



Nigeria University Students' Perception of Reality Programmes on Television

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Abstract

The study analyzed reality television programmes and ascertained Nigerian students' perception of the programmes. Data were also generated with a 22-item self-developed questionnaire with a reliability of 0.81 established using Cronbach's coefficient alpha. The instrument was administered on 388 respondents drawn from six different Universities across the six states in the South-South geo-political zone of Nigeria using a simple random sampling technique. The results show that reality television programmes are produced with educational contents meant to teach the audience skills being performed or perfected by the contestants and the programmes helps audience members to learn things about other people. The study concludes that reality television programmes have serious influences on audience members as they desire to be like the people they watch in the programmes. Again, to a great extent, many reality television audience members do believe that what they watch in the programmes are real life situations and not mere acting. Therefore, it is recommended, among other things that since reality television programmes enable audience members to learn things about others when they watch contestants in the programmes, producers must ensure that reality television programmes aired on Nigerian television stations are those capable of impacting positively on the lifestyles of Nigerians, especially University students.

Keywords: Reality TV; Reality programming; Programme schedule; Gratification; University students

Introduction

Reality-based shows have gradually taking over global television programming. People who have been following events on television for the past five years can easily agree

that television programming in the twenty-first century has thus far been dominated by reality-based programmes [1]. For the past several years, reality television has dominated mainstream television programming, providing relatively inexpensive entertainment [2]. No doubt, reality television has become a pastime which many television stations now rely on for winning large audience and advertisement patronage from advertisers. Television shows such as the Delta State Government-sponsored Delta Talent Quest, Star Quest, Gulder's Ultimate Search, MTN's Project Fame, Glo's Naija Sings, ABC's The Bachelor, GTBank's The Debator, NBC's The Apprentice, Maltina's Family Dance All, FOX's American Idol and even cable shows like MTV's The Real World have continued to dominate television stations' timeslots on a regular basis. In America, FOX's American Idol is the network's most-watched non-sports show ever and was the most watched show overall for the entire 2004-2005 television season [1]. The Big Brother Africa show aired by DSTV satellite channel is very popular among viewers in Africa.

The popularity of these shows is such that television stations and networks find themselves scrambling to place more reality programmes on air to keep up with audience demands. The driving force of reality programming lies in the fact that, it places the audience member on the opposite side of the entertainment arena, providing all viewers with the possibility of becoming potential entertainers as in the case of Big Brother Africa and Gulder Ultimate Search season 8 where audience members are given the opportunity to vote out contestants and vote in an evicted contestant who they will like to see back in the show. This way, the audience participates effectively in determining who should entertain them. The growing popularity of the reality genre invites questions regarding its utility and consequences for audiences.

In Nigeria, reality television programmes are gradually becoming a dominant genre in television programming and the reason may not be farfetched. Many programmes on television now revolve around reality television chiefly because they now provide audience members, advertisers, and producers with certain entertainment gratifications and benefits which the

scripted programmes like film and home videos may have difficulty fulfilling.

A Uses and Gratification study by Nabi, et al. [3] found that one of the primary factors for viewing reality television is that it provides the audience the opportunity to participate in the show vicariously through real contestants that they can relate to. This type of viewer participation exists almost exclusively within the reality television genre; even though some networks have identified this trend and have tried to create scripted programming that could achieve the same effect.

For advertisers, the appeal of reality television is that it is a genre that allows for product-placement to be incorporated into the show without distracting the viewers' attention or reducing the quality of the show. Gulder's *Ultimate Search*, for instance, has featured competitions where rewards, ranging from free drinks to mobile phones, have been given out to winners. Employing this type of product placement within scripted programming would be much more difficult for producers to successfully do, as it is often seen as "selling out" on the part of the television stations [4].

Reality television programmes have been criticized for being overly provocative and a disquieting representation of the society. The South African version of *Big Brother* proved to be highly controversial for its overt sexual content. However, Hyde-Clark notes that youth perceive reality programmes to be a reflection of their culture. "Youth may see reality TV as a reflection of the attitudes and behaviour exhibited in society. They may see the comments made by contestants as an accurate expression of how they are viewed by society, and adjust their perception of themselves accordingly".

