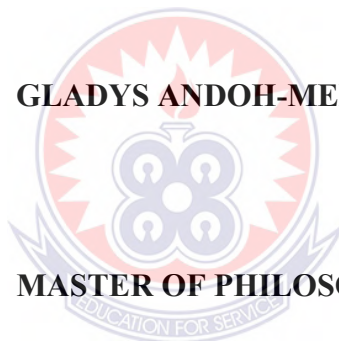


UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

**VIEWERS PERSPECTIVES ON REALITY DATING SHOWS IN GHANA: A
CASE STUDY OF *DATE RUSH* SHOW**

GLADYS ANDOH-MENSAH



MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

2022

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

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**A dissertation in the Department of Strategic Communication, School
of Communication and Media Studies, Submitted to the School of Graduate
Studies in partial fulfillment**

**of the requirements for the award of the degree of
Master of Philosophy
(Strategic Communication)
In the University of Education, Winneba.**

DECEMBER, 2022

DECLARATION

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

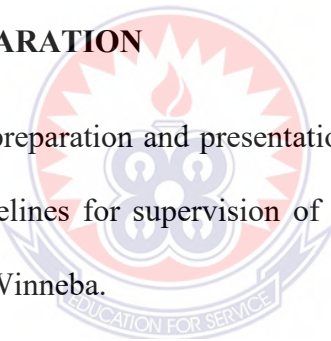
I, **Gladys Andoh-Mensah**, declare that this Thesis, with the exception of quotations and references contained in published works which have all been identified and duly acknowledged, is entirely my own original work, and it has not been submitted, either in part or whole, for another degree elsewhere.

SIGNATURE:

DATE:

SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this work was supervised in accordance with the guidelines for supervision of Dissertation as laid down by the University of Education, Winneba.



NAME OF SUPERVISOR: **GIFTY APPIAH-ADJEI (PHD)**

SIGNATURE:

DATE:

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my parent Mr. and Mrs. Andoh-Mensah for their continuous love and support always.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Starting and ending the journey on this research has been challenging and tough one but in all this, I thank God so much for his grace, mercies and strength. A work of this nature could not have been successful without the assistance, encouragement and inspiration from many individuals, for without each of them, this work would not have come to an end. I therefore, wish to express my profound gratitude to them.

Firstly, a sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Gifty Appiah-Adjei (PhD), for her constructive criticism and feedback which helped in shaping this work in the right direction to address the problem identified. I would also like to express my appreciation to the Faculty Members of the School of Communication and Media Studies for their academic and social support during my graduate studies years. Your cherished contributions have shaped my work greatly and I appreciate it. Not forgetting Mr Stephen Tindi, much grateful, your work and guidelines proved to be very instrumental in this work.

I would like to acknowledge the astounding support of my family. My parent Mr. and Mrs. Andoh-Mensah and my brothers Dennis Kwoffie and William Andoh-Mensah for their unwavering support in prayers, cash and motivations throughout my pursuit of this Mphil degree. I am forever grateful to God for giving me a supportive family. To my family “Ayekoo”

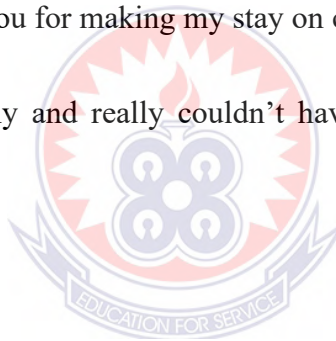
Also, to these three amazing people in my life like Emmanuel Ofori, Maxwell Diedong and Keziah Konam, your untiring supports, inspirations and checkups throughout the research process was really remarkable. I am very grateful to you all and for God for giving me such a caring and loving friend. God bless us all. Additionally, I would like to acknowledge my seniors Miss Belinda Osei Mensah, Mr.

Rainbow Sackey, Miss Elizabeth Owusu Asiamah, Mr. Godfred Asare Yeboah, Mr. Divine Atta kyere-Owusu, Mr. Paul Adams, Mr. Emmanuel Sankah and Mr. Emmanuel Nii Adama Mensah for their push and intellectual support. You all inspired me to excel and challenge myself and I am thankful for listening and having you at that time. Another gratitude goes to my RoVaDith family. God continue to bless you ladies for me. Forever thankful.

A big appreciation also goes to the four contestants of *Date Rush* show (season five) and the twenty-six viewers who contributed to the successful completion of this thesis. I say thank you for your rich and insightful contributions which funded the basics of this work, making the work factual and valuable. Finally to my COMSSA' 13 UEW family. Thank you for making my stay on campus a memorable one.

I love you all very dearly and really couldn't have done this without any of you.

Thank You



ABBREVIATIONS

TV- Television

TV3- Television 3

PSI- Para-social Interaction

U&G- Uses and gratification

RTV- Reality Television



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ABSTRACT

Reality television shows are a relatively new genre on television that intriguingly draw in and hold the interest of different viewer demographics. One of the most common types of reality shows is a reality dating show. Reality dating shows have steadily taken over the TV programmes market and have also recently attracted a lot of interest from both scholars and television viewers. As such, the African media landscape has gradually embraced this genre of television programming and Ghana is not an exception. However, research on the phenomenon of reality dating shows has not received much attention. This study attempts to analyse the *Date Rush* show, a reality dating show produced by a privately owned Ghanaian television network, TV3. The study gathered data through three focus group discussions with active viewers of the *Date Rush* show in Winneba and phone interviews with four contestants of the show. The work was anchored on The Uses and Gratification theory, which offers an analysis of the motivations of the focus group participants for watching the reality dating show. Furthermore, Para-social Interaction theory was used to analyse the nature of interactions the viewers and contestants of *Date Rush* share. A purposive and snowball sampling technique are used to draw a sample of thirty (30) participants, consisting of four (4) contestants on the show and twenty-six (26) viewers. An analysis reveals that the most salient gratifications sought were entertainment and social interactions. Also, findings show that the viewers perceived the 'real' in the reality genre as partially scripted, not original or authentic. Besides, it was discovered that viewers and contestants of the *Date Rush* show form Para-social interactions. The Para-social interactions between viewers and contestants bothered on the kind of narrative engagement, social media engagement as well as face-to-face interactions. The study concludes that the *Date Rush* show (reality dating) television programmes have serious influences on viewers. The study recommends that there should also be more avenues for viewers to share and comment on the show. It appears that even though viewers interact with contestants of the show, the avenues for interactions are limited. The inclusion of segments like call in live and pass their comments or interests with the contestants would go a long way to enriching interactions.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Television viewership throughout the world has been a major interest for television stations as they put in efforts to create compelling contents that stimulate viewers' interest in order to increase viewership (Thielman, 2014). According to Demirtas and Baskaya (2015), the existence and presence of so many television networks and channels to serve the interest of diverse niches of viewers has made the television industry a highly competitive industry as far as revenue generation is concerned. It is worth noting that the advent of online streaming platforms such as Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime among others have intensified the competitiveness in the television industry by driving traditional television networks to put in their utmost effort in creating content that will attract viewer traffic to their channels (Ruangrak, 2016). When TV channels have intriguing content, and viewership increases, the brand of the channel becomes prominent which then leads to profit maximization due to the fight for commercial and advertising spots by companies. As a result of the aforementioned factors, television channels are increasingly creating reality shows that are able to generate significant traction for their channels (Ruangrak, 2016; Thielman, 2014). Evidence has indicated that most people in recent times are actually drawn to television reality shows based on the notion that these programmes are more entertaining and more real than other TV programmes (McDermott, 2012).

Recent history about Reality TV may result from economic forces. Beck, Hellmueller, and Aeschbacher, (2012) indicate that the concept of the reality show was introduced in 1948 by Allen Funt and the show was titled *Candid Camera* (Hellmueller & Aeschbacher, 2010). After this series ended in 1964, Granada Television Series was

also broadcasted in the United States (Beck et al., 2012). In the early 1990s, the telecast of the MTV series '*The Real World*' portrayed the daily lives of ordinary people (Demirtas & Baskaya, 2015). The authors also mentioned that the programme, *The Truman Show*, was another reality TV show produced in 1998 which narrated the story of an average person who is unknowingly filmed 24 hours per day (Demirtas & Baskaya 2015). Not so long after that period, other novel forms of television reality shows sprung up which have undergone some sort of variegation with many newfound formats released on yearly basis (Demirtas & Baskaya, 2015).

Reality television shows are a popular type of programmes that falls under a television programming genre called factual television entertainment. Factual television entertainment is a genre of television programme that involves 'actual people' – nonprofessional actors (Godlewski & Perse, 2010). These people are not people who are acting but rather bringing their real personalities out in connection with the said programmes to their viewers. Characteristically, these reality shows are unscripted programmes, with nonprofessional actors (Hall, 2006; Nabi et. al., 2003). Basically, reality shows that are not staged, involve nonprofessional actors, and are unscripted fall under the factual television genre. Hill (2005, p. 2) explains that "reality TV is about the viewing experience of a developing factual television genre. It is commonly assumed that viewers cannot tell the difference between entertainment and information, or fiction and reality in popular factual television".

Reality TV has prompted much popularity in recent time and has gained more academic attention than the genre had received in its first 40 years (Beck et. al., 2012). There were several shows after this era such as *Survivor*, *Big Brother*, and *American Idol* which transformed the entire industry (Jain & Roy, 2015). For example in 2000, *Survivors* was broadcast by CBS in the USA with a similar platform to that

of *Expedition Robinson*, and in 2001 *Operación Triunfo*, a Spanish-produced talent show achieved great success among viewers that it was subsequently exported to many countries (Digeon, 2019).

Reality television shows prosper on a blend of ‘sensation’ and ‘authenticity’, exploiting the sensationalism of the ‘real’ to attract mass viewers and generate advertising profits (De Witte, 2018). As a genre of television programme, reality-TV can be considered as one of the newest. The genre emerged as a solution to the oversaturated television market in the 1980s and 1990s as it was relatively inexpensive compared to other television productions (Lovelock, 2019). This genre can boast of its vast variety of formats and content, its influential presence in prime-time slots, and its high viewers share (Andrejevic, 2004; Digón 2019). It still fills the television programme schedules of many channels. With ever-changing presentations and content, along with ‘thematic’ channels and other programme types being influenced by reality TV content, it can be said that reality television continues to evolve and dominate the television world. Reality television since its emergence has been praised countlessly for giving a platform to ordinary people, raising awareness of social issues, and revitalizing factual programming (Deller, 2020).

Some of these new show such as *Big Brother*, *Osbournes*, *Top Model*, *Survivor*, *The Bachelor*, *Take Me Out*, *Young Famous and African*, *Ultimate love* and *Judge Judy* among others are centered on real-life and average people. Although it has been decades since these TV shows began, they have been powerful in sustaining the interest of viewers (Hall, 2006; Roberti, 2007). Despite the fact that these TV series have been on the air for decades, they have shown to be effective in maintaining viewer attention (Beck et. al., 2012; Roberti, 2007). Furthermore, significant format changes and developments have brought these forms of TV shows up to date and

made them modern. *American Idols and American Got Talent*, for example, use dramatic compositions as well as unadorned or genuine 'human interest' segments that focus on the candidates' everyday life.

“Some reality TV shows are created to reflect the basic format of conventional reality TV shows with features such as a moderator, a fixed plot throughout the show, performers, well arrangement set and costumes, stage setting, lighting, voting through SMS, direct viewers, selection, elimination rounds and winning prizes” (Demirtas & Baskaya, 2015 p.217). One of the populous sub-genres of reality television shows includes the reality dating show (Ferris et. al., 2007). Reality dating shows largely telecast non-actors in a dating condition. A typical example of such a show is ABC channel's *The Bachelor* show which presents 25 women who are in competition over one man (Ferris et. al., 2007). Although reality television shows such as dating shows are becoming very famous among a large number of viewers, there are general debate in society regarding their authenticity and whether these shows are scripted or unscripted (Ruangrak, 2016). That notwithstanding, viewers of these shows somewhat connect with contestants on some levels (Arulchelvan, 2019).

As a result, the current research aims to better understand viewers' perspectives and motives on reality television shows, as well as the kind of interactions that viewers and the contestants have. The study focuses specifically on *Date Rush* show, a Ghanaian reality dating show that has recently gained a lot of popularity among the Ghanaian population. According to a survey by Shine Publications (2020, para.10) study, the *Date Rush* show "has achieved so much popularity and excitement among Ghana's upper, middle, and youthful viewers." The show, while not having a significant social impact, plays with the idea of choosing a life mate and the complexities involved.

1.1.1 Perspectives of viewers to reality television (RTV)

Although RTV shows have gained some appreciable level of popularity, their latent importance is not just related to their popularity (Hall, 2006). As indicated by Hall, these shows attract scholarly focus due to the fact that they provide remarkable insights regarding how viewers ‘make sense of media text’ (p. 193). The subject of realism is somewhat embedded in viewers’ observation of these shows (Ruangrak, 2016). Whilst some people would sustain the argument that these shows present a firsthand or direct documentation of reality, the issue of realism is encountered with ambiguity (Hall, 2006). Thus, although a large percentage of these shows seemingly present real people engaged in real-time events, their activities unfold in a situation where they are cognizant of the fact that they are in camera (Hall, 2004; Hall, 2006). The realism aspect of these shows can be considered one of the most dominant topics regarding the perspectives of viewers as far as reality TV shows are concerned (Das, Sarkar & Hussain, 2021; Hall, 2003; Hall, 2006; Ruangrak, 2016). For instance, Das et. al., (2021) make the argument that some television channels in their pursuit of amassing a huge viewership tend to produce ‘scripted dramas’ which they present on TV as reality shows. The aforementioned scholars also suggest that anytime the issue of scripting these shows arises, the producers get to be very articulate in contesting the fact.

The literature on RTV shows has revealed that there is a general disputation among viewers’ regarding the authenticity and realism of these shows. Whereas some people express the opinion that these shows are scripted and that participants are just acting, others also are of the view that the shows are real and participants are portraying their natural attributes and behaviors (Ruangrak, 2016). However, in a perspective analysis study conducted by Das et. al., (2021) to investigate the viewers’ perspective of

reality TV shows, it was found that the manipulation of reality regarding these shows and debates about their authenticity do not actually deter viewers as they choose to be intrigued by what they see on their screens.

1.1.2 Connection between viewers and contestants of reality TV shows

In spite of the sustained argument regarding whether or not reality TV shows are realistic, there seems to be an apparent connection between viewers and participants (Das et. al., 2021). According to the aforementioned authors, once participants of these shows attract viewers' attention, it is basically about engaging and occupying them through the programme till it ends.

Based on the levels of connection that get to be formed between viewers and contestants, this kind of show offers viewers the opportunity of developing confidence in order for them to become themselves (Lundy et. al., 2008). In essence, reality TV shows or their participants possess the tendency of becoming an empowering tool for their viewers'. Based on a study conducted by Lundy et. al., (2008) concerning the way students consume reality TV shows, it was found that there were significant elements of social affiliation regarding the student viewers and show participants.

1.1.3 Reality Shows in Ghana

Reality shows gained popularity in Ghana in the year 2003, when Sammy B, an indigene of Ghana, featured in the first season of *Big Brother Africa* (BBA) which is an adaptation of the international *Big Brother* series. *Big Brother Africa* is a reality show which showcases twelve (12) housemates from twelve (12) different African countries living in an enclosed house for a stipulated period of time. The winner

usually ends up with a cash prize coupled with fame. It however stopped transmission after nine seasons (Folayan et. al., 2019). It was widely speculated that the reason for BBA's popularity in Ghana is the fact that Ghanaians were eager and excited to be represented in an international/African programme as it was the first time that the reality show would be created using participants of different personalities from a continent. However, since the debut of Big Brother Africa in South Africa 2003, reality TV shows have become a common feature on television stations across the continent (Darkwah & Resario, 2022).

The increased viewership of *Big Brother Africa* by Ghanaians resulted in the birth of the first reality show in Ghana called Mentor. Reality shows have helped the development of a host of television stations in the wake of the democratization of airwaves in the 1990s. The emergence of reality TV has paved the way for private individuals to own stations, creating an environment of competition for viewership (Darkwah & Resario, 2022). Shows range from music to dance, cooking, dating, weight loss, cultural education and promotion reality shows (Darkwah & Resario, 2022). It is an irrefutable fact that most TV stations in Ghana air a variety of reality shows, many of which are quite educational and have a significant impact on today's youth. The likes of *GMB*, *TV3 Date Rush*, *Mentor*, *Miss Malaika*, *Talented Kidz* and *Mtn Hitmaker* are all having a significant impact (Asare, 2020).

RTV has been embraced in Ghana but just a few can be labelled very good (Sterger, 2017). The Ghanaian media have recently come under fire for what is widely perceived as smothering antisocial content. Ghanaian cultural nationalists have expressed their displeasure with the dominant depiction of western and other non-Ghanaian cultures, which they believe has harmed indigenous cultures (Dennis, 2018). This idea of globalization (Robertson, 1995) is not limited to the elite. Low-

income Ghanaians who are not necessarily part of the global elite have bought into the concept of reality television shows and are actively involved in their production, either directly or indirectly (Resario & Darkwah, 2021). The introduction of Ghana's TV reality show was one of the well-received shows by the general public, partially because there was no competitive alternative entertainment of the sort at the time, and the reality show offered numerous and various forms of entertainment (Sterger, 2017). Most reality shows in Ghana, such as *Talented Kidz*, *Ghana Most Beautiful*, *MTN Hitmaker*, *Miss Malaika Ghana*, *Date Rush*, *Di Asa*, and others, have thrived since their inception.

Reality shows have a strong presence on many TV channels in many countries (Digon, 2019), and Ghana is not an exception. Therefore, it can be argued that reality shows are booming in Ghana because of the viewers' acceptance of this genre. What is vital is it continues to be nurtured and encouraged. With the multitude of reality TV shows being aired, alongside their vast variety of formats and content, their influential presence on primetime slots and the high viewers share can boast of its tremendous growth.

1.1.4 The Date Rush Reality Show

The show's main goal is to find love. The *Date Rush* show is a reality dating show created by Adesa Production Limited, a Media General Group company, in collaboration with Rush Energy Drink. Each season of the TV3 *Date Rush* show runs for thirteen weeks, and an episode is aired each Sunday. The show was put together in response to the need to provide support for young Ghanaians looking for a forum to meet, interact, and form long-term relationships (Twellium, 2018). The show's

concept is thought to be a rip-off or adaptation of a British dating show known as *Take Me Out* because of its resemblance (Twellium, 2018). The *Date Rush* show is split into two sections and shown separately. It was also made to deliver the maximum entertainment experience to spectators as the plot unfolded week after week. The show features an eligible bachelor and ten attractive ladies, with the bachelor having to persuade one of the ladies to go on a date with him. A male on the show must impress himself about the ten girls with video presentations about as well as some dancing moves. A couple of men and women who have passed through the season 1-5 of the show have found matches that they have gone on dates with.

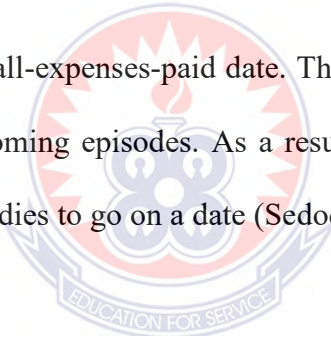
The first episode of this television series was launched on 2nd November 2018, which means this series have been in existence for some few years. It is worth noting that this show, has gained so much popularity and excitement among viewers (Sedode, 2020). The show which airs on TV3 Network every Sunday at 8:00 pm ends up among the top trends on most social media platforms (Twitter, Instagram and Facebook). People are talking about the show on social media because of its thrilling character and outcomes. Shine, (2020) in his news article listed *Date Rush* show as one of the top four reality shows in Ghana.

