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USES AND GRATIFICATION OF 'GOODBYE, MY LOVER' REALITY PROGRAM OF CHINESE VIEWERS

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Abstract

The reality show "Goodbye, My Lover" by Mango T.V. is extremely popular among the age group 18-50 in China due to the emotional appeal by audiences. The show captures the life of participants who are on the verge of divorcing and are given chances to introspect their decisions. The present study aims to investigate the media exposure, usefulness and gratification of Chinese audiences from the show. The study also aims to investigate gender differences in media exposure, usefulness and gratification of the reality show in a sample of 400 individuals. By using a questionnaire will provide an easy and quick form of collecting data along with greater chances of generalizing the findings to the larger population. Through questionnaires, statistically significant information can be obtained about how love-themed variety reality shows, notably "Goodbye, My Lover" is found useful and gratifying by the audience. Once informed consent has been obtained, Zoom sessions will be used to conduct a virtual orientation for the study and the questionnaire will be filled out by the participants in Questionnaire Star. Subsequently, the collected raw data will be statistically analysed using descriptive and inferential analyses. In the inferential analyses, Pearson's correlation and regression will be used to explore how media exposure to the audience is useful and gratifying/satisfying for them and a t-test will be sued to compare the groups.

Results reveal that the reality show has a significant impact on male audiences than on female audiences. Moreover, results indicate that there is a positive relationship between media exposure and both usefulness and gratification which suggests that increased exposure to the show increases the emotional growth and the overall satisfaction of the viewers. Understanding the audiences can help the media creators in creating better and more diverse shows that connect with the viewers.

Keywords: Reality Show, Media Exposure, Uses and Gratification, Chinese Audiences

Introduction

Media, in some form or another, has penetrated and influenced the lives of almost every indi-vidual around the globe. Among them, T.V. is an easily accessible source of audio-visual media that presents a variety of shows and forms of entertainment, from drama to news, cooking shows, movies, and reality shows. In contemporary times, reality shows have become the most influential and most-watched shows on television around the world and have engaged audiences to a great extent (Pahad et al., 2015). In China also, there are reality shows on almost every conceivable theme, from cooking to dancing, singing, challenges, and love. Among these, love reality shows are exceedingly becoming popular in China due to their emotional appeal (Zhang, 2020; Zhao, 2014). One such novel reality show on the broader theme of love but the specific context of divorc-es, 'Goodbye, My Lover,' has been created by Mango T.V. in China. In every season, the show focuses on the life of three couples who are on the verge of divorce or already proceeding with it and shows the interpersonal conflicts, efforts, and emotions that go into making an intricate rela-tionship of life partners in a marriage work (Morton, 2020). In the show, the participating couples are taken on an 18-day trip filled with challenges (physical, mental, and emotional) and given time to introspect their relationship with their partners.

The show has released three seasons with 13 episodes each since 2020, obtained a Douban rating of 8.9, and received more than 3.5 billion views. These numbers speak of the popularity of 'Goodbye, My Lover,' which appears to connect with the audience at an emotional level (Ashley, 2020). Although the show is top-rated, there has been no research on what makes it so popular among the Chinese audience, particularly those in the age range of 18-50 years, who are the largest consumers of this show. To cater to this research gap and to better understand the emotional appeal of love reality shows, particularly 'Goodbye, My Lover,' the present study was designed.

Research Objectives

The primary aim of the present study was to investigate the media exposure, usefulness and gratification of Chinese audiences with the show 'Goodbye, My Lover.' To fulfil this aim efficiently, three research objectives were designed.

RO1. To study media exposure, uses, and gratification of the reality show 'Goodbye, My Lover' of the audiences.

RO2. To study the effect of gender on media exposure, uses, and gratification of the reality show 'Goodbye, My Lover' of the audience.

RO3. To study the relationship between media exposure, uses, and gratification of the reality show 'Goodbye, My Lover' of the audience.

