in future research using this dataset.

Is historical authenticity in visual media important to audiences?

Having outlined some of the ways that historical authenticity is perceived by audiences, it is worth making a final point on the significance placed on authenticity. When the respondents were asked to give an example of media texts, or aspects of media texts, they found to be authentic, eighty-five respondents stated either that they were unable to do so (Q14) or that every media text was entirely, or at least in some way inauthentic (Q15). For example,

> Films and TV series are made to be entertaining [. . .] The verb 'making' already implies that it's constructed . . . . I can't think of a historical film or TV show that is highly authentic. (Dutch male, 18–29, Q14)

> Nothing is authentic! And almost everything contains bits and pieces of authenticity. (Finnish male, 30–39, Q15)

Despite the fact that these two representative respondents made blanket declarations about the nature of the authenticity of historical media, they had both previously reported that they nonetheless engaged with them. This was something that was seen elsewhere in the data, where an additional thirty respondents stated explicitly that they didn't feel historical authenticity in media to be that important, for these respondents it seemed more important that the texts be enjoyable or inspiring:

> I don't believe inauthenticity is a barrier to being enjoyable. (British male, 18–29, Q14)

> I know they're not very historically accurate, but I love the broad strokes of history they paint, and they inspire me to go look to more historically accurate sources for more information. (American female, 30–39, Q12)

These comments from respondents suggest two things. Firstly, they imply that people do not consider authenticity an important aspect of their engagement. These respondents demonstrate that they critically approach these media based on their function as entertainment and question their reliability as a historical source: a historical skill in its own right.[35]

This brings us to the second point. The final respondent suggests that she engages in information seeking behaviour based on the histories she has seen in historical media. Therefore, despite perceiving these media as often inauthentic representations of the past, she enjoys them regardless and turns to perceivably more reliable or credible sources for comparison, thus engaging in learning activities based on this perceived inauthenticity and undertaking a form of historical investigation. This means that perhaps the value of these media texts is not in how authentically they represent the past, but more in how they can engender critical engagement by audiences, providing a foundation for future historical enquiry.

Conclusion

This chapter has given a broad overview of general trends of audience perceived authenticity in historical film and TV, based on the findings of a self-reported survey. The respondents compared three media forms (TV, film and games) on the basis of perceived authenticity and indicated that TV was considered the most, and historical games were the least authentic media form. The representations of material culture, particularly costumes, props and sets, were demonstrated to contribute to perceptions of authenticity in film and TV. TV and film histories were also perceived to be authentic if they were faithful adaptations or remediations of (even entirely fictional) written works, where TV and the written word were seen as the most authoritative, in that they conveyed the most authentic – or 'truest' – factual information. Historical

representations in TV and film appeared to be under the influence of negativity bias, where respondents considered historical media as more authentic if they depicted the negative aspects of the past; conversely representations that were thought to whitewash or sanitize history were seen as inauthentic. Despite these respondents identifying what they felt was (in)authentic and why, these perceptions of (in)authenticity did not seem to obstruct their engagement with or enjoyment of historical media, and they considered historical authenticity to be largely inconsequential.

As a final remark, the findings here have been outlined, where possible, with specific reference to representations of the medieval in media. However, the data as a whole was drawn from references to a much wider range of historical periods. This suggests that it does not appear to matter what specific period of history is represented within a media form, as the audience and player perceptions of these media seem to function in the same way regardless.

Appendix: Survey questions

1. Are you aged 18 or over? [Yes/No]
2. Do you play Historical Video games? [Yes/No]
3. What genres of historical games do you play? [Select All that apply: Strategy: Real-time; turn based etc.; Action: First Person Shooters, Third-Person games, Action, Action-adventure, etc.; Other: Point and click, Platformer, etc.]
4. When you play historical games, are you **more likely** to play alone or with other people? [Select One: With people face-to-face (co-located); With people online; Alone and with people (face-to-face or online) equally; Don't Know]
5. After you have played historical games, have you ever talked to anyone about the game itself and/or the historical content, either face-to-face or online (i.e. on social media, forums etc.)? [Select One: Yes: I've talked about the game; Yes: I've talked about the historical content; Yes: I've talked about both; No: I haven't talked about either; Don't Know]
6. How much do you agree with the following statements? [Select one: Agree; Somewhat Agree; Somewhat Disagree; Disagree; I do not want to answer]
    6.1. One of the main reasons I play historical games is to learn about history.
    6.2. I have learnt something about history through playing historical games.
    6.3. I have decided to play a historical game because I read a book or story with similar historical content.
    6.4. When I play historical games, I am more likely to engage with other media (e.g. TV, film) with similar historical content.
    6.5. When I play historical games, I will often take part in online activities that relate to the historical content (e.g. post on forums or social media).
7. What specific historical games do you/have you played the most? Why? [Free text]
8. Do you watch historical films or TV shows? (**Fictional**, i.e. **NOT DOCUMENTARIES**) [Yes/No]