The producers show the gentleman's initial video presentation before introducing him to the ladies. All of this happens in four stages. A quick introduction to the man and his work is provided in the first video. After the first video, the females who approve of the gentleman's introduction keep their rushes on (approval), while those who are not interested in him switch them off (disapproval). The man's previous relationships are discussed in the second video. Ladies who are okay with his background keep their rushes on, while others who are not impressed turn off theirs. The gentleman discusses his aims and goals in the final video. Again, those who are still impressed

by his presentation keep their rushes on, while those who are not impressed do away with them. Following this stage, it is up to the man to choose his date from among the girls who are still wearing their rushes. He alternates turning off the rushes of the girls he does not care for, leaving only two of his favorites. The gentleman then proceeds to ask the two ladies a series of questions. He eventually chooses the person he believes will be his ideal date.

This is the same format that is used for the second part of the show. However, in the second part, it is a group of ten men that get to contest for a lady, this part was just introduced in season five. In essence, just like how a guy comes to present himself to 10 women in the first part, it is one lady that comes to present herself to 10 men on stage (Twellium, 2018).

The two are set up on an all-expenses-paid date. The two will share their experiences with the audience in upcoming episodes. As a result, gentlemen who appear on the show must persuade the ladies to go on a date (Sedode, 2020).



1.2 Statement of the Problem

Reality television entertainment programming has grown in popularity in the twenty-first century, as people watch, listen, and get entertained (Potter and Goldsmith, 2017). Reality television shows are changing the social and cultural perceptions, shifting sensitivities, social interactions, and associations with nature (Dennis, 2018; Kurnia, 2020; Ruangrak 2016). People used to interact and form relationships in person, but now they watch television and are constantly exposed to audiovisual content (Lissitsa & Kushnirovich, 2020). Reality programmes have become ingrained in people's lives, serving as both a platform for reflecting on society and a medium for better understanding of one's self (Arulchelvan, 2019).

Reality television shows are a relatively recent phenomenon on TV that interestingly captures and occupies the attention of varying groups of viewers (Kumar & Arulchelvan, 2015). Myriad research studies have been conducted by scholars throughout the world to academically examine this television genre from varying angles and perspectives (Dennis, 2018; Kurnia, 2020; Ruangrak, 2016; Wilfred et. al., 2019), audience activity (Godlewski & Perse 2010; Hill, 2017); impact on viewers (Arulchelvan, 2019; Sapra, 2014); viewers' motivations towards adult TV reality shows (Kurnia, 2020; Kumar & Arulchelvan, 2015); different sub-genres of television reality shows (Kurnia 2020; Potter & Goldsmith, 2017; Wilfred et. al., 2019); and the ethics and morals of some subgenres of television reality shows (Chan & Jekinson, 2017; Healey, 2018; Nwafor & Onyekachi, 2015).

In furtherance, there has been some scholarly attention given to a sub-genre of reality TV shows known as reality dating shows (Lee et. al., 2022, Ferris et al., 2007; Hall, 2006; Roberti, 2007). Ferris et. al., (2007) drew data from a content analysis of 64 hours of reality dating shows coupled with a survey of 197 young adults to determine how the content of reality dating shows relate to actual dating behavior attitudes and preferred date characteristics. Roberti, (2007) also examined demographic variables, personality characteristics, and attachment styles of individuals who spend time watching television dating shows. The Internet-based study was conducted using a convenience sample of 601 people, 413 of whom watch television dating programmes. The results showed substantial demographic disparities between the two groups, and demographic factors were related to particular television viewing habits. Three reasons to watch television dating shows were identified by an exploratory factor analysis: excitement, social learning, and escapism. Viewing habits were predicted by sensation-seeking, attachment type, and reasons for watching television

dating shows. Also, Lee et. al., (2022) looked at predicting winners of the dating reality shows specifically *The Bachelor* using machine learning algorithms. They gathered all 422 contestants from seasons 11 through 25. They applied three machine learning models to predict the ideal traits of a successful *Bachelor* contestant and tested three algorithms namely: random forest classification, neural networks, and linear regression. Although the neural network performed the best overall, they discovered consistency across all three models.

Although, there have been studies on RTV dating shows, the above evidence points to the fact that most of these works are usually situated within the Western contexts. This can be attributed to the fact that this phenomenon is relatively new within the African context and for that matter, Ghana. In the Ghanaian context, there have been very few studies on reality television shows in general. (Asare, 2020; Dennis, 2018; Resario and Darkwah, 2021). Whilst Dennis (2018) examined how Ghana's cultural aesthetics is promoted through a Ghanaian-produced beauty reality show, *Ghana's Most Beautiful*, Resario & Darkwah (2021) investigated how plus-size are subversively commodified on a Ghanaian reality TV, *Di Asa*.

As evident in the extant literature, it can be argued that scholarly publications regarding reality TV shows are rather scarce in the Ghanaian context. It can also be suggested that research studies with respect to reality dating shows appear nonexistent within the Ghanaian context although the phenomenon has emerged in Ghana. Owing to the aforementioned arguments, the present study addresses a gap in the literature regarding the issue of reality dating shows as well as addressing a research gap in geographical literature. Therefore, relying on the uses and gratification as well as the para-social interaction theories, the present study examines the perspectives of Ghanaian viewers of TV3 '*Date Rush*' about the show.

1.3 Research Objectives

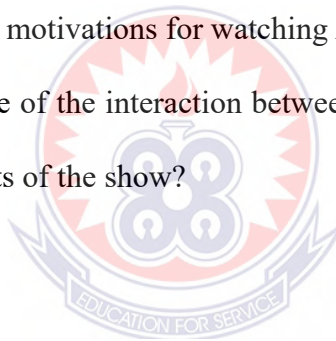
The study sought to:

1. To examine viewers' perspectives about the *Date Rush* show.
2. To investigate viewers' motivations for watching the *Date Rush* show.
3. To ascertain the nature of the interactions between viewers of *Date Rush* show and the contestants on the show.

1.4 Research Questions

The research was guided by the following questions;

1. What are viewers' perspectives on the *Date Rush* show?
2. What are viewers' motivations for watching *Date Rush* show?
3. What is the nature of the interaction between viewers of the *Date Rush* show and the participants of the show?



1.5 Significance of the study

The growth and pervasiveness of television reality dating shows in contemporary times cannot be overemphasized. These shows are largely embedded with content that intrigues viewers who end up committing their leisure and productive times to satiating their desire of watching what happens next on the programme. These viewers also get to have certain perspectives of these shows and their participants. This phenomenon implies that these television programmes have some impact on viewers. Although this is the case, scholarly literature on television reality shows in Ghana is rather scarce. In view of this, the present study is a significant contribution to the literature on television reality dating shows.

The study shall unearth the perspectives and motivations of viewers regarding the show and this dimension shall similarly contribute to scholarly discussions on viewers' or audiences' positions regarding television content. Findings from the study would also be beneficial to media channels, television producers, advertisers, and creators of reality TV programmes. This group of people can draw lessons from what the viewers make of television shows and these lessons can consequently direct their focus.

For future researchers who wish to further probe the phenomenon of television reality dating shows in other geographical settings or in the Ghanaian context, this study serves as a good basis for them to make their investigation since it provides relevant theoretical and empirical foundations for their future studies.

1.6 Scope of Study

The present research is based on a Ghanaian dating reality show, *Date Rush* show, precisely the study focuses on season five (5) of the show. Due to the nature of the study, which requires key engagements with viewers, the participants of the study are made up of viewers of the *Date Rush* show who live in Winneba and some contestants of the *Date Rush* show. In essence, the selected participants are ardent patronisers of the fifth season of the *Date Rush* show.

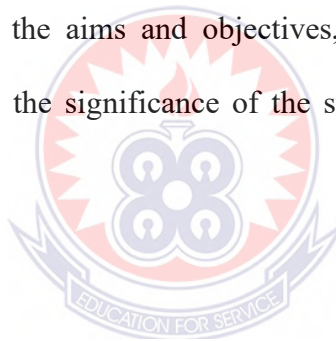
1.7 Organisation of the study

This study was organized into five (5) distinct chapters which are titled accordingly. The first chapter offers a general background and basis of the study. It reveals the aims and objectives, the actual identified research problem, the significance of the

study as well as the scope the study has covered. Chapter two provides the literature review of the study and the theoretical framework of the study. Chapter three tackles the methodology of the study. Chapter four captures the analysis of the research findings. Chapter five provides the conclusion of the study and enumerated recommendations for future researchers.

1.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter serves as an opening to the entire thesis by discussing background information on the study. Aside from the background, the main problem that the research seeks to solve was also discussed. It also provided justification for the research by enumerating the aims and objectives, key research questions that the study aims in answering, the significance of the study, as well as the scope of the entire study.



CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.0 Introduction

This chapter of the study presents previously published research works and articles related to the current subject of discussion. Particularly, extant scholarly studies around viewer's perspective for watching reality television shows, viewers' motivation of reality dating television shows, and the nature of interaction between viewers and contestants were thoroughly discussed in this section. Additionally, the theories that underpin the present research study are also discussed in this chapter.

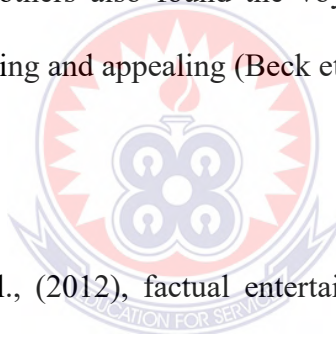
2.1 History and development of factual entertainment television

In describing factual entertainment television, Hill, (2011) has indicated that this genre of television programming encapsulates almost every television programme that telecast the activities of real people. According to the author, the history and development of factual television entertainment is convoluted based on the fact that categorization of what constitute factual television is rather broad. Hill, (2011) postulates that factual television is developed under three broad categories or strands. These distinct areas include tabloid journalism, documentary television and popular entertainment (Hill, 2011).

The evolution of personal storytelling in both news and print media has largely influenced the proliferation of reality programming (Miller, 2014). Another major element that impacted on the emergence of reality programming is the development in technology and the invention of devices such as satellites and mini cameras. Having realized the essence of these technological artifacts in conveying live news products

and unfolding situations to audiences, producers saw the need to use these devices in creating various forms of factual television entertainment (Glynn, 2000). In essence, this dependence on raw footage became a staple ingredient of reality programming.

Beck et. al., (2012) indicate that although the portrayal of ordinary people in unscripted situation in TV formats is as old as the inception of television, *Candid Camera*; (produced by Allen Funt) is widely recognised as the earliest factual television entertainment. *Candid Camera* was produced in 1948 and largely considered as a prototype of reality television programming (McCarthy, 2009). In its inception, the show, *Candid Camera* was criticized by some publics on the basis that hidden cameras and recording technologies were used to spy of on people and invade their privacy. However, others also found the voyeuristic, unscripted and intimate nature of the show intriguing and appealing (Beck et. al., 2012; Khatri & Ahuja, 2011; Padelford, 2012).



According to Beck et. al., (2012), factual entertainment television also constitutes television programmes such as quizzes, talent shows, and live discussions among others, therefore, the history of reality television cannot be traced without acknowledging the development of these types of TV programmes. Beck et. al., (2012), indicate that just like *Candid Camera*, the first talent show in the United States started in the late 1940s. In essence, factual television shows began appearing in the 1940s. Scholars such as McCarthy, (2004) and Ruangrak, (2016) attest that before the inception of the recent trends of reality shows, talent competitions, quiz shows, documentaries and talk shows were origins of reality television programming. Some researchers also point to the fact that *Candid Camera*, *I'd like to see*, *Queen for a day*, and *An American Family* were the earliest produced reality television shows

(McCarthy, 2004; Miller, 2007). Although most scholars would make allusion to *Candid Camera* as the first reality programme on TV, DeVolld, (2011) however indicated that *'The Original Amateur Hour'* which was a talent hunt programme was aired on TV several months before *Candid Camera* and must therefore be considered as the first reality television show.

The consensus in literature indicates that factual entertainment television began in the 1940s and this genre of television programming began experiencing a surge and popularity in the 1980s and 90s (Beck et. al., 2012; Hill, 2011). According to Kilborn, (1994), Robert Murdoch was another personality who contributed immensely to the proliferation of factual television when he established his television channel, Fox TV in the 1980s. Glynn, (2000) also indicates that the involvement of Fox TV in producing several reality TV programmes significantly contributed to the growth and development of factual entertainment television. Based on studies in the early part of the 1990s, this genre of television programming was an established part of peak time network schedules, and other countries had begun to take note (Beck et. al., 2012; Hill, 2011). In view of the aforementioned history of how reality TV emerged and the growth of other sub genres, this study focuses on one new genre called reality dating shows.

2.2 Reality Television Shows: An Overview

Reality-TV is one of the most popular television genres. It has created a hybrid between documentary and fiction genres which is interesting and fresh to the viewers (Mante, 2016). The general idea of reality TV shows had invariably been centered on how entertainment content is shot in a real-time setting with participants performing real life activities (Kumar and Arulchelvan, 2015). Largely, the representational

process and transmission of reality TV programmes have been about live studio shooting of actions by participants captured sometimes through surveillance cameras and shown to background audiences. According to Hill (2011), “Reality TV is a catch-all category that includes a wide range of entertainment programmes about real people located in the border territories between information and entertainment, documentary and drama” (p. 2). According to Hill (2011), popular factual television encompasses almost any entertainment programmes about real people. Arulchelvan, (2019) also emphasizes that regardless of the form in which a particular reality show is telecast, these shows are invariably shot in “a real setting with real people (much like documentary), shoots in front of a live studio viewers participating in the programme, or shoots using hidden surveillance, relies on the camera, capturing everything as it happens” (p. 79).

Whereas Hill, (2011, p.2) indicates that “there are reality TV programmes about everything and anything, from health care to hairdressing, from people to pets, Kilborn (2003, p.11) posits that the basic goal for almost all reality programming is “that of diversion rather than enlightenment”. According to Hill (2011), although some creators of reality TV shows argue that certain formats can provide social value, the fact remains that entertainment value is the dominant value behind reality TV.

Every television channel wishes to have their own reality TV shows in their catalogue of programmes (Ruangrak, 2016). Audiences of these shows are also mostly enthused about knowing more about the different facets of participants hence the growing popularity of reality TV (Demirtas & Baskaya, 2015). According to studies, reality TV programming has become one of the major revenue generation streams for television channels that televise them (Hearn, 2010; Huff, 2006; Quail, 2015). This is hinged on the fact that they accumulate large viewership and consequent advertising

support or sponsorship. The outcome of this phenomenon is the increasing cutthroat competition among television channels to arrest the interest of varied and huge number of viewers and patronisers (Demirtas & Baskaya, 2015).

In an earlier study, Kilborn (1994) indicates that reality shows can be typically viewed through the following variables;

1. Recording of an event in the lives of the individuals or group.
2. Capturing of dramatized reconstruction of real-life events.
3. Packaging the materials into an effective entertainment programme which can be later widely marketed for the television viewers.

Vijaykumar & Arulchelvan (2015) **state** that reality TV programming can be examined based on some peculiar characteristics. These characteristics include;

1. Use of non-professionally trained actors.
2. Programmes being filmed in unscripted situations.
3. Giving more prominence in capturing contestants' spontaneity over improvisation.
4. Having a very limited level of producer/director's creative involvement in the programme.
5. The recording of the contestants' experience is not limited to a particular moment.

There is stark evidence that reality TV shows are now produced in different formats and based on variety of concepts in order to capture preferences of diverse groups of audiences (Cho & Chung, 2014; Henry, 2011; Dyer, 2010; Gray, 2018; Vijaykumar & Arulchelvan 2015). From the above discussion, it is evident that reality television shows are designed to capture the unrehearsed lifestyle, behaviors and attitudes of its participants or casts. These shows are also generally viewed to be unscripted and

present activities that are not directed by a producer. In all the forgoing overview of reality TV seem to highlight viewership perspectives, motives and connections in the wider context to this study focus.

2.3 Types of Reality TV Shows

Based on research in the arena of reality TV programming, it can be suggested that there is a wide categorization of these shows and some concepts seemingly overlap each other. (Cho and Chung 2014, Dyer 2010, Gray 2018) However, it is suggested by Demirtas and Baskaya (2015) that producers of reality shows are mostly less concerned about directing viewers focus to social issues and largely concentrate on only the entertainment factor that they induce in these shows. Similarly to Ghana, *Date Rush* show is no exception to the norm that most reality shows are entertainment-focused. Historically, reality programmes were mostly concentrated on real footage that related to lifestyle, authority enforcement and homemade unintentional comedy (Ruangrak, 2016), however, these shows carry distinctive stories in recent years. Hill, Weibull, and Nilsson (2007) suggest that there are five sub-genres of reality TV shows which include “ ‘infotainment’ - oftentimes depicting crime or emergency services; ‘docusoaps’- depicting institutions and groups of people; lifestyle- often about personal appearances and home making; and reality game shows- depicting an experience with a group of people or situation” (p. 18). DeVolld, (2011) on the other hand asserts that there are seven sub-genres- Documentary or Docu-Series, Reality competition: Elimination, Makeover/ Renovation, Dating, Hidden camera/ Surveillance/ Amateur contest and Supernatural, Travel/ Aspirational.

An article by Yahr, Moore and Chow (2015) however proposes that there are relatively more sub-genres of reality TV shows than the aforementioned ones. Yahr et. al., (2015) therefore, indicate that there are about 10 sub-genres of these shows. According to the above-mentioned authors (DeVolld, 2011; Hill et. al., 2007), the first genre includes the type of shows where participants are not necessarily talented but contest for prizes as seen in *Big Brother Nigeria, I'm in love with Bomaye and Survivor*. The second sub-genre include shows where talent is required for the competition in order for prizes to be obtained. Examples of this genre are *The Voice, American Idol, Talented Kidz, The Pulpet, MTN Hitmaker and TV3 Mentor*. The third includes dating and love shows which telecast the search for perfect relationship partners by participants; examples of these shows include *Date Rush, The Bachelor, Millionaire, Ultimate Love and Matchmaker*. The others include family sub-genre like *Young, Famous, and African, Keeping up with the Kardashians*; autobiographical sub-genre; ridiculous people sub-genre; life improvement sub-genres; *Wo nsaano Adwuma*, business and career sub-genre; like *America's Next Top Model, Shark Tank, McBrown's Kitchen and Law enforcement*, hidden camera related sub-genre; *Cheaters, Spy TV, Jokers and lastly wives'* sub-genre; this content documents lifestyles of rich wives. Example of such shows are *The Rich Housewives and Wife Sisters*.

Some researchers hint that aside being a way to amass large audience, television channels are increasingly appropriating varieties of television reality shows into their programming scheme due to the low cost involved in producing them (Joyner, 2010; Roberts, 2011). It is evident on Ghanaian TV screens as more reality television has been incorporated into the programming of most TV channels. According to these researchers, the cost involved in remunerating participants pertaining to reality TV

shows is relatively lower than shows or episodes where recognized actors are cast. Joyner, (2010) for instance suggests that these shows also act as advertising platforms for brands which consequently generate income for producers. In relation to the above discussions, it is evident that *Date Rush* show falls under reality dating shows and TV3 producers do have other reality shows due to its low cost in producing. Consequently, the rise of reality programmes on the Ghanaian market can be explained by the fact that Ghanaian based shows are more expensive and do not attract many sponsors and advertisers (Mensa-Bonsu, 2011).

