

Peaking Emotions Positively: Discovering Viewers' Justice in Reality TV and all Its Glory!

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Abstract

In the current glory of reality TV, the ideology of viewers' justification revolves highly around their acceptance and recognition of the TV series. In truth, reality TV possess high capability in influencing viewers' feelings and emotions despite of viewers' inability to notice their affection towards the content of the show. This was stated as the "mcdonalisation" of viewers' feelings. This article aids to reveal viewers' true feelings concerning their positive sentiments gauged from popular reality TV series. Never to deny the authenticity, many of the reality TV production did manage to present a positive front; hence it is important to discover how this production turns into a powerful tool in persuading viewers to generate positive reactions. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to evaluate the correlation between reality TV content and viewers' responses. With reference to the nature of the research, the suitable method will be based on qualitative approach, which includes focus group discussion with 30 reality TV admirers and content analysis on a specific selection of reality TV program.

Keywords: reality tv scenes, viewers' feelings, positive emotions

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Introduction

In recent years, many young adults enjoy a new trend of reality TV shows. Reality TV today no longer confines to documentaries, news and current affairs programs. The real concept of reality TV is an "unscripted" program; such as documenting actual event, featuring ordinary people, focusing on personal experience and emotions; which more than often touches viewers' feelings (Wahab, 2014).

Aslama and Pantti (2006) states that the monologue in reality TV tends to evoke more emotions from audiences as its monologues allow emotions to "run free". There are also many close-up scenes in reality TV that focuses on the character's facial expressions that will trigger viewers' emotions. These emotional provoking scenes that are intentionally scripted have been seen as the "Mcdonalisation of emotions" (Aslama & Pantti, 2006).

TV programs, in general, are meant to be entertaining; to provoke, engage and amuse audiences. These are categorised as comedy, drama and some films that engages viewers to "feel good"; as described by Moss (2009) as "light entertainment". He stated that light entertainment is a kind of entertainment that doesn't require heavy involvement or much attention. Thus, TV programs always provoke positive emotions via audio and visual stimulation.

However, some reality TV programs do provoke negative emotions like anger, sadness and fear, but these shows usually have scenes to allow viewers to replace these negative emotions with positive gestures at the end. This proves how reality TV viewers are easily engaged with different kinds of emotions intended by the program. As what Moss (2009) stated in his book "The Entertainment Industry: an introduction", the quality of an entertainment, in this case will be the reality TV program, is judged by the degree that it provokes viewers' emotions.

The discussions of this paper will look into the gap of the literature to address how viewers are loyal admirers of reality TV programs without understanding the reason to their emotions. In parallel, Coyne (2013) stated that viewers have a high capability to be affected emotionally while watching reality TV programs but without the ability to realise their affected emotions. However, the fact is that it is challenging to assess the effectiveness of reality TV and emotions (Ellis, 2009). Therefore, this paper will discuss the degree of how reality TV viewers' positive emotions are being provoked.

The research objectives for this study will be:

1. To evaluate scenes in reality TV programs that are likely to portray positive emotions.
2. To recognize positive emotions that are likely to be received by viewers.

Background

Reality TV has become a trend in media industry and it possess high capability to influence viewers' feelings and emotions despite of viewers' inability to notice their affection towards the content (Coyne, 2013). However, Ellis (2009) state that the effectiveness of reality TV is not simple to assess as it involves the sincerity and authenticity of the performance.

Previous literature argue that in spite of evidence towards the negative notion, reality TV program are just as capable in bringing forward positive effects for the viewers. Vettehen et al. (2005) categorises 6 different kinds of contents that could provoke emotions, whether positive or negative - sex, violence, destruction, humour, celebrities, and other emotional content that shows close up scenes of people expressing their emotions.

In significant to this, Coyne (2013) stated that reality programs are most likely to be imitated and with many TV series presenting positive front, it became a powerful tool in influencing viewers' positive feelings. The idea has been acknowledge through previous findings that categorizes reality TV into three concepts; therapy machine, confrontation platform and video diary (Aslama & Pantti, 2006).

