

REALITY TELEVISION PROGRAMS IN MALAYSIA: A DREAM COME TRUE?

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ABSTRACT

Reality television programs have changed the media landscape drastically since the turn of the millennium. Owing to its interactive nature, reality television has become a highly marketable advertising vehicle. In view of its rising popularity and potential in marketing, the influence of these programs is of public interest. This study examines what motivates the viewers in Malaysia to watch reality television programs. Using factor analysis, five motivation factors were extracted: suspense; personal identity and social interaction; engaging/entertaining; romance or attractiveness of contestants; sensation seeking. Three MANOVA models were used to explore the relationship between group differences due to gender, age, education background and the composite of the five motivational factors. Significant multivariate effects were found for all the three models considered. Univariate effects were also found for three of the factors, revealing some interesting findings of those who are fascinated by reality television programs in Malaysia.

Key words: Reality television programs, motivation, involvement, factor analysis, reliability analysis, MANOVA.

INTRODUCTION

When the television program *Survivor* debuted in the summer of 2000 in North America, the “reality television” genre became intensely popular. Subsequently, many new reality shows have been launched everywhere. The dramatic rise in the popularity of reality television shows at the present time can be considered as phenomenal in the world media landscape. Many reality shows have created history in terms of people’s participation and revenue generation.

Reality television is a genre of television programs that capture “ordinary” people in unscripted, producer-contrived situations (Rankin, 2004). Participants allow a large portion of their lives to be scrutinized on and off screen. Their talents, emotional outbursts, conflicts, intimate moments and heart-wrenching confessions are captured on camera around the clock. The often unpredictable twist of events and unexpected human drama in these shows have proven to be a great success in the contemporary entertainment industry.

While popular American shows like *The Apprentice*, *Survivor* and *Fear Factor* appeal to many Malaysians, the locally produced reality television shows like *Malaysian Idol*,

Akademi Fantasia and *Mencari Cinta* have generated much excitement as well as controversy in the local entertainment industry. Hussin (2005) reported that the third season of *Akademi Fantasia*, created such craze among the Malaysian public that it raked in RM 1.7 million through audience short messaging system (SMS) responses for the final round. Mawi, the eventual winner, has since become the nation's hottest celebrity with the local media describing the hype surrounding him as "Mawimania". Likewise, local newspapers and magazines covered *The Malaysian Idol 2* events extensively to feed the ardent fans. Daniel Lee, who beat 9000 other aspirants and survived four grueling months of competition to become the second Malaysian Idol has also captured the hearts of many young Malaysians. Khoo (2005), from *The Star* newspaper, reported that *The Malaysian Idol 2 Grand Finale* held on 23 September 2005 received 1.67 million votes.

Although reality television shows have created new dreams and hopes for television producers, advertising agents, aspiring contestants and devoted viewers in Malaysia, the Government is not too pleased with some of these programs. The deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia was reported to have complained that the shows "borrowed extensively from Western culture" and expressed fear that "these shows could have a negative impact on viewers because some of the action wandered from the norms of local culture" (The Star, 2005a). Subsequently, the Deputy Minister of the Energy, Water and Communications Ministry announced that the Ministry would decide on the kind of reality television shows that would suit the Malaysian society better and reflect Asian values (The Star, 2005b).

Malaysian youth is certainly the main target audience of reality television shows and other promotional events that accompany the programs. Many are so influenced by the persuasive power of the networks and broadcast companies that they actually spend substantial amount of money to participate in these highly interactive programs. At present, it is still uncertain whether the government will impose some limitations on the current reality shows. Nevertheless, it is timely for the authorities and public to reflect on the social and financial impact of this phenomenon and to address the resulting issues appropriately.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Long before the proliferation of reality television, Lee and Lee (1995) had predicted that there would be revolutionary transformations in the entertainment and communication infrastructures as a result of the advent of technology. In order to predict the future of interactive television, the researchers investigated on how and why people watched television. Their study concluded "mood elevation" or the desire to relieve stress, relax and escape from everyday worries was the most important motivation for people to watch television. Another important factor was named "social grease" which refers to pleasure in talking about a shared television experience with others. The patterns of viewing and viewing gratifications observed by the two researchers helped them to successfully predict the phenomenal boom of reality television we are experiencing today.