2.4 Reality TV Shows in Africa

Reality television shows are not only telecast in the West. As indicated earlier, reality television has become a global phenomenon (Beck et. al., 2012). In effect, this genre of television programming has steadily made in-roads into the African media scene (Sarpong, 2018). According to Sarpong (2018), variety of reality television shows are being produced and aired in many African countries to cover topical issues and in some cases, relatively controversial subjects. Considering the diversification and revolution of lifestyles, taste and desire for intriguing contents on television networks across major cities in Africa, local television channels are induced to adapt Western television programming styles that are appealing to their audiences in order to increase viewership (Sarpong, 2018; Thusu, 2006). In adapting Western television programming, media producers in the African context have been adept in creating reality television programmes centered around entrepreneurship, sports, cooking, music, and politics among others (Chikafa & Mateveke, 2012; Sarpong, 2018). In essence, there are African adaptations of Western reality TV shows such as *Big Brother*, *Survivor*, *The Apprentice*, *Idol*, *Survivor*, and *Got Talents*, and others. The

peculiarity about these is that they all vividly mimic the American and European outlooks with respect to content and style (Sarpong, 2018). One of such reality television shows that has gained popularity across the African continent was the *Big Brother Africa show*. This show has provoked extensive discussion among the African television viewers, and scholars. Whereas some consider it with pleasure, others hold a contemptuous position about the portrayals and characterization of participants on the *Big Brother Africa show*.

According Chikafa and Mateveke (2012), there has been controversies surrounding the telecast of *Big Brother* show owing to some culturally polemical activities on the show. Scholar, Wole Soyinka stated that the *Big Brother Africa* show is banal and does not have anything to offer the African continent (Dolby, 2006). The major contention about the show is that it telecasts some sexually-provocative instances (Nwafor & Onyekachi, 2015).

The importation of media programming from the West into Africa has raised some skepticism concerning morals and cultural implications among some section of the African populace on the grounds that these television formats could consequently corrode the cultural values of Africans (Osarieme, 2012). According to Sarpong (2018), the development of media, particularly television on the African continent, was aligned with the promotion of nationalist contents with the aim of inculcating the African identity in citizens. In essence, the adulteration of the media with foreign television format is likely to conflict with the original intent behind the formation and development of television media on the continent. In a study conducted by Sarpong, (2018) to explore the concerns associated with reality television shows and the African societal norms, it was suggested that these shows were largely used to project

western culture, indecent ways of dressing, and sexual immorality and other foreign posturing's that conflict with African values.

The chunk of extant literature on reality television in the African context primarily focused on the moral and cultural contentions of these shows (Chan & Jekinson, 2017; Chifaka & Mataveke, 2012; De Witte, 2012; Healey, 2018; Nwafor & Onyekachi, 2015; Osarieme, 2012; Sarpong, 2018). It is also worth noting that most of these studies give attention to the *Big Brother* show based on the fact that this show is telecast throughout the continent and amasses a large viewer's base (Anyanwu, 2021; Nwafor & Onyekachi 2015; Osarieme, 2012; Ojemola et. al., 2020). For instance, Osarieme (2012) conducted a survey of 300 academic staff and students of a Nigerian university to examine the conflict between morality and reality TV, specifically, the *Big Brother Africa* show. The analysed data primarily demonstrated that the show's presentations do not align with Nigerian moral standards in particular and largely conflict with African cultural values. Respondents indicated that Nigerian media houses should be discouraged from telecasting such a programme. Osarieme, (2012) makes recommendation that the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation must be proactive in checking the activities of the media in order to prevent the transmission of morally and culturally contentious materials.

Similarly, Nwafor and Onyekachi (2015) investigated the influence of *Big Brother Africa* reality show on undergraduate students of some four selected universities in Nigeria. Based on data collected through survey of 350 students, findings shows that this reality television show contributed to moral decadence among a section of undergraduate viewers. The study found that 114(33%) undergraduate students of opposite sexes tend to engage in cohabitation, indiscriminate sexual behaviour, and termination of unplanned pregnancies owing to their exposure to the *Big Brother*

Africa show. These threats to moral and cultural values have led to clarion calls being made to authorities by civil society groups, individuals and academics to check the kind of materials produced on reality television (Anyanwu, 2021).

On another level, some reality television shows are being produced to foster community development projects in Africa (Ramafoko, Anderson & Weiner, 2002). Ramafoko et.al, (2002) indicated that a South African reality television programmes, Kwanda, presents content that seeks to empower viewers to rely on their collective efforts to develop their communities and not solely depend on government for development. De-Witte, (2018) also indicate that reality shows produced in Africa could reignite the value of cultural heritage among the youth population. Relying on a dancing reality television show Kasapreko Omanyaba, De- Witte mentioned that this show authenticates the African heritage and must be promoted. In likeness, Dennis, (2018) reports that Ghanaian cultural nationalists have voiced their opposition to the dominant depiction of Western and non-Ghanaian cultures, much to the detriment of local ones. However, there are a few media outlets that make an effort to promote Ghanaian culture, such as Ghana Most Beautiful (GMB). The review of literature in this section suggests that reality television is not limited to the West but Africans are also making strides in producing their own shows to amass viewership for the television channels. However, some analysis suggests that there are moral and cultural decadence problems with our local TV programming. In essence, requests have been made for media organizations to retool their television programming and not focused on presenting Western values.

2.5 Reality Dating Shows

Reality dating shows are among the most populous genre of reality shows gaining vast attention among television viewers and scholars (Ruangrak, 2016). According to Ferris et al., (2007), participants are portrayed in dating situations whilst the television camera and photographic equipment serving as the main observers of a real-time event in these genres. Viewers' involvement in this type of show is also critical to its growth and popularity since most of these shows are increasingly appropriating dialogic ways to engage audiences (Hall, 2006). Some examples of reality dating shows include '*Love is Blind*', (where thirty (30) singles are brought to set to spend ten days going on blind speed dates), and '*Married at first sight*'-singles come together to look for love and the succeed matches goes through counseling ending up married on set). '*The Bachelor*' is also- a television reality show where twenty five (25) women are in a contest to win the love and affection of one man (Ferris et. al., 2007).

According to Freydkin, (2002), *The Bachelor* show amassed a huge viewership and its viewers was predominantly women around the ages of 18-34. In essence, the show largely engaged young adults. Few studies have investigated dating reality shows from different perspectives and facades. For instance, Hetsroni (2000) examined contextual and culture-related influences on partner selection with regard to television dating shows. Based on a content analysis of 208 survey questionnaire administered to American and Israeli nationals, it was found that although physical attributes largely determined partner selection, this show was more common among Americans than the Israelis.

Ferris et. al., (2007) however conducted a content analysis of a 64 hours reality dating shows coupled with a survey of 197 young adults in order to examine the relationship between their dating preferences and what they see on the shows. Findings show that although there is some relationship between dating preferences among respondents and what they see on the show, this nexus is not so pronounced. In undertaking this study, Ferris et.al., (2007) employed Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory in reinforcing the argument that television shows such as reality dating shows to a large extent influence human behavior.

Another study was conducted by Swiatkowski, (2018) to examine the correlation between dating shows and relational aggression. The social comparison theory, social cognitive theory, theory of reasoned action, and cultivation theory were used as lenses to analyze data consisting of 117 days. The study revealed that although there is evidence of media effect on relational aggression as a result of watching these shows, this effect is however minimal. Wang also (2011) studied the prevalence of dating television reality shows in China by investigating the perspective of audiences. Through quantitative analysis of an online survey, it was found that some audiences are passionate about these shows because they think their content and plot will help educate or inform them on how to get a life partner. Also, some married viewers said they believe they can learn some helpful things from viewing these shows that they can use in their marriages. Additionally, there are audiences who watch the show for the purposes of entertainment and fun. Wang, (2011) found that their respondents who were ardent viewers of these shows generally trust the authenticity of the shows.

On their part, Porter and Standing, (2020) attempted to understand the role reality TV shows play in young people's understanding of healthy relationships. The sampled show for this study is '*Love Island*', a British dating reality show. Through focus

group discussions and perspectives of the viewers, it was reported that the show somewhat elicited and influenced normative heterosexual behaviors in younger viewers.

2.6 Viewership of reality TV

In the literature on reality television, it has been expressed extensively that these shows have been tactically created and embedded with intriguing contents that ultimately arrest the curiosity and involvement of wide range of viewers (Gray, 2018; Hill, 2004; Kuhne and Oprea, 2020). According to Beck et. al., (2012), the controversies surrounding the realness of reality TV shows somewhat influence their popularity. Beck et. al., (2012) also maintain that discussions around the voyeurism and commercialism of these shows increase the enthusiasm of viewers and draw additional attention to them. A number of studies had been conducted to investigate reality television show in light of viewers (Arulchelvan, 2019; Gray, 2018; Hill, 2004; Kuhne and Oprea, 2020). According to Hill (2004), the growing number of reality TV viewership is associated with the growing number of the shows being produced. It was found that while the ‘Survivor’ reality show had an estimable number of 27 million viewers, the finale of American Idol pulled in 23 million viewers in the year 2002 with about half of the female teenagers in the U.S. tuning in (Hill, 2004). It was also indicated that the finale of reality dating show, Joe Millionaire drew a viewership of 40 million. Hill, (2004) indicates that as far back as 2000, 70% of the population in U.S. aged 4 to 65 watched reality television programmes.

In a study by Arulchelvan (2019), it was found that viewers of reality TV shows are mostly aware about these shows through commercials, traditional media, and YouTube promos. Scholars have indicated that younger television viewers are largest

consumers of television programmes (Denhart & Denhart 2015; Campbell, 2018). For instance, Denhart & Denhart (2015) suggested that adults from 18 to 49 years are the largest demographics with regard to reality television viewership. Citing a report by Oregon State University, Campbell (2018) hints that 68 percent of people in the age bracket of 18 to 29 are enthused by reality television. In earlier research, Frank (2003) noted that the majority of reality TV programmes are made to appeal to people under the age of 25. According to Frank (2003), young viewers are more likely to be attracted to reality TV shows given the fact that they identify themselves with characters and situations that are portrayed on these shows.

In a study conducted by Nabi et. al., (2003); to investigate the psychology of appeals of reality television programming in the United States, it was found that these shows were largely likeable among viewers who possessed voyeuristic attributes. This assertion is consistent with Baruh's (2010) position since Baruh also indicates that reality viewers are people who are high in the personality trait of voyeurism. Nabi et. al., (2003); categorized viewers into regular and casual. According to the authors, regular viewers are enthused about these programmes because of the fulfillment they obtain from peeking into someone else's lifestyle and comparing it to their own lifestyle. On the other hand, casual viewers tend to consider reality TV as a way of alleviating their boredom (Nabi et. al., 2003). From the discussions under this section, it can be said that reality TV has gained massive viewers since its emergence and has gained much attention in the literature concerning its viewership age range having the youth dominating. Therefore, in the present study, an attempt has been made to understand how viewers see reality TV shows in Ghana putting into consideration the above assertions.

2.7 Viewers' perspectives and motivation for watching reality TV shows

In the literature on reality TV shows, a number of scholars have researched on motivations or reasons why viewers watch these shows and eventually get attached to them. For instance, a study by Patino, Kaltcheva and Smith (2012) indicated that viewers watch reality TV shows for entertainment. They further state that viewers generally enjoy the programme and also use it to while away time. These assertions by the aforementioned authors were determined through an exploratory study that investigated motivation behind watching reality shows by adolescents. Data from this study were drawn from a sample of 800 adolescents across the United States.

In another study by Reiss and Wiltz (2004), it was indicated that adult viewers of reality TV sometimes desire to watch these television programmes based on traits of feeling self-important, secure and romantic. Some others were largely motivated by curiosity and suspense associated with episodes of the shows they viewed. This is in contrast with an assertion by Ebersole and Woods, (2007) which indicates that viewers watch reality TV shows because they are emotionally attached to the concepts of the show.

Relying on the theory of uses and gratification, Patino et. al., (2012) conducted a survey study which gave them the understanding that viewers of reality TV shows invariably identified themselves with some specific aspects of the reality shows hence their motivation to watch them. Lundy, Ruth and Park (2008) also reveal that some people also watch the shows because they simply cannot resist them. Papacharissi and Mendelson 2007 also discovered that certain viewers were driven to watch reality shows based on the need for social affiliation, companionship and in some cases voyeurism.

In a relatively recent study by Kumar and Arulchelvan, (2015) to examine the motivation and impact of watching reality television programme in India, it was found that young housewives were driven to watch reality TV shows based on the fun and entertainment components of the shows. Additionally, the study found that a key motivation for watching such shows was the fact that it offered talented individuals the platform to showcase their potentials. Data for this study was drawn by means of a structured questionnaire from 1040 respondents in the Chennai district of India. From the review, it was evident that the dating genre of reality television has gained substantial attention among television viewers. The examination also shows that scholarly attention towards this phenomenon is diverse.

Research has indicated that viewers of reality television shows hold diverse perspectives and perceptions of these shows. According to Das, Sarkar, and Hussain (2021), the most profound contention in literature regarding the perceptions and perspectives of reality TV programming has to do with its authenticity. In essence, there is a growing debate regarding the ‘realness’ of these shows (Arulchelvan, 2019). Whilst some population are of the opinion that these shows are authentic and participants are portrayed in real life setting, others also maintain the position that these shows are scripted, edited and later aired on television (Hall, 2006). In a mixed method study conducted by Das et. al., (2021), it was found that there was a general skepticism among respondents about the realness and authenticity of these shows. The study revealed that although the ‘manipulation of reality’ raises concerns among audiences, this phenomenon did not occlude them from patronizing their choicest reality TV shows. In a series of focus group interviews with young adults, Hall (2006) revealed that viewers perceived the behavior of cast members as a reflection of their own personality. Hall (2006) further reiterated that participants found reality shows

humorous and unpredictable. In all the perspectives and motivation for watching reality TV discussed above will help the current study in establishing Winneba viewers' perspectives and motives in watching *Date Rush* show.

2.8 Social Media as a Streaming Media

The popularity of the Internet as a communication tool has prompted in-depth study into the characteristics that set it apart from other forms of media. Interactivity has gotten a lot of attention as a component of the online experience. People now place a lot of importance on social media (McBride, 2015). It facilitates information exchange and content creation. In order to engage with one another, users spend a lot of time on social networking sites (SNS) like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Additionally, organisations have recognised the power of social media, and they are increasingly utilizing it to promote their services and study client satisfaction (Khan & Chang 2019).

Social media introduced two-way communication where the customer and seller may engage with one another, and it can establish a long-lasting relationship between a business and its customer (Agnihotri et. al., 2016) hence, many companies have created their brand pages on social media platform such as Instagram, YouTube, Twitter and Facebook to advertise their services (Chang et. al., 2015) and increase brand popularity (Zadeh, 2014). The brand popularity is dependent on various factors like vividness, interactivity and post content (Vries, 2012). In recent times, many Ghanaian TV stations have created their stations social media handles. These handles are used to stream live programmes to reach out to the fragmented audience social media. This phenomenon is thriving because more individuals are patronizing this new kind of social networking. As a result, people can engage in this kind of

relationship in a free and open environment provided by various live streaming platforms (Hamilton, 2014). Consequently, the rise of social media and its interactive capabilities have made it easier for television viewers to participate in and react to a variety of trending subjects, including prime-time television programmes (McBride, 2015) like *Date Rush* show.

2.9 Connection between viewers and Contestants

Viewers of reality shows sometimes see themselves and their lives being represented by the contestants of the shows (Lundy et. al., 2008). This situation suggests that there is an ongoing relationship or connection between viewers and participants of reality television shows. A number of recent studies have paid attention to the relationship and connection between media characters and their audiences as a major factor influencing the growth of reality television programming throughout the world (Siyong & Cho, 2014; Tian & Yoo, 2015). Using an online survey, Siyong and Cho (2014) found that viewers of reality television shows shared certain connections with participants of the show. The authors employed the para-social interaction theory (PSI) in analyzing data from 401 respondents in order to arrive at this conclusion. Similarly, Tian and Yoo (2015) found that there is connection between viewers and participants of ‘The Biggest Loser’ reality show. The findings indicate that audiences have direct relationships, and PSI is highly associated with audience exposure to the programme. Rubin (1993) for instance mentions that the level of selection and involvement regarding the use of media is essentially related to the concept of ‘audience activity’. Unlike many conventional television programmes that largely concentrate on the content without paying attention to audience interaction, reality

television programmes are actually providing their audiences relational and participatory roles (Godlewski & Perse, 2010; Enli & Ihlebaek, 2011).

In a study by Charles (2012), it is indicated that reality television shows have assumed interactive traits that allows a connection between viewers and participants by way of digital technology. One of the recent prominent ways that suggest the connection between viewers and participants of reality television shows is 'voting' (Enli & Ihlebaek, 2011). Although voting options are increasingly common in reality television, *Date Rush* show does not have this function because its contestants are only required to select the partner who is best for them without any third party. Godlewski and Perse (2010) developed the theory of audience activity to scrutinize the relationship between viewing motivations, recognition of the participants, 'cognitive and emotional involvement' before, during and after exposure to media content. The scholars discovered that, instead of according the levels of cognitive and emotional involvement during exposure, reality television provides to the audiences new kinds of post-exposure activity, and also opportunities for finding previously unavailable 'additional gratifications' through voting to affect the programmes result. Such interactivity creates involving experiences via the active control of the media. In addition, there is a higher level of psychological engagement relating to thinking about and spending attentiveness of viewers who vote to whom they chose to vote for. This study seeks to identify the connections viewers and contestants share, with a focus on Winneba viewers in light of the extensive literature that has been summarised above regarding the relationships between the viewers and contestants.

2.10 Theoretical framework

This section of the research presents the theories that underpin the study. These theories are, specifically, the Uses and Gratification and Para-social Interaction theories. The study appropriates the above-mentioned theories based on the fact that their basic assumptions and tenets align with the objectives of the research.

2.10.1 Uses and Gratification Theory (Q2)

Although Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974) are widely acknowledged to be the propounders of the Uses and Gratification, McQuail (2010) makes the argument that this theory is traceable to researchers who began studies in the 1940s to understand why people are drawn to popular radio shows and why they read specific newspapers on daily basis. The implication of this is that this theory emerged as a fitting lens through which an explanation can be given as to why people rely on certain media products and the benefits they draw from them (**products**). In the communication discipline, researchers are employing the Uses and Gratification theory to investigate, explicate and offer reasons why some populations use particular media and what gratifications they acquire from them (Whiting & Williams, 2013). The basic assumption of Uses and Gratification theory is that there are various reasons why people patronize or use mass media and these reasons are tied to the gratification they wish to obtain from the media (McQuail, 2010, Katz et. al., 1974). A number of scholars who have advanced the discussion of this theory, gave reasons why some people consume specific media products. Whiting and Williams (2013) postulate that some people use media as a way of killing time. In essence, media is consumed by some population in order to while away boredom, to release tension or to pass time. Additionally, according to Musa et. al., (2015), one of the most important motives for

why consumers use certain media products is for entertainment. Based on the lens of Uses and Gratification, Musa et. al., (2015) again found that some populations consume media for the purposes of seeking information. On the other hand, Asemah (2011) points out that some people use media for self-educational purposes or to gain knowledge. In recent years, media types such as digital media and social media are used for self-expression, surveillance and communication among others (Musa et. al., 2015). For instance, whereas Whiting and William (2013) found that 56% of their study respondents use social media to express their opinions by uploading comments and likes, Gallion (2010) opined that people join Facebook to promote their career.

2.10.2 Relevance of the Uses and Gratification theory to the present study

The uses and gratification theory is employed in this study to analyze findings for the research objectives 2. The research objective examines viewers' motivations for watching the *Date Rush* show. The above research objective have close connections with some earlier studies that were done in the domain of reality TV shows which tended to rely on the theory of uses and gratification (Demirtas & Baskaya, 2015; Ebersole & Woods, 2007; Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2007). For instance, Demirtas and Baskaya (2015) relied on the uses and gratification theory to investigate viewing motives behind reality TV shows. According to the aforementioned scholars, this theory is an ideal lens for analyzing and understanding reasons why people watch reality TV shows. Using the same theory, Ebersole and Woods (2007) did a quantitative survey to understand reasons why people watch reality TV shows and found personal identification with characters, entertainment, passing time, mood change and vicarious participation as key factors that influence people to patronize such shows.

On the other hand, Papacharissi and Mendelson (2007) in light of the uses and gratification theory found that habitual pass time and entertainment were the major reasons why people watch reality dating shows. Further analysis drawn from this survey study reveals that apart from passing time and entertainment, the same set of respondents watch reality television shows to gratify the voyeuristic tendencies and for purposes of companionship.