Reality TV as Therapy Machine

In reference to the empirical data by Aslama and Pantti (2006), reality TV is used as a therapeutic culture where the casts would disclose intimate feelings as an effort to begin their 'healing' process. In similarity, reality TV also act as therapy machine for viewers to anticipate benefits (Vogel, Gentile & Kaplan, 2008) and to be used as mass-consumed therapy (Shattuc, 2004). Good example would be the set-up of TV talk-shows where it is presented in a therapeutic environment and very well known in assisting viewers to heal with popular social issues such as self-esteem.

Vogel et. al. (2008) also discusses on viewers' aspect in seeking therapy from reality TV; which was mediated by their attitudes and stigma. In the current environment, viewers are also an active participant in sharing social issues online (Omar, 2014). Having to face social issues might exposed viewers to past humiliation and to have TV shows as a platform to share their experience with others, it correlates with their anticipation in gaining benefits to assist them in solving those issues.

Reality TV as Confrontation Platform

The development of confrontational dialogue in reality TV progresses from a verbal confrontation into emotional confrontation (Higgins, Montgomery, Smith and Tolson, 2011). In similarity, Aslama and Pantti (2006) conduct a content analysis which presents results where the confrontation aspect in reality TV allow the display of anger, rage and accusation; however this then evolve into a positive display of actions by showing the casts' ability to rationalize the situation (Nabi, Finnerty, Domschke & Hull, 2006) by expressing their confidence and trust (Ellis, 2009).

The common confrontation is conversational and in often occasion, the casts of reality TV will have issues such as clashing ideas or taste (McMurria, 2008) and with the usage of voice overs, the confrontation will be emphasized (Higgins et. al., 2011). The purpose of it all is just to portray the naturalistic elements of human characteristics by capturing emotional content from the show (Devillers, Cowie, Martin, Cowie, Abrilian & McRorie, 2006).

Reality TV as Video Diary

Video diary format in reality TV is significant in emphasizing the ‘truthfulness’ of the content in correlation to how a normal diary would be (Deller, 2014). Allen and Mendick (2013) conduct qualitative interview analysis and discover that video diary approach assist the viewers in believing that the content is authentic. In addition, the process of having casts confess into the camera will reinforce the ‘authenticity’ of the story.

Holliday (2004) state that video diary also assist in capturing performers’ identity; where identity reading is a powerful mechanism in affecting viewers’ positive emotions. Based on empirical data collected by Aslama and Pantti (2006), reality TV is always based on a narrative and it turns into a diary-like story; which is one of the reason why video diary are always confessionals (Deller, 2014). Hence, the video diary approach in reality TV correlate well with it being a therapy machine and used as a confrontation platform.

Theoretical Framework

This study uses Principles of Causality as a guidance in discussing the research findings. According to Aristotle, Principles of Causality “is the relation between an event (the cause) and a second event (the effect), where the event is understood as a consequences of the first” (White, 1990). This theory has been used as early as Aristotle’s era by philosophers and scientists for experiments and researches. Zhang (2013) suggests three things related to this theory:

1. Everything contains a cause and an effect;
2. Everything can be a cause and/or effect in some context;
3. One cause may be the effect of another thing, and one effect may be a cause of another.

Causality guards the relationship between events - the cause and effect. Spirkin (2013) believes that this principle is used universally with one phenomenon causing the other to happen but with intermediate interval that links in between. Reality TV viewers watched a show for 2 hours (cause), but the emotions (effect) will only happen at the end of the show.