Literature Review

Concept of Media Exposure

The theory of media exposure contends that information obtained from the media and conveyed to people has a substantial impact on their attitudes, mental processes, beliefs, and behaviors. The importance of the media in influencing perceptions and opinions by making news and information accessible to a large audience is highlighted by this concept. It suggests that frequent encounters with media, like through TV shows, movies, or online content, may cause people to internalize behaviors that are compatible with how the media portrays them. Cultivation theory, agenda-setting, selective exposure, para-social interaction, and social learning are some of the concepts that are included in the notion of media exposure. Since media representations may not always accurately reflect reality, it underlines the significance of critical media comprehension and literacy. People, media producers, and society shall understand how media exposure affects the ideas, attitudes, and behaviors of individuals in order to manoeuvre and make wise decisions.

Theory of Uses and Gratification

The theory of mass communication considers the possible impacts that mass communication has on people and society, acknowledging that media may have both immediate and delayed consequences on the actions, mindsets, and perceptions of individuals. The complex and context-dependent interactions involving media and society are highlighted in this theory. When it comes to understanding how the media works and how it has a significant impact on the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours of individuals, the theory by McQuail (1987) is still an essential component of the discipline of media and communication studies.

Thus, the Uses and Gratifications Theory depicts a dynamic and constantly evolving process in which people continually analyse their needs, choose media material, utilise it, and assess their satisfaction with it. It also emphasises the active role that people play in decisions regarding their consumption of media and the multitude of motives and gratifications that are sought by diverse audiences. However, the precise procedures and specifics may change depending on the situation and the circumstances of each individual.

Concept of Reality TV Show

TV is an easily accessible source of entertainment for a larger share of world population. Among the different forms of entertainment shows observed on television nowadays, reality TV shows are one of the most watched and influential forms of TV shows which keep the audience engaged and coming back to watch them day after day, season after season (Pahad et al., 2015). Reality television frequently makes us consider what we would do in the same circumstance, which may be an excellent exercise in exploring our principles. Most reality shows have as a recurring subject the fundamental conflict between self-interest and self-sacrifice (Skeggs & Wood, 2012). Individuals are familiar with these themes of right and wrong behavior, betrayal, competitiveness, and connection because they make comparable decisions every day without the help of cameras, fictitious situations, or exposure. People are drawn to it because, at their most fundamental level, they enjoy seeing human drama and can identify with difficult choices (Skeggs & Wood, 2012). They want to witness the battle, whether it is for fame, fortune, or notoriety.

Information about Goodbye, My Lover

'Goodbye, My Lover' is the first reality show with the theme of divorce in China, which is positioned as a "marriage documentary observation reality show". Reality shows should focus on the lighter and more interesting content of life, and the topic of divorce, while striking, is clearly too heavy in style. In order to embed divorce perfectly into the reality show model, the creators need to plan enough accurate narrative logic and program architecture. The establishment of the structure is an important skeleton of establishing the overall program, and the program structure set up by "Goodbye, My Lover" is wholesome (Morton, 2020). The first season of the show was aired in 2020 and it focused on three different types of marriage samples, inviting three couples facing an emotional crisis on an 18-day trip out of the routine state of life. During the journey, the program team arranged a series of emotional experiments and games, and the tasks set a new situation and order. At the end of each day, the guests answered a question" Do you still want to get a divorce?" After the whole trip, they were required to make a final decision.

Demographic Audience

Depending on the particular show and its intended audience, the demographics of the audience of reality TV shows vary. The present study targets the audience of "Goodbye, My Lover"; therefore, one demographic feature of the audience for the present study is that they should have watched the show "Goodbye, My Lover". These viewers have personal experience with and knowledge concerning the program. They are, therefore, qualified to share their perspectives on the communication and emotional value of the show. Also, since the poor may not have access to TV, and the rich may find the show too boring or not up to their standards, the middle socio-economic class individuals have been targeted for the present study.

Conceptual Framework

The aim of the present study is to investigate the uses and gratifications of the audience of China with the show "Goodbye, My Lover". For the fulfilment of the objectives of this research, a conceptual framework has been proposed (Figure 1)
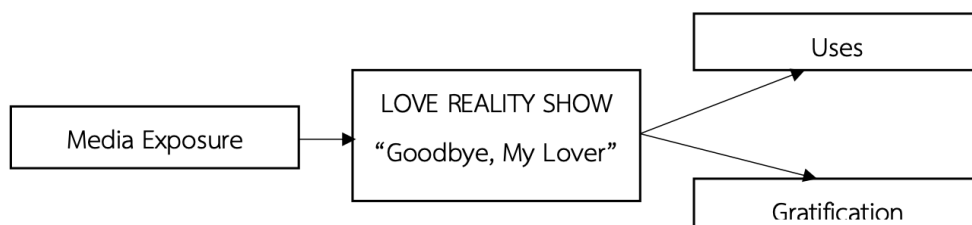