The uses and gratification theory “seek to explain the uses of media and the satisfactions derived from them in terms of the motives and self-perceived needs of the audience” (McQuail, 2005, p.569). In view of this assertion, television viewers tend to consume specific programmes with the assurance of deriving some appreciable levels of satisfaction from the programme. It was indicated by Barton (2009) that “although this approach, in essence, uses and gratification, may be applied to a wide range of material, in recent years it has been most frequently applied to genre-specific television programming in attempt to discern what certain shows provide viewers that is not provided through other types of programming” (p. 462). In Barton’s (2009) study, focus was placed on reality television shows such as *The Bachelor/ Bachelorette, Survivor and The Apprentice*. Through the lens of Uses and Gratification theory, it was discovered that ‘personal utility’ was one of the new gratifying elements that viewers derive from such shows. This was one of the strongest predictors of overall gratifications obtained. Personal utility refers to the viewer gaining something personally useful from the programme. This research provides support for viewers genre specific programming selection is related to the gratifications obtained. Therefore it is important to understand that the viewers are watching for different reasons. These reasons may lead to differing perception by

viewers and thus differing effects. The research also found that gratifications sought and obtained varied across different type of reality TV shows.

Based on a survey research, Yuile (2012) also examined uses and gratification in light of dance reality television shows. The study which drew data from university students found that there were three categories of viewers of dance reality TV and these categories have different gratification effects. These people include frequent, moderate and infrequent viewers.

Using the same theory (Uses and Gratification), Mead (2006) examined viewers' motivation for patronizing *Survivor* and other selected reality TV game shows such as *Big Brother* and *Fear Factor*. Findings from this study indicate that viewing motives largely varies depending on the type of show. Based on the fact that earlier scholars relied on the theory of Uses and Gratification to understand viewers' motives of reality shows, coupled with the fact that the tenets of the theory align with the objective 2 of the current study, the theory is appropriated to understand viewers' motivation for watching *Date Rush* show (season five).

2.10.3 Para-Social Interaction theory (Q3)

Para-social interaction theory is a media effect theory introduced by Horton and Wohl (1956). According to this theory, media consumers are sometimes entranced by the contents and performers of some media products to the point that they begin to identify with the performers (Schiappa et. al., 2007). In essence, para-social interaction is a communication theory that explicates the extent to which individuals or audiences relate with personalities they know only through the media. This interaction is largely unidirectional and unreal. According to Hartmann and Goldhoorn, (2011) para-social interaction is an illusionary unreciprocated

involvement of television viewers and media personalities and performers. Some audiences develop the tendency to like and intimately follow the speech of a media personality, programmes or film regardless of the fact that the audience knows the personality in actuality (Stever, 2017). A notable tenet of the theory is that para-social interaction is intensified after every viewing experience. This implies that the more the audience experiences the personality via the media, her or his attachment to that personality is increased. Some factors that influence para-social interaction include the medium (television, radio, and internet.), the content (entertainment programmes, educational programmes, talk shows.) and the viewers (gender, developmental stage and psychological stage) (Allen & Gerg, 2007; Horton & Wohl, 1956; Stever, 2017).

Although the theory emphasizes the unidirectional relationship between the viewers and the media characters, a comprehensive PSI occurs even in face-to-face social circumstances, especially in a situation where there exist a large gap in status between the performer and his or her viewers (Allen & Gerg, 2007; Horton & Wohl, 1956; Stever, 2017).

According to scholars, television personalities or characters exist as a function of the media and they have the ability to achieve a so-called intimacy with a crowd of strangers (Stever, 2017; Tian & Yoo, 2014). This intimacy can be influential and satisfying to those who are willing to take part in the relationship. Viewers, who choose to make these favorite a part of their daily life, will then strengthen this relationship. As time passes in this supposed relationship, “the devotee – ‘the fan’ – comes to believe that he ‘knows’ the persona more intimately and profoundly than others do; that he ‘understands’ his character and appreciates his values and motives” (Horton & Wohl, 1956, p. 217). This base creates the primary understanding in the formation of para-social relationships when related to television. For the majority of

viewers, para-social relationships are simply complementary to normal social life, (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

2.10.4 Relevance of the theory to the study

Applicability of the theory and practice of any body of knowledge is critical in establishing relevance. A theory must draw its application in order to yield significant contribution to the field in which it is developed or seeks to enrich (Tian & Yoo, 2015). The para-social interaction theory is being appropriated into this study on the basis that its tenets have a close connections to the study objective 3. This objective sought to ascertain the nature of the interactions between viewers of the *Date Rush* show and the participants on the show. According to scholars who advanced the discussion of para-social interaction, there are possibilities that television viewers sometimes exhibit interactive behaviours with some television personalities or icons (Hartman & Goodhoorn, 2011). Additionally, a number of scholars have reiterated the fact that para-social interactions exist between viewers of reality TV and participants (Henry, 2011; Siyoung & Cho, 2014; Tian & Yoo, 2015).

Henry (2011) compared the type of para-social interaction that exist between viewers and already famous celebrities who were on reality TV shows, with the kind of para-social interaction the same viewers share with new faces who became popular as a result of the show. Using the para-social interaction theory. Results show that respondents' para-social relationships and degree of moral disengagement with their favorite celebrity and non-celebrity on reality shows are influenced by the type of sub-genres of the reality-based programmes (i.e. game shows, dating shows, documentary soap operas). Siyoung and Cho (2014), in their study, explored ways in which viewers of reality TV programmes built para-social relationships with media

characters through social media and found that social media was fostering the growth of para-social interactions. On the other hand, Tian and Yoo (2015) found that the connection between viewers and participants of ‘The Biggest Loser’ reality show is largely para-social. Tian and Cho (2015) examined para-social interaction in view of a health-related reality television programme *The Biggest Loser*. Findings from the study suggested that reality shows were programmed in a way that foster an attachment to the participants by the viewers. In essence, the research efforts by the aforementioned scholars to understand the interactive process between reality TV viewers and contestants relied on the para-social interaction theory which suggests that this theory is suitable for the present study. Pinkston (2012) also conducted a study to investigate whether rich participants of reality television shows contribute to creating materialism in viewers. The study relied on para-social interaction theory and found that para-social relationship with a wealthy reality TV star influenced materialism in viewers.

In view of the aforementioned studies, it is in place to state that para-social interaction theory is a deserving lens through which viewer members of the *Date Rush* show can be studied. In essence, previous studies that relied on this theory are somewhat related to this study and that is a good rationale and indication for appropriating the para-social theory into the present study.

2.11 Chapter summary

This chapter of the study sought to discuss previous relevant literature in relation to the understudied subject. In essence, the chapter reviewed literature on reality television shows, reality dating shows, motivation for watching reality shows, viewers' perspectives of reality shows and the nature of interactions between viewers and contestants of the show. The chapter also discussed the relevant theories that will act as lens through which the subject is analysed.



CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the systematic procedure followed to collect and analyse data pertaining to the perspectives, motivations and the nature of interactions amongst viewers and contestants of the *Date Rush* show. This section also covers the research strategy used, as well as the descriptive and interpretative case study design used to close the scholarly gap highlighted in the previous chapters. The last segment unpacks the trustworthiness aspects of the research and the ethical issues which were followed, in order to assist the research questions below;

1. What are viewers' perspectives for watching *Date Rush* show?
2. What are viewers' motivations on the *Date Rush* show?
3. What is the nature of the interaction between viewers of the *Date Rush* show and the contestants of the show?

3.1 Research Approach

In order to explore and understand the meaning that viewers and contestants have ascribed to the show, qualitative research approach was adopted for the study. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), qualitative research encompasses the collection of a variety of empirical materials - personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in people's lives. Similarly, according to Lindlof and Taylor (2019), qualitative research identifies and explores phenomena such as causes and attitudes in more depth. Rather than altering social action mathematically, qualitative research retains and analyzes its situated form,

substance, and experience. This means qualitative research is successful at obtaining and gathering detailed information about a population's norms, attitudes, and perceptions (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). Creswell (2014) also avers that qualitative research approach examines a real-life bounded system over a period through detailed and in-depth data collection that involves multiple sources of information. In tandem with Creswell's (2014) definition, this study involved the researcher collecting data using two data collection procedures- interviews and focus group discussion - to obtain detailed and in-depth data. Creswell (2014) further states that qualitative research seeks to bring forth the meaning of a phenomenon from the viewpoint of the participants or those experiencing it directly. In the same manner, this study reflects the voices of the participants focusing on the motives, perspectives, and interactions they have with *Date Rush* show.

As a result, the qualitative research approach examines events or manifestations in their context and attempts to derive meaning from the people involved. The present study did not quantify data which was collected; instead, the researcher understood and evaluated the significance of the viewers' and contestants' representations based on the research as viewed and interpreted by them. As a result, qualitative research was appropriate and applied. The researcher became accustomed to the participants' deep understanding of the issues.

The various personal viewpoints of the participants helped determine their motivations, perspectives, and the nature of interactions the participants have with *Date Rush* show. Rich contextual information retrieval is noted by Robson and McCartan (2016) as a strong strength of the qualitative technique. It was beneficial for me to use a qualitative approach to obtain a rich and detailed description of the viewers' perspectives and their nature of interactions with the contestants of the *Date*

Rush show because it offered ample time for me to continually tease out the nature of the integration as it was experienced, structured, and interpreted by the participants during the interviews (Cropley, 2015). One significant reason for using the qualitative approach was that it allowed me to connect with viewers and contestants on a "human level, thereby gaining insight into participants' inner experiences" (Creswell, 2013, p. 41). Furthermore, the qualitative research approach was chosen because qualitative methods are especially useful in discovering the meaning that people give to events that they experience. With that said, this approach helped me to investigate viewers' reception to the *Date Rush* show, what they think about the show and the interactive aspect between them and the contestants. As a result of qualitative research, I was able to **discuss** the findings in a narrative format, complete with descriptive data, emergent themes, and story lines that agree with Kumar, (2011) and Simon, (2011) work.

3.2 Research Design

Research design is the strategy, plan, and structure of leading research (Creswell, 2014). Thus, it is the blueprint for conducting a study and maximizing control over factors that could affect the quality of the findings. Also, Burns and Grove (2001), Cropley (2015) and Yin, (2015) attest to the fact that a research design illustrates how other components of the research, come together to answer the research questions. The selection of a research design is mostly dependent on the nature of the research problem, the researcher's personal experiences, and the audience for the study (Creswell, 2014). Corbin and Strauss (2008) also opine that qualitative research involves going past the known in order to see the unknown. In doing this, they suggest that researchers must gain an "in-depth understanding of the phenomena from the perspective of the people" (p.18). In line with the above, a case study design was

selected based on the nature of the topic, its objectives, and the participants that participated in the research work. Thus, a case study design was employed because of its advantages in justifying the phenomenon and revealing in detail the exceptional perceptions and concerns of individual participants in a real-world situation, thus understanding *Date Rush* show based on the perspectives of viewers, in great depth, which would have been misplaced in other designs.

3.2.1 Case Study

A case study is one of several ways of doing qualitative research because it aims to understand human beings in a social context by interpreting their actions as a single group, community, or a single event (Creswell, 2014). A case study, according to Yin (2015, p. 23), is "an investigation into a current phenomenon in its real-life setting, when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not immediately visible, and numerous sources of evidence are utilized." Beverland and Lindgreen (2010, p. 58) posit that case study is "an exploration of a bond system, thus bounded by time and place or a case (or a multiple cases) over time through multiple detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information-rich in context". Additionally, case studies in their true sense explore and investigate contemporary real-life phenomenon through detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions, and their relationships (Zainal, 2007). Specifically, this study looked into the motivations and viewpoints of viewers on the *Date Rush* show, as well as the nature of interactions between viewers and contestants in Season five (5).

The case study approach is also useful in situations where the context of the events being studied is critical and where the researcher has no control over the events as they unfold (Yin, 2018). In the same way, the current study examines some *Date Rush*

show (Season five) viewers in Winneba concerning their motivational factors in watching the show and their interactions with the contestants of the show, thus an activity that happens in the real-life context of *Date Rush* show viewers and conducted within the participants preferred settings where the researcher did not have control over the choices.

Furthermore, Yin (2018) emphasizes that there are two types of case studies that can be conducted: single case and multiple case studies. Yin (2018) defines multiple or collective case studies as those that examine instances across multiple sites. This includes selecting a variety of events or situations to illustrate multiple points of view on the subject. This study relied on a single case study. This is because, according to Stake (1995), each case study should be examined as a whole, although a researcher can examine multiple cases at the same time. Finding appropriate and manageable samples from which to obtain empirical data is crucial, according to Yin (2018). A single case study has the opportunity to include subunits of analyses as compared to multiple cases which lead to better insight and in-depth description of a study through a more complex design that includes the demographics of viewers, instead of doing a peripheral analysis of the phenomenon (Yin, 2003). It is essential to find relevant and manageable samples to collect empirical data from (e.g., direct observations, interviews, audiovisual materials, reports, and documents). In addition, the current study, which used a case study design, included a variety of data collection methods and processes, including interviews and focus group discussions with participants.

When conducting a single case study, it is possible for the researcher to form a bias. This bias can be for the subject; thus, a researcher can become so close to the study participants which will in turn affect that interpretations that will be made from the data. This is very common, since it is normal for humans to be subjective (McLeod,

2019). It is not just the researchers who can influence the outcome in this type of research method. Participants can also influence outcomes by giving inaccurate or incomplete answers to questions they are asked. With the above limitations at the back of my mind, I made sure I was neutral by not forming any deep bond with participants. I further verified the information presented to ensure its accuracy as well.

Lastly, Thomas (2011) and Yin (2009) point out that a case study can help understand and provide answers to the *how* and *why* something happened. As a result, the purpose of this inquiry is to analyze and explore all of the activities embedded in the interactions in order to find answers to the questions of "how" viewers perceive *Date Rush* show and "why" they watch it. The design was therefore chosen for this study because of its advantages in revealing in detail the unique perceptions and concerns of individual participants in a real-world situation. The researcher was therefore able to obtain a detailed account of viewers' and contestants' daily experiences in relation to the phenomenon (Yin, 2018).

3.3 Sampling Techniques

Sampling technique can be defined as the choice of some part of totality on the basis of which a judgment or inference about the aggregate or totality is made (Haque, 2010). Basically, it is a process of obtaining information about an entire group by picking only a part of the group. Daymon and Holloway (2010) also describe the sampling technique as a decision on what data to access and the particular place or site the data can be accessed in order to achieve one's objective for a study. This technique fits the study compared to random sampling since random sampling would be unsuitable for the investigation of the central phenomenon of this study. The purpose here is not to generate a representative sample and then generalize the results,

but rather to learn from people who are 'information-rich and can best help to understand the specific interest of this research.

3.3.1 Purposive Sampling

Respondents were selected using the purposive sampling technique. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) define purposive sampling as identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest in a study. Purposive sampling is suitable for qualitative studies where the researcher is interested in informants because of their experience of the phenomenon under investigation.

In the opinion of Bernard (2017), purposive sampling is a non-random technique whereby the researcher approves what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience. Creswell (2013) points out that when using purposive sampling, decisions need to be made about who or what is sampled, what form the sampling should take, and how many people or sites need to be sampled. Per the goal of the research, the purposive sampling technique was employed to identify participants who were known to meet the criteria, thus be consistent viewers (active viewers) and some of the contestants of *Date Rush* show (season five) and who could talk from personal experience of the phenomenon under investigation. In connection with the above postulation, *Date Rush* show (season five) was purposively selected as a case for this study because the researcher, after a preliminary study found that *Date Rush* show was the only reality dating show in Ghana hence it have been given the much attention. Also, season five was the most talked of reality show as at then (2021; 2021a).

Again, some contestants and active viewers (viewers who watched the show every Sunday on any medium of choice) of *Date Rush* show season five were purposively selected to be participants of the study because they possessed information that assist the researcher to understand the situation under study and provide appropriate data to answer the research questions (Creswell, 2014).

The major recruitment approach was by the snowball sampling. It allowed the study to rely on other participants' suggestions for finding participants (Saunders et. al., 2016; Robson & McCartan, 2016). The viewers' category of this study had the criterion of sampling persons who viewed the most episodes of *Date Rush* show (season five) (Handcock & Gile, 2011). Creswell (2005:206) asserts that a snowball strategy is a form of purposeful sampling in qualitative research that "typically proceeds after a study begins and occurs when the researcher asks participants to recommend other individuals to study". Snowball sampling yields a study sample through referrals made among people who share or know of others who possess some characteristics that are of research interest.

3.4 Sample Size

Lindlof and Taylor (2002) state that sample size is the 'terra incognita' of qualitative sampling strategy, making the point that there is no structured way that a scholar can adopt to determine if a sample is enough or limited for research. Also, Miles et. al., (2014) contend that when it comes to qualitative research, sampling mostly relies on small numbers to help study and analyze in-depth and detail the phenomenon. Creswell, (2014) adds that as a general rule, qualitative samples should usually lie under 50. In line with their suggestion, thirty (30) participants were purposively selected

for this study (4 contestants of *Date Rush* season five and 26 viewers), since the study does not intend to extrapolate its results to the wider population. The selection of thirty (30) participants was also informed by the objectives of the study which sought to elicit varying views from viewers and contestants on their viewing *Date Rush* show and their nature of connection they share with the contestants. The four contestants consist of two (2) males and two (2) females who appeared on the show through to almost the end of the season. The twenty-six (26) viewers consisted of nine males and twenty-three (23) females. The study had call interviews with all four (4) contestants of the show and three (3) focus group discussions for twenty-six (26) viewers.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

Creswell, (2014) emphasizes that data collection does not only focus on actual types of data and procedures, but also involves obtaining permissions, obtaining a good sample size, recording materials and anticipation for ethical issues that may arise. This study, therefore, employed semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus group discussion as the data collection methods in accessing the required raw data for coding. Creswell, (2014) postulates that such an approach aid in providing adequate information to help achieve the goal of investigations of this nature.

3.5.1 In-depth Interviews

Clark and Braun, (2013) talk about interviews as being the most familiar data collection tool for both qualitative research and participants. They cited Briggs (1986) that affirms interviews are certainly one of the most common methods of data collection within the social and health sciences and most commonly used qualitative

method of data collection. Also, Lindlof and Taylor (2002) posit that interviews are particularly well suited to understanding the social actor's experience and perspective.

Structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews are the three types of interviews (Crowe et. al., 2011). Koulston and Choi (2018) are of the view that when it comes to qualitative research data collection, semi-structured interviews and/or focus group interviews are often used.

Semi-structured interviews allow not only the assessment the participants' opinions, statements and convictions, but they also help to elicit narratives about their personal experiences. Predominantly the semi-structured contains questions that are loosely structured to give participants more chances to express themselves fully whiles giving accurate data (Lai et. al., 2021). Results obtained through semi-structured interviews can be compared among participants since all of them are required to express their views about the same general themes (Nohl, 2009). This data collection method was selected to enable the researcher get the four contestants of the show to tell of their experiences with *Date Rush* show and their fans, and reveal how they interact with the viewers, resulting in personal detailed descriptions that could not have been easily obtained by other methods of inquiry. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to contact a small number of people who were essential and important in gathering rich and detailed material (Blandford, 2013). Patton, (2015) notes, that a semi-structured interview is useful in eliciting another person's thoughts, and allows an investigator to acquire information that would be impossible to collect using other methods. An interview guide was prepared to help the researcher stick to the right questions to ask the participant. Interview guide is a list encompassing a set of questions that have been set, to serve as a guide for researchers in collecting information or data about a specific topic. Lindlof and Taylor (2011) have claimed

that questions on an interview guide are likely to be well-thought-out and have focus; hence, interviewers can simply follow it to elicit applicable information to answer their research question. Using an interview guide is easy because one can make use of inquisitive questions on the guide to make the information gathered more relevant and useful. Simultaneously, it gave the researcher some leeway in responding to the interviewees' responses, allowing the researcher to establish the subjects and issues as they arose. Phone call interviews were conducted with the four contestants of *Date Rush* show (season five). In safeguarding the anonymity of the interviewees', the researcher codified the identities of the contestants. The following are the codes for the interviewees: (Contestants of the show); CP1 (Contestant participant 1); CP2 (Contestant participant 2); CP3 (Contestant participant 3); CP4 (Contestant participant 4).

