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## A Conceptual Analysis of the Competency of Television Music Reality Show Participants

**Shantharaju S.**

Assistant Professor, Department of Media Studies, Christ University, Hosur Road, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

**Dr. N. S. Ashok Kumar**

Professor, Department of Mass Communication, Central College, Bangalore, University, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

### **Abstract:**

*To live in society, every individual seeks a distinct identity. The perusal of art helps in the creation of this identity, if not on a global scale, at least in one's immediate social circle and personal space. Right from the beginning of civilization, art forms have been practiced at multiple levels by various communities and have emerged diversely across geographies. Today, due to media intervention, the emergence of this identity faces many challenges. With some opportunities being offered by the media, the viewer is left with one of the two options – to either be a participant or a viewer. Though the television channels try to be interactive, the programmers' end always dominates the choices offered to their viewers. From game shows to music shows, television reality shows have expanded to various genres to offer entertainment. Every program has a set of loosely constructed criteria like proficiency in dance, music, theatre etc. However, these participants, who are a mixed group of different socio-economic backgrounds, are mostly never trained in the respective forms. The present conceptual paper attempts to understand the issues of reality show participants, especially for dance and music shows.*

**Keywords:** Television, children, reality shows, training, guided learners

### **1. Introduction**

With the advent of TV in 1959, Indian audiences' curiosity and consumption started to grow. The 1969 and 1975 preliminary broadcasting plans of the former Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi added to this curiosity. However, it was the 1982/83 sports mania which created a pan-Indian patriotism towards sports as well as an enormous craving for entertainment (Victor Sunderaj, Children and Television). With the liberalization policies, private channels like Star, CNN, Zee started functioning along with the government-run Doordarshan. T.V channels were slowly changing their programming patterns to increase viewership. Hence, Soaps, Sitcoms, Teleserials were the initial content which attracted Indian TV viewers. During the same time, the birth of reality television in India took place with the introduction of singing competitions like Zee's Sa Re Ga Ma Pa and DD's Meri Awaz Suno. These early singing shows played a unique role in creating the existing pool of talent in the industry. Most successful singers in Bollywood today have been contestants on these shows. As the number of private channels was increased the program patterns also grew. The music, dance reality shows became an inseparable part of TV entertainment. Indian Idol, Just Dance, Dance India, Dance Plus, Voice of India are few such successful programs.

All these programs call for a general audition in various metro cities, selecting around 20 contestants for the next level. As the program proceeds, the number of contestants is reduced through eliminations, either by a panel of judges or through public votes and most of the times through both. Finally, one or two in rare cases are considered as exceptional performers. These winners often belong to various age groups, ranging from 5 years to 40 or more.

Witnessing the surge in reality shows since the past 20 years (from 1993's Zee's Sa Re Ga Ma Pa), raises various pertinent questions. What all the winners currently doing? Were they able to make a career in music or dance? Were they successful if they did? What about the other contestants who were eliminated? Were they only used as filling agents to prompt skilled contestants? These questions need to be focused upon to understand the entire discourse around TV reality shows which goes beyond the scope of this paper. This article focuses only on the training and skill aspects of participants which differentiate mere participation and rejection of TV reality shows. Alternatively, the sake of the present argument, the paper focuses on reality shows meant for children on Indian television only.

## 2. Methodology

As mentioned above, not much research has been done in the area. Hence the researcher had to depend on the conceptual or theoretical presentation of methodology rather than an empirical one. This paper also includes observations and content analysis. Most of the Kannada television reality shows like Ede Tumbi Haduvenu, Sa Re Ga Ma Pa, Super, Minute, Star of Karnataka and few national channels' reality shows, Dance Plus, Dance India, Just Dance, Voice of India, Sa Re Ga Ma Pa (Hindi) are closely observed in order to evaluate the following objectives. The primary reference is the visual material.

## 3. Objectives

To understand the children as content for TV reality shows.

To understand the problems faced by unguided learners of TV reality shows.

