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Factors Influencing Audience Satisfaction of Chinese Documentary Programs among Undergraduate Students in China

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Abstract

This study seeks to explore the factors influencing audience satisfaction of Chinese documentary programs among undergraduate students in Peking, mainland China. Viewership and preference for Chinese documentaries as well as satisfaction derived from Chinese documentaries form the informant's social, culture, political, and environmental consciousness. Thus, the objective of this study is to ascertain the satisfaction of the audience derives from Chinese documentary TV programs and to understand informant's preference for Chinese documentaries. The present study leverages on data was gathered via interview with 20 students as the informants residing in Peking mainland, China. Findings indicate that audience satisfaction of Chinese documentary emanates from students longing for a credible and up-to-date sources of information evident in the content of Chinese documentary programs. Additionally, their knowledge of events around them as well as their roots is further enhanced by their viewership of Chinese documentary programs. Further findings also suggest the uses and gratifications approach of media explains the audience's perception, preference, and viewership of Chinese documentary programs.

Keywords: Influence, Audience Satisfaction, Chinese Documentary Programs, Undergraduate student Peking China.

Introduction

The 21st century with the beginning of the information age social disabled, Smart fast pop-up loading of electronic devices has gained prominence. Documentary programs have gained great viewership and attention around the globe due to its tendency of delivering evidence based information about people's experiences, events, and places thereby uncovering the truth (Bagos et al., 2017). Remarkably, the manner in which viewers are consuming media contents and TV programs has continued to change. This is made possible by the commercialization and segmentation of media to meet the needs of consumers (Jenkins, 2012). The myriad ways, ease and affordability of streaming platforms and the ever-growing

amounts of documentary content has placed movie theatres and films on the losing side (Gil & Gutierrez-Navratil, 2017). This is due to the availability of multiple viewing platforms as well as the comfort afforded to viewers even from their bedrooms (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Podara et. al., 2019). And as the media is increasingly becoming convergent, audiences are also becoming increasingly fragmented. Given the shifting roles of television networks around the world, public TV has continued to stay true to its original calling of providing information and entertainment to mass audiences as well as providing an alternative to commercialized TV and media (Irving, 2015; Macek, 2017).

Technological advancement and wide audience appeal has also opened up new ways of communicating with the audience and thus documentaries have become avenues of promoting a social cause (Karlin & Johnson, 2011; Chattoo, & Feldman, 2017). John Grierson has been credited for coining the term documentary in 1926, his anticipation was that documentaries could be used to influence people's ideas and actions (Stollery, 2017). Thus, documentary viewership has become popular among students in mainland China, particularly in Peking area, and will continue to have strong viewership across the globe. Alfian & Herdjiono (2019), state that documentary programs make learning real and easy for students as well as generating interest to learn. Moreover Liu (2018) stressed that documentaries expose students to real issues and enable them have a sense of relevance to develop critical thinking abilities with perspective taking that empowers proenvironmental disposition of students. Equally, Almeida & Geerts (2016) posit that documentary is a complementary means of communication because it enables communicative research and deliver information that ordinary communication cannot offer. As a result of this, documentaries have been able to generate great attention and viewership among students because of its ability to tackle real-life issues (Jones et al., 2019). In recent years, China's eco-cinema as an independent documentary outfit has generated greater attention in the humanities with regards to the achievement of variety via multimedia documentaries (Cui, 2017). Particularly, environmental documentary in China offers students the opportunity to understand environmental challenges as well as offering voices to the marginalized groups and emotional connections to further motivate learning interests among students (Liu et al., 2019).

To this end, given the evolution of news and information dissemination, credibility of news is viewed in China as the accuracy and authenticity of information which matches facts to reflect objective reality. However, the acquisition of sensitive information has been noted to change the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of people (Chen & Yang, 2018), and thus, the credibility of news reporting in China has been questioned by many including student and foreign media given the regulation of media and internet in the country (Sun, 2016). As such, the impact of uncensored and unrestricted information on students' attitudes and awareness of their immediate environment brings to bear students a preference for documentaries. And so, the question remains if this information acquired from documentaries aids or impacts their academic pursuits. Therefore, this study is focused on factors influencing audience satisfaction of Chinese documentary programs among undergraduate students in Peking Mainland China.