3.5.2 Focus Group Discussion

Focus Group Interview is a “carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain opinions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment” (Krueger & Casey, 2000, p. 5). A facilitator guides the group based on a pre-arranged set of topics. The facilitator creates an environment that encourages participants to share their perceptions and points of view. As stated by Lindolf and Taylor (2019), focus groups discussion has become a stand-alone data collection method by itself though it is a form of interview. In view of this, data was collected based on the response of participants on topics derived for the objectives of the study. Also, it can reveal a wealth of detailed information and deep insight and allow individuals to describe their feelings and experiences (DeVellis, 2003). The focus group discussion was used by the researcher since it was a strategy that could potentially be used as an additional source of data. This enabled the researcher to hold and sustain a productive

discussion with the active viewers thereby capturing as much data as possible that was vital in understanding their motivations and perspectives for watching *Date Rush* show. Variations exist in the literature regarding the optimum size of a focus group depending on the topics complexity, the type of participants and the skills of the moderator. Some researchers suggest that the appropriate group size ranges from four (4) to twelve (12) members (Barbour, 2010; Stalmeijer et. al., 2014). Furthermore, since certain experiences take a long time to explore, the number of participants in the focus group might be dependent on the participants having similar experiences. As a result, the group should be limited since the size can vary depending on the research goal (Nagle and Williams, 2013; Muijeen et. al., 2019). In tandem with the above propositions, and also based on the objectives of the study, the researcher conducted three (3) focus group discussion made up of seven(7), nine(9) and ten(10) members. Focus group discussions were conducted to compare the responses and seek any similarities and burgeoning trends between the groups. A focus group discussion guide aided the researcher to focus on the exact questions keeping the researcher on track. This is supported by Guest et. al's., (2013) definition of a focus group discussion guide that it contains questions that guide researchers when they gather people from similar backgrounds or experiences together to discuss a specific topic of interest.

3.6 Data Collection Procedures

The main focus of the data collection procedure is on the numerous steps, ways, and means by which the researcher employs the various data collection techniques to gather data for the research study (Clark and Braun, 2013). Creswell, (2014) emphasizes that, data collection does not only focus on actual types of data and

procedures, but also involves obtaining permissions, obtaining a good sample size, recording materials and anticipation for ethical issues that may arise.

3.6.1 In-depth Interviews (IDI)

In view of the **global** pandemic crisis causing the adhesion of protocol restrictions, phone call interviews as one means of data collection was best in collecting data for this study. The questions (Appendix A) were developed to take advantage of the knowledge gaps identified in the literature review. They were refined and organized to accurately reflect the realities of each participant type. The researcher personally contacted each **contestants** through their Instagram handles prior to the phone interviews to explain the researchers' intentions and secure their consent in participating the study. The researcher was able to get in touch with fifteen of forty-five contestants of the fifth season of *Date Rush* show; ten (10) of them declined, leaving five to partake. After exchanging contacts with five possible participants, we decided to carry on our conversations on WhatsApp. The researcher was able to successfully schedule an interview appointment with the four remaining but the fifth (5th) person opted out at the last minute because of her busy schedules. The phone interviews were scheduled by contacting the contestants ahead of time and scheduling an appointment. A day before the interview, a telephone call was made to remind them of the date and time. Before the said dates, interview guide was given to contestants to enable them to examine the requirements of the interview.

On the day of each interview, the first 10 minutes were devoted to go over the questions, such as the participants' ages, occupations, educational backgrounds and the main questions. The researcher also briefed the contestants about the study, the researchers' motivations for conducting the study. Every interview therefore began with a reaffirmation of the interview's tenacity, a pledge of confidentiality, and that

the interviewer genuinely wanted to hear what they felt, thought, and that the interview was being conducted for research purpose only.

Additionally, I requested for permission to record the calls for transcription and made clear that the interpretation of the interview will be returned to validate its accuracy. During the recording, notes were also simultaneously taken as a backup of the recordings to reduce the likelihood of losing the data. Following that, the interviews were recorded with all four contestants' consent. We had informal interviews as suggested by Machado-Borges (2003) because it allowed for flexibility on the side of both the interviewer and the interviewee. The semi-structured interview guide (Appendix A) was used to direct the nature of interview with each interviewee. This process was repeated for all the four (4) contestants interviewed. Each phone interview took thirty (30) to forty-five (45) minutes. In line with Lindlof and Taylor's (2002) assertion, the researcher ensured straight to the point questions, brief interview encounters, interviewee anonymity, and focused more on individual perceptions about the phenomenon under study. After each interview, all the notes and recorded data were reviewed to make sure they had been completed accurately. Transcriptions were then made by playing the recordings continuously so that it accurately captured the interviewees' exact comments. After that, a soft copy of the transcripts was sent to them for reading, commenting, and approval or disapproval. For the purpose of getting the data ready for analysis, the interview transcripts were cleaned.

3.6.2 Focus group discussions

Three focus groups were formed. In line with Creswell's (2014) assertion that a typical focus group should have a minimum people of six, I saw to it that members of the groups were not less than six in a group. The researcher recruited active viewers in Winneba town with snowballing being the primary source of reaching the right target.

The group consisted of seven, nine and ten members respectively. Eight (8) of them were males with the remaining eighteen (18) being females. The first group had five females with two males, second group six females and three males and last group had six females and four males. With the use of snow balling, members of each group had similar background thus; they knew each other and were totally comfortable with each other hence making the discussion flexible and fun. The time of day and length of time for the interviews was also crucial because I wanted to get time and date that was reasonable and convenient to all members of each group. So as not to interfere with individual busy times, they chose Saturday July 17 and Sunday July 24. Two groups on Saturday then the other one on Sunday. I chose to have three groups because of the number of respondents and also to be able to compare the responses and seek any similarities and burgeoning trends between the groups. Prior to the two appointed days I had met them to explain the nature of the study and gave guidelines on how the discussion was going to be like.

At the venue the purpose of the research and ethical issues were discussed. After that, consent was requested before the focus group was recorded. Before we began. I made sure the seats were arranged in a semi- circular way while the researcher sat in the middle in order to be seen by all. The style of seating adhered to Escalada and Heong's, (2009) assertion that a semi-circular seating arrangement expedites interaction among participants as it enables them to freely see and hear each other. The conversation officially started with the researcher serving as the session's rapporteur. I was completely objective and impartial throughout the discussion. A focus group guide was used to facilitate the discussion. According to Bell (2018), a focus group guide is a list of questions with their accompanying prompt for researchers to use. In order to ensure that all aspects of the study questions were

thoroughly covered, it was necessary to structure and direct the debate. The time period allotted for Saturday and Sunday's focus group discussion was 2 hours for each discussion. On the Saturday first group started at 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. and the next from 2:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. The Sunday group also started from 3:00 p.m.-4:30 p.m. This time period did not interfere with any one's schedule because it was a consensus. For all the focus group discussions, I divided the two-hour block into different time slots so as to progress smoothly throughout the interviews. I utilised the first 30 minutes for participants to arrive and meet myself, other participants and basically get comfortable. I took demographical information from them. Additionally, I asked questions that set the pace for group members to express themselves. With the help of my assistant she used my iPhone seven to record the discussion, making sure the phone was close enough to get a clear recording and I advised them to talk one after the other in order for the recorder to get everything that each member talked about while I led all the three group discussions. The questions were set in a simple manner for everyone to understand. They were equally okay to communicate in English language. The researcher also took notes throughout the discussions. The recorded information was played back numerous times, and the information was then transcribed while taking into account the research themes revealed by the research objectives.

3.7 Method of Data Analysis

This section presents the processes undertaken in order to analyze the required data for the study. With this stage, the investigator must make 'sense' out of what was just uncovered and compile the data into sections or groups of information, also known as themes or codes (Creswell, 2009).

Analysing data in a qualitative study, according to Frankel and Wallen (2003), essentially involves analyzing and synthesizing the data the researcher obtains from various sources into a comprehensible description of what he or she has gathered. The successive levels of coding provide researchers with documented and well-organized answers to the research questions.

The data analysis began with the individual phone interviews to the focus group discussions. In answering the research questions, data were analysed using a thematic approach. Thematic analysis is a technique for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns in data, according to Clark and Braun, (2013). This approach makes it possible to code and present the findings according to unique themes that meet the study's objectives, and the researcher can interrogate the latent meanings, the assumptions and ideas that lie behind what is explicitly stated (Clarke and Braun, 2013). In reading through the interview and focus group discussions transcripts, the researcher looked out for portions that well suited a descriptive write up about the specific phenomenon being studied. There were recognised themes and issues that addressed the research questions. The interview transcripts were read several times by the researcher to familiarize with the facts as indicated by the research focus, particularly the questions and objectives (Bryman, 2008). Furthermore, it was made sure that comprehensive and direct quotations were used to convey many viewpoints and explanations in order to highlight the research issues and support the in-depth descriptions and debates of the particular research subject. This allowed the researcher to produce linking concepts that were significant among participants. Sub categories were then created from recurring concepts. This was done to avoid disregarding an element that could afterwards look significant. The found elements were then bundled according to likenesses (Cohen et. al., 2013).

The categories were then further reviewed and condensed, suggesting that portions of the data had been reduced to what was essential to the study. Finally, the clusters were carefully examined to identify the most plausible subjects. All that was done to decrease the data until no new themes could be identified. This was concurrent with a phenomenon known as "data saturation" (Cohen et. al., 2011, p. 601), in which no new information could be revealed. This approach worked well because it covered all the areas of the targeted investigation because they addressed various facets of the study issues, hence sub-themes were developed. The analysis was carried out utilizing quotes after determining the codes represented by the sub-themes.

3.8 Ethical Issues

In a qualitative study, the researcher enters the participants' private worlds, which take the form of their personal domains, values, and flaws. This creates ethical concerns that must be addressed anytime conducting research. Creswell, (2003) issues the warning that the researcher has a duty to respect the rights, needs, values, and wishes of the informants. Research ethics in general sense, as defined by Convery and Cox (2012), is primarily the observation of human rights in research. A balance between risks and benefits must be reached by all parties involved in the research process. It also includes other elements influencing the outcome of the research, such as the fair selection of research participants (Beyrer and Kass, 2002). Shelley-Egan (2015) adds that, the credibility of every study is paramount; hence issues of privacy, informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality are critical to a study and must not be undermined or disregarded. Some ethical issues that came up during the study had to do with informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity and the consequence of the interviews. Adherence to strict ethical guidelines so as to respect participants' secrecy, privacy, self-respect, rights, and anonymity was religiously followed.

In terms of seeking consent and giving information, I informed the participants about the purpose of the research work and what will be expected of them. The participants were then given the opportunity to either accept or decline to be part of the research study. Only those that gave their consent were interviewed and used for the research work. Even after consent had been given by the participants, the researcher informed them of their right to withdraw from the study or answering a particular question if they deem it intrusive or inappropriate. Consent for the use for recording the phone call interviews and focus group sessions and then later for the use of the interviewees' quotes for the study was entreated.

With respect to confidentiality, the informants were assured of both high (information considered very private) and low (information considered mundane) forms of confidentiality, as espoused by Cohen et al., (2011). Also, to ensure anonymity and privacy, pseudonyms were used to hide identities. All participants were informed by the researcher that their names would not be used. Instead, quasi names were to be used, and I made it clear that no information could be spread that might in any way reveal their identities. Additionally, I ensured that the viewers and contestants were kept anonymous and secret by removing any identifying characteristics before disseminating the findings. A word of assurance was provided to the effect that their identity and answers were to be handled with discretion and were to be used for research purposes only.

Data integrity was the final ethical consideration. To guarantee the reliability and integrity of the findings, it was crucial and imperative that data integrity be maintained. Preventing unauthorized or outside access to information and data was one strategy to improve integrity. It was made possible by using passwords and cautious data storage to safeguard the records of the electronic files on the iPhone 7.

Bias was avoided during data collection by allowing the participants to express themselves freely (Robson & McCartan, 2016). The researcher did not suggest any research direction or make comments that could influence the discussion during the interviews or focus groups.

3.9 Trustworthiness of the Data

According to Whittemore et. al., (2001), trustworthiness in a qualitative study can be achieved by its credibility, authenticity, transferability, dependability and confirmability and by operationalizing these terms. The authors further add that it can be achieved through long engagement in the field and the triangulation of data sources, methods and investigators to establish credibility. Anney (2014) in his research paper *Ensuring the quality of the findings of qualitative research: Looking at trustworthiness criteria* found that most students at the University of Dar Es Salaam-Tanzania in their dissertation employed the quantitative trustworthiness criteria such as reliability and validity to assess the accuracy of qualitative inquiry. However, Brink (1993) and Creswell (2014) are of the view that the meaning that validity and reliability carry in qualitative research is different from what they imply in quantitative research. Hair et al., (2020) affirm this point by pointing out that qualitative research reliability is used to serve as a tool to develop understanding than just looking at its quantity. Anney, (2014) therefore suggests that researchers should rather consider dependability (in preference to reliability), credibility (in preference to internal validity), and transferability (in preference to external validity) and confirmability (in preference to objectivity) as trustworthiness criteria for qualitative investigation as propounded by Lincoln and Guba (2000).

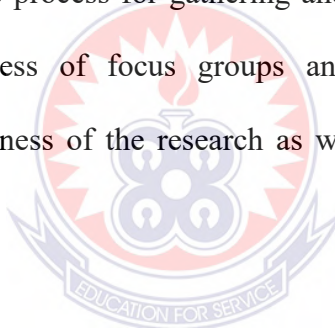
Creswell and Poth (2013) indicate that validity in qualitative research is geared towards determining the accuracy and truthfulness in research findings as best expressed by the researcher and participants. Dejonckheere and Vaughn (2019) attest that reliability can be better by taking thorough field notes, recording devices and transcribing digital files. They believe validity is employed to emphasize a process rather than verification accomplished through extended field time, careful description and a tight bond between the researcher and the participants. This was meant to provide further insights into the elements under study. The study gave a thick description of the phenomenon under study as supposed by Geertz (1973) in Daymon and Holloway (2011). Finally, another way the researcher legitimises the findings of the data collected was the use of the member checking strategy. This is where the researcher returns the transcripts from an interview and focus groups discussion to the participants to confirm if their accounts in the data collection interactions were accurately captured by the researcher (Creswell, 2013). The researcher returned the interview transcript that was extracted from the recorded audio to the members who participated in the interview to confirm if the data correspond to the responses they gave. They went through it all and confirmed that indeed those were a true representation of their responses. This tactic ensured the quality of their responses by enhancing trust between the researcher and respondents.

Trustworthiness is very significant in every study especially having to do with fellow humans. Therefore, this study abides to trustworthiness using the criteria of Anney (2014). In assertion after gathering data from the participants who watched *Date Rush* show (Season five) and four contestants of the show, the researcher gathered the findings of 30 participants, through phone interviews and three focus group

discussions. The findings were meant to offer further insights into the research under study.

3.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter examined the structure of a qualitative approach along with the case study design employed after the consideration of the philosophical assumptions underpinning the study. The study focused on the perspectives and motivational of some active viewers in Winneba community and further looked at the nature of interactions they have with some contestants which could be used to better practice. It used a case study to shed insight on the experiences of the research's participants. In addition to describing the process for gathering and analyzing data, the chapter also discussed the effectiveness of focus groups and interviews as data-generating methods. The trustworthiness of the research as well as the ethical procedures was presented.



CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the data collected and discusses in detail the results obtained from selected participants of the study. Interviews and focus groups were the primary means of data collection for this study. A total of thirty (30) people participated in this study. For the purposes of ensuring the participants' anonymity, pseudonyms have been used for all the thirty (30) participants. The following are the codes for the participants: VP (Viewer participant) and CP (Contestant participant). Themes were generated from the findings to facilitate understanding using existing relevant literature with principles from the theories of Uses and Gratifications and Para-social Interaction. The following research questions were formulated for the study;

1. What are viewers' perspectives for watching *Date Rush* show?
2. What are viewers' motivations on the *Date Rush* show?
3. What is the nature of the interaction between viewers of *Date Rush* show and the contestants of the show?

4.1 Analysis and Discussion of Demographic Data of the Participants

The information dealt under this section was collected from active viewers who patronize the *Date Rush* show by watching it every Sunday on any medium and as well as some contestants of season five (5) of the show. Demographic information collected from the participants was in relation to Age, Gender and Educational background.

The demographic characteristics of participants in this study are important as these characteristics provide readers with a better appreciation of the subject or population being studied (Connelly, 2013). The participants for the study consist of four (4) contestants of *Date Rush* show (season five) and twenty-six (26) active viewer participants: in which three focus groups discussion and four (4) phone call interviews were conducted. In all, a total of thirty (30) participants took part in the study. For easy identification and reference in the analysis, the three (3) focus groups were named Focus Group 1 (FG1) Focus Group 2(FG2), Focus Group 3 (FG3), and the four contestants of *Date Rush* Show were labeled Contestant (CP) 1 - 4.

4.1.1 Age Distribution of Participants

This section shows the age range of participants with the corresponding number and ratio percentage of participants in each group.

Table 1: Age of Participants

Age group	Number	Percentage (%)
Under 21	4	13
21-25	14	47
26-30	9	30
31-35	3	10
Total	30	100

Source: Field Data, 2021.

Table 1 above displays the age group statistics of all participants. The table reveals that out of thirty (30) participants, 4(13%) are within the age group of 0-21, 14(47%)

represent the age group from 21 – 25, and 9(30%) represent the participants within the age bracket of 26-30, whilst another group of 3(10%) represented those within the ages of 31-35. This was followed by 9 participants who were 26 to 30 years with a percentage of 30. According to Denhart (2015), adults aged 18 to 49 make up the majority of reality television viewers.

4.1.2 Gender Distribution of Participants

This section shows the participants by gender and their total percentage in the categories of Male and Female. The gender distribution of participants is presented in table 2 below.

Table 2: Gender of Participants

Gender group	Number	Percentage (%)
Male	8	27
Female	22	73
Total	30	100

Source: Field Data, 2021

Table 2 shows that 8(27%) of the participant of the study were males, whilst the remaining 22 (73%) of the participants represented females. This is not surprising in that reality shows have mostly female-dominated consumers (Ward & Cox 2021). This could be the reason why most of those who watch the show are females.

4.1.3 Educational background Distribution of Participants

Education backgrounds of the participants were established as well. Participants' level of education is sectioned into no formal education, basic education, secondary and tertiary level respectively. The distributions of participants' levels of education are presented in table 3 below.

Table 3: Educational Background of Participants

Educational Background	Number	Percentage (%)
No Formal Education	2	6
Basic level	5	17
Secondary level	11	37
Tertiary Level	12	40
Total	30	100

Source: Field Data, 2021.

The outcomes displayed in table 3 show that most participants have an education to the tertiary level representing twelve (12) out of 30 (40%). Followed by eleven (11) people who had their secondary education. Basic level was recognized with five (5) members while 2 persons had no formal education. This affirms Geetha & Pavithra, (2018) assertion that majority of educated folks have interest in watching reality shows.

4.2 Analysis of main findings

The study sought to investigate the *Date Rush* show viewers' perspectives, motives on the show and the nature of interactions formed with the reality show contestants. In all three research questions were raised, and with the help of a semi-structured interview guide, data was gathered from thirty (30) participants through interviews and focus group discussions.