## 4. Importance and Research Questions

To master any art form, it takes a lot of practice and training. Hence, children are encouraged to start practice at a very young age which would instil confidence in them and make them more proficient at a later stage of their development. Due to the achievements that the children gather at a young age, they start considering themselves 'special,' which helps enrich their creative world. Even if these children choose not to pursue those art forms later in their life, training instils in them discipline, making them more committed to any work they decide to do.

However, participation in television reality shows does not enhance the child's capacity nor does it instil confidence which could elevate a child's life. Instead, the child acquires a sense of superiority as he/she believes that he/she is "special" which could lead to a feeling of entitlement or arrogance, as they believe that the TV monitor is the entire world and nothing exists beyond it. In the post 2012 reality shows (after NHRC's hard recommendations on Zee's 'AATA' Telugu children show, which was asked to halt production, after receiving complaints of human rights violations for which the channel appealed later and was allowed to air the show), reality programs revolving around children have developed a sense of appreciating everything and providing only humorous, soft feedback rather than constructive, and sometimes hard, criticism. In most of the cases, the judges verbally appreciate everyone, though some contestant's performance is not great. Here are the few questions which need to be answered.

1. Dilemma of judges and awarded the best performer.
2. Basic training of contestants

At the age of 10 or 12, which is a transforming period to adolescence, won't these experiences leave a permanent mark on their personality development? What is the long term impact of reality TV experiences on children? Do they compare and contrast or evaluate the comments before internalizing them? These are several questions that must be examined by psychologists and sociologists in association with media professionals to provide a good policy framework. This paper tries to pitch in on these questions rather than attempting a statistical analysis. There is not much research done in the area that would illustrate the importance of the above questions and thus this paper attempts to pave a way forward.

## 5. Discourse around Guided and Unguided Participants of Reality TV

### 5.1. Need of Understanding Guided and Unguided Learning Patterns-Solving the Problem

Music and dance could be learned in many ways and many forms. Though one could learn from seeing and listening, it can be broadly classified into guided and unguided form of learning.

In guided learning, there is a clear teacher-student relationship that exists. The learner is constantly instructed, made to rehearse until the Raga (musical note) or Mudra (dance movement) is imbibed perfectly and is then introduced to the various Ragas and Mudras in the order of their complexity. As the students get older, their knowledge matures under the guidance and training of the teacher. Achieving some expertise in the area may take months, years or even decades. As they grow older and learning quotient, the teacher sets the amount of time in months, years or decades public appearance. Though one can criticize that this is only restricted to a few art forms practiced by upper caste communities, one cannot deny the fact that the teacher-student relationship is universally important for any art form to be learned. Yakshagana from Coastal part of Karnataka, Neelagararu of South Karnataka is few such example. Any other forms of learning except the teacher-student space is considered as unguided learning where the student puts the effort to learn alone, sometimes with informal guidance from others.

In unguided learning, no formal teacher-student relationship exists. Rather, an organized learning pattern is created where the learner depends on various other forms of imitation, observation, multimedia tools, TV or Radio, CD or internet sources. No one can deny the fact that unguided learners have the capability to surprise the world. This has been immortalized in our myths and legends for e.g. Ekalavya, Sudra Sambooka and some of the other singers and artists of our time.

However, by and large, it is the guided learners who have predominantly cleared the path for the music and dance community. Unguided learning also requires a certain method of order and knowledge of the body of science. Though, initially, child participants of reality shows were guided learners, the post-2000 reality show contestants were more likely to be dominated by those who were unguided and perhaps, self-learners. If appropriate data is collected about the winners of any music reality show like Meri Awaz Suno, Sa Re Ga Ma Pa or Ede Tumbi Haduvenu, one may be able to demonstrate this phenomenon. Leading singers of today, who were previously the contestants of above mentioned reality shows show this pattern clearly- Sunidhi Chauhan (then 12 years old) was a lead singer in famous musicians Anandji-Kalyanji's troupe Little Wonders' by the age of 11; BelaShende winner of Sa Re Ga Ma Pa

in 1998, (then 16 years) hails from a family with a music background; Shreya Ghosal (then around 15 years), started practicing classical music at the age of six and had a solid guided learning from early childhood. Hence these contestants could fit in popular genre demands as their voice adaptability was more compared to unguided ones.