Although *Survival*, *The Amazing Race*, *Temptation Island*, *Fear Factor* and similar shows have dramatically changed audience ratings and the television landscape, the literature on reality television remains scant. Despite this, a study conducted by Nabi et al. (2003) could be considered as the most comprehensive attempt to understand the psychology of the appeal of reality-based television programming. The uses and

gratification perspectives of television programs formed the main theoretical paradigm of this study. Theorists of these fields believe that people actively seek out and embrace media content to gratify their needs and interests (Blumler, 1979). Gratification, as suggested by Lee and Lee (1995) was found to have a positive effect on regular viewers. However, the study found that contrary to general belief, voyeurism did not have a significant role in attracting people to watch reality-based programs.

The appeal of reality-based programs is grounded in consumer motivation, which was investigated by Reiss and Wiltz (2004). According to Reiss (Reiss and Wiltz, 2004, page 363), “people pay attention to stimuli that are relevant to the satisfaction of their most basic motives, and they tend to ignore stimuli that are irrelevant to their basic motives”. This theory is called the *sensitivity theory* or the *theory of 16 basic desires*. Using the 16 basic desires, Reiss and Wiltz assessed the appeal of reality television with a sample of 239 adults. The researchers found that the people who watched reality television had above-average trait motivation to feel self-important, friendly, free of morality, secure, romantic and, to a lesser extent, vindicated.

In the last three years, reality shows have moved from being a fad to mainstream. Many analysts found that the shows were also becoming more reprehensive ethically and morally (PTC Special Reports, 2002; Rankin, 2004; McVey, 2004; Javors, 2004; Moorti and Ross, 2004; Parker, 2005; Templin, 2005; Malaysia Media Monitors’ Diary, 2005). Previous studies on reality television failed to take into account the opinions and social values of people who watch reality programs or participate in activities related to the reality-based shows. Kahle and Kennedy (1988) suggested that social values could directly influence interests, time-use activities and roles, which in turn influence consumer behavior. We believe that the social values of our target population can provide some insight into their level of involvement with activities related to the shows. Understanding the level of involvement of this group and what motivate them to be involved is important for both the broadcasters and government agencies in formulating practical policies. The concept of involvement was first introduced in psychology on social judgment theory (Sherif and Hoveland, as cited in Funk et al., 2004). Extant literature also reveals that involvement has many meanings in communication and persuasion research. In media research, the conceptualization of media involvement is theoretically and empirically grounded in the audience activity concept in the uses and gratifications tradition (Perse, 1990a, 1990b; Levy and Windahl, 1984). In the last two decades, further developments in the theoretical framework and measurement scale of this concept have been reported (Zaichkowsky, 1985; Andrew et al., 1990; Havitz and Dimanche, 1999; Patwardhan, 2004).

In programming reality television, the participatory element is vital in attracting the audience. The fact that most reality-based television shows have an audience voting system in which audiences are able to express an opinion or preference for particular contestants or elements of the show, and therefore are able to affect the outcome of the shows, is one of the highest form of empowerment television audiences have ever experienced. A unique and very different form of audience involvement is evolving with such unprecedented empowerment. We found neither academic literature nor suitable survey instrument addressing the current development. Instead of exploring the inner worlds of audience involvement without a sound theoretical framework, we feel it is better to examine its explicit forms in terms of activities the audience is normally involved in. At least we shall be able to grasp some understanding of the mass hysteria reported in many parts of the

world. In this study, we shall look at how often the audience get “involved” with 13 key activities related to reality-based shows. The activities investigated include sending SMS votes, attending parties and immersing in thoughts about the show when one is not watching it.