4.3 RQ1. What are viewers' perspectives on *Date Rush* show?

The first question of the study focuses on the opinions of the viewers of the *Date Rush* show; on how they feel about the show. Perspective is the way we see the world through our senses, and it encompasses both our awareness of environmental cues and our responses to those inputs (Scherlis, 2015). The ability to perceive thought is aided by learning about the features and elements of the surroundings that are vital to one's survival. Dating shows provide a range of satisfactions for people with varying personal traits, reputations, and financial circumstances. According to Agbonifoh, Isibor, and Okere (2016) viewers' impressions of television shows are mostly shaped by their involvement, connection, and programme performance. The authors define audience involvement as their judgment of the programme's significance. This implies that a programme's status is greatly influenced by the needs, values, and interests of its audience.

Perspectives can be negative or positive. Criticism about reality television today is related to its originality (Aslama & Pantti, 2006; Skeggs, 2009). Thus how reality shows is authentic. Moreover, most literature assert that criticisms linked to reality television is mostly negative such as ethnic and racial disparity in role portrayals (Glascok & Preston-Schreck, 2018; Williams-Burnett, Skinner, & Fallon, 2018),

gender inequality and discrimination (Kavka & Weber, 2017) , aggression and race (Scharrer & Blackburn, 2018), the demeaning way in which those that suffer from substance abuse are portrayed (Oksanen, 2014), disparagement of national culture, religious beliefs, and stereotypical profiling (Pusca, 2015; Schneeweis & Foss, 2017; Tremlett, 2014); Williams-Burnett, Skinner, & Fallon, 2018). In this regard the researcher explored from the viewers of the *Date Rush* show to ascertain what they perceive the show to be. After sifting and organising the gathered data, it emerged that participants see the show as *lacking originality, being an example of a show with influx of foreign culture as well as a source of revenue for the station.*

4.3.1 Lack of Originality

The theme of lack of originality emerged as the participants advanced their reasons for concluding the show is not authentic as it should be. The theme has to do with the show not being authentic and real in nature. The participants see the *Date Rush* show as a type of reality television show hence should have the unscripted nature it comes with. Reality television shows create an illusion of what the "real world" should be like (Hankinson, 2015). In the majority of academic studies, it is practically impossible to come up with an accurate definition of what reality television is and what it is not (Deller, 2020). According to Couldry, (2003) defining reality television narrowly obscures its true meaning rather than serving the concept. Research has frequently examined the degree to which representations of particular populations may be regarded to be authentic and representative of reality (Escoffery, 2006) in order to analyze authenticity in Reality TV. However, Hill (2014) argues that reality TV blatantly invites viewers to investigate the flexible nature of realism, performance, and identity rather than making claims to ultimate authenticity. The theme lack of

originality in the show align with the perspective of the participants that the *Date Rush* show is not hundred percent real and authentic. There has been debate on whether reality television programmes are authentic or not (Das-Souvik et. al., 2021). The twenty-six participants unanimously agreed that *Date Rush* show was scripted and not real; thus nine of them said it was hundred percent not authentic but the rest opted that the inauthenticity is to some percentage. Excerpts from participants are captured below;

I tell people that Date Rush show is scripted and not original. I feel sad for those who are emotionally attached to it... (VP4, FG3).

Another participant added

When will people understand that this programme is staged? It's just for entertainment and nothing serious (VP9, FG1).

Participants concurred that not all aspects of the show accurately depicted its unreality, but that as a whole, the show did not reflect reality as it had been represented. Participant had this to say;

The show has got the potential of being real but now I see it to not be hundred percent real. Even though I love the concept and frame it comes with, I see it to be a scripted show. I think it is a nice initiative to bring people on board to choose love. Even though it's scripted, some people come onto the show being real and they get love (VP5, FG2).

Another participant added

...the show is new to us, I love how dynamic TV3 is with their shows. I think the motive of the show was to bring us entertainment but I think it ended up not being real because people rarely get genuine date (VP6, FG2).

Majority of the participants believed that the show was not real. This assertion relates to Olarinmoye and Odunaike's (2016) claim that reality shows are sometimes planned and edited for entertainment while yet being presented as true to the viewers.

Out of the many points highlighted for the reasons why the participant see the show as scripted, participant reiterated that they see the *Date Rush* show as an opportunity for the contestants to showcase themselves to the public. The show's main goal is to provide a platform for young people who are looking for real love to meet someone, however the participants had the impression that the contestants chose the show more for its popularity, only for the attention it would bring them in order to pursue other goals in the future. They continued by adding that this was why, when they go for matches, the majority of dates tend to fail. Here are a few examples to support this;

As for me I don't see the programme as they want us to believe that people go there to find love. I clearly see that these ladies go there to gain media hype. Some of them are already into the media space, however, they are not mostly known so they use this TV3 programme as an opportunity to gain that popularity so that people may get to know them then they have more followers (VP2, FG 2).

Another participant indicates that

...this show has lost its essence if you ask me. I used to love it but this current past season came with people who are hungry for fame and to promote their businesses (VP3, FG1).

A participant had this to say;

The contestants are fake, because their motive is to promote themselves after they come to the show. People who identify them at home end up bringing their secret relationships or marriage out. Why play with people's emotions? I

think measures should be put in place to penalize those who take the platform for granted (VP1, FG3).

Similarly

...it is true paa, I know two contestants who had been there and they attest it is just for fame and to promote what they are into. You see when they are asked of their profession majority say, actor, models, actress, singer, and the entrepreneurs. They just want to be known (VP7, FG2).

It is clear from the aforementioned extracts that the participants believed that the show was not as authentically true as it should be. This finding was evident in Das-Souvik et. al's., (2021) research study, which discovered that the most profound argument in literature regarding the viewpoints of reality TV programming concerns its authenticity. It might be the case that some reality television is not actually real; perhaps some of it is written, as this study's findings imply, and perhaps the "entertainment" idea that arose makes this most evident. Thus, if reality television programme producers are actively pursuing ratings, shares, downloads, views, and money, and if genuine people are as uninteresting as Kitman alleges (2009). Television companies do much more than just film the events when it comes to the production of a show. The majority of television networks and show creators are more focused on the quantity of viewers than the quality of their programming (Meehan, 2005). Their sole focus is on maintaining viewers' interest so that they continue to watch and on spreading the buzz about the programme to attract additional viewers. Having said that, they will stop at nothing to keep their programme dramatic and engaging. (Meehan, 2005). Nothing has stopped the viewers from contributing to reality TV shows' enormous viewership, despite the controversy surrounding their

veracity. Reality TV shows are a huge hit with the viewers, and the fact that TV channels continue to commission them season after season with more sponsors on board is the proof of how successful they are. Although viewers claim to comprehend the misleading nature of reality television, they still insist that fair play and not a show at the expense of preferential judgment by the programme creators are what they really desire (Das- Souvik et. al., 2021).

4.4.2 An Influx of foreign culture

TV entertainment shows are influencing the social and cultural habits of viewership. The sensitivities, relationships, associations, and face-to-face encounters are now somewhat influenced by the content on TV and the internet (Das-Souvik, 2021). Another theme the analysis of data revealed is the perspective on the shows adaptation on the adoption of foreign culture. In spite of the participants' perspective of the show as not being real, others were of the view that the *Date Rush* show does not align with the Ghanaian culture. Some believe it is encouraging promiscuity, which would mean pushing individuals, particularly young people, to lead lives that are foreign to the Ghanaian culture. According to Jekayinka (2021), culture encompasses the full range of human behaviour that is socially passed down from generation to generation. Appiah & Baffour (2022) asserts that cultural change is gradual rather than abrupt. He argues that culture is a dynamic process that changes continuously. It changes just in the same manner that people do. Any culture that exists outside of one's own country's borders might be considered foreign culture (Bhagat et. al., 2002). Even though colonialism is no longer practiced, the goods and traditions of the former colonial countries continue to influence and oppress Africa (Lando, 2020). As a result of the impact of global media and the development of new

technology, the Ghanaian media and supermarkets now reflect the multicultural nature of the world; which *Date Rush* show has been identified as one. In human history, the entertainment industry is the greatest cultural disseminator (Lemos & Charles, 2018). The media industry, which includes television, movies, advertisements, and video games, has established a platform for not only establishing trends and reshaping society, but also influencing identities in significant ways. That is to say entertainment influences culture to a larger extent. It is no wonder that participants compared their culture to the *Date Rush* show being telecasted on the screen. Below is quote from a member of the focus group;

My second thought on the show is how foreign the show is. It is so clear the concept is nowhere near our Ghanaian culture (VP1, FG3).

Again a viewer participant said;

I see Date Rush show as portraying the western culture, something that is new to us (VP4, FG1).

It also emerged from the coded data that some of the viewers saw the *Date Rush* show concept as foreign culture. Some said they saw the show as not being indigenous Ghanaian culture. They perceived such love as being practiced by the Europeans. The participants explained that in their culture, trying to find a love partner is mostly initiated in a quiet or silent manner. However, this show presents how to propose to woman and men publicly. Below are excerpts of participant thoughts;

The initiative is a good one but it's still not fit in our culture. I feel they should incorporate a lot of things to match our culture. I clearly see it's as a foreign culture that has been brought or introduced here. Boyfriend-girlfriend relationships on television are something that is not part of our culture. Our culture, you know, makes it difficult to have open relationship like this show is trying to present to us (VP8, FG3).

Another participant stated this;

It is a foreign concept because our traditional culture doesn't condone these practices. Parents speak ill of the show because they see it not to be right as the show could influence the youth. We know relationship in our culture is very sensitive and it has to do with the family acceptance but the show is indirectly showing us how the Westerners do their things (VP5, FG1).

Discussions of perspectives concerning reality shows typically focus on the negative effects rather than the positive ones which are reflected in this study (Blitvich, & Lorenzo-Dus, 2013). It has been said that the mass media in developing countries serve as Trojan horses for the spread of Western values and the continuation of cultural imperialism. (Cunningham, 2009). Most of the programming on media screens is from foreigners. The media outlets frequently promote programmes that, in terms of the Ghanaian culture, have little to no redeeming qualities. In recent years, Ghana has imported more than half of its media content (Tindi & Ayiku, 2018). The gap between the levels of development has widened as a result of many years of colonization of Africa by wealthy countries (Appiah & Baffour, 2022). A recent effort has been made to produce and introduce local serials in Ghana where foreign programming now occupies a larger portion of the screen. Most of these serials, however, are just a reproduction of some of the foreign serials, albeit in local settings and with local actors and actresses. The cultural values of these glocalised programmes are essentially the same as those of the foreign ones, reinforcing foreign culture and values (Donkor, 2013). The cast and staff are local, but the formats and production values are imported (Donkor, 2013). According to Ksiazek and Webster (2008), who were quoted by Tindi and Ayiku (2018), the situation in Africa is different from that of Europe and Latin America, where longitudinal research in specific nations have shown that viewers have a strong affinity for local and regional

performances. African media consumers favour foreign (Western) content in huge numbers, and local producers tailor their production to suit consumer preferences (Endong, 2014; Haynes, 2011). Further to the above assertion, a viewer had this to say;

Date Rush show is a foreign culture but I like dynamic shows, knowing and learning other countries culture isn't bad you know. So I see nothing wrong with it being foreign (VP10, FG3).

The theme shows how the individuals show displeasure of how the show is not original as it should be.

4.4.3 Source of revenue for the station

During the focus group discussion, some viewers shared their opinions on the show's potential as a revenue source for the show's producers and the station as a whole. Reality TV has become increasingly popular, and the costs of producing reality TV are still far lower than those of most scripted programmes. As such, reality show has remained dominant in TV programming because of the high income return potential and simple production value it has (Wilfred et. al., 2019). Researchers also found that reality television blurs the lines between reality and fiction, suggesting that such shows may be changed to increase their ratings, shares, downloads, and views, if not to take into consideration the economics and analytics that guide its programming. (Kitman, 2009; Torrego et. al., 2021).

This theme discusses how viewers see the show as a source of revenue for the station.

A participant had this to say;

I also think it's a revenue for the station to earn money because they are the first to introduce this genre of reality show hence high patronage and viewership (VP1, FG1).

Similarly another participant of a different focus group said;

This show is a win for the producers because of how it's one of a kind in Ghana and within a short time has gained much hype and growth; every season and new development. I am impressed (VP7, FG 3).

In some few years, reality TV programming has established itself as a reliable source of income (Lamont, 2019). This has resulted in fierce competition between networks during prime time, especially on weekends, to attract as many viewers as possible for TV ratings done by the Broadcast Audience Research Council, an independent entity that tracks TV viewing in a selected group of households' United States of America (Das-Souvik et. al., 2021). Still regarding the revenue, participants also remarked that the producers are actually succeeding because of the visibility the programme has generated with viewership, which has led to numerous sponsorships. A viewer participant had noted;

Tv3 has done well by being the first to introduce Date Rush show onto our screens even though they still have to check some aspects of the show; the show now has a lot of sponsors so the adverts are too much; this shows the station is earning much (VP6, FG2).

The above discussions show how viewers see the show to be a revenue for the station, due to the fact that the show was the first of a sort to hit in Ghana, it has attracted high viewership, landed the various sponsorship deals and the fact that it is frequently

discussed in trending issues every week. These findings can also be seen in Joyner's (2010) work which attest that these shows also act as advertising platforms for brands which consequently generate income for producers

4.4 RQ2. What are viewers' motivations for watching *Date Rush* show?

Investigating the reasons why people watch the *Date Rush* show is one of the goals of this study in order to confirm the needs that Winneba viewers were hoping the programme would satisfy. Uses and gratification theorists contend that viewers deliberately seek out particular media to meet particular needs. They also emphasize how people experience various forms of gratification which have an impact on how frequently audiences choose to watch the programmes (Mante, 2016; Kubey, 2018; Shim et. al., 2018). The study's findings are in line with the uses and gratification hypothesis, which helped explain how viewers deliberately chose the *Date Rush* show to meet their needs and further their various viewing motives. This suggests that viewers choose particular television stations and, consequently, preferred programmes to suit their demands. Even though these viewers watched the same episode of *Date Rush* show, they had different appeals because of how the show have influenced them. The three focus group interviews (which included 26 viewers) revealed several themes, including *Entertainment, Education, Status-Seeking, Interactions and Identifying with Contestants*

4.4.1 Entertainment

People receive their entertainment from a variety of sources, and everyone has a way of doing it. The theme of entertainment in this study is operationally defined as the media's ability to amuse its audiences with fun, enjoyment, and laughter. The key elements to develop this theme were elements of leisure, pass time, hobbies, ease of stress, and relaxation. In general, to entertain is to present the public with something pleasurable or enjoyable that holds their interest throughout the duration of the entertaining event or object perceived (Van Loggerenberg, et. al., 2021). Entertainment reduces tension and eases stress in the viewers and provokes the feelings of excitement, delight, curiosity, and immersion that motivate individuals to seek out more of this type of content from the media (Baran & Davis, 2010). Although there are many other reasons why people watch television, "entertainment is the most obvious and visible function of television," (Adia, 2014 pg. 96). All twenty-six (26) participants of the three focus group discussions, manifested entertainment as the first and main reasons. Seven out of the twenty –six participants outlined entertainment. Thus, while the seven participants consider the whole show to be entertaining, the remaining 19 participants consider parts/aspects of the show to be entertaining to merit their watching of the show. This suggests that *Date Rush* show is a source of entertainment for the participants. Excerpts from a viewer in focus group two:

...I watched the show because the contestants were hilarious. The competitors were really dramatic. From the beginning to the end of the show, I enjoyed it. I laughed while watching every episode (VP8, FG2).

Another participant from a different focus group had the opinion that the dancing in the *Date Rush* show entertains her.

... The dance moves that the Date Rush show contestants display mostly excite me. Expecially, when they are coming onto the stage and after the Show with their free style dances. I enjoy watching the Show every Sunday because of the dancing moves (VP5, FG3).

Viewer number five (5) in focus group three (3) indicated that the dancing entry and exit aspect of the show is what attracts her in watching the show hence gratifying her wants, this point is seen in Adia (2014) assertion, which highlights that some viewers pick elements of shows they believe can be utilized to state their deepest wants.

Additionally, the findings showed that some participants admitted to the fact as they are being entertained with the show it also aids them in releasing stress. Seventeen (17) participants of the focus group discussions watch the programme to release stress. Everyone experiences stress to some degree. With all of life's obligations, the participants indicated they are overburdened, and eventually builds up stress among them- both the working and non-working class. However, the overall wellbeing is significantly impacted by how the individuals dealt with stress. There are numerous factors in life that might lead to stress: work, finances, relationships, children, and everyday annoyances are a few of the major causes of stress. When people are under stress, they use various mechanisms or methods to combat it (Popoli et. al., 2012). Many of the participants mentioned that they frequently watched *Date Rush* show after a difficult or lengthy week. A member from a focus group discussion had this to say;

The Date Rush show sometimes allows me to let go of my day 'wahala'. I even get so much into the programme that I forget about things surrounding

me at that period the show is airing; it also helps me to sometimes forget about the difficulties in life (VP2, FG3).

In a similar vein, a fellow participant was of the view that there was much pressure in the system therefore needs something to calm down the nerves.

The pressure in the system is too much. Sometimes when I come home, I need a movie or a show on your screen to calm down your nerves, I mean something that can cool the pressure, and Date Rush show is one of my stress release system. There is pressure everywhere you go. From workplace to the house. I sometimes just need distraction from my daily pressure (VP4, FG2).

The data also suggested that some viewers watched the *Date Rush* show as a hobby and a means to pass the time when they were bored. Goh et. al., (2012) refers to the pass time construct, commonly known as ‘killing time,’ as the desire of the users to look for content anytime they have free time or generate content when they are without other options. Hobbies are a significant category of leisure activities that can have a significant impact on their users (Passmore, 2003; Unruh, 2004). Also, hobbies are commonly regarded as beneficial leisure activities or non-work occupations (Lee, & Park, 2014; York & Wiseman, 2012). People have different hobbies and it is not surprising that in the narration of their motivation to watch *Date Rush* show, some participants recounted that the show had become their hobby. The show had become part of their weekly activity. A member of the focus group one said that...

Every Sunday at 8 p.m., the show is aired, and since that is the time I have free time, I watch it then. I now enjoy doing it, which prevents me from getting bored. I watch because I'm lonely from being by myself. There isn't a worthwhile programme on at that hour, so I stick with what has become a habit (VP3, FG1).

Similar comments from another participant confirmed the notion that people choose to watch *Date Rush* show for leisure.

Whiles others prefer to watch different programmes on Sunday evenings as a means of occupying their leisure, I mostly watch the Date Rush show. It has become a hobby for me (VP6, FG2).

These findings are in line with the uses and gratification theory, which helped explain how viewers deliberately chose the *Date Rush* show to meet their needs and further their various viewing motives. This suggests that viewers choose *Date Rush* show, to gratify their entertainment needs. The theme of entertainment was also found in the studies by (Ebersole & Woods, 2007; Kumar and Arulchelvan, 2015; Patino et. al., 2012; Papacharissi & Mendelson 2007). In conclusion, it can be said that all 26 of the participants in this study used the viewing experience to satisfy their need for entertainment. They were able to laugh and smile as a result. That is to say, the participants found the show to be enjoyable, which is what entertainment seeks to do.

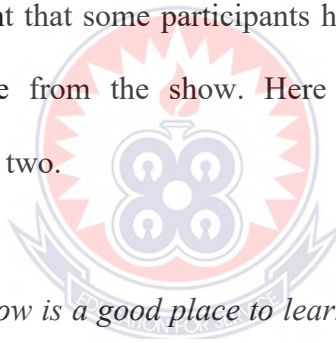
4.4.2 Education

The subject of information seeking is motivated by people's desire to gain more awareness and knowledge of oneself, other people, and the wider world (Shao, 2009). The information that a viewer notates might be valuable to the individual, so giving oneself practical knowledge, is one of this theme's major markers. Depending on the issues individuals are facing specifically, their perceived value and legitimacy they attach to the programme, it was clear that certain individual viewers derive different types of information from viewing *Date Rush* show. In totality fifteen (15) participants attested to gaining information on relationships from the show. Thus, they consider the programme to be worthy and credible enough for them to gain

information that can enhance their relationships or solve some of the problems in relationships. For instance, a participant emphasized that from watching the *Date Rush* show, he gained insights into how women see situations in relationships and the qualities they want to see in men they would go into a relationship with. The participant had this to say,

...as for Date Rush show, it is a source of information. It is educative. Ladies are teaching me new things. There were some things that I had no idea women found attractive but the programme has revealed a lot about women to me. I clearly recall a lady voicing out that she wants a man with six-packs; I did not know that was a major priority for some ladies. So, I have started training my body to get some (VP3, FG2).