9. When you watch historical TV or films (NOT DOCUMENTARIES), are you **more likely** to watch alone or with other people? [Select One: Alone; With people; Alone and with people equally; Don't Know]

10. **After** you have watched an historical film or TV show (NOT DOCUMENTARIES), have you ever talked to anyone about the show/film and/ or the historical content, either face to face or online? [Select One: Yes: I've talked about the show/film; Yes: I've talked about the historical content; Yes: I've talked about the show/film AND the historical content; No, I haven't talked about either; Don't Know]

11. How much do you agree with the following statements? [Select one: Agree; Somewhat Agree; Somewhat Disagree; Disagree; I do not want to answer]
    11.1. One of the main reasons I watch historical film/TV is to learn about history
    11.2. I have learnt something about history through watching historical TV/film
    11.3. I have decided to watch a historical film/TV show because I read a book or story with similar historical content
    11.4. When I watch historical film/TV, I am more likely to read books or play video games with similar historical content.
    11.5. When I watch historical TV or films, I will often take part in online activities that relate to the historical content (e.g. post on forums or social media).

12. What specific historical TV shows or films (NOT DOCUMENTARIES) do you/ have you watched the most? Why? [Free text]

13. How authentic/realistic are the historical representations in each of the media forms, **in your opinion?** [Select one: Authentic; Somewhat Authentic; Somewhat Inauthentic; Inauthentic; I do not partake in this medium]
    13.1. Video games
    13.2. Feature-length film (not documentaries)
    13.3. TV series (not documentaries)

14. Can you think of a specific historical film (e.g. *Apocalypse Now*; *Gladiator* etc.), TV show (e.g. *The Last Kingdom*, *Vikings*, *Downton Abbey* etc.) or video game (e.g. *Assassin's Creed*, *Total War*, *Wolfenstein* etc.) that is **highly authentic**? Why? [Free Text]

15. Can you think of a specific historical film (e.g. *Apocalypse Now*; *Gladiator* etc.), TV show (e.g. *The Last Kingdom*, *Vikings*, *Downton Abbey* etc.) or video game (e.g. *Assassin's Creed*, *Total War*, *Wolfenstein* etc.) that is **highly inauthentic**? Why? [Free Text]

16. Would you be interested in finding out the results of this survey and how the research develops? If so, please enter your email address. If not, please select 'Next'. [Email addresses will be used **strictly for this research** and not passed on to 3rd parties.] [Free Text]

17. What is your age? [Select One: 18-29; 30-39; 40-49; 50+; Prefer not to say]
    17.1. What is your gender? [Select One: Male; Female; Other; Prefer not to say]
    17.2. What is your nationality? [Drop-down list]

18. What is your occupation? [Select One: Student; Academic; Professional/Other Occupation; Other (Please specify)]
    18.1.   What is your academic field/discipline/occupation/occupational area?
19. In an average month, how often do you play digital games of any kind? [Select One: I don't play games; Daily; Several times a week; Weekly; Several times a month; Once a month; Less than once a month; Prefer not to say; Don't Know]
    19.1.   How long does an average gaming session last? [Select One: N/A; ½ hour; 1 hour; 2 hours; 3 hours; 4 hours; 5 hours; Over 5 hours; Prefer not to say; Don't Know]
20. In an average month, how often do you watch films or TV **of any kind**? [Select One: I don't watch TV or films; Daily; Several times a week; Weekly; Several times a month; Once a month; Less than once a month; Prefer not to say; Don't Know]
    20.1.   How long does an average viewing session last? [Select One: N/A; ½ hour; 1 hour; 2 hours; 3 hours; 4 hours; 5 hours; Over 5 hours; Prefer not to say; Don't Know]
21. In an average month, how often are you online for **any reason**? [Select One: Daily; Several times a week; Weekly; Several times a month; Once a month; Less than once a month; Prefer not to say; Don't Know]
22. On average, how long are you online for? [Select One: N/A; ½ hour; 1 hour; 2 hours; 3 hours; 4 hours; 5 hours; Over 5 hours; Prefer not to say; Don't Know]