Similarly, we are not able to find a suitable scale to measure what motivates or appeals to our target population of reality television audiences. Instead, we compiled 28 items, some of which are taken and modified from the literature we have reviewed, to gauge motivation. We acknowledge that the items have not been subjected to validity and reliability checks prior to the survey owing to resource constraints. Despite this limitation, the study provides some insight, from the consumers’ perspectives, for understanding the phenomenon of reality television programs.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine the more popular reality shows in the Klang Valley, Malaysia, especially on what appeals to or motivates the viewers and how involved the target population is with the reality television shows. The specific aims of this study are to:

- Determine viewers’ motivation for watching reality television programs.
- Determine audiences’ involvement with activities related to reality television programs.
- Profile viewers of reality television programs.
- Understand if there are differences among various groups of viewers in terms of their motivation to watch reality television programs.

The geographical scope of this study is the Klang Valley, which comprises Kuala Lumpur and its surrounding areas such as Bangsar, Petaling Jaya, Subang Jaya, Shah Alam, and Klang. This is the heartland of Malaysia’s industry and commerce, where most often, the latest products and services are introduced first compared to other parts of Malaysia.

HYPOTHESES

The Malaysian television stations are flooding the market with a proliferation of reality-based programs. From the highly successful shows like *Survival* and *Fear Factor* to our locally produced *Malaysian Idol* and *Akademi Fantasia*, people enjoy watching the intense competition generated and are sending out increasing number of SMS. To have a better understanding of this phenomenon, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H₁: Motivational factors for watching reality television are linked to individuals’ social values.
- H₂: The level of audience involvement with reality television programs differs between programs.
- H₃: Males and females differ collectively in terms of the motivational factors identified.

- H₄: The linear combination of motivational factors identified is related to differences in age group.
- H₅: The linear combination of motivational factors identified is related to differences in educational background.

METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE

A field study, using a structured questionnaire, was carried out. The questionnaire focused on basic demographic information as well as types and frequency of reality television programs watched. Audience motivation consisted of 28 items, using a 7-point Likert scale (1=“Strongly disagree” to 7=“Strongly agree”). The questionnaire also covered audience involvement in various interactive activities associated with the reality shows (1=“Never” to 4=“All the time”). The List of Values (LOV), developed by Kahle (1983), was used to measure value importance (nine items, using a nine-point scale ranging from 1=“Very unimportant” to 9=“Very important”).

The data were collected in September 2005 by 144 undergraduates who were trained in questionnaire administration and ethics. They were instructed to recruit reality television audiences above 18 years of age to complete the questionnaire. The target population consisted of people residing or working in the Klang Valley who had watched at least five episodes of any reality television program between September 2004 to September 2005. To reduce selection bias and ensure a more representative sample, students were given four age quotas to fill (18–24, 25–35, 36–45, 46 and above). Within a 2-week period, 720 questionnaires were completed using the personal interview approach.

Owing to the difficulties in conducting random sampling in a wide geographical area such as the Klang Valley, most of the students contacted their family members and others known to them for the interview. However, given the relatively large sample size and reasonable cross-section of age, we believe that the non-probabilistic sampling would be able to provide a good snapshot of the issues under investigation. In addition, the topic of study is non-personal and many respondents actually found it interesting; hence reducing respondent fatigue that is commonly associated with surveys.

Of the 720 questionnaires that were administered only 665 were usable for our analysis. The sample profile for this study consisted of 50.2% males and 49.8% females. There was a reasonable spread of age groups with 28.6% being between 18–24 years old, 27.2% between 25–35, 22.7% between 36–45 and 21.5% were 46 years or older. Sixty percent of the respondents worked full-time. Overall, 36.4% completed their pre-university education or diploma; 36.7% were university graduates; and 7.7% had attended graduate schools.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that respondents watched 3.00 hours of television on an average day, with a standard deviation of 1.60 hours. Both males and females spent approximately equal time watching television. The types of programs which the respondents watched most often were: dramas (32.3%), news (21.8%), movies (15.0%), reality television (11.0%) and

comedies (8.4%). Documentaries, soap operas, talk shows and other programs were less popular.