Chinese society has been intensely influenced by Confucian ideologies of harmony and hierarchy (Hofstede, 1980; Ting-Toomey, 1994). And so critical scholars such as Virulrak (1983) claim that foreign media intrusion has played a significant role in changing indigenous values and cultural belief systems around the globe including China (Virulrak, 1983). The underlining question at this juncture stems from the need for credible information and sources as well as make-up of audience satisfaction of Chinese documentary programs among

undergraduate students. Thus, if the acquisition of unrestricted information leads to change and self-awareness behaviors among students, does the degree of exposure or direct exposure to unrestricted information affects students' academic knowledge and relational towards documentaries? In an attempted to understand audience the satisfaction towards Chinese documentary, the underlining issues perception influence, preference for credible information, and preference for documentaries becomes the focus point in understanding satisfaction of documentary programs among students in Peking.

Furthermore, mass media functioning in social reality requires objectivity, which has been repeatedly questioned in the presentation of informational news reporting documentaries and films in China (Sun, 2016). Nevertheless, if Jorgen Westerstahl (1983), the notion of objectivity as factuality with relevance and impartiality must be upheld, has Chinese documentary demonstrated impartiality in balancing non-partisanship and neutrality in its position of reporting? Although the availability of multiple media outlets and streaming points has afforded students numerous medium of accessing unrestricted content and access to uncensored content; and given the fact that media is deeply regulated in China (Qin et al., 2018), has documentaries aired in various platforms been able to crystallize the dichotomy of control of media and its content in the country? If audience satisfaction of Chinese documentary TV programs as reflective of reality arouses awareness among undergraduate viewers, the cultural, economic, political, and social dispositions of such student must be explored to understand their gratification level.

Review of Related Literature

John Grierson eight principles of minor manifesto of beliefs has been widely credited as the first to utilize the concept of documentary (Stollery, 2017). Thus, Britannica Academic (2017) defines a documentary film as a motion picture that shapes and interprets factual material for educational or entertainment purposes. Equally, Rajala (2017) describes a documentary film as the truth or truth-telling. Documentary film or program has grown significantly over the past three decades, and the advent of digital media has taken the popularity of documentaries to a new height (Eitzen, 2018). The ability of documentary to recount peoples experiences from a candid perspective enable it to continuously generate attention from the audience and viewers because of the audience appeal for documentary programs as well as technological advancement which also gives audience multiple platforms and avenues to communicate and engage (Karlin, & Johnson, 2011; Dowling & Miller, 2019). Although some scholars like Campolo et al (2013) argue that documentary films are a form of arts with immeasurable power to influence the audience with a diminutive measurement indices to do so. On the other hand, some documentary programs, especially educational documentary films are made to change the attitude and mindset of viewers as well as inspire action for social change. And the goal of awareness creation through documentaries to a large extent has been achieved (Barrett & Leddy, 2008; Godlewski & Perse, 2010).

Satisfaction is closely associated with personal fulfillment in the media perspective and Hecht (1978), describes it as an affective reaction to media content and usage that reflects the viewer's gratification given the motives of viewing the selected media choice. Research indicates that satisfaction with media usage is characteristically a result of active viewership or use of media (Kim & Rubin, 1997; Perse & Rubin, 1988) and the more time spent or invested in viewing a certain programs, the more satisfied or gratified the viewer became with it. As such, the audience have becomes emotionally and cognitively involved in watching designated programs of their choice because documentary programs and a few other reality

shows encourage participation and generates emotion among viewers because of its contents and focus on people experiences and realities of our time (Perse & Ferguson, 1993; Bieniek-Tobasco, et al., 2019). Although numerous scholars have described audience satisfaction and dissatisfaction in various ways and contexts. However, the majority of them agree that satisfaction is an emotional reaction that emanates from either affirmation or disapprove of their expectation of media messages (Oliver, 1980). Accordingly, Jacobs (1995) and Assael (1998) both agreed that satisfaction over a service performance or TV program is easily attainable when the outcome is greater than the expectations of viewers and when expectations beat performance dissatisfaction and disapproval overtakes viewer opinion. In the same way, Palmgreen and Rayburn (1985) see it as a general feeling of contentment resulting from a recurring exposure to a particular kind of content over time. As such, Hecht (1978) in an attempt to uncover audience satisfaction through television viewership, found that fulfillment of audience expectation can only be ascertained through engagement with the media. Hence, the level of fulfillment derived from media such as documentary viewership can be explained by viewer's perception of the gratifications and benefits gained from the purported media being used.