This study, therefore, became necessary as it analyzed reality programmes on television as well as assessing the perception of the youth, especially Nigerian students, regarding reality programmes on television.

Statement of the Problem

Reality programming is gradually becoming the toast of television stations and advertisers globally. The relatively cheap production costs and high audience viewing figures ensure a steady stream of new and repeated formats of reality television on television screens in different homes today. The 'real' drama of the programmes is highlighted by the interactive capacity of the shows, with the audience supposedly directly influencing events on the television screen.

A reality television programme, for instance, is a programme supposedly devoid of 'acting out' unfolding events with everything happening being "unplanned", "real", but documented for viewers to see on-going or live happenings with every passing moment. There are no actors, just competitors (young men and women who probably live in the same neighbourhood) doing their best to win the star prize of the reality show. The setting varies, based on the theme of the reality show. Issues, therefore, abound as some people perceive reality television programmes as 'rewarding idleness'.

Some people may also be seeing reality programmes on television as another way of exploiting the minds of the young audiences of the programmes without morally impacting on their lives. The craze for instant fame is another issue, because many youths now suddenly discover their supposedly hidden talents which the reality television programmes provide them with a platform to stardom with little or no hard work.

The focus of this study therefore, was to assess the perception of University Students towards reality television programmes. In other words, what is the nature of reality television programmes and how do University students perceive such programmes?

Objectives of the Study

- Find out the perception of University students of reality television programmes.
- Determine the effects reality television programmes have on University Students and the society.
- Ascertain if the gender of University students affects their perception of reality programmes on television.
- Find out how reality television stars influence University Students.

Research Questions

- What is the perception of University students towards reality television programmes?
- What effects does reality television programmes have on University Students and the society?
- How does the gender of University students affect their perception of reality programmes on television?
- How do reality television stars influence University Students?

Theoretical Framework: The Social Construction of Reality Theory

The central concept of The Social Construction of Reality theory is that persons and groups interacting together in a social system, over time, form concepts or mental representations of each other's actions. It is these concepts that eventually become adapted into reciprocal roles played by the actors in relation to each other. The reciprocal interactions are said to be institutionalized when these roles are made available to other members of society to enter into and play out because in this process, meaning is implanted in society. Knowledge and people's conception (and belief) of what reality is becomes embedded in the various institutions of the society.

In reality television programmes, achievement of reality is often the main goal of production but the realities are socially constructed with the viewer's accepting what is served to them as authentic. They present pictures to their viewers which are meant to give them an understanding of what the world they live in is. These pictures most times, form what the

viewer's know about the world and their perception of the world is likely to be based on what reality television presents to them, especially in a time when television has become a substitute parent and guardian for many young people and a companion for adolescents in many cultures. Just like Lippmann's observation, realities in these reality television programmes could also be distorted or pseudo realities which the producers may have consciously placed to achieve their commercial objectives.

With reference to this study, this theory implies that when people relate with reality television programmes, it is usually based on the understanding that their respective perceptions of reality are related. This they act upon with the understanding their common knowledge of reality has become reinforced. When people watch reality television programmes, it is mostly with the understanding or perception that realities in life are the same with what the programmes present to them. In fact, without the viewer's understanding that what they are being presented with is the same as what they know to be real around them, reality television programmes will lose their followership and meaning.

Methodology

The study adopted the survey research design as it helped in gauging perceptions on reality television by students in Nigerian Universities. This design was specifically used to elicit the response of University Students on the perception of reality television programmes.

The population of the study comprises the regular students of six universities located in six Nigerian states in the South-South geo political zone. The Universities are Niger Delta University, (NDU), Bayelsa State; Delta State University (DELSU), Delta State; University of Calabar (UNICAL); Cross River State; and University of Uyo (UNIUYO), Akwa-Ibom State. Others are University of Benin (UNIBEN), Edo State and University of Port Harcourt (UNIPORT), Rivers State. Besides having a good number of Nigerian youths in these institutions, the study requires the views of an informed population who, to some extent, are knowledgeable in what they watch on television and are able to give authoritative and informed analysis about them, hence the choice of university students. The total population of the study is 219,064.