The intervals mentioned by Spirkin (2013) can happen between a span of 2 to 3 days. The cause and effects may, in certain circumstances, coexist before coming into a full blown effect. Reality TV viewers watching the program will laugh when there is a comedic scene or feels empathy when a character tells a heartwarming story. In this case, viewers emotions (effect) develops as the scenes of the TV program develops. The full blown effect will happen when the program comes to an end with a climax or

with discussions between viewers about the story. This is described by Sprkin (2013) as "feedback" - when the effect is spread back to the cause of the phenomena. One can easily described and discuss this Principle of Causality as a basic linear process but it can also be multi-dimensional. The one effect may happen due to the different causes that a variable has gone through at different time or space. The result depends on the interacting bodies (variable). Different TV viewers will experience different kinds of emotions despite watching the same comedic scene due to their different ethnic background or life experiences.

Methodology

This study takes a qualitative perspective as it is designed to assess the portrayal of positive content in reality TV and the projection of viewers' positive feelings and emotions. The method used for this study is qualitative content analysis and focus group discussion.

Sample

The selected reality TV to be assessed for content analysis method is 5 episodes of reality competition "So You Think You Can Dance", season 10. The purpose of this particular selection is due to the positive value that has been reported in the show description; therefore it will be beneficial to identify whether or not such value is gauged by viewers. As this show caters for viewers' age ranges from 18-25, the selected respondents for focus group discussions consists of young adults who meets the following criteria:

- Audience of "So You Think You Can Dance" season 10
- Admirers of reality TV

Procedures

The findings from the literature analysis presents three concepts of reality TV; as a therapy machine, a confrontation platform and a video diary (Aslama & Pantti, 2006). Thus, the qualitative approach of content analysis is to analyse the selected 5 episodes of "So You Think You Can Dance" based on the three mentioned concepts. The procedures include observing each episode, listing down relevant criteria and categorizing each criteria with the right concept. The purpose of this is to evaluate the type of scenes in the show that are likely to portray positive emotions.

The procedure of focus group discussion begins with the preparation of group interview questions. The prepared questions are semi-structured as moderator may add some impromptu questions during the discussion. There are 3 sessions of discussion with 10 participants in each session. The process begins by asking for permission, booking venue, sending out invites, selecting moderator and assistant moderator, conduct discussion, handle recording, tabulating data, analyzing and synthesizing data. The purpose of this is to assess different types of positive emotions that are likely to be received by viewers from watching the show.

Results and Discussion

This section is intended to discuss the outcome of content analysis and focus group discussion. The presentation of results is separated into two areas; evaluation of scenes from reality TV and evaluation of viewers' positive emotions.

Evaluation on Reality TV Scenes

The selected 5 episodes of "So You Think You Can Dance" is from season 10 episode 14 – 18. The analysis of each scene from these 5 episodes are listed and grouped by using the categorization method. Table 1 presents the findings from episode 14 on how the scenes related to three concepts; therapy machine, confrontation platform and video diary.

Table 1. Categorization of scenes for episode 14

Episode	Concept	Description of scenes
14	Therapy Machine	A compelling story about love and how it can overcome all odds A story on how to handle a person going through a break-up
	Confrontation Platform	Speech from choreographer advising contestant to be brave in dancing out of his comfort zone Advice from a friend to be open towards the acceptability of second chances Judges making remarks on contestant who are known as 'the one to beat'
	Video Diary	Showcase of contestants' first participation until the final announcement of the first tap dancer contestant to make it in the top 20 Evolution story on how a contestant finally manage to have a breakthrough performance Portrayal of a dancer's first recognition when the judges give the first ever standing ovation

Analysis from episode 14 presents results that show how choreographer could inspire dancers to be more open with their feelings. The portrayal of feelings revolves mostly around past stories that teaches them how to deal with future problems such as accepting second chances and forgiveness (therapy machine). This will encourage viewers to anticipate benefits as mentioned by Vogel et al., (2008).

From the inspiration, it is connected to contestants' progress (video diary) and evaluation as a performer while being assessed by experienced judges (confrontation platform). Table 1 summarizes how different scenes; with similar connections of stories, are categorized in different concepts.