Methodology

The study explores factors influencing audience satisfaction of Chinese Documentary programs among undergraduate student in Peking mainland China. Thus, the study adopts a qualitative research instrument as it seeks to investigate the personal experience of audience satisfaction of Chinese documentary viewership (Chauvette et al., 2019). Given that, the qualitative research approach seeks to explore the underlining meaning behind people's experience. As such, the need to understand the factors that influence the audience satisfaction of Chinese documentary programs among undergraduate students in Peking, China, emanates from the student's perception of a credible information source. This influences the preference for documentary programs given the awareness of their immediate environment. As such their social, political, social, environmental, and cultural disposition contributed immensely to their awareness, need and satisfaction in Chinese documentaries. The choice of media outlets and platforms also contributes to audience satisfaction of Chinese documentary programs because students even as an audience are able to choose between outlets like streaming service, internets, Cable TVs, and public TV in their quest for suitable information to suit their needs. The study also examines archival documents; field note observations triangulated to understand the influence satisfaction from Chinese documentaries among students.

Respondents Interviews

The study applied a purposive sampling method with undergraduate students mostly located in Peking Mainland China. The sampling method eliminates bias thereby offering undergraduates students in the study location the chance of participating in the study. A total of 20 undergraduates were involved in the study. Face -to -face interview was conducted with informants along with observatory notes and online documents to buttress findings. In-depth interviews with informants were recorded in Mandarin and translated into English by a certified translator. The interview lasted about 30 to 60 minutes each with the various informants involved and at the convenience of the informants. The interview process was completed within two months period and the privacy of each respondent was ensured with informed consent of the respondent to voluntarily participate in the study. Participants

included males and females aged 20 to 26 years who are undergraduate students in Peking district Mainland China. The choice of employing the qualitative methods as most appropriate for this study emanates from the approach to produce thick descriptive data that divulge the complexities of individual participant life experiences as well as bringing context and meaning to those experiences (Rahman, 2017). Additionally, the instrument employed enables testing and refining of the theory of user and gratification by revealing nuances surrounding the preference for documentaries and the satisfaction derived in a subjective manner.

Table 1

Participants Summary

Pseudonym	Status	Age	Location	Gender	Race	Length of Interview (minutes)
P1	Student	22	Peking China	Male	Chinese	40 Minutes
P2	Student	20	Peking China	Male	Chinese	50Minutes
P3	Student	24	Peking China	Male	Chinese	40Minutes
P4	Student	22	Peking China	Female	Chinese	60Minutes
P5	Student	22	Peking China	Female	Chinese	30Minutes
P6	Student	24	Peking China	Female	Chinese	40Minutes
P7	Student	23	Peking China	Male	Chinese	50Minutes
P8	Student	23	Peking China	Male	Chinese	30Minutes
P9	Student	25	Peking China	Male	Chinese	40Minutes
P10	Student	26	Peking China	Female	Chinese	50Minutes
P11	Student	26	Peking China	Male	Chinese	30Minutes
P12	Student	26	Peking China	Female	Chinese	30Minutes

P13	Student	25	Peking China	Male	Chinese	60Minutes
P14	Student	25	Peking China	Male	Chinese	55Minutes
P15	Student	23	Peking China	Female	Chinese	40Minutes
P15	Student	20	Peking China	Male	Chinese	30Minutes
P16	Student	22	Peking China	Male	Chinese	45Minutes
P17	Student	24	Peking China	Female	Chinese	40Minutes
P18	Student	20	Peking China	Male	Chinese	50Minutes
P19	Student	23	Peking China	Female	Chinese	35Minutes
P20	Student	20	Peking China	Female	Chinese	30Minutes

Source: authors compilation

Recruitment Procedures for Respondents

It was imperative to employ an appropriate sampling methods in order to harness participant's expertise and characteristics in the context of the study. Therefore, the selection criterion for this study was based on participant's status as undergraduate students, located in Peking Mainland China. In addition to their ability to articulate ideas and thoughts of satisfaction derived from the viewership of Chinese documentaries. Thus, a purposive sampling strategy was employed in selecting individuals who met the criteria considered for participation in the study. Nonetheless, five pilot interviews were conducted. And the issue of unit of analysis led to the criteria of informants as strictly only undergraduate students were identified as key informants and utilized in the main study.

Informants Demography

All informants involved in the study are Chinese, located in Peking district, Mainland China, and aged between 20 to 26 years of age, while male participants are 12 in number, the female participants are eight in number.