There is more chance of guided learners winning in the public forum as the training makes them confident to adapt to complex notes or songs. Popular child-based reality show on E-TV Kannada, Ede Tumbi Haduvenu hosted by legendary film singer, S.P. Balasubramaniam is a good example of this trend. Most of the participated children who won were either from a family of musicians or had practiced music from a very young age.

### 5.2. Space for Guided Learners and Unguided Learners

The selection of unguided learners and success of guided learners correlates to each other. This gives enough room to be suspicious about whether the unguided child artists are deliberately chosen and carried till the final round to aid the winning participants? The recent trend in child based reality TV supports this possible doubt. In the 12th edition of Sa Re Ga Ma Pa Little Champs (Kannada) which started airing in October 2016, the contestants were often introduced with the constant reminder of their socio-economic backgrounds (which has been done in earlier editions too regarding children who come from slums). The judges who were on the selection panel of the auditions constantly reminded the audience of the socio-economic background of the contestants. "Oh, you are from a village where there is no electricity. Right?", "We did the right thing by choosing you when you said that you learned music by listening to the radio," "Here is the contestant's mother who has not seen her son for a month. She could not resist meeting her son and has travelled alone all way from 100 km to unite with her child", are some of the common expressions used by judges and anchors.

It is evident from the conversations between the judges and the anchors that they are also making comments that would resonate with viewers from a specific/selected socio-economic background. Maybe this increases the viewership of such programs; dividing viewers based on their support of the urban elite or the rural poor. The point is that programmers assume that rural viewers support these contestants thinking that they are one of them. The success of such kids would create a para-social relationship between the contestants and viewers, mostly the rural class. Western programs like X factor were criticized for the same technique, where they were trying to divide the viewers into working and elite class.

It is a well-known fact that the theatrics that arises when the child is eliminated from the show is phenomenal, making the audiences emotional. Often teary-eyed parents are forced to talk during emotional outbursts, judges have given prolonged standing applause and emotional hugs are quite commonly seen in any children's reality show across language programs on Indian television. Another aspect is that the unguided or self-learners practice for the joy of it, rather than pursuing it as a career. Mostly they imitate their perceived models whereas guided learners also imitate, but learning happens in a group and one-on-one relationship circle. There is more coordination between mouth and mind as they are aware of the basics and the grammar of an art form. Their mistakes are corrected much before they become a part of their practice. A long journey with a set of skilled and knowledgeable artists naturally helps the child learn what is right and what is wrong. A child develops a sense of judgment for his/her capability through constant exposure to teachers, seniors, and peers.

### 6. Conclusion

The outburst economic gave rise to mediated values and are extended to various spaces of society. The huge number of urban media consumers are trying to become the content of the media they consume. Television reality shows provide them a chance to do that. It might be any genre like game shows or singing competitions; they offer a platform to earn immediate fame. The social space for exhibiting the children's talent has changed in the academic structure or the non-media public spaces. Thus it is not surprising that television is perceived as a showground. It is easier for adults to accept defeat or rejection, but children may not understand it the same way. The innocence of the child does not distinguish between reality and the illusion of television. Since there is no physically visible impact of TV reality shows, it is quite difficult to draw a clear line to measure its impact. However, cognitive changes cannot be measured by a numerical approach. It does have the impact as perceived by parents and music teachers. The researcher approached various music schools, where the teachers, hailing from a traditional approach to teaching art forms, were apprehensive in accepting children who had appeared on TV. One needs to orient the child about the possible outcomes of a television reality show. Consequently, the society also needs to have an ethical demarcation on pushing their children to be on TV reality shows. The media/production houses also need to be brought under legal terms in setting the selection criteria and to take care of the child in the long run.

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