Table 2. Categorization of scenes for episode 15

Episode	Concept	Description of scenes
15	Therapy Machine	Story on how to deal with the death of a good friend Story of father-son struggle in facing the world Inspiration story about diseased cousins, strong mother and family
	Confrontation Platform	Acknowledgement by judges by calling out one dancer as the crown favourite and other dancers need to step up their game A friend tells the truth to the other friend; requesting him not to use rough journey as an excuse
	Video Diary	Documented the first lesson on provoking a dance routine about societal judgement Portrayal on how one contestant can be consistent throughout dance practices

Analysis from episode 15 in Table 2 presents results that show how the contestants will support each other by sharing inspiration in what makes them a better dancer (therapy machine). The show proceeds by having one of the contestant reaching out to another about the unconstructiveness in relying on excuses about life failure; stated that failing is part of life (confrontation platform). In parallel to what was reported by Higgins et al., (2011), this is an example of confrontational dialogue in reality TV that can turn into an emotional confrontation. The episode also documented how a routine process can provoke current issues and the documentation proceeds by showing contestant's hard-work in order to be consistent on stage (video diary).

Table 3. Categorization of scenes for episode 16

Episode	Concept	Description of scenes
16	Therapy Machine	Story about earth's disaster and how to save mother nature
	Confrontation Platform	Contestant with negative daughter-parent relationship just receive a heart-warming message from her mother Contestant show frustration in handling a difficult routine
	Video Diary	Portrayal on how one of the contestant has the ability to work well with many new different dance partners

Analysis from episode 16 in Table 3 presents results that shows a story on how humans are responsible for the damage on earth and changes need to happen in order to save the world (therapy machine). In similarity, the following content relates to frustration where one contestant are not able to gauge with difficult choreography and hit breaking point (confrontation platform). Similar to what was reported by Ellis (2009), reality TV presents a positive front by expressing content about confidence and trust. To proceed with that, the positive vibe comes from a heartfelt message from the contestant's mother (therapy machine) and how the contestant could portray strong ability to switch dance partners (video diary).

Table 4. Categorization of scenes for episode 17

Episode	Concept	Description of scenes
17	Therapy Machine	Story a couple that is drifting apart and could not fix their relationship Story on how good it feels to have a dream and experience it in reality
	Confrontation Platform	Judges claim that one of the contestant has the ability to give everyone 'chills' Choreographer stresses how the female contestant have to be strong and show women empowerment
	Video Diary	Portrayal of contestants' journey from the beginning until the announcement of the finalist

Analysis from episode 17 in Table 4 presents results that shows a story on how not all couples end up together; some struggles and unfixable (therapy machine). The shows proceed with the story on a contestant's journey from the beginning of the competition and how the final announcement finally takes place (video diary). Another heart-felt portrayal shown in the episode is where choreographers demand all female dancers be stronger and show women power (confrontation platform).

Table 5. Categorization of scenes for episode 18

Episode	Concept	Description of scenes
18	Therapy Machine	Story on how dancing can bring people together and it can bring a smile on someone's face Inspiration story on young dancers age 5-10 years old dreaming of dancing professionally
	Confrontation Platform	Choreographer stresses in practice to contestant to remind them that dancing should be focus only on techniques but also on the character
	Video Diary	Nostalgic video montage of the winner's journey and progression in the competition

Analysis from episode 18 in Table 5 presents results that show a story on how dancing can bring people together and that children from a young age of 5 have a beautiful ambition to work as a professional dancer in the future (therapy machine). As it proceeds, the choreographer keeps on reminding the contestant to forget about technique and think about the character of the dance by focusing the feeling towards the music (confrontation platform). As the show ended, it portrays the emotions and meaningful journey of season 10 winner by showcasing a video montage on how her dance progresses throughout the show (video diary). In parallel to this, Holliday (2004) states that reality TV can assist in capturing performers' identity; which is powerful in affecting viewers' positive emotions.