Data Analysis

Data Analysis in qualitative studies centers on the researcher's subjective interpretation of data as information obtained from informants or participants. Thematic analysis approach was employed for the study where organizing, identifying, analyzing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set which metamorphosed into findings. Given that qualitative study seeks to investigate participant's experiences (Maxwell, 2019). Thus, the researcher's judgment subjectively is essential in the interpretation of data. Equally, the investigator (researcher) becomes the primary instrument of inquiry in the study in making

judgments about coding process themes, as well as the decontextualizing, and recontextualizing of data (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Creswell & Hirose, 2019). Consequently, data from informants was analyzed with Atlas Ti 8 windows software. From the raw data coding process started with emerging patterns, from coding labeling to the formation of themes and final findings for the study.

Validity and Reliability of Instrument

In an attempt to maintain rigor that is expected of in qualitative studies, reliability by way of member checking ensured that informants verify their views as intended. Along with a pilot study geared at ensuring the reliability of the instrument and process. Equally, the validity as reflected in the findings of the studies, provides practical understanding of informants experience, choice and satisfaction derived from Chinese documentaries to suit their information need and awareness of their immediate environment.

Result and Discussion

Research questions guiding the study centered on factors influencing audience satisfaction of Chinese documentaries program among undergraduates. Participants perception, preference and gratification in viewing Chinese documentary programs cumulate into audience overall satisfaction. In answering the following research questions, issues such as, accessibility of documentary programs, content, credibility of information source, and personal needs for information were among reasons informants prefer Chinese documentary programs.

RO 1: Why do you prefer Chinese documentary programs?

Informants contend that content, accessibility and availability of documentary programs were reason they prefer it. This is because most documentary programs are free and easily accessible as compared to other TV programs and shows like movies, soap operas and reality show. Also the fact that documentary makers were more likely to release their documentaries for viewership as soon as production is done compared to seasonal TV shows. This indicates documentaries release does not have the requirement of meeting the commercial target before it could be made available for free viewership. Thus, availability and accessibility particularly on platforms like YouTube, make informants satisfied in watching Chinese documentary TV programs. Equally, content, credibility according to informants documentaries expose them to real life issues and enables them think in a critical way about the information contained in the documentary they watched. Also, informants deciphering is a result of their connection to the subject matter in the chosen documentary being watched at a given time. This is because they can identify with the reports or the story line as cast in the documentary and thus they trust and believe it to be true because they can identify and associate with it from a personal experience viewpoint. Also personal needs such as entertainment and educational needs were among the reason informants prefer documentary programs in answering the question. P4 responds was echoed by majority of the informants:

“Documentary TV programs are free and their content are about real life situations and once you know where to find it you can view it anytime you want and you don’t have to wait for the next season like normal TV shows and I really like the cultural narratives of ancestors through the documentary programs I have seen”.

This is in consonance with previous findings by Karlin & Johnson (2011) which found that there is consensus that documentary programs significantly impact individual attitudes and cultural narratives. Although there is limited empirical research to measure the purported impacts of documentaries on attitude, however documentary programs impact attitude of people towards issues when it resonates with their consciousness. Also, Liu (2018) states that documentaries programs reveals to students real life issues and also helps them develop a sense of relevance towards their immediate surroundings and well as makes them think critically with dispositions on social issues. Similarly, Fortner (1985) indicated that a comparable evaluation and presentation of medium range exposure to documentary TV could result in increased level of awareness of information and retainable knowledge among students prompting eminent attitude changes towards it. Therefore, informants believe in the content, inspire their quest and demand for documentaries as well as the ease in accessibility and availability of documentaries.

RO2: How satisfied are you watching Chinese documentary programs?

In answering the second research question informants equivocally stressed that documentary programs are generally liberal in their point of views without necessarily taking sides over issues given the state of media and information regulations in China. Also informants stressed that given the availability of diverse information channels and platforms documentaries have become one of their main medium of exposure to other perspectives other than the Chinese information domain. The assertion of all informants in the study with respect to satisfaction derived from Chinese documentaries is summed in the view of P12 thus:

“The media here is representative of our government and it helps in shaping our moral values and perspective especially for us the young ones to follow. However our documentary programs give us a different perspective which is something like the actual and real thing. Something like our ancestral roots and historical facts can sometimes be logical but they are also consistent with what my grandparents and my parents told me when I watch Chinese documentary programs because historically they have rich facts that I can trust and I believe them and I am very satisfied because I trust the information I get from Chinese documentaries”.