Following the sample size of 400 as obtained using the Taro Yamane's formula; a purposive sampling method was used to arrive at the final respondents selected from each of the six strata of the population.

This was done to ensure that the researcher gave the questionnaire to persons whose opinion will be relevant to the study and who have knowledge of reality television programmes.

The students' perception of reality television programmes (STUPORTP) questionnaire consisted of 22 items divided into two sections – A and B. Questions in section A were formulated in the dichotomous response format such as Yes or No, while questions in section B were formulated in the likert

rating scale type format such as Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD).

Questions in the questionnaire provided answers to research questions four to seven (4-7) as well as providing data for the testing of the two hypotheses formulated in the study.

The researcher, with the aid of research assistants administered the copies of the questionnaire to the respondents in the six (6) selected Universities in the South-South geo-political zone of the country.

The completed copies of the questionnaire were collected on the spot after administration. This ensured that the total number of copies of questionnaire administered were the same with the number retrieved.

The researcher was present at the point of administration to answer all oral questions from the respondents and gave guidance within the confines of research ethics where necessary, on how the questionnaire was to be answered.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This segment of data presentation and analysis focuses on responses obtained from 388 respondents in six different Universities across the South-South geo-political zone of Nigeria. The researcher developed the University Students Perception of Reality Television Questionnaire (USPRTQ).

The instrument was a 24-item questionnaire divided into three sections. Section A focused on demographic variables; section B had questions on thematic variables on Television and Reality Television Programmes, while section C centred on thematic variables on University Students perception of Reality Television Programmes. Details of data obtained from the survey are presented below (**Table 1**).

Table 1: Frequency of watching reality television Programmes.

Frequency	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very often	144	37
Often	220	57
Undecided	24	6
Total	388	100

Information was sought on how often the respondents watched reality television programmes. As indicated in **Table 1**, the majority of the respondents (220 or 57%) indicated that they watched reality television programmes often.

One hundred and forty-four (144) respondents representing 37% indicated that they watched reality television programmes very often, while the remaining 24 respondents constituting 6% were undecided about their frequency of watching reality television programmes. The survey result thus indicates that the level of reality television watching among

the respondents was very high and this is likely to affect their perception and understanding of the programmes.

Table 2: If reality television programmes helped the respondents to learn things about other people.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	355	92
No	24	6
Undecided	9	2
Total	388	100

Table 2 indicates that the majority of the respondents, representing 92%, agreed that reality television programmes helped them to learn things about other people. Twenty-four (24) respondents representing 6% said that reality television programmes did not make them to learn things about other people, while the remaining 9 (2%) respondents were undecided on whether reality television programmes helped them to learn things about other people or not. The analysis shows that an overwhelming majority of the respondents agreed that reality television programmes enabled them to learn things about other people and given the result it could be concluded, therefore, that reality television programmes enable people to learn things about others (**Table 3**).

Table 3: If reality television programmes allow people to see what happens in other places.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	346	89
No	42	11
Undecided	0	0
Total	388	100

Information was sought on whether reality television programmes allowed University students to see what happens in other places as if they were really there. **Table 3** indicates that the majority of the respondents (346 or 89%) indicated that reality television programmes allowed them to see what happens in other places as if they were really there, 42 (11%) indicated that reality television programmes did not allow them to see what happens in other places as if they were really there. This result thus indicates that, to a great extent, people do see the programmes as real and therefore believed that what they watched was real life.

Table 4: If people watched reality television programmes because they feature people of their gender.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	52	13
No	329	85
Undecided	7	2
Total	388	100

Table 4 indicates that the majority of the respondents, representing 85%, disagreed that they did not watch reality television programmes because they featured people of their gender. Fifty-two (52) respondents, representing 13%, said that they watched reality television programmes because they featured people of their gender while the remaining 7 (2%) respondents were undecided on whether featuring people of their gender influenced them to watch reality television programmes or not.