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Based on this conceptual framework, the media exposure of the audience to the love reality show "Goodbye, My Lover" will be analysed first. Then, the uses and gratification of the audience with the show in enhancing their communicative and emotional values will be analysed with the help of online survey questionnaires. Moreover, a quantitative comparison of the differences in these values of male and female audiences will also be undertaken.

Methods

Population and Sample

Since the study aimed to analyse the media exposure, usefulness and gratification of Chinese audiences with the show 'Goodbye, My Lover,' these audiences were the target population of the study. Being regular audiences of the show, this audience could provide more significant details on the uses of this program and the gratification they felt with it. The sampling frame of the study comprised a Chinese audience (both male and female) of the show 'Goodbye, My Lover' in the age range of 18-50 years, as individuals in this age range are the largest consumers of the show. The final sample was selected through the convenience sampling method, and the sample size was decided upon through G*power calculation, taking inspiration from the study of Zhao (2014), in which a sample size of 231 participants was used. To make the study generalizable over the broader population of the show, 400 individuals (both male and female) were selected as the final sample of the study. The sample was selected in the process of data collection itself, where the first 400 individuals who filled out the research questionnaire were chosen as the study sample. The sample was categorised into three groups for later analysis- group 1 had watched only season 1; Group 2 had watched only season 2; and Group Three had watched both seasons.

Research Instruments

The independent variable in the present study is the media exposure of the audience to the show 'Goodbye, My Lover', and the dependent variables are the uses and gratification of the audience with the show. Given the nature of the research, the exploratory design of the study, its sample size, and a quantitative research tool, preferably a survey questionnaire, were considered appropriate for collecting data for this study (Nayak & Narayan, 2019). A survey questionnaire is appropriate for affordably collecting quick and more extensive data. Moreover, it is more appropriate for carrying out data analysis of more extensive data, making it easier to generalise the findings on a broader target population (Nelson et al., 2019). As there are no standardised tools for these variables and none in the specific context of the show 'Goodbye, My Lover,' a survey questionnaire ' Uses and Gratification Scale' was self-constructed on the Chinese platform 'Questionnaire Star.' A rigorous process of tool construction was followed that involved pilot studying and validity and reliability establishment. Items with ICVI (Item-wise content validity) of 0.8 or more were selected in the tool, and the tool had a test-retest reliability coefficient value of 0.80.

The tool had two parts. Part one had information on the demographic aspects of the sample, including the age, gender, education level, occupation, and watching preferences of the audience. Part two of the questionnaire had twenty-four Likert-type item statements in three categories- media exposure, which had 07 items, which had 08 items; and gratification, which had 09 items. These items were scored on a continuum of one to five, where one meant 'never', and five meant 'always.' All the twenty-four items of the scale were positively scored, and the score range for the categories was 7-35, 8-40, and 9-45 for media exposure, uses, and gratification, respectively. Higher scores in the three categories reflected higher media exposure of the audience with the show and their corresponding higher uses and gratification with it, and vice versa.

Data Collection

The data collection process began with the identification of the target population for this study, which was the Chinese audience in the age range of 18-50 years who had partially or fully watched the show 'Goodbye, My Lover.' After finalising the target population, the link to the survey questionnaire with a consent form for participation in the research was shared on several social media platforms such as X, Facebook, WeChat, and fan forums of the show and student groups of Rangsit University. The link had information on the purpose of the study and filling out the questionnaire, as well as instructions regarding filling out the questionnaire. The participants first had to sign the consent form that could ensure their voluntary participation, and then they were directed to the survey. Individuals (male or female), whether students or other non-students working or non-working, who were interested in the survey could fill out the questionnaire.