Of the 17 reality television programs assessed by the respondents, three were local productions: *Malaysian Idol*, *Akademi Fantasia (Fantasy Academy)* and *Mencari Cinta (Looking for Love)*. These shows have generated much-needed impetus for the local Malaysian entertainment industry besides evoking much public debates. On the whole, respondents from the Klang Valley preferred popular Western reality television shows as indicated by their ranking: *Fear Factor* (32.2%); *The Apprentice* (22.3%); *American Idol* (10.4%); *The Amazing Race* (8.9%); *Malaysian Idol* (6.9%); *Survivor* (6.8%); *Akademi Fantasia* (3.2%); *The Swan* (1.5%); *Xplorace* (1.1%); *Newlyweds* (1.1%); and *Mencari Cinta* (0.6%).

Audience Motivations for Watching Reality Television

To understand the underlying motivations of our reality television audiences, we performed a factor analysis with the 28 items used in this study. The Principal Axis Factoring extraction method and the Varimax rotation using Kaiser Normalization were used in factoring. Five components or factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.00 were extracted, providing a total explanation of initial variance for up to 49.7%. Although the explained variance was not high, the factor structure obtained was well defined and easy to interpret.

From factor analysis, *Suspense* was the most appealing motivational factor for watching reality television shows, accounting for 26.9% of the total variance. The other four factors that emerged with eigenvalues greater than one were *Personal Identity and Social Interaction*, *Engaging or Entertaining*, *Romance or Attractiveness of Contestants* and *Sensation-seeking*.

Although we were not able to pretest the reliability of the scales used in this survey, subsequent reliability analysis of the items making up each of the 5 motivational factors identified in this study showed good internal consistency. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for *Suspense* (alpha=0.765), *Personal Identification and Social Interaction* (alpha=0.725), *Engaging or Entertaining* (alpha=0.745), *Romance or Attractiveness of Contestants* (alpha=0.709) were all well above 0.6. Although the fifth factor *Sensation-seeking* attained an alpha coefficient of only 0.465, low Cronbach values are common for scales with fewer than ten items (Pallant, 2005). *Sensation-seeking* comprised only three items and satisfied the criteria recommended by Briggs and Cheek (1986) with the inter-item correlation within the optimal range of 0.2 to 0.4.

Table 1. Summary of Factor Analysis Results on Motivation for Watching Reality Television

Factor	Initial Eigenvalue	Main Item (with factor loading in parenthesis)
Suspense	7.546	I like seeing real people face challenging situations (0.707) I enjoy guessing who will win (0.676) I like when something unexpected occurs on reality television shows (0.538) I enjoy trying to guess what will happen on reality shows (0.473) I like watching reality television because it is shocking (0.434)
Personal Identity and Social Interaction	2.360	Watching reality television makes me feel smart (0.644) Watching reality television makes me feel better about myself (0.612) I find myself talking to people more frequently because of reality television (0.563) I like watching reality television because I can relate to the participants (0.530)
Engaging/ Entertaining	1.486	When I watch reality television shows, I get so involved I don't want to change the channel (0.676) I like being able to talk about reality television shows with people I know (0.629) I enjoy watching reality television shows (0.575) I hate it when I miss an episode of a popular reality show and everyone is talking about it (0.393)
Romance/ Attractiveness of Contestants	1.353	I enjoy watching reality television because of the romance/relationships among contestants (0.737) I enjoy watching reality television because of the physically attractive contestants (0.583) I watch reality television to follow my favorite contestant on the show (0.556) I like watching reality television because of the exotic locations (0.447)
Sensation-seeking	1.188	I like watching fights among contestants (0.539) I like watching people on reality television shows when contestants forget they are on camera (0.451) I enjoy watching how people behave on reality television because they have low morals and values (0.324)

Level of Audience Involvement

A descriptive scale (1="Never", 2="Sometimes", 3="Most of the time" and 4="All the time") was used to gauge how involved the respondents were with 13 key activities

commonly associated with reality television programs. The results revealed that the respondents were not favorably disposed to locally produced reality shows. Only 3.2% or 21 out of 665 respondents indicated that *Malaysian Idol* was their favorite reality television show; and 13 out of 665 respondents cited *Akademi Fantasia* as their favorite. As a result, the type of activities they participated in appeared to be less interactive. Basically, they just watched and talked about the shows but seldom involved themselves directly in voting for the contestants or attending reality show functions. Table 2 shows the relative ranking of audience involvement based on the mean scores calculated for the activities considered.