This analysis shows that the gender of the reality television contestants or personalities did not matter to the respondents. This implies that the respondents were most likely to watch a reality television because of its contents or arrangement and not because it featured people of their gender.

Table 5: If reality television programmes shown in Nigeria are appropriate for young people.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	199	51
No	142	36
Undecided	47	12
Total	388	100

It can be seen from **Table 5** above that the majority of the respondents 199 or 75% agreed that reality television programmes shown in Nigeria are appropriate. One hundred and forty-two (142) respondents, representing 24%, said that the reality television programmes shown in Nigeria are not appropriate for young people. The remaining 47 respondents representing 12% were undecided. This implies that respondents love the programmes they watch and believe the programmes are appropriate for them.

Table 6: If gender affects the way respondents perceive reality television programmes.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	293	75
No	92	24
Undecided	3	1
Total	388	100

Information was sought from the respondents on whether their gender affected the way they perceived reality television programmes. **Table 6** indicates that the majority of the respondents 75% said that their gender affected their perception of reality television programmes. Ninety-two (92) respondents, constituting 24%, said that their gender did not affect their perception of reality television programmes. The remaining 3 respondents (1%) were undecided on this issue.

It can be deduced from the data presented that the gender of the respondents affected their general perception of reality television programmes. The implication of this is that the respondents could be biased in terms of assessing programmes independently without bringing in their personal feeling to judge.

Table 7: If the personalities on the shows are like the respondents are their friends.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	284	73
No	103	26
Undecided	1	1
Total	388	100

Table 7 presents data on whether University students perceived the personalities on the reality television shows they watched as ordinary people like them or their friends indicates that 284 respondents, constituting 73%, said they thought the personalities on the reality television shows they watched were like them or their friends.

One hundred and three (103) respondents, constituting 26% however, disagreed, saying they did not think that the personalities on the reality television shows they watched were like them or their friends. The remaining one (1) respondent was undecided.

The implication of this is that when the respondents see the contestants or participants in the reality television shows as people who are like them or their friends, they likely may want to be like them (**Table 8**).

Table 8: If reality television programmes exploit the weaknesses of contestants for commercial and entertainment purposes.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	234	60
No	127	33
Undecided	27	7
Total	388	100

Information was sought from the respondents on whether reality television programmes exploits the weaknesses of contestants for commercial and entertainment purposes. Data analysed reveal that out of the 388 respondents, 234 constituting 60%, agreed that reality television programmes exploit the weaknesses of contestants for commercial and entertainment purposes.

On the contrary, 127 respondents representing 33%, said that reality television programmes exploit the weaknesses of contestants for commercial and entertainment purposes. The remaining 27 respondents, constituting 7%, were undecided on whether reality television programmes exploit the

weaknesses of contestants for commercial and entertainment purposes or not.

Table 9: If reality programmes make respondents to feel that success in life can only come through competitions.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	151	39
No	231	60
Undecided	6	1
Total	388	100

Table 9 which presents data on whether reality television programmes make the respondents feel that success in life can only come through competitions reveals that the majority of the respondents (231 constituting 60%) disagreed that reality television programmes made them feel that success in life could only come through competitions.

However, 151 respondents or 39 agreed that reality television programmes made them feel that success in life can only come through competitions. The remaining 6 respondents, constituting 1%, were undecided on whether reality television programmes made them feel that success in life could only come through competitions or not (**Table 10**).

Table 10: If watching reality television programmes makes the respondents desire to become stars.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	298	77
No	76	19
Undecided	14	4
Total	388	100

Information was sought on whether watching reality television programmes made the respondents want to become stars. **Table 10** indicates that 298 respondents, constituting 77% said that they wanted to become stars after watching reality television programmes.

Seventy-six (76) respondents, representing 19% disagreed that watching reality television programmes did not make them feel like becoming stars.

The remaining 14 (4%) however, were undecided on whether they did wish to become stars after watching reality television programmes or not.