Once 400 individuals had filled out the surveys, the link to the questionnaire was disabled. During the data collection process, appropriate measures were adopted to ensure that the research was ethically conducted and the participants were not harmed in any form, physical or otherwise (Hasan et al., 2021). One way to ensure this was to avoid asking the participants for their names, which could lead to any form of identification. Along with this, the participation was voluntary and informed by means of a consent form, which ensured that participants were duly informed of the reason for which the data were being collected from them. Once data had been collected, the participants were thanked for their time and efforts. The raw data collected from the survey was then exposed to various forms of statistical analyses to find the outcomes of the research.

Data Analysis

The data collected through the survey questionnaire was quantitative, which necessitated quantitative data analysis for the study. For this, the raw scores on the 'Uses and Gratification Scale' from each participant were compiled together in M.S. Excel to form three scores each for media exposure, uses, and gratification. These scores were then exported to IBM SPSS, where the actual data analysis took place. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were applied to study the general trends in the data and establish the cause-effect relationship between the independent and dependent variables. As part of descriptive statistics, mean, standard deviation and percentages were calculated to study the patterns in demographic variables of the study, such as age, gender, education level, occupation and watching preference. t-tests were computed to compare different demographic groups on the basis of gender and check for any differences in their exposure to the show 'Goodbye, My Lover' and the uses and gratification they obtain from it. Pearson's correlation was calculated to identify the nature and direction of the relationship between media exposure and uses and gratification, while regression helped in ascertaining the strength and extent of the relationship between media exposure and uses and gratification.

Results

Participant Characteristics

Of the 400 participants who filled out the survey questionnaire, there were 162 (40.5%) males and 238 (59.5%) females. Thirty-one participants were in the age range of 18-21 years, 125 were between 22-25 years of age, 108 were between 25-30 years of age, 112 were between 31 and 35 years, and just 24 participants were above the age of 36 years. Watching preference revealed that 249 participants had watched the second season, 89 had watched the first season, and 62 participants had watched both. More than 2/3rds of the sample were at least a graduate, and only 11% of the sample needed to be more educated. In occupation, 39.8% of participants were permanent workers, 4.8% reported working as freelancers, and 13.5% reported being students. Based on this statistic, it can be observed that the audience of the show is mainly educated working females between the ages of 22 and 35.

Trends in Media Exposure, Uses, and Gratification

Mean and standard deviation values of media exposure use and gratification of the audience of 'Goodbye, My Lover' reveal average scores. The mean value of media exposure (M = 24.49, S.D. = 5.35) lie in the average level of exposure, suggesting that the sample audience exhibits moderate excitement in watching the latest episodes of 'Goodbye, My Lover,' interacting in the fan forums of the show or recommending the show to their friends or family. Similarly, the mean of uses (M = 28.71, S.D. = 5.25) and gratification (M = 32.15, S.D. = 6.25) also lie in the average range. This suggests that audiences find the show moderately useful in understanding and managing their relationships and are moderately satisfied with it in contributing towards their emotional growth and overall well-being.

Gender-wise Comparisons

The differences between male and female audiences in their media exposure use and gratification with 'Goodbye, My Lover' were analysed through mean values. Though mean values are higher for male audiences for all three variables, namely media exposure, uses, and gratification than for female audiences, the statistical significance of these differences was assessed using t-tests. t-value for male and female scores for media exposure was found to be significant, t (398) = 5.47, p < .001, which reflected that males are more excited to know and discuss about 'Goodbye, My Lover.' Similarly, a statistically significant value of the t-test for uses, t (398) = 4.18, p < .001, suggests that males report 'Goodbye, My Lover' to be more helpful in understanding and managing their relationships as compared to their female counterparts. Lastly, the t-test value for gratification was also found to be statistically significant, t (398) = 4.68, p < .001, which reflected that the male audience is statistically more satisfied with 'Goodbye, My Lover' than the female audience due to its impact on their emotional growth and well-being. Thus, on the whole, it is observed that the show has a more significant impact on the male audience than the female audience.

Relationship of Media Exposure with Uses and Gratification

Media exposure of audience was observed to be strongly and positively correlated to the uses they perceive of 'Goodbye, My Lover,' as the value of correlation coefficient, r (398) = .76, p < .001 (Table 1). This value reflects that the perception of the audience concerning the uses of 'Goodbye, My Lover' for their emotional growth increase with increase in their exposure to the show and vice versa. Similarly, media exposure was also found positively correlated with gratification that audience feel with 'Goodbye, My Lover,' as r (398) = .81, p < .001, implying audience are more satisfied with the show when they are more exposed to it and vice versa.