Evaluation on Viewers' Emotions

Focus group discussion was conducted with a total of 30 young adults who are audience of "So You Think You Can Dance" season 10 and admirers of reality TV. The focus group respondents' responses were categorized into: inspiration, impact, action and self-realisation. As a sample of respondents' quote for each category, Table 6 presents some of the important points in shorter version, followed by a longer discussion below.

Table 6. Categorization of focus group discussion

Category	Respondent	Short Description
Inspiration	#2	Inspired seeing the contestants face challenges
	#1	As a motivation to become a better dancer/person
	#15	Ability to motivate younger generation as well
Impact	#11	Impact us by making us grow stronger together
	#7	Huge impact towards having a no-quitting-attitude
	#10	Impact in a wonderful journey with a friend
Action	#4	Sign up for dance lesson for the first time
	#21	Adapting positive value; such as responsibility
Self-realisation	#3	Realization in making dancing a full time career
	#17	Realization in having strong passion about life
	#12	Realize that nothing in life comes easy

Inspiration

All respondents stated that they were inspired and motivated by contestants of the “So You Think You Can Dance” season 10, as each episode features some trainings and challenges that contestants had to go through. Respondent 2 explained that, “I feel inspired seeing how the contestants fight out to make sure they put up a good show despite the challenges they faced”. Respondent 4 agreed and continued explaining, “... this not only made us feel like we are growing with the contestants. It feels like we are going through these challenges with them”. Respondents 1 and Respondent 9 also stated that seeing how the choreographer in the reality TV show motivated the contestants when they are down inspired them to be a better dance coach themselves. Respondent 1 explained further:

... it’s like you feel you’re not doing enough for your dance students in class. The dance coaches and judges actually gave them substantial comments just to motivate the contestants to do better. Seeing what they did to these contestants made me feel that I should motivate my students more, to be able to see them do better in their dance routines. I realize my coaching method wasn’t enough to motivate my students. I am inspired to coach better.

Respondent 3, said that:

... some of their dance routines showed flaws and it made him learn from their mistakes to do better in his own dance. It also inspired him to take up some of the dance steps to put into his dance routine.

When asked if all episodes of the show are inspirational, all contestants agreed unanimously that it is an inspirational show and Respondent 7 commented, “every single detail is a motivation that he was inspired to take up different dance genre”. Respondent 11 commented, “... basically all of us were inspired and want to learn more, so that’s why we watch the show”. Respondent 15 agrees and added “The show is very good. Because for viewers, we can understand the competition stage; and it seems like the dancers can also inspire younger generation”.

Impact

A significant portion of the focus group focused on discussing the impact of the show on the respondents. The reality show not only inspired the respondents but also left an impact on them. Respondent 2 and Respondent 7 both agreed that each episode has a significant increase in difficulty. Seeing how the contestants worked hard for each dance routine and the many hours they have invested on their perfecting their dance routine at their practice sessions have impacted them to “never give up dancing”.

Respondent 2 also stated that:

... there was once I was facing some difficulty impressing my dance coach and I decided to watch an episode of the show just to get inspiration. I felt that I wasn't just inspired, but it also left a huge impact to not stop dancing. Nobody is as good, so we should all work hard to make it better.

In parallel to that, respondent 11 commented:

... they have shown how arguments break out, and how they overcame them. So we learn from the show. How we overcome our problems, and from there we grow stronger together; just like the dancers in the show. This is the biggest impact the show ever bring towards me and how I live with this wonderful people around me.

Respondent 10 related a true story:

... I shared this with one of my crew member who was injured. One of the contestants have also experience an injury. Despite the mishap, he did not only push himself harder to mater that particular routine, but also made him a better dancer. We also won the competition in the end and he was so thankful I shared the show with him.

Respondent 28 discusses on how the show make an impact for him to see the world in a different perspective. He commented:

... the dancers will never give up, and they put on a very good show at the end of their practices. Imagine all the hard work – this really bring a huge impact towards my thinking. Everything is tough in this world. But as long as you put effort, you can do it.

