

PREFERENCE OF REALITY SHOWS TO NEWS STORIES ON TELEVISION AMONG YOUTHS IN PORT HARCOURT, RIVERS STATE

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the preference of reality shows to news stories among youths in Port Harcourt. The work was hinged on the Uses and Gratifications theory and Individual differences theory. Three objectives and three research questions were adopted. Survey design was used and sample size of 400 respondents drawn from the population size using the Taro Yamane formula. The questionnaire was used to elicit data from a population size of 488,642 being the number of youths in Port Harcourt. The instrument was administered on 40 respondents from 10 communities in Port Harcourt. Simple percentages were used to analyse data. Findings show that the extent to which many youths prefer reality shows to news stories is great and the inability to spend more time watching the news on television placed the preference of reality shows to news on television higher. The study recommends that television outfits should include more entertainment stories in their news as a way of making the youths tune in especially if they missed any episode of their favourite reality show.

Key words: Reality Shows, News stories, Television, Youths, Members of Audience, Entertainment.

INTRODUCTION

Television as the medium of sight and sound to produce aesthetic and attractive pictures to the waiting public has been a great companion to millions of people over the years. The beauty of the visuals is as captivating and interesting as the television broadcasters themselves. Over the years, there has been an emergence of reality shows on television which garner a highly rated active audience. Television like other media performs functions like information, education, persuasion, surveillance, transmission of heritage. However, the entertainment function appears to have a stronger effect on the young people rather than information which is required to make some groundbreaking effect locally or even globally.

Reality shows come in seasons with realism nearly eroded. Just as some television channels like CNN, Aljazeera, Channels television are known for more of news stories, some channels are completely sold out to running television reality shows season after season each year with promises of meeting the entertainment needs of members of their audience. This is in contrast to well planned, edited and professionally delivered news programmes. Characters in reality shows are far from professionalism yet accepted and adored by their teeming audience who are mostly youths.

Television reality shows are about the creativity of the production team since they ensure beautiful pictures are churned out to the waiting members of the audience who can determine the professionalism displayed with the audio and visual qualities of a television reality show. As unprofessional as the actors on television reality shows are, the number of sponsors and advertisements on such shows never give the impression of the loss of realism as they keep increasing until a particular season runs out or a brand goes into sole sponsorship for that season.

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Language used by the actors, their physical appearances, their outfits and what the winners stand to make at the end of a season endear the public to reality shows whereas television news stories are professionally scripted, devoid of foul languages, produced by a qualified team of editors, sub-desk editors, proofreaders, camera men and presented by trained and properly dressed news anchors who are on set whether in the field or studio not to attract attention to themselves but to ensure that the public gets the message in a political, economic, cultural, religious or educational story.

Statement of the Problem

The trend of being an addictive and active member of audience stems from the need to feel a strong sense of connection with the characters on a reality show. This has become a norm among the youths. This level of interest and connection looks farfetched with news stories on conventional television. Choice of a particular genre whether news or reality show on television ignites interest among members of the audience. The preference, participation and viewership of news and news related programmes on television seem to be in sharp contrast to the same level of attention given to reality shows on television. The interest in news stories is not totally eroded but the interest in television as the medium for exposure to news seems forgotten. Be that as it may, the attention of the youths tilt towards an ongoing reality show until it runs out. The same cannot be said of news stories on television, especially with the advent of the new media.. It is on this backdrop that this study is embarked on.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to investigate the preference of reality shows to news stories among youths in Port Harcourt.

The objectives are to:

1. analyse the extent of the preference of reality shows to news stories on television among youths in Port Harcourt;
2. examine why youths in Port Harcourt prefer reality shows to news stories on television;
3. analyse the factors that influence the preference of reality shows to news stories on television among youths in Port Harcourt.

Research Questions

These questions guided the study:

1. What is the extent of the preference of reality shows to news stories on television among youths in Port Harcourt?
2. Why do youths in Port Harcourt prefer reality shows to news stories on television?
3. What factors influence the preference of reality shows to news stories on television among youths in Port Harcourt?

Review of Related Literature

Reality Shows

From Nigeria to Ghana, India to America, Tanzania to Mexico, entertainment programmes no doubt stimulate emotional attachment to members of the audience as values and personal inclinations are greatly influenced by them, more than the straight-jacket, hard news. Moreso, there is strong retainment of information derived from exposure to reality shows since reality shows affect attitudes and behaviours. (Ryerson, 2008).