Once more, it was evident that some participants had picked up new dancing moves and fashion-styles/ sense from the show. Here is an excerpt from a different participant in focus group two.



The Date Rush show is a good place to learn something new. I picked up new dance moves, life lessons, and decision-making ideas. New dance moves are always presented on stage by the contestants. The Date Rush show provided me with further fashion knowledge because each week, they arrive dressed differently. My sense of style has improved as a result of the show's clothing choices (VP4, FG1).

According to Ambrose et. al., (2010), learning is a process that results in change that comes about as a result of experience and raises the possibility for higher performance. This claim is supported by a review of the data from focus group conversations that showed six (6) participants experienced a variety of individual and interpersonal relationship problems in their relationships that insights from the show helped them to address. The vast majority of the participants fall into the category of

those who are most concerned about relationships and who think that *Date Rush* show is one of the mediums from which they may learn. Some participants claimed that the show's question and answer segments helped them because they gained relationship advice that they could apply to their dating life and so improve their relationships with their partners. One viewer stated that;

From the Date Rush show season that just ended, I learned a lot. Despite the show's entertainment value, I usually like listening to the host's general questions to the contestants before the show starts. I pick up a lot of relationship advice that helps me solve my own problems with relationships and it works (VP7, FG3).

A similar observation was made by two additional viewers participants.

In season five, I also discovered that being genuine and honest is preferable to lying and faking it in order to win someone over. I grew to appreciate this contestant even more because of what she said. (VP1, FG2).

Another said;

This brings to mind a Sunday when my partner and I had a disagreement; fortunately, the presenter brought up the subject in a question. After receiving an answer to that query, I discovered how to approach the problem and, for the first time, I tried to tackle it. Yes, I don't talk about my relationships with people; instead, I turn to the media for support (VP4, FG3).

From the foregoing, it can be seen that participant recognise the necessity that *Date Rush* show is a medium that assists them to satiate their wants of acquiring new information facts related to relationships. This implies that participants did not just watch the *Date Rush* show for the fun aspect alone but also as a platform to gain knowledge. The results are also in line with studies by Dsante, (2019) and Folaayan et. al., (2019) who indicate that in spite of the bad associations that the genre of reality

television has received in the literature, some participants still find these shows to be educational and gain learning gratification from. This finding is also in line with the extant literature on the motivation of watching reality shows. For instance, participants in the works by Patino, Kaltcheva and Smith 2012, Reiss and Wiltz 2004; Papacharissi and Mendelson 2007 and Kumar and Arulchelvan, 2015 attested to the educational benefits viewers received from watching the shows.

4.4.3 Status Seeking

According to Lee and Ma (2012), using media to make one feel superior and admired to elevate one's status is an example of status seeking, and it is defined by Wohlforth et. al., (2018) as actions taken to improve or maintain one's placement in relation to others. In connection the study, status seeking describes how sharing of updates and discussions of *Date Rush* show in various social media platform helps individuals to attain status among peers or networks. The desire to appear educated and the sense of importance associated with providing primary sources of information are the important indicators for this theme. Social media has a growing impact on people's daily lives and routines (Akar & Topçu, 2011). Given the significance of social media in consumer lives, businesses and marketers flock to social media platforms in the hopes of communicating with their target clients (Alam, 2018). In a same way, individuals utilize social media to become popular. The power of television and other media is primarily used by those who appear on the show to obtain popularity, but this study's findings demonstrate that some participants also achieved fame through sharing of updates and information about the show on their social media platform. Three (3) participants said that they also gained popularity as a result of the *Date Rush* show in this manner because they become the source that other people go to for

information about the show. The focus group participants said that they often shared some of the finalists' photos and brief videos on their social media accounts, which resulted in a large number of followers and ultimately helped some viewers to become well-known.

A viewer participant stated that,

Due to the Date Rush show, I gained popularity. Every time the show aired, I cut out the intriguing sections from some of the Date Rush videos and shared them on my social media accounts. As a result, people began to follow me on Instagram and other platforms to watch such videos. I quickly gained fame and decided to keep going (VP2, FG3).

Similarly, the data showed that the participants' captions and comments about the show on their posts and stories were ways they attempted to gain the kind of attention they received from their followers. In support of the aforementioned claims, another participant noted that he got well-known as a result of frequently tweeting about the show's ongoing events.

Every other Sunday, I would publish an image that I had taken from TV3 platform and my TV to my Twitter page, along with a clever description that drew attention to the interesting part. During season 4, I was consistently trending because people were retweeting my quick videos and pictures from the event. I had no choice but to keep up my good work in this season five (5). This was a breakthrough for me because I am just starting out as a blogger. I got to jump on a trending issue to make it and its working. (VP8, FG3).

Another participant of the study was of the view that she became popular when she identified other people around her and some of her contacts on WhatsApp were interested in the show and through that she formed a common platform where aftermath of the *Date Rush* show was discussed. Excerpt from the participants is below:

Due to my involvement with the Date Rush show, I gained popularity around campus. I guess I make an excellent storyteller because my friends frequently ask me for updates after missing an episode. So, we made the decision to form a group. When they learned about me, more students approached me for updates and expressed interest in joining. Currently, we debate each contestant of the shows their level of assurance and outspokenness, the significance of the event as the highlight of the week, and the attire they wore on stage on my WhatsApp page. We mostly discuss this whilst the show is being aired (VP5 FG2).

It is evident that participants constant sharing of *Date Rush* show updates to their targeted followers, has earned the participants status and fame among their peers. This image, according to the participants, transcends social media as some come directly to them to get answers to whatever questions they got concerning a contestant or the show in general. They expressed how wonderful they feel when something like that occurs. This supports Rogers' (2003) remark that people will come across as credible if the information they provide is authentic. This finding is in agreement with a study from, Kalsnes and Larsson, (2018). The authors identified that people view the dissemination of news as a potent means of elevating their status. That implies that participants view the dissemination of *Date Rush* show briefing as a potent means of enhancing their standing.

4.4.4 Opportunity for Interactions

An interaction is an experience that involves a continuous flow of anticipations, emotions, and memories (Hornbark & Oulasvirta 2017). In this study, the concept of interactions began to take shape as data from participants showed how *Date Rush* show satisfied their needs and wants for interactions, communication, and socialization with friends, family, and members in their online communities. From the

data, two dimensions of social interactions—internal interactions and external interactions—emerged. Out of sixteen (16) participants who attest to the fact that interactive viewership was their motivation for watching the show, nine (9) identified their type of interaction as both internal and external, while three (3) were solely for the internal interaction. The remaining four (4) indicated external interaction as their motivation. In relation to the show's internal interactivity, these viewers participants noted that they enjoyed watching the show with others at home or on campus so that they could converse while doing so. Sharing information with loved ones and friends was frequently mentioned. They claimed that the experience creates a cozy atmosphere and invites other people's opinions and recommendations to debates about what is happening. This is what one viewer participant said;

We enjoy watching together, my sister and I. I enjoy watching with my family a lot, and anyone else who is home is welcome to join us. I appreciate it when we start to have conversations about it and relate to it (VP7, FG2).

Also, another participant had this to say with a similar opinion;

Since I have a television in my room, my friends and I would meet and discuss various topics about the show as they came on. I love watching with my friends since we share the same affection for the contestant and the show. The overall experience of watching is made more pleasant by the opportunity to discuss relevant issues and laugh at amusing events (VP5, FG1).

Another said;

I mostly watch with my partner it gives me something to bond over. I mean the bond of closeness. We enjoy watching together to lighten our night. (VP5, FG2).

According to the findings above, viewing the *Date Rush* show is interesting because it gives participants an opportunity to interact with close friends. Thus, they are able to discuss issues while watching the show. Sharing the watching activity with significant others is fun and easy activity as they were all into the show. This is in consonance with a study by Taylor and Bazarova, (2018) on college students' media usage and relational bonding in their romantic relationships. Relational closeness is defined as a subjective experience of intimacy, emotional affinity, and psychological bonding (Taylor & Bazarova, 2018). Their study demonstrated that the media can help partners form stronger romantic relationships. Similarly, gained relational closeness with their friends, families, and loved ones when watching and engaging with the *Date Rush* show. This is because they seamlessly navigate between the personal networks of their relationships with others.

The external mode of interaction was also mentioned by the participants. Researchers have found that students who use Facebook and Instagram to communicate with friends on campus were more likely to adjust socially in college (Yang & Yen, 2020). They transfer and strengthen their in-person discussions online by conversing with their friends online and by following their social media accounts. In light of this, social or external connection reveals the driving forces behind people's visits to any social media platform, including the desire to share ideas, connect with friends, or engage in other human interactions (Ko, Cho, & Roberts, 2005). Through engaging with other viewers and absorbing content regarding the *Date Rush* show, participant in this profound imagined community created and maintained through social media. Koh's, (2016) highlights of Anderson's (1983) definition of imagined community is a socially constructed community that is both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because most of the people may never know themselves, meet themselves,

or even hear of one another, but in each person's imagination, there is a living representation of their union. Koh's (2016) examination of imagined communities and social media adds that social media also develops asynchronous communities around topics and interests, supporting Anderson's argument. This form of imaginary community was identified in the data as a total of thirteen (13) participants of the focus group discussion talked about how they rush to social media platforms every Sunday as the show begins. Below is what a participant said;

It's really good to interact with other viewers who share your interests. I find myself interacting with others as I giggle at the amusing comments. Every Sunday as soon as the programme starts, I go to Twitter and use the hashtags "#DateRush or #DateRushShow" to look for any fresh updates to the live show (VP2, FG3).

Similarly,

Interacting with other viewers of same interest is really nice as I laugh at hilarious comments and I end up socializing as well. Every Sunday as soon as the show begins. I go to twitter and search for any new updates of the live show with the help of hashtags "#DateRush or #DateRushShow (VP1, FG1).

Again,

I enjoy watching Date Rush show now that social media has become a part of the viewing experience. I enjoy watching live episodes on Facebook more than watching it on television I sometimes watch on television and on my phone too (VP8, FG3).

They also added that they flocked to social media sites to read and discuss reactions to the episode as Facebook and Twitter were the popular platform for these quick communications as far as the show was concerned. People will use the hashtags "#DateRush" or "#Date Rush Show" when posting to help other users find, consume,

and respond to their content. Participants also noted that live external interactions with others through Facebook and Twitter made the watching of the show to be more fun.

The imagined community of social media is not only a part of the viewing experience but also enables viewers to become more informed and have an awareness of the content they are consuming. These imagined communities form a sense of a direct connection to social groupings around the world (Koh 2016). Similarly, social media incites ‘immediate connectedness’ for viewers of reality dating shows through engaging with other viewers and absorbing content regarding the shows. For dating reality show viewers, social media has the power to engage audiences with the storylines, create connections between audiences, and bring attention to problematic behaviors (Godlewski and Perse, 2010). A viewer participant had this to say;

...the comments, predictions, discussions and hilarious statement about contestants and issues are what make me want to watch on social media instead of watching on my television. I get to bond with new people as well even though I don't know them personally or will never see them (VP7, FG1).

Additionally;

Over 5 thousand people watch the live streaming; just imagine how the comment section would be like. Lot of opinions and crazy comments, people attacking each other for their favorite is fun to read while watching (VP9, FG2).

Participants of the study are comfortable concurrently existing and openly communicate their thoughts and opinions in both external and internal interactions. They attest to the interactive factor as a big deal in gratifying their needs.

4.4.5 Identification with Contestants

Motivations for watching the *Date Rush* show appears to be multidimensional in structure. Previous work on uses and gratifications motives regarding social gratifications appears relative in the study, such as identifying with characters and the goals of companionship. (Adia, 2014; Rubenking et. al., 2018). The opinion of the participants was that they could relate to some of the contestants. In other words, nine (9) participants said they recognised themselves in their favorite contestants. After interacting socially with them (through Instagram, Facebook and TikTok), they realised that most of the things they liked and shared were common with their preferred contestants on the show. A participant is more inclined to stick with and support a contestant if their personal beliefs and the contestant's beliefs are common. For instance, a participant claimed she could draw comparisons between herself and one of the *Date Rush* show contestants;

I admire her because she thinks like I do. Her taste and preference for a partner is exactly what I am looking for. My choice of partner should be fair, well built, six packs, and should be hairy. This is the description of one of my favorite contestants on the Show so I can say I identify with that person (VP5, FG1).

Additionally,

The way they describe certain situations on the programme sometimes simply makes you feel like you can relate to them completely. I want to be like them and I start becoming attached to my favorite two. I eventually feel as though I know them well as you know someone you like (VP10, FG3).

It is also apparent that *Date Rush* show viewers used their appearance to foster companionship with their favorite contestants in order to demonstrate their power and telepathy with one another. Indeed, the power of social media created the opportunity. This finding is supported by existing literature. The connection between media

characters and their audiences or fan bases have been cited in a number of recent studies as a key element promoting the growth of reality television programming. A number of studies (Charles, 2012; Godlewski and Perse, 2010; Siyoung and Cho, 2014; Tian and Yoo, 2015) found that there is strong connection between viewers and Contestants. Nine participants reported having a strong connection with contestants, indicating that contestants who appear familiar elicited these types of responses.

Four out of the nine participants reported that the contestants they admired were those whose appearance and opinions on the show had an impact on their life. Among the traits the participants said had influenced (through their watching of the show) were patience, respect for one's own decision, care, calm, carefulness, tolerance, forgiveness, positivism, and intelligence. A viewer participant said;

Being patient and valuing your choice in life were what I learnt from my favourite contestants and I am applying them in my personal life. What is yours would be yours so no need being loud and changing your preference to suit someone. Also, I wasn't a calm person but am improving (VP5, FG2).

Regarding the influence of *Date Rush* show contestants in the life of participants, participants three (3) of focus group one (1) also stated that,

In terms of personality and beliefs, I can relate to some of the contestants. I was also inspired by a lady from the recently ended season. Her level of focus and the fact that she never gave up but stood by her choice despite a contestants repeatedly not being chosen, alongside the numerous competitors she encountered inspires me (VP4, FG1).

On the same issue of the influence of contestants, a participant underscored that;

It has affected my personal life because as contestants are asked of their story behind their previous breakups, I was marveled about how people can be wicked and mean, I am now more careful with people. I picked cues from how not to trust people with your relationship (VP7, FG2).

Social factors that influence viewing tend to have a multidimensional structure. Previous research on uses and gratifications motives on social gratification such as identifying with characters and the pursuit of company seems relevant to this finding (Pittman & Sheehan, 2015). The findings are in line with the findings of Tindi and Ayiku (2018), who similarly found that depictions of social and personal issues, such as self-determination and patience, had an impact on viewers' personal views about challenges faced in their personal lives.

4.5. RQ3. What is the nature of interaction between viewers of *Date Rush* show and the contestants of the show?

In respect to television, the idea of interactivity has become more popular (Jermyn & Holmes, 2006). As part of the ever-expanding interactive economy, reality television has concentrated on the ways in which this televisual format encourage audience engagement and, in general, has contributed to the change of viewers from passive customers to active viewers (Andrejevic, 2004; Holmes & Jermyn, 2004). Resario and Darkwah (2021) attest to the primary focuses that reality television has recently embraced, such as the social issues, entertainment interests, and participation nature. Interaction can be thought of as the reciprocal influence between culture and grief, according to Wang et. al., (2011). It relates to the transitory action between people. In order to comprehend the participant and contestants' interactive behaviors, this research question investigated the different forms of engagement and interactions that participant and contestants utilise to communicate with each other. This analysis has been divided into two parts- from the perspective of the participants and from that of the contestant- to appropriately respond to research question three. All thirty participants were required for this question. The researcher used the para-social

interaction theory to analyse and discuss the findings. Thus, a total of four (4) themes emerged from the data analysis with two (2) themes from the participants point of view; (*narrative engagement and social media engagement*) and two (2) themes from the contestants' viewpoint; (*online interactions and face to face encounters*).

4.5.1 Participants' Viewpoints

Viewer participants shared their views on how they formed connection with the contestants of the show and the means they use to interact with them. The coding of the data summed two main themes from the participants being *narrative engagement and social media engagement*.

4.5.1.1 Narrative Engagement

Narrative engagement is the feeling of being occasionally 'drawn in' to a story's universe and momentarily losing consciousness of the real-world surroundings (Bilandzic et. al., 2019). Thus, the sensation of being completely absorbed in a story and having a connection to both its plot and its characters. Though states of narrative engagement are the outcome of a reader or viewer's connection with a particular tale, certain individuals are more prone than others to take in the situation (Bilandzic et. al., 2019). Greater enjoyment of the tale and greater potential for the story to have an impact on the reader, listener, or participant are both related to narrative engagement (Richardson et. al., 2020). Narrative involvement engages viewers in the storyline, and they are able to experience vicarious cognitive and emotional responses to the narrative (Brechman & Purvis, 2015). These traces were identified in the responses given by the viewer participants. Out of the twenty-six (26) participants, sixteen

participants described the narrative engagement as one of the ways they connected with the contestants. These participants stated;

I usually watch the show alone, and I get so engrossed that I stay that way until the commercial break before I realise my environment. (VP6, FG3).

A participant also indicated;

Yes, it does happen to me, I get so involved in the show that I get lost in my thoughts, keen in the moment (VP6, FG2).

Another said;

I get carried away too, sometimes I feel like I am also at TV3 studio. I even end up making noise then I come back to my realization that I am disturbing (VP2, FG1).

Additionally, ten (10) participants' admitted that they spoke out loud about issues of events quite frequently. This further suggests that the participant were immersed in the show because they orally and unconsciously expressed their opinions while watching. This result is consistent with a study on South African soap opera viewers by Pitout (1996), which found that viewer participants frequently have audible dialogues with characters. An example of some viewers attesting to such vocal engagement is seen below;

I might shout. The most of the time, my roommates and I would shout when someone you least expected to have a date gets a date or when the pairing did not feel right. The same applies if a favorite makes a strong argument in response to questions or suggestion. As if we were there, we hype them up and cheer. Home support is what it is referred to (VP10, FG3).

Similarly, the participants added that the experience gives the impression that the contestants can hear them and, as a result, communicate like peers. This is evident in the excerpt below,

It's almost as if they can hear what I'm saying. I have a real sense of being present with them (in the studio). I feel as if I can identify to some of them emotionally, which makes me want to support them, so I turn to like them more... (VP4, FG1).

Again, another participant noted that,

There is like a connection with the personalities, I connected to two contestants who were in there for long, not with ones that left like early (VP4, FG2).

The participants generally agreed that they did have a connection with some of the contestants of the show and that they could relate to them. However, they did not necessarily feel that they could relate to them personally as individual. It was also mentioned that the degree to which they related to different personalities was closely linked to the duration of that persons stay in the competition. The longer a contestant remained in the competition, the better the viewer participant got to know them and the easier it was to relate to them, hence generating the para-social interactions and relationships.

I won't completely say that I know her because I watch her and follow her upkeep but I think if I had met her couple of times then I would kind of know more about her then I can say she is a friend (VP3, FG1).

A viewer similarly said,

No , I don't classify them as friends, I don't think so, I think I know something of them because they obviously revealed a little bit about themselves, but I don't think they revealed all of what they really are (VP9, FG3).