The data above implying that the reality television programmes have serious influence on the respondents as the majority of them desired to be like the people they watched in the programmes. This also means that the programmes could spur the respondents into wanting to become stars like the ones they watch on reality television programmes.

Table 11: If the reality television programmes watched have educational contents.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	25	6
Disagree	66	17
Undecided	47	12
Agree	142	37
Strongly Agree	108	28
Total	388	100

Table 11 indicates that the majority of the respondents (142 or 37%) agreed that reality television programmes they have watched have educational contents.

One hundred and eight (108) respondents, representing 28%, strongly agreed that the reality television programmes they watched have educational contents in them.

However, 66 respondents representing 17% disagreed that the reality television programmes they have watched do not have educational contents in them. The remaining 47 respondents representing 12% were undecided.

Table 12: Reality television programmes do not promote cultural/traditional contents/values.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	23	6
Disagree	117	30
Undecided	27	7
Agree	177	46
Strongly Agree	44	11
Total	388	100

Table 12 indicates that the majority of the respondents (177 or 46%) agreed that reality television programmes do not promote cultural/traditional contents/values.

Forty-four (44) respondents, representing 11% strongly, agreed that reality television programmes do not promote cultural/traditional contents/values. One hundred and seventeen (117) respondents, representing 30%, strongly disagreed that the reality television programmes do not promote cultural/traditional contents/values.

However, 23 respondents representing 6% were undecided.

Table 13: If reality television programmes affect the way respondents viewed the society.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	23	6
Disagree	117	30
Undecided	27	7
Agree	177	46

Strongly Agree	44	11
Total	388	100

Table 13 shows that the majority of the respondents (177 or 46%) agreed that reality television programmes affect the way they viewed society. On the flipside, 23 respondents representing 6% disagreed that reality television programmes affect the way they viewed society. However, 27 respondents or 7% were undecided. **Table 13** presents data on respondents' level of agreement on whether reality television programmes featured personalities the respondents respect.

Table 14: Reality TV programmes teach people to believe in their abilities.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	3	1
Disagree	6	2
Undecided	13	3
Agree	149	38
Strongly Agree	217	56
Total	388	100

Table 14 shows that the majority of the respondents, 217 or 56% strongly agreed that reality television programmes teach people (viewers) to believe in their abilities. One hundred and forty-nine (149) agreed, 3 respondents strongly disagreed, 6 agreed, while the remaining 13 respondents were undecided.

Table 15: The personalities in the shows watched encourage young people to be hardworking in life.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	22	6
Disagree	17	4
Undecided	40	10
Agree	169	44
Strongly Agree	140	36
Total	388	100

As shown in **Table 15** one hundred and sixty-nine respondents representing 44% of the sampled respondents agreed that the personalities in the reality television programmes, they watched encouraged them to be hardworking in life. Twenty-two (22) respondents representing 6% strongly disagreed that the personalities in the reality television programmes they watched did not encourage them to be hardworking in life while 40 respondents representing 10% were undecided.

Discussion of Findings

The study found that the majority of the respondents perceived reality television programmes as programmes that help them learn things about other people. Again, data in **Table 3** also show that the majority of the respondents hold the perception that reality television programmes allow people to see what is happening in places outside their areas.

Supporting this fact, Melnick [5] says reality television programmes are shows that make people learn about the classes of people who live in the same country, and people they may never come face-to-face with because they live in places different from theirs, exhibit a different socioeconomic caste, have jobs that are shockingly dangerous, or have a culture that many would consider weird when they are exposed to associating themselves with them. This shows that in spite of the barrage of criticisms against reality television programmes, there are still things to be learnt from them and this may be the reason why many of the programmes continue to dominate our airwaves.

Melnick [5] in a study titled: What Reality TV Teaches Teen Girls found that 75% of girls said that reality TV depicts people with different backgrounds and beliefs and that reality television programmes introduce new ideas and perspectives. Melnick's study also reveals that reality television programmes have raised viewers' awareness of social issues and causes as well as taught them new things that they wouldn't have learned about otherwise.