Reality shows are statutorily about real people from real life. Most of these reality shows are shot on live television as the members of audience grapple to enjoy the live scenes as they come. Most television stations apart from the all-entertainment television stations (television stations that broadcast only entertainment programmes) have a couple of reality shows in the scheduling of their programmes. (Dars, Sakar & Hussain, 2021). Members of audience especially the youths, not

only show interest in the various actors on these reality shows, they select their favourite participants and campaign for their preference from other members of audience exposed to the same reality shows while wooing non-participants to join the trend. Reality shows also referred to as reality tv shows or unscripted drama are a genre in television programming created for entertainment often hosting unknown people. It is one of the most significant new programme developments of the new century though the genre is in fact nearly as old as the medium itself. (Allen, 2019).

New Media

The emergence of the new media became a game changer in the world of media with the availability of various technologies. This corroborates Okunna (2020) that there is a lot of advancement and improvement as a result of the new media because everything is affected: from the method of gathering news, to the production and delivery of news and other programmes. Other programmes include reality shows. Otherwise called online broadcasting, one huge advantage is that with the new media feedback is eminent which gives it the name interactive communication and having the attributes of face-to-face communication. On the new media, the audience can immediately react to messages as all encumbrances have been made easy by the global interconnectivity of graphics, audio, visuals and print communication. (Okunna, 2020). With several technological devices at the disposal of members of the audience, choice of what to watch and react to is faster whether news or reality shows. The internet may not have completely overshadowed the television, the preference for the new media or reality shows is predominantly coming from the younger generation who will transport both positive and negative attitudes and habit from reality shows to real life situations in the near future. (Hasan, 2013). According to Hasan (2013), "the global findings overwhelmingly suggest personal internet time rivals TV time." (p. 773).

Television News Functions

Called the medium of beauty, television relegated the print and the acoustic medium radio by combining their characteristics to become one medium. Television has the following characteristics: ubiquity, immediacy, flexibility, voracity, voluntaries, interference and potential for social control (Okunna, 2020). Television is a powerful and sophisticated medium rendering service in areas like news and events coverages, educational, developmental, political, commercial, cultural, economic information as well as entertainment – music, drama, fiction and comic programmes (Hasan 2013). This shows that no function is superior to the other. Information or the news function is as important as the entertainment function. Television news also has its aesthetical prowess just like reality shows, the difference is in their functions – information and entertainment.

The tilt towards reality shows and away from the news function presents an imbalance in the selective exposure of programmes based on the need to be gratified per time. News on television enjoys better viewership when a story has gained public interest and the agenda has been set based on analysis and interpretation of the issue in the news. The information gets more attention on the internet if the television outfit transmits online as well. News stories on television do not seem to garner the same viewership at the broadcast time compared to members of audience who could tune to the same television channels for their favourite reality show. Interest has shifted to news on the internet rather than on television.

In Nigeria, Big Brother Naija (BBN) is one reality show that critics say is morally degrading and lacks every sense of uprightness as sexuality is celebrated on the show. However, there are other reality shows like Nigerian Idol and Voice Nigeria where talents are hunted. Members of audience who are fans of these reality shows never forget the broadcast time for these programmes however, the same cannot be said about news broadcast time on television which has indirectly compelled television outfits to merge their broadcast with the new media in order to have wider viewership.

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Television as a mass medium performs several functions as already mentioned. El-Nawawy & Powers (2008) looked at the functions of the mass media in conflict resolution in four stages which are: awareness, learning, mobilization, confidence-building. Entertainment or reality shows were not mentioned in managing conflict though it is understandable that entertainment function of television is for relaxation and to ease boredom. The same time and energy used employed in relaxing can be used to get information about the immediate environment, national and global update.

Theoretical Framework

This discourse is standing on the uses and gratification theory and individual differences theory of the mass media.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

Proponents of this theory believe that members of audience are active because they make active decisions about media contents they are exposed to. Members of audience as postulated by this theory rely on the mass media for benefits which they get by engaging in selective exposure. The theory which is basically about interest and choice was propounded by Blumler & Katz in 1974 suggests that people expose themselves to media messages because of what they derive as explained in the following needs:

1. Diversion - members of the audience rely on the mass media to help them shift attention from pressing needs which they achieve through stimulation – easing of boredom and arousing their intellect; emotional release – members of audience identify with characters in the media and relate their ordeals with those of the media personalities; relaxation – members of audience allow themselves to be freely entertained, informed and educated.
 2. Withdrawal - media contents are relied upon by the members of the audience to help them avoid people, events or engaging in certain action.
 3. Personal relationships or social utility - as social agents, people interact with other members of society based on mass media contents such as drama, documentary, soap opera which serve as the topic for discourse among members of the audience. This interaction strengthens ties.
 4. Surveillance or cognition - members of audience allow themselves to be exposed to media content for the purpose of satisfying the need to acquire knowledge and gather information on health matters, sports, government functions, according to (Blumler & Katz 1975) “by keeping up to date with news about local and international events...”
 5. Personal identity - this can be likened to value reinforcement where members of the audience allow themselves to be exposed to media contents that portray their belief system. There is the need to identify their sense of self by making judgements about what and who they want to watch.
- The study gave an insight on the reason youths in Port Harcourt prefer reality shows over television news stories. They choose the media content to view, read or listen to for expected gains while ignoring the media content that might not meet their need.

Individual differences Approach

This approach enunciated by American communication researchers, Defleur & Ball-Rokeach in 1976, states that the same information from the same mass media audience have been discovered to have different effects on the different individuals of the audience. The cause of this, is what Bittner [1989] interprets as differences in our personalities or psychological traits. Individuals perceive, enjoy, negate and understand information or content differently due to certain variables. Individuals respond differently to mass media content based on their psychological needs which they do to satisfy those needs. This theory comes to play in the preference of reality shows over television news stories among youths in Port Harcourt. One's background; culture, religion, level of education, awareness, amount of exposure, and so on plays an in-depth role in the cognitive abilities of individuals.

The Individual differences theory suggests that individuals respond in diverse ways to the content disseminated by the mass media according to their psychological needs and that people utilize the mass media to gratify those needs.

It is vital based on its psychological approach to comprehend the preference of reality shows over television news stories. This approach to reactions gives importance to the individual audiences and asserts that a person's sentiments, wants, attitudes and values play a crucial role in how they react and consume the media. The approach has also implied that due to these differences, individuals are selective about their use of the mass media as well as its contents.

Research Methodology

The study adopted the survey method using questionnaire and interview to elicit responses. Quantitative research was used to measure the outcome of the preference of reality shows to news stories on television among youths in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The study population comprised youths in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. According to the National Population Commission (2006), Port Harcourt has a population of 1,148,665. The choice of youths in Port Harcourt was as a result of their unhindered access to television. The population of the study therefore is 488,642 youths. The sampling technique utilized in this study is the purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling was chosen for this work because it guarantees that only the subjects or individuals who meet the objective of the study are picked. Taro Yamane (1967) formula was used for the sample size. The formula is specified as: $n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$

Where n = sample size (unknown), N = population size (488,642), 1 = fixed numerical factor, e = margin of error usually 5% or (0.05) to derive the optional sample size. $N = 1,148,665$, $e = (0.05)^2$, $n = 399.5 = 400$ respondents (approximately). The primary source of data for the study was copies of the questionnaire, while the secondary sources were interviews. The instrument used in this study for data collection are copies of the questionnaire.

The qualitative method of data analysis which is largely descriptive was used to analyse responses from the research questions. Simple percentage was also used to analyse responses from the questionnaire. Data was transcribed from the information drawn from the questions issued to respondents. An interview schedule containing the questions was used to collect the data. Port Harcourt was divided into 10 zones and each zone had 40 copies of the questionnaire.

Presentation and analysis of data

400 copies of the instrument were administered however, 382 copies were retrieved.

Table 1: Distribution and retrieval of questionnaire

S/N	Name of Community	Questionnaire Distributed	Distribution Rate %	Questionnaire Retrieval
1	Oroworukwo	40	10.00%	38
2	Rumuwoji	40	10.00%	39
3	Azuabie	40	10.00%	36
4	Oromerezimbu	40	10.00%	38
5	Orochiri	40	10.00%	37
6	Abuloma	40	10.00%	40
7	Borikiri	40	10.00%	37
8	Ogbunabali	40	10.00%	40
9	Elekahia	40	10.00%	39
10	Nzimiro	40	10.00%	38
	Total	400	100.00%	382

A four-point likert scale comprising Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) was used to structure items on the instrument. For the data, mean and criterion mean were used where any mean below 2.5 was rejected while those from 2.5 upwards were accepted. Criterion mean = $4+3+2+1 = 10/4 = 2.5$.

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Research Question 1: What is the extent of the preference of reality shows to television news stories among youths in Port Harcourt?