Action

The “So You Think You Can Dance” season 10 also made a few respondents take up a dance routine or dance as a hobby. Respondent 4 mentioned that the he started watching the show from its second episode and it is as if he found his “calling”:

... I remembered vividly that the contestants were dancing to the Bleeding Love song when I turned on the TV that night and I was immediately attracted to it. I didn't even get to sit down on the sofa. I stood there watching for the next few minutes. I've never took up dance lessons in my life and that

particular episode not only made me took up contemporary dance, but also made dance my hobby.

Respondent 7 also stated “a few contestants like tWitch, Pacman, Emilion, D-Trix, they are such good dancers that it made me take up other genre in dance like hip-hop and contemporary jazz.” Respondent 21 discusses how her action after watching the show, relates to positive values that the show presented. He commented “... from the show, dance taught us a lot of values like responsibility, bravery, confidence, discipline; and all this can be turn into action”.

Self-realisation

Lastly, the discussion in the focus group ended with respondents revealing how the show has left a huge impact in them that they would not stop dancing. A few respondents also commented that it has definitely affected their life’s decision. Some were small, while others took a huge turning point in their lives. Respondent 3 commented, “... I will not stop dancing. Seeing the contestants grow and improve each week just made me want to take dancing into a full-time career”.

Respondent 1 further explained that the reality show made her wanting “to not only become a better coach but also dance is everything that I can do to make me happy. I’m always in an upbeat mood when I see the dance routines!”

Respondent 6 revealed that: “... the show wasn’t only my favourite, but it made me go back and take dance lessons after she had stopped dancing a few years back due to personal reasons.” In parallel, respondent 17 mentioned “I realise that I have passion. Maybe for someone who would like to be a dancer; they can look for ways to pursue that. Almost like discover a path, or discover your own journey”.

Respondent 7 also commented that:

... the show created a dancer out of me as I have never taken any formal training for dance before. After watching the series, I started picking up steps and later on signed up for a dance class. And because of that, I’ve now found that contemporary jazz is my thing.

Respondent 2 later agreed that the show made her realize that “nothing comes easy; be it dance or life in general. I learned that we have to persevere in order to achieve our dreams and this can be applied in all aspects of life”.

All of these findings shows evidence in which it manage to reveal viewers’ true feelings concerning their positive sentiments gauged from popular reality TV series.

Conclusion and summary

This study is guided by the following research objectives:

1. To evaluate scenes in reality TV programs that are likely to portray positive emotions.

2. To recognize positive emotions that are likely to be received by viewers.

For the first research objective, the findings from content analysis shows how the scenes in reality TV manage to evoke viewers' emotions by evaluating three components of the scenes: as a therapy machine, confrontational platform and in a form of a video diary; as suggested by Aslama and Pantti (2006). As for the second research objective, focus group findings discover four different positive values gauged by viewers from watching the reality TV show. These values includes; inspiration, impact, action and self-realisation. This support the statement by Moss (2009), where reality TV as a light entertainment are able to make viewers to feel good. The result of both content analysis of the TV show and focus group supports the statement where viewers develop positive emotions after watching the show. The Principles of Causality further help proven that these positive emotions (effect) must have a cause (in this case, reality TV shows). As stated by Zhang (2013), the cause and effect may sometimes coexist to achieve a full blown effect. Thus, this theory relates to how each episode of reality TV show must have an issue or focused topic to keep viewers coming back for more interesting stories.

Recommendation

For future discussion related to viewers emotions and reality TV shows, there should be a focus on negative emotions. The research may focus on the reason behind producers of reality TV shows allowing negative emotions to develop among viewers. Besides that, researchers should also analyse how producers script reality TV shows to evoke both positive and negative emotions to attract viewers. Finally, researchers may also look into the connection between TV ratings and reality TV script.

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