Table 1

Correlation Coefficients (r) between Media Exposure and Uses and Gratification

	D.V	r	p-value
Media Exposure	Uses	.76*	.000
	Gratification	.81*	.000

Note. * p < .01

Impact of Media Exposure on Uses and Gratification

The regression model developed for the impact that media exposure of 'Goodbye, My Lover' had on the uses perceived by its audience was found predictive for this relationship as F (1, 398) = 554.12, p <.001. The Beta value or regression coefficient, r (398) = .76, p < .001, was statistically significant for this model, suggesting media exposure had a significant direct impact on the perceived uses of 'Goodbye, My Lover' for the audience. From the R2 value, it was revealed that media exposure contributed towards a 58% variation in the use of 'Goodbye, My Lover.' Similar to uses, the model of regression developed for media exposure and gratification of the audience with 'Goodbye, My Lover' was found predictive as F (1, 398) = 766.88, p <.001. A direct significant impact of media exposure on the gratification of the audience was revealed by a statistically significant regression coefficient, r (398) = .81, p < .001. Also, media exposure was found to predict a 67% variation in audience gratification. Thus, it can be conclusively asserted that media exposure was a significant predictor of uses and gratification perceived by the sample audience of 'Goodbye, My Lover.'

Discussion

Through this study, the researcher wanted to explore the media exposure of the Chinese audiences to a love reality show, 'Goodbye, My Lover', and the uses and gratification they obtain from it. As opposed to the conventional viewpoint of higher consumption and engagement of emotional T.V. shows by females (Deery, 2015), this study found males to be more interested and engaged with 'Goodbye, My Lover,' a reality show based on emotional and interpersonal themes. This finding has pointed towards shifting gender roles where individuals have become more flexible in their conventional gender roles as well as choices and preferences.

The study found a positive correlation between media exposure of 'Goodbye, My Lover' and its uses and gratification felt by the audience and noted that media exposure could statistically influence and predict to a considerable degree the uses and gratification the audience derives from it. These findings have suggested that media exposure to diverse forms of media (conventional or social media) has immense potential to broaden the perspectives of Chinese audiences on their interpersonal relationships and improve their emotional and overall well-being. This finding derives support from Pahad et al. (2015), who noted that more exposure of audiences to diverse forms of media can influence and alter their thinking, actions, and emotional reactions. The findings also indicate some fundamental needs, preferably psychological needs, that 'Goodbye, My Lover' appears to fulfil, which motivates the audience to engage more actively with the show and perceive it as valuable and satisfying. Observations of Papacharissi and Mendelson (2010) on the theory of uses and gratification substantiate this finding, which suggests that individuals are drawn to and engaged more with such media forms that fulfil either their cognitive, emotional, or social needs or all of them or a combination of these needs.

The study has specific critical implications for media creators, audiences and researchers. Media creators can better explore the audience demographic of their existing shows to create such new and diverse shows that cater to their emotional needs, which can help expand the audience base for their shows. Additionally, creators should keep the cultural aspects of the audience in mind when designing a new show. It is so because cultural needs and background also play a crucial role in influencing the perceptions of the audience, and what may be expected in one country may not be applicable in another country. The audience can benefit from this study as they can find the outcomes relatable to them and can introspect on which needs the shows they watch appear to fulfil. They can also make informed decisions on what to watch based on their diverse needs. Researchers can take this study as a base and carry further gender-based comparisons in different cultural settings to observe the universality/uniqueness of such differences.

Despite adopting a comprehensive methodology and analysis, this study has a few limitations. One, the outcomes are specific to the cultural setting of China, and they may not be applicable to other cultural backgrounds; therefore, a multicultural study can be carried out to find universal patterns that can be widely generalised. Second, the sample selection of this study has been made through convenience sampling, which is not a representative form of sampling; future research can utilise random sampling methods with larger samples to ensure the sample is representative of the target population. Lastly, the use of self-constructed and non-standardised tools for data collection and the absence of a qualitative measure may impede an accurate assessment of the variables being studied.

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