Notes

1 For example: J. Stoddard, 'Film as a Thoughtful Medium for Teaching History', *Learning, Media and Technology* 37, no. 3 (2012): 271–88; Kurt D. Squire, 'Replaying History', PhD thesis (Bloomington: Indiana University, 2004).
2 Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).
3 Deepak Chhabra, Robert Healy, and Erin Sills, 'Staged Authenticity and Heritage Tourism', *Annals of Tourism Research* 30, no. 3 (2003): 704.
4 Jonathan Stubbs, *Historical Film: A Critical Introduction* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 46.
5 Gordon Waitt, 'Consuming Heritage: Perceived Historical Authenticity', *Annals of Tourism Research* 27, no. 4 (2000): 2.
6 K. Andriotis, 'Genres of Heritage Authenticity: Denotations from a Pilgrimage Landscape', *Annals of Tourism Research* 38, no. 4 (2011): 2.
7 Waitt, 'Consuming Heritage', 846.
8 Ibid., 847.
9 Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, 'Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101.
10 Anne Adams, Peter Lunt, and Paul Cairns, 'A Qualititative Approach to HCI Research', in *Research Methods for Human Computer Interaction*, eds Paul Cairns and Anna Cox (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 138–57.
11 Shing-On Leung, 'A Comparison of Psychometric Properties and Normality in 4-, 5-, 6-, and 11-Point Likert Scales', *Journal of Social Service Research* 37, no. 4 (2011): 419.

12 Jon A. Krosnick and Stanley Presser, 'Question and Questionnaire Design', in *Handbook of Survey Research*, eds Peter H. Rossi, James D. Wright and Andy B. Anderson, 2nd edn (Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2010), 269.

13 Sian Beavers and Elizabeth FitzGerald, 'Perceptions, Perspectives and Practices: A Study of the Players of Historical Games', Paper presented at *DiGRA/FDG '16 Conference* (Dundee, 1–6 August 2016); Sian Beavers, 'Medievalism at Play: Audience and Player Receptions of the Medieval in Popular, Digital Media', Paper presented at *The Middle Ages in the Modern World Conference* (Manchester, 28 June–1 July 2017).

14 Michael Toolan, *Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2012), 49.

15 Beavers and FitzGerald, 'Perceptions, Perspectives and Practices'.

16 Ibid.

17 Some respondents talked about multiple media texts in terms of material culture within the same response, the reason why 'references' has been used here.

18 *Wolf Hall* (United Kingdom: BBC Worldwide, 2015).

19 Natalie Zemon Davis, '"Any Resemblance to Persons Living or Dead": Film and the Challenge of Authenticity', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 8, no. 3 (1988): 271.

20 Stephen Lubar and David Kingery, *History from Things: Essays on Material Culture*, ed. Stephen Lubar and David Kingery (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 1995): x.

21 Waitt, 'Consuming Heritage'; Chhabra, Healy, and Sills, 'Staged Authenticity and Heritage Tourism'.

22 J. B. Pine and J. H. Gilmore, *Authenticity: What Consumers Really Want?* (Harvard: Harvard Business School Press, 2007), 71.

23 Hilary Mantel, *Wolf Hall* (London: Harper Collins, 2009).

24 Philippa Gregory, *The White Queen* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2009).

25 Robert Graves, *I, Claudius* (London: Penguin, 2006).

26 Robert Rosenstone, *History on Film: Film on History* (Harlow: Pearson, 2006), 5.

27 Robert Rosenstone, 'The Historical Film as Real History', *Film-Historia* 5, no. 1 (1995): 7.

28 *The Last Kingdom* (UK: BBC, 2015–present).

29 *Vikings* (Ireland: MGM Television, History Channel, 2013–present).

30 Chang Sup Park, 'Applying "Negativity Bias" to Twitter: Negative News on Twitter, Emotions, and Political Learning', *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 12, no. 4 (2015): 342–59.

31 Ibid., 344.

32 Benjamin E. Hilbig, 'Sad, Thus True: Negativity Bias in Judgments of Truth', *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 45, no. 4 (2009): 983.

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34 Joseph P. Forgas, 'When Sad Is Better than Happy: Negative Affect Can Improve the Quality and Effectiveness of Persuasive Messages and Social Influence Strategies', *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 43, no. 4 (2007): 513.

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