Table 2: Mean ($\bar{x}$) analysis of the extent of the preference of reality shows to television news stories among youths in Port Harcourt.

S/N	ITEMS	SA 4	A 3	D 2	SD 1	TOT AL	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	Remark	%
1	I prefer watching news to reality shows.	92 368	74 222	132 264	82 82	936	2.4	Disagree	2.4
2	I can spend hours watching reality shows but I can't spend more than 30 minutes watching the news on television.	75 300	109 327	119 238	79 79	1077	2.8	Agree	2.8

Research Question 2: Why do youths in Port Harcourt prefer reality shows to television news stories?

Table 3: Mean ($\bar{x}$) analysis of why youths in Port Harcourt prefer reality shows to television news stories.

S/N	ITEMS	SA 4	A 3	D 2	SD 1	TOTAL	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	Remark
3	Reality shows are highly entertaining	99 396	108 324	73 146	102 102	968	2.5	Agree
4	I don't watch reality shows	89 356	102 306	94 188	97 97	947	2.4	Disagree
5	I watch television just for news	103 412	119 357	78 156	82 82	1007	2.6	Agree

Research Question 3: What factors influence preference of reality shows to television news stories among youths in Port Harcourt?

Table 4: Mean ($\bar{x}$) analysis of factors that influence preferences of reality shows to television news stories among youths in Port Harcourt.

S/N	ITEM	SA 4	A 3	D 2	SD 1	TOTAL	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	Remark
6	I don't have the time to sit and watch news on television.	98 392	106 318	73 146	105 105	961	2.5	Agree
7	I find news boring.	101 404	81 243	95 190	105 105	942	2.4	Disagree

Discussion of findings

Based on the three objectives that birthed three research questions and the opinions of respondents on the items in the table, analyses were carried out to measure the preference of reality shows to television news stories among youths in Port Harcourt.

Research Question 1: What is the extent of the preference of reality shows to television news stories among youths in Port Harcourt?

In answering the question, related questions contained in Table 2 were asked. Responses from item 2 with the mean of 2.8 which is above the mean criterion agree that they can spend hours watching reality shows but cannot spend more than 30 minutes watching the news on television while, item 1 with the mean as 2.4 shows that respondents do not agree that they prefer watching

news to reality shows meaning that the extent of the preference of reality shows to news among youths in Port Harcourt is great. This corroborates Hasan (2013) that "live coverage of events by tv and radio have more dramatic effect and result in greater awareness. Since tv is an audio-visual medium, its content can greatly impact public opinion". (p. 136).

Research Question 2: Why do youths prefer reality shows to television news stories in Port Harcourt?

The result generated from this research question indicates that respondents agree that reality shows are highly entertaining with mean of 2.5 as seen on item 3. This is in agreement with Okeke & Nwosu (2020) that entertainment programmes help members of the audience relax, take away their boredom and enjoy their leisure moments. Item 5 which generated mean of 2.6 showing that the respondents agree that they watch television just for news while, item 4 shows disagreement of not watching reality shows with mean of 2.4.

Research Question 3: What factors influence the preference of reality shows to television news stories among youths in Port Harcourt?

With mean of 2.5, respondents agree that they do not have time to sit and watch news on television as seen on item 6 while, the respondents disagree with finding the news boring which is shown on item 7 with mean of 2.4.

CONCLUSION

The result of the findings of the study indicate that the preference of reality shows to television news stories among youths in Port Harcourt is high and basically for entertainment. However, the function of the mass media to disseminate information should not be repudiated as the various functions: entertainment, education, information, surveillance play complimentary roles, signifying that no function is superior to the other just that information or news function appears more serious than others. The study also found that individual values play a high role in the preference of reality shows over television news stories. Due to the advent and technological advancement of the new media in the 21st century, television outfits can find ways to merge their terrestrial broadcasting with the new media for a wider reach to members of the audience who do not have the time to watch the news on television.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Some recommendations are hereby made, based on the findings of the study:

1. Since the extent to which youths in Port Harcourt metropolis prefer reality shows is great, television outfits should endeavour to follow the youths to their comfort zone which is now the new media by way of using the new media for news broadcast where it will be easier to get the attention of the youths to watch the news.
2. Preference to reality shows notwithstanding, television outfits should include more entertainment stories in their news as a way of making the youths tune in especially if they missed any episode on their favourite reality show.
3. Combining information and entertainment is called infotainment which creates a lasting impressive on the minds of the target audience, the entertainment approach if used regularly can increase the audience base of a television outfit.

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