Table 2. Level of Audience Involvement with Reality Television Shows

Activities Related to Reality Television Shows	Relative Rank of Involvement	Mean
I watch the show	1	2.55
I talk to my friends about the show	2	1.97
I read about the show in the newspapers	3	1.88
I imagine how I would act in a similar situation	4	1.84
I think about the show when I am not watching it	5	1.61
I watch other programs that include contestants from the show	6	1.60
If it's possible to vote for participants, I do it	7	1.53
I would attend a public appearance if my favorite character from the show is there	8	1.36
I SMS my votes	9	1.34
I watch the show on the web	10	1.27
I am in the audience	11	1.20
I telephone in my votes	12	1.14
I attend reality television show parties	13	1.12

To obtain a glimpse of how involved the respondents were when they actually had the opportunity to participate in activities such as voting for the contestants, we looked at the sub-samples of those who said *Malaysian Idol* and *Akademi Fantasia* were their favorite reality shows.

Malaysian Idol fans were predominantly female (61%). Their education levels were 31% with some secondary or primary school education, 29% had pre-university qualification, a certificate or diploma, and 19% had a first degree. Other than watching the show, the other activities associated with the show that the group was frequently involved in were: read about the show in the newspapers (70%); talked to their friends about the show (63%); watched other programs that included contestants from the show (60%) or thought about the show when not watching it (54%). Forty-three percent of the group sometimes

sent SMS to vote for the contestants, 10% did so most of the time and 29% had never sent SMS to vote. Fifty percent said that they would vote for the contestants if possible and most of them (78%) had never been in the audience.

The majority of *Akademi Fantasia* fans were also females (67%), with 33% of the fans having some secondary education, 29% had pre-university qualification, a certificate or diploma and another 19% were graduates. The *Akademi Fantasia* supporters appeared to be more involved with the show than their *Malaysian Idol* counterparts. Other than watching the show, the other activities that the group was frequently involved in were: reading about the show in the newspapers (91%) and talking to their friends about the show (81%). Many of them (67%) revealed that they would vote for the participants if it were possible. Forty-three percent of the fans sometimes sent SMS to vote for the contestants, 9.5% of them did so most of the time and 4.8% sent SMS all the time. Sixty-seven percent also watched television programs that included contestants from *Akademi Fantasia*. However, they did not go all out to support the contestants as 81% of them never attended the show in person.

Motivational Factors and Social Values

The respondents considered *Fun and Enjoyment of life* to be the most important value from the list of values (LOV) scale (Kahle and Kennedy, 1988). The relative importance of values for the sample is summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Social Values Relatively Important to Reality Television Audiences

Value	Rank	Mean	Std. Deviation
Fun and enjoyment of life	1	7.69	2.08
Self-respect	2	7.63	2.24
Sense of accomplishment	3	7.41	2.26
Security	4	7.30	2.38
Being well respected	5	7.29	2.24
Warm relationship with others	6	7.11	2.22
Self-fulfillment	7	7.10	2.19
Excitement	8	6.91	2.06
Sense of belonging	9	6.61	2.34

To understand if the motivation factors to watch reality television shows were correlated with the values investigated in our survey, we first computed the averaged linear composite of the items made up of each factor presented in Table 1 to represent the corresponding motivational factor. Then non-parametric correlation tests using the Spearman's correlation were conducted. The test results show a significant relationship in the following pairs of value and motivational factor:

- The value *Excitement* was positively correlated with motivational factors *Suspense* ($r=0.253$, $p<0.01$), *Personal Identity and Social Interaction* ($r=0.151$, $p<0.01$), *Engaging / Entertaining* ($r=0.241$, $p<0.01$) and *Sensation-seeking* ($r=0.109$, $p<0.01$).
- *Fun and enjoyment*, the value ranked as the most important by the respondents was also positively correlated with *Suspense* ($r=0.157$, $p<0.01$); *Personal Identity and Social Interaction* ($r=0.097$, $p<0.05$); *Engaging / Entertaining* ($r=0.191$, $p<0.01$); and *Sensation-seeking* ($r=0.123$, $p<0.01$).
- The other values such as *Warm relationship with others* and *Sense of belonging* were correlated with less important motivational factors.
- The results revealed that people who placed excitement, fun and enjoyment in daily life found the suspense and highly enticing elements of reality shows appealing.

Multivariate Analysis of Variance

Conceptually, motivational factors are related (Rubin, 1981). The five motivational factors extracted from our results were also found to exhibit moderate correlation between 0.30 to 0.57. To explore the relationship between the composite motivational factors and demographic variables proposed in our hypotheses, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted.

Three MANOVAs were performed to investigate gender differences (H_3), age differences (H_4) and educational background differences (H_5) in relation to the linear combination of the five motivational factors (dependent variables) namely: *Suspense*, *Personal Identity and Social Interaction*, *Engaging/Entertaining*, *Romance/Attractiveness of Contestants* and *Sensation-seeking*. Preliminary assumption testing was conducted to check for normality, linearity, univariate and multivariate outliers, homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices and multicollinearity, with no serious violation noted.

The results indicate that the difference between males and females on the combined dependent variables was statistically significant: $F(5,588)=5.460$, $p=0.000$; Wilks' Lambda=0.956; hence H_3 is supported. When the dependent variables were considered separately, only *Engaging/Entertaining* ($p=0.005$) and *Sensation-seeking* ($p=0.046$) were significantly different between males and females. An inspection of the marginal means indicated that females felt reality television programs were more engaging or entertaining. However males reported they were more motivated by the *Sensation-seeking* factor.

In relation to age, it was found to have a significant effect on the combined motivational factors: $F(15,1618)=2.917$, $p=0.000$; Wilks' Lambda=0.929; hence H_4 is supported. Examination of the between-subjects effects tests revealed that three of the factors reached statistical significance. They were *Engaging/Entertaining* ($p=0.000$), *Romance/Attractiveness of contestants* ($p=0.001$) and *Sensation-seeking* ($p=0.000$). The marginal means revealed a consistent trend that the younger the viewers, the more motivated they were by these three factors to watch reality television programs.

The multivariate test showed that educational background also had a significant effect on the combined motivational factors, though less significant as compared to gender and age: $F(20,1864)=1.855$, $p=0.012$; Wilks' Lambda=0.937; hence H_5 is supported. When the factors were examined separately, group differences due to educational background for two

of the factors were found. The factors were *Romance/Attractiveness of contestants* ($p=0.040$) and *Sensation-seeking* ($p=0.047$). The group with a certificate or diploma was most motivated by the *Romance* factor (mean=4.229), followed by the pre-university group, bachelor degree holders, those who had completed secondary school and below, and lastly post-graduates (mean=3.679). *Sensation-seeking* enthralled the bachelor degree holders most (mean=4.647), followed by the pre-university group, certificate or diploma holders and post-graduates. Those who have completed secondary school and below were least attracted by *Sensation-seeking* (mean=4.300).

Influence of Reality Television Programs on Youths

The results revealed that hedonism (*Fun and enjoyment of life*) and achievement (*Self-respect and Sense of Accomplishment*) were dominant social values embraced by reality television fans, and these values were linked to their media consumption behavior. These results are consistent with the findings of Laverie et al. (1993). The view that values guide behavior is also evident in the literature from psychology, sociology and organization behavior (Kahle and Kennedy, 1988; Nabi et al., 2003) and might offer an explanation for the popularity of reality television shows as well as by-products of this genre. This is an emerging youth-culture that appears to embrace celebrity culture as a norm.