Thus, preferences for Chinese documentaries by undergraduate students in Peking is as a result of the trust and believe that it offers them a credible and reliable source of information with respect to their cultural heritage and this impacts on their satisfaction because they believe in the content of Chinese documentaries. According to Li and Yang (2018), experts and scholars locally and internationally are far apart in articulating their views on Chinese communication, environment, geography, and financial information. While local Chinese documentaries like the smog documentary take a neutral reporting tone by upholding an event based perspective of the current situation in championing public opinion using documentaries to speak. However, the western coverage of Chinese news information reports from a context-based position of the dangers and risks of pollution with limited focus on efforts in place or made in battling the situation irrespective of minuteness of efforts. As collaborated by Macbean (2007), there is increasing awareness on environmental protection efforts in the overall coverage of documentaries and its impact in China. This has also impacted the disposition of students in Peking as they increasingly believe in the content and perspective of Chinese documentaries. Likewise, Robinson (2013) found that an independent

Chinese documentary has become representative of the people attracting attention from the academic world and film festivals because of its ability to not only resist mainstream political discourse but also able to maintain consumer culture in a marketing economy. Chinese documentaries have become an alternative film making practice and factory for cultural products by portraying and recreating Chinese roots and beliefs systems.

RO3: How informed are you become viewing Chinese documentary programs?

Informants overwhelmingly agreed that Chinese documentaries has become their most trusted source of information particularly in understanding the perception of the world about Chinese media and culture. Also informants equivocally agreed that Chinese people and China is culturally and environmentally rich given what they now know about various places and regions within their country even though they are yet on visit those places. Furthermore, informants assert that their awareness to some aspects of Chinese culture, particularly food, has been reawakened through documentary TV programs viewership. For instance, informant 17 notion as collaborated by five other participants stated that Stinky Tofu is declining in consumption due to its strong odor. However, a documentary TV programs documenting its preparation and consumption not only educate them on how to prepare it but also expose them to indigenous Chinese cuisines that are almost forgotten.

“The narrative and image of documentary programs engages me personally because I am better informed about the subject matter of the particular program I view. Personally, documentary programs are a friendly way of learning and obtaining information from a different point of view and documentaries about our Chinese heritage and culture is very informative to me because it can uphold us Chinese people differently and I have been able to learn what we have here in china and as Chinese people can only be replicated in other places to look like us but it cannot be the same as what we have here as Chinese people. We are different and I realize this by watching Chinese documentaries and I expect to look different and be seen differently when I travel to another country one day because I already know that I am Chinese and I am different from others and I have to expect that people will view me differently and I am well prepared and aware of these type of things and these are things I have learnt viewing Chinese documentaries and I know better now about other people’s culture”

Evidently, documentary programs has the capacity of engaging audience because even though it takes the shape of conventional presentations like TV, news or movies yet it captures audience perception in a different way by exposing them to things they either need to pay greater attention to or things they should know and must know. Thus, awareness towards issues moves the targeted audience from just being aware of an issue to actually acting on the awareness of such issues. Moreover awareness towards issues not only empowers people but also mobilizes them with great focus on addressing the particular situation or problem. Mao (2011) states that although documentaries with educational discourse are usually advantageous however, during the viewership of Chinese educational documentary programs, rational and emotional feelings of viewers are aroused thereby enabling them to also experience the Chinese education fully. In addition Flynn (2015) asserts that the impact of documentaries programs lies in its ability of drawing audience attention to

issues and enabling a catalyze discourse dues to its enlightenment and engagement capacity. Hence, satisfaction of viewership of Chinese documentaries emanates from the informational needs, awareness creations abilities of documentaries, engagement of viewers in a way that gratifies them as well as availability of choice.

Limitations and Contributions of the Study

The various research designs and method adopted by researchers in any given research study has its merits and limitations. Thus, results from an exploratory studies such as this has limited generalizability or generalization due to the limited sample size given that only 20 informants participated in the study. Informants involved in the study were mainly from Perking districts and thus findings cannot be generalized. Furthermore, the social economic statue of students was not taken into consideration and that aspect plays a considerable part in their perception, preference and level of satisfaction of viewership of Chinese documentaries. Since the study is bounded in Peking, China, this also limits the scope of study and so future study can expand the scope of the study to include large population and locations to have a broader view of audience satisfaction of Chinese documentary program viewership among students in China. Consequently, future research can integrate the aspect of informant's (students) prior knowledge of documentaries programs, documentary type and informant's background as the determinant of audience satisfaction of viewership of Chinese documentaries. As a result, future research would be meaningful in measuring whether the student's social background and prior knowledge impacts their choice; preferences, perception and satisfaction towards Chinese documentary programs.

This research would contribute to provide a variety of implications for policy makers, media practitioners (such as broadcasters, video websites, documentaries' producing teams, etc.). Further, our findings suggested the uses and gratifications approach of media explains the audience' s perception, preference, and viewership of Chinese documentary programs.

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