Llopis [6] supporting why people watch reality television programmes, notes that people will desperately seek the glory associated with being a star and this alone is a motivating factor. Though most people may not admit it, deep down inside them, they want the power and influence associated with feeling relevant.

Carroll [7] also suggests that apart from winning, people also learn how to take criticisms for their actions on reality television, noting that the competition shows judges would critique the contestants and provide constructive feedback on their performances or other type of work product they are tasked with producing. This certainly provides the contestants with all the information needed to decide what's most useful for them, and make adjustments where necessary for better results. This is obviously positive because there are people who live the world daily, wanting someone to tell them if they are doing the right thing or not and this does not give them enough confidence to believe in their abilities. But when they hear what the judges have to say concerning the performances of the contestants on the programmes, they are able to make adjustments and do better with their skills.

The study sought to know from the respondents if they had ever thought of becoming stars as a result of watching people in reality television programmes. Result from analysed data indicates a majority of them did want to become stars after watching reality television programmes. This implies that the reality television programmes have serious influences on the respondents as a majority of them desire to be like the people

they watch in the programmes without knowing that what they are watching on television may not be of societal acceptable standards and that there are consequences for actions taken by contestants in the programmes, which the producers do not show to the viewers. The fact that the respondents desire to be like the people they watch, means that they may also be willing to do anything to be like them without minding the effect on their lives and the society, even if they know them.

Nicholson [8] believes that reality television has affected today's society. Commenting on the topic: What effect do you think reality television has had on today's society? The writer notes that teenagers spend a lot of their time watching television shows. Whether it's on their phones, iPods, or televisions, and that most teenagers enjoy watching reality shows such as "Jersey Shore," "The Real World," "Rock of Love," or "Sister Wives." Nicholson stresses that while reality television can be interesting, it can also have a negative effect on some teens, that some reality shows show their cast members doing things that are highly inappropriate, some also condone young ladies dressing in racy attire and acting promiscuous and when a teen sees people on TV doing all these negative things, it makes them think that they should also be able to indulge in the same.

The study also discovered that gender is a major factor that affects people's perception of reality television programmes. It is evident from the data presented above that gender of contestants or personalities in reality television programmes affect their perception. For instance, Melnick [5] found in her study that young girls who watch reality TV have come to believe in them. Because of their belief that the programmes are real, they now expect to see what they watch happen in their regular lives. Melnick's study reveals that young teen girls who watch these programmes tended to accept and expect more aggression and bullying in life, compared with girls who didn't watch any reality TV programmes.

Audience members bring their gender bias into issues relating to people's behaviours on television, which often reflect in their perception of the programmes they watch. Pusavat, in a study on Gender Perception Differences for Relationships Portrayed on Television, found that characters who violate expected gender behaviour are seen as less real, and the behaviour less acceptable. This has important implications regarding perception of sexes. For instance, when a woman engages in the same behaviour as a man (or vice versa), the audience readily recognize this behaviour as unusual, and more importantly, have much lower approval of such behaviour. So, while many male audience members may be seeing women in a programme such as Big Brother Africa as women of easy virtue, by judging them harshly for defying gender stereotypes and engaging in casual sex, for instance. Similarly, these same audience members do not see the men who have sex with these women on reality television programmes in the same light. This implies that there is a very strong gender bias in terms of expectations with regard to the way females conduct themselves on the programmes. Again, female audience members will continue to perceive Gulder

Ultimate Search with much bias, especially as the programme becomes more elusive to female winners because their perception is that it is not designed to favour the female contestants going by the fact that a contestant needs some level of physical strength to win the contests. So, it is not surprising that the study found that gender of the audience affects their perception of the programmes.

Majority of Nigerian University students believe that the personalities in the reality television shows they have watched were like them or their friends. The implication of this is that when the respondents see contestants or participants in the reality television shows as people who are like them or their friend, they may likely want to be like them. This is likely to bring in some elements of celebrity worship on the part of the audience members and when this becomes the case, the desire to become or aspire to be like the contestants is no longer in doubt.