The youthful viewers are the most ardent supporters of reality television programs, as demonstrated by their readiness to participate or support youth celebrities or idols' talent search. The public witnessed this phenomenon yet again during the recent talent-search reality show, *One in a Million*. Suki, a seventeen-year-old student, became an instant youth celebrity when she was voted the winner on 22 September 2006 (The Star, 2006). The prize money of *One in a Million*, Channel 8 television's biggest talent-search reality show, is made up of a recording contract that includes production with top-name producers, collaboration with top-name artistes and a marketing campaign. This talent show attracted more than 5,000 hopeful participants. The huge number of aspirants vying for the prize is a reflection of how earnest our youths are in seeking fame and success through the promise of a reality program.

Celebrities or "idols" produced by reality shows have strong influence on youths worldwide, and it is no different in Malaysia. Youths do not just admire the artistic talents of their idols but are also curious about their idols' personal lives, opinions and values. As such, youth celebrities become powerful opinion leaders for their fans. The entertainment industry, marketing executives and advertisers are well aware of their power. An increasing number of winner of reality shows are being used as celebrity product endorser or spokesperson in various promotional activities and advertising. It is important for our society to realize that we will not be able to stop our youths from coming under the power of celebrity culture. Taking the challenge of this emerging culture positively is a more pragmatic approach instead of just lamenting over the loss of our cultural identity.

CONCLUSION

The goal of this research was to explore the underlying motivation dimensions of the highly popular reality television programs in the Klang Valley. Using factor analysis, five motivational factors were identified, namely, *Suspense*, *Personal Identity and Social Interaction*, *Engaging/ Entertaining*, *Romance/Attractiveness of Contestants* and *Sensation-seeking*. Although the items used to measure the motivation construct were not pre-tested for validity and reliability, four out of five of the dimensions that emerged proved reliable.

The three MANOVA models tested revealed that viewers from different gender, age and educational background differed significantly in relation to the composite motivational factors. However, irrespective of their gender, age or educational background, the respondents were equally enthralled by the dominant factor - *Suspense*. When examining the univariate effect, *Suspense* was found to have the highest rating. On the other hand, *Personal Identity and Social Interaction* was rated lowest, and failed to reach any statistical significance when examined across the different classification groups. Two important inferences could be drawn from this MANOVA. Firstly, reality television programs were not able to elevate the viewers' self-esteem, nor enhance social interaction or communication among the Klang Valley viewers. Secondly, the overall feeling of all the groups for the factor *Personal Identity and Social Interaction* was slightly negative, regardless of their gender, age or educational background. Some interesting differences due to groups were also detected for the other three factors. The younger the person, the more engaging, romantic and sensational reality shows meant to him. Females felt reality programs were more engaging or entertaining than males, but males were more motivated by the sensation-seeking factor.

Although our overall sample showed a low level of involvement with respect to the interactive activities of the reality shows in this study, it did not necessarily imply they were not interested in the activities. About 90% of them cited popular Western reality shows as their favorite although they did not provide any opportunity for them to participate in the interactive features of these shows. When the sub-samples of *Malaysian Idol* and *Akademi Fantasia* fans were examined, we found them to be involved or very involved with various activities associated with the two local productions. However, the small number of respondents in these two sub-samples refrained us from drawing strong conclusions about the level of involvement in this study.

Currently, reality television is at the forefront of the entertainment industry in Malaysia. People are continually fascinated by the concept of becoming famous and rich by "being themselves". For the entertainment industry, reality television has tremendous potential to become a rich advertising vehicle. In fact, reality television has become a key site for experiments in "advertainment" (Deery, 2004). This is a new marketing concept that merges advertising and entertainment based on innovations in digital technology.

On the other hand, there are many ethical issues and matters of public interest to be considered. What is the impact of these shows on our attitudes, emotions and values? We have seen some good reality shows which promote positive values and are very motivating. There are also many programs, which seek to exploit the lives of real people for the purpose of making a profit. With more hybrid forms of reality programs flooding our homes, there is certainly a need for further research to study the social, cultural, psychological and financial impact of these shows.

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