Many viewers of reality television programmes obviously desire to be like the people they watch simply because they see them as everyday people who were ordinary like them before the show and if after the show, they have become famous and popular, they can then aspire to be like them. This view is supported by Yazbek who says "I was always amazed and intrigued by reality television shows. The idea that simple, ordinary people might become TV stars fascinated me". Many young people are fascinated by the fact that a "nobody" in their neighbourhood has been transformed into a star after participating in a reality show and this attitude of I am better or have better talents than she does moves them to want to become stars like the ones they have watched.

Again, the idea of seeing who you are in someone on television is another fascinating aspect about reality tv shows viewers would want to relate with. Yazbek further states that "During early childhood, I grew up watching cartoons and movies whose far-fetched scenarios seemed distant from my life. Then I discovered the vast world of Reality TV whose characters I could relate to, as opposed to the professional movie actors whose real or active lives seemed out of my league". This also supports the fact that many viewers of reality television are people who are already tired of the usual acting done by famous movie stars and simply want to see the girl or boy in their neighbourhood acting those roles he thinks characterise their everyday lives. The fact that Reality television can allow an ordinary individual to become a celebrity in a twinkle of an eye is so fascinating to the audience members and they would always watch to see the new celebrity that would emerge. It gives the audience members hope that they too can be famous like the supposed ordinary people they watch.

According to Gotz [9], one of the most appealing aspects of reality television, is its power to make audience members feel like part of the action. Like in the movies, the audience members do not easily relate with the actors but reality television gives the audience members the opportunity of being part of the making of the stars and this is simply an indication to the audience that they too can become famous as they participate in the making of stars.

Gervin [10] links the reason why Reality Television is so popular among audience members to the fact that the public can relate to the situations and lives of the people who play roles on the shows. This again, is a part they never enjoy with scripted shows. Gervin also note that young people relate with reality television programmes because they (the programmes) have become trendsetting. For instance, when a reality star wears a certain hairstyle, pair of earrings, clothing, or shoe, it is very likely to see many people mimicking that same trend.

Conclusion

Based on the above findings, the following conclusions are reached.

That reality television programmes have serious influences on audience members as they (audience) desire to be like the people they watch in the programmes and this is what often spurs the young audience members into wanting to become stars like the ones they watch.

Reality television programmes have become platforms for a successful life for many young people because, after seeing their friends or neighbours becoming stars through the programmes, all they desire is to be stars. It also gives them the platform to exhibit or showcase their talents which ordinarily may have taken time to nurture and maintain. For instance, programmes such as Nigerian Breweries sponsored Star Trek and MTN Project Fame have been able to make many young Nigerians to become music stars because of the opportunities given to them by the programmes. This has also made other young people believe that they too can become stars if they participate in such reality television programmes.

To a great extent, many reality television audience members do believe that what they watch on the programmes are real life situations and not mere acting. This is supported by Raghuvanshi [11] who notes that "many behavioural experts say that young minds (especially girls) are often influenced by what is shown in these shows, and they forget that most of the instances shown are scripted."

Reality television programmes enable people to learn things about others because when the audience watch the contestants, they pick some tricks or attitudes from them. This also underscores the cultivation analysis of Albert Bandura that heavy television watchers are likely to exhibit characters or traits like those they watch on television.

It is evident from the study that University students are ardent watchers of reality television as they were found to watch different reality television programmes and very often.

Recommendations

Given the findings and conclusions reached, the following recommendations are put forward.

Since reality television programmes have serious influences on audience members as they desire to be like the people they watch in the programmes, audience members must observe

caution while watching the programmes because not all that happens in the programme are real (devoid of acting).

Since reality television programmes enable audience members to learn things about others when they watch contestants in the programmes, television regulators must ensure that reality television programmes aired on Nigerian television stations are those capable of impacting positive lifestyles on Nigerians, especially University students.

Since Advertisers pay television bills, regulators must ensure that producers do not allow the commercial interest of advertisers to influence what they produce or put as the content of reality programmes with a view to avoiding the exploitation of young minds that only when they become reality TV stars will they be fulfilled in life.

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