The above excerpts indicate participants having para-social interaction. A virtual connection to characters is likely to develop when viewers are drawn to and psychologically immersed in the narrative context or programme (Kukkakorpi & Pantti, 2021). Many of the participants interacted Para-socially with the shows contestants. Most of the participants developed emotional attachments to the shows contestants. The need to convey encouragement and support was consequently brought on by emotional involvement. In order to follow or respond to a character's point of view and experience empathy and affinity for that character inside the narrative world, viewers will actively participate in para-social interactions with that character or with others (such as relatives and friends) regarding that contestant. In this approach, viewers have gradually lost awareness of themselves and have instead become more deeply engrossed in the programme.

The results for this study further support the underlying theory that helps explain the link between para-social interactions and narrative engagement as a significant impact. This research adds to our understanding of how narrative engagement works by indicating that including TV audiences in a scenario has a favorable impact on para-social interactions. Or, to put it another way, the para-social interactions becomes more dynamic as audience members become more immersed in the story. The tight connection provided by narrative involvement makes listeners feel as though they are a part of the narrative setting (Choi & Maliangkay, 2014).

Various academics have described para-social interaction in different ways. For instance, Schiappa et. al., (2006) characterize the procedure as viewers engaging para-socially with characters as if they were real, so "blurring the boundaries between viewing and living." Additionally, Paluck (2009) describes the process as a means by which viewers create opinions and views about individuals they only know through media, whether or not those individuals are genuine or imaginary. Due to the closeness that develops between contestants and viewers, para-social interactions are particularly powerful in the reality television genre (Kühne & Oprea 2020). Overtime, audiences develop intimate bonds that mirror real-life social interactions, which are intensified when viewers gain information regarding the personal lives of celebrities (Rasmussen, 2018). It is said that para-social interaction takes narrative engagement one step further as audience utilize this knowledge to build perceived friendships with individuals featured in media (Kühne & Oprea 2020) . Thus each participant should have at least one character they could consider as their friend and build a para-social relationship with (Kühne & Oprea, 2020).

4.5.1.2 Social Media Engagement

In addition to allowing viewers to see ‘the actual person behind the celebrity mask’, reality television has evolved into an interactive cross-platform media experience by encouraging direct viewer participation over the phone and via the use of digital technology (Charles, 2004).

During the focus group discussion, social media engagement was also brought up as a channel through which some participants continue their interactive involvement with the contestants they find most endearing. As participants comment and learn more about the contestants on social media, the connections made with the contestants

leave personal networks to public networks. The participants indicated that through YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok, they were able to keep up with their favorite contestants' life after the show and also get updates from them concerning the dates they have. For instance, one participant indicated that;

Once I decide I like a contestant, I start following them. As a frequent user of Instagram and Tiktok, I keep myself updated on these comments that I like on these two networks (VP3, FG2).

Another stated that,

Twitter, Instagram and TikTok platforms are where I usually follow some contestants. Now social media is the fastest place to get quick and direct information from. So, the connection with them (contestants) still continues after the show (VP1, FG1).

Similarly, another indicated that,

I enjoy not only seeing the contestants' lives after the show," but also to see how their selected dates continue, and always checking to make sure they're still together (VP9, FG2).

The excerpts prove how the participants utilized social media to know more of their favorite contestants, stay in touch with them and their relationships after they get a match and when the show ends. The involvement of social media in reality dating show viewing is an attractive feature for viewers (Porter & Standing, 2020). Many types of digital media are consumed by viewers in the 21st century, so for some, using social media on their laptops and mobile devices to watch reality dating shows feels like a logical extension of how they use social media in general.

The findings on social media interactions are consistent with Aw & Labrecque, (2020), findings that para-social interactions fully mediate the relationship between social media interaction and celebrity attachment. Additionally, they mentioned that an exploratory analysis uncovers whether different types of social platforms may be more conducive to establishing para-social interactions. Just as viewers participant establish and strengthen relationships and friendships through watching reality dating shows together, they also can do so through using multiple media forms. Additionally, para-social interactions have often been characterized as one-sided and mediated, according to existing literatures (Madison et. al., 2016). On the other hand, it has been asserted in a number of studies that the use of internet communication technology has made para-social contact a more realistic reflection of social interaction (Ballantine & Martin, 2005; Kassing & Sanderson, 2009). The capacity of a participant to make a comment or send a direct message to a persona (contestant), partially simulating a more realistic social interaction, could boost the presence of para-social interaction, regardless of whether the communication is received. Thorson and Rodgers (2006) discovered that the way viewers see interpersonal interactions through relationships mediated by the internet had an impact on para-social interaction. Some participants in the study indicated that they go further to interact on contestants' post with comments, likes and shares anytime they upload a new post. Others claimed that they had enabled their notification bells in order to interact with posts as quickly as possible. The notification bell is a feature on apps that notifies as soon as the person post. Through this community formed through social media, the viewers turn to show support for contestants they like by reacting positively to their posts. Perhaps because reality dating show contestants are accessible and seen as 'normal people,' viewers are very comfortable engaging with them in the public networks of social media

where they can discover more about the contestant's life and personality. Imagined community of social media is not only a part of the viewing experience of reality dating shows, but also enables viewers to become more informed audience members and have an awareness of the content they consume (Chwe, 2013). Some viewers had this to say in relation to this theme;

Oh yes, the ones I follow on social media, I go beyond just following. I have turned on my notification bell that helps me know as soon as they post. I always want to be part of the first to comment under the post. I tend to find joy when I have updates from them (VP7, FG2).

Similarly,

As for me I have the notification on for my favorite contestants' lives' only. I love to see him physically interacting with us. It gives the picture as though we having a video call (VP5, FG3).

The participants in the focus group interview said another reason for following them was to be involved in their dates update to test the authenticity of contestants. As viewers used social media sites to judge how well the dates get along outside of the show, it became an indicator of authenticity. In addition, they can more closely relate to relationships build ups after they get a match date because that is the one of the places they can get updates of them. This was made clear in Marwick's, (2013) research, which shows that micro celebrities, such as contestants on reality dating shows, are aware of the reasons why people interact with their content on social media and are looking to profit from it. According to her examinations of micro celebrities, the authenticity of persons on social media is judged across time, in that their authenticity is established by evaluating their current behaviors against their past

for consistency (Marwick, 2013). Excerpts below give clues to how active viewers use some social media platforms to determine and monitor the relationship strength of contestants of *Date Rush* show.

I follow them only out of curiosity to see how their dates turn out, not because I have any relationship with them. Their social media platforms are where we detect if the couples relationships work or not. Most people stop posting their dates after a month or two, which informs us that the date they were given for the show didn't work (VP4, FG2).

A participant also stated,

Oh, I am not really a fan but I follow the interesting date matches on social media just to confirm my predictions, which all the time turns out to be right. Some dates are obvious it wouldn't last or vice versa (VP1, FG3).

It is also seen in an assertion by participant eight (8) that;

As a blogger, I have to follow those who get dates on their pages to also get firsthand information to feed my followers on twitter. I read comments, attend their live streaming, observe their fan base and I get to comment as well. I go there as a mutual source (VP8, FG3).

In relation to research question two, these themes emerged and it was clear that the primary interactive nature the viewer participant had was the narrative engagement which in turn formed para-social interactions and relationships and lastly, they choose social media as their primary route for engaging in conversation. It is evident that many of the participants formed para-social relationships with the contestants of the show, thus, the contestants became like friends to them and they even made one side communication with them verbally or made comments in their minds when watching

alone or with people. Interestingly, the fact that some participants said they linked to and connected with some of the contestants but did not necessarily feel as though they knew them personally could imply that they were aware of the artificial nature of the interactions. In other words, participants' ability to develop para-social interactions and relationships with the contestants outside of the show was unaffected or restrained by their awareness that the relationships were made up in their minds. Contrarily, it appears that participants in the study nevertheless experienced, the 'unrealness' of the relationships yet, the participants still received emotional gratification through para-social interaction.

4.5.2 Contestants View Point

The researcher did a phone call interview with each of the four (4) contestants who appeared in season five (5) of *Date Rush* show, to ascertain the existence of interactions they have had with viewers and the kind of relation they had with them. Literature makes it clear that viewers who choose to participate in activities beyond merely viewing the show are regarded as 'fans' of the programme. (Bourdaa and Delmar, 2016). Accordingly, the contestants referred to the viewers as such during the interview. Upon the analysis of the interviews with the contestants, two (2) themes emerged namely *online interactions and face to face encounters*.

4.5.2.1 Online interaction

The media has developed into a potent tool in the communication sector. That is to say, the social media network has changed how people engage and communicate around the globe. Popular social media platforms in the twenty-first century include Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, TikTok, MySpace, CyWorld, and LunarStorm

(Hellemans et. al., 2021). It is not surprising that the contestants used some of the various social media platform to interact with their fan base. Contestants gain a following on social media by leveraging their popularity with the show's viewers after the season has ended (Hargraves, 2018). They become micro celebrities as they are able to 'gain the recognition of traditional celebrities' as they interact with fans and craft a persona (Marwick, 2013). All four (4) contestants testified that their involvement in the show had reflected greatly in their social media followings. A contestant of the *Date Rush* show had this to say,

...if I could remember I had an account of 13k which was banned early this year, which made me go off social media for a while. So, I created a new account knowing I would be going for Date Rush show. I hash tag my post with date rush and I frequently commented on related stuff of the show and I was noticed and started gaining followers. So the very first day I was shown on the stage. I went viral and my followers were increasing like magic. From 500 to 2000 followers on my first episode. And the following week boom 11k. I was like this is strange. Then 15k, so that whole month I was growing my page. So yes, am almost 44k (CP2).

Another contestant reiterated that,

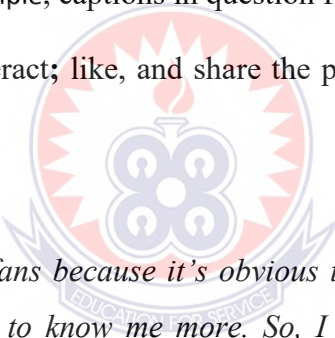
My social media following, particularly on Instagram, has increased because of the Date Rush Show. I think due to the drama on stage and everything, and my trends, the Nigerian blogger, Tunde, posted me some time ago. My social media account has been growing, particularly Instagram, Date Rush Show has really helped my following a lot and even on "Tik Tok" people have been following me... (CP4).

Contestant three also said;

...when you put yourself out there, it's not private anymore. It's for the public so automatically after watching you severally on a show every Sunday and following your interviews and all of that, people would love to interact with

you, follow you and know about your everyday life so automatically your social media following will grow rapidly. Yes, it affected my social media following because I remember before I went to the show, I was not up to 2k. I was somewhere around 1.4k there about and now have 20k plus (CP3).

Also, connections between contestants continue after the show as, dating reality shows can lengthen contestants' time in the spotlight. Contestants can confirm breakups with their significant others from the programme or discuss their relationships on social media. The contestants affirmed that with the help of social media, they have had social interactions with their followers. According to three out of four contestants, the way their captions were written encouraged their followers to engage with the post. Example, captions in question forms that are seeking for opinions motivate their fans to interact; like, and share the post more. Below are quotes from some contestants;



I think about my fans because it's obvious they are following me because of updates and want to know me more. So, I feed them with my everyday hot pictures and with nice interactive captions. I have lineups of when to post what where and when. I post on all of my social media platforms. It interesting when my comment section is full of love and compliments (CP1).

Similarly, contestant four had this to say;

Yes, I feed my followers with updates of how far my relationship is going. I basically post about relationship stuff and things about me because that is what am known for. I do that on my Instagram page and my Instagram stories too, for my followers to interact (PC2)

These close relationships with contestants formed through viewership are fostered as contestants share their feelings and emotions via conversations and monologue.

Followers tend to exhibit brand loyalty and want to offer information as feedback because of the close relationship formed by interaction and openness. Although Song and ZimkHam (2008) stress that the perception of mutual communication experience would promote interactivity, they also mention that they believe interaction depends on people's subjective perspective. The study determined the effectiveness of the para-social interaction building process with the use of para-social interactive theory. According to Labrecque (2014), listening and reacting reinforce the beneficial effects of para-social interaction. These positive outcomes seem to be most influenced by followers' active desire to believe, be loyal, and responsive to the contestants. Similar to celebrities, the contestants can exhibit their unique personal characteristics and share details of their daily lives and activities on social media (Kantola, 2014). In relation to the aforementioned, all four contestants for the study attested that their interactions with fans have progressed from the para-social interaction stage to two-way interactions as a result of their ability to see and reply to comments, respond to direct messages, and interact through live streaming, friendly competitions, sharing fans' posts as advertisements to strengthen the bond, as well as occasionally meet fan base communities that are typically unplanned. Contestant 1 had the following quote:

I have my own special way of interacting with my fans. Sometimes I go live on Instagram and most of my fans join my live video and try to chat with and engage them in whatever am doing on the live video. There is an instance where I run free adverts for those of my fans who are into business as my way of appreciation to them. The other way is through posting love issues about my date and me and we try to discuss matters of love and some will be commenting and sharing ideas... (CP 1).

In similar vein, another contestant added how he engaged his followers,

I do live a lot, almost every day. And when I come live everybody wants to join, to hear and see what I am doing. I interact with them. I am very practical person. I am who I am just that they see me to be different (CP 4).

Another said;

I have people running into my DM every day. Sometimes people even come under my post to say I should reply them in my DM and a whole lot. It is only when am bored, idle and not doing anything that I pick my phone, scroll through the message request, accept and maybe try to reply a couple of them. The reason for doing that is, sometime most of them have nothing to say but just want to go personal with you but you know I can't go personal with everybody (CP3).

Para-social interaction is known as a one sided that media users can maintain an enduring active status in their relationships with media personas (Fredrick et. al., 2012), whereas social media has shared elements. In a study to look into how professional sportsmen utilize social media (Twitter) to improve promotions, it was shown that the most common method is interaction and direct communication with fans (Hambrik & Mahoney, 2011). Celebrities who read their followers' social media messages, respond to them, and engage in conversation with them are engaging in a new kind of discourse (Stever & Lawson, 2013). It demonstrates the fundamental value of analyzing celebrities' interactive social media presence. It is demonstrated that the relationship created between celebrities and their followers may be described as a two-way interaction as opposed to the earlier assertion of more conventional model of one-way interactions (Zhuang, 2018).

4.5.2.2 Face to Face encounter

A pre-staged encounter, as defined by Ferris (2004), is referred to as a 'face to face encounter' in this study. The concept of the face-to-face interaction has been described as an upstaged encounter that a fan has with a star during their "everyday routine." Thus, the celebrity sighting is unexpected and "can happen anywhere - serendipity and surprise are key features of this type of encounter" (Ferris, 2004, p. 237). Another prevalent notion is that a celebrity is someone who is widely recognized, knows few people, and is objectified for their skill, talent, or, in this case, fame (Escalas & Bettman, 2017). There are many different motivations for celebrities to interact with their fans. Commercially speaking, it makes sense to build strong bonds with your client base, and it is obvious that one of the roles that fans perform is that of consumers (Giles, 2000).

As Harris and Ferris (2011) contend an unmediated encounter between a fan and a celebrity gives the fan the impression that they have "gathered some evidence about the real person behind the fictional façade, intensifying the relationship with the star" (p.30). As such, celebrity meeting also forms more than just a confirmation of one's fandom. Also, a fan will seek out this unmediated encounter since it has substantial value to the fan because of the dynamic between fans and celebrities differs greatly from that of typical social encounters since one party typically looks to gain something from the interaction. This award can take the form of a photo, an autograph, or an interesting tale to tell their friends. Fans could want to chat with their celebrity, get their picture taken with them, or even ask them to sign some of their memorabilia. The celebrity must set aside time for them in light of this (Ferris, 2014). If a celebrity does not treat his/her fans with respect, the public may perceive the celebrity negatively, which will eventually have an impact on the fan base. The above

assertions were visible in the four contestants' narratives. They attest that they do meet fans in their daily activities and they enjoy that moment at times. This is what one of the contestants said;

Yes, I have met bunch of my fans day in day out. I actually loved meeting some of my fans. I remember I received an invitation to dine and drink with other famous people, particularly movie stars. I was asked to invite a few of my friends to a gathering, so I decided to advertised on my social media platform and I was successful in getting some of my fans to come along... (CP1).

Another said;

I occasionally communicate with my fans offline, in person, on public transport, and in a number of other locations. Some people will request selfies, which I grant them, because that's all part of the show when and it comes to love... (CP2)

Another said;

...oh, when we meet up it beautiful. They do approach me sometime, ask if it's me, take pictures and chart small... (CP3).

The above excerpts tell of how the encounter between contestants and their fans provide a timeless experience for the fan: one that becomes immortalized by interactions or selfies gotten. This trophy becomes an important anecdote which the fan base, relish sharing with friends and family (Dannar, 2018). This theme can also be seen in other studies (Ferris, 2014; Escalas and Bettman, 2017; Reijnders et. al., 2014). Reijnders et. al's., (2014) work address the unique and irreplaceable value that face-to-face encounter has come to possess. During the fan-celebrity interaction, a bridge between the celebrity and 'regular people' is momentarily created because they temporarily put the fan at the same social rank as the social elite, unmediated interactions are in high demand among fans. Reijnders et. al., (2014) pinpoints that,

“these meetings do indeed constitute a violation of the normal rules of accessibility between celebrities and fans, between extraordinary and the ordinary, between people with and people without remarkable social standing” (p. 152). The closeness of the fan to the celebrity pulls them nearer to their ‘divine’ hence the sacrament is performed via the giving of time and money. During the interviews, two contestants attested to the fact that their fans did behave like they had seen gods whenever they see them in town and in exchange, the contestants offer them limited time to communicate with them. A participant had this to say;

I didn't realise I had a large fan following until I went to town for the first time after the show. People were yelling my name for attention all over, and it was then that I realised I was a celebrity. It was a pleasant experience, and my favorite part was letting them take photos of me and engaging in the chatting. They also surprised me as some act towards me as if am their divine.. (CP4)

Another said;

...when I actually meet them, I allow them the space they require to communicate with me. I am captivated by the affection. This year, I hope to organise meet and greet with them. It's good to see my admirers on normal days, but some of them act as though they've seen god... (CP2).

Ferris, (2014) added that in-public interaction is unplanned and frequently unwanted by the celebrity. This assertion was seen in the narratives of two contestants who said fans at times do too much upon seeing them and it makes the experience uncomfortable and unwanted at times. Below is an excerpt of a contestant;

I don't remember when last I picked passengers car, the questions, the stir and all is uncomfortable meanwhile I am a normal person like them and do have daily activities. The last time I picked passengers car. I became shy, so I now get a bolt or uber to avoid some preventable scenes, you know am a student... (CP4)

The participants' views testifies Das-Souvik et. al's., (2021) assertion that communications between TV characters and audiences remain theoretically attainable because of mass media and face to face meet ups. Connections can be strengthened through that, which enables the progression of two-way communication via face to face encounters and thus provides interactive communication that supersedes that of traditional one-way delivery. It is visible that contestants do also form two-way communications with their fans.

4.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter summarises the findings and discussions of the research questions that were raised for the study. The three research questions raised for the study assisted in generating data that were sifted, organised, and analysed through with the guidance of the Uses and Gratification theory and Para-social interaction theory. The first research question (RQ1) which sought to investigate viewers' motivations for watching *Date Rush* show. The data demonstrated five (5) viewing motives from the active viewers thus *entertainment, education, status seeking, interactions and identifying with contestants*. Research question two (RQ2) sought to viewers perspectives on the *Date Rush* show and three themes were discovered from the data. *They are lack of originality, an influx of foreign culture and source of avenue for the station*. Finally, research question three (RQ3) looked at the nature of interactions between the viewers and contestants of the show. It had four themes consisting two themes from the participants point of view (*narrative engagement, and social media engagement*), and two (2) themes from the contestants point of view (*online interactions and face to face encounters*).

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the study and focuses on drawing conclusions based on the study's major findings. Based on the observations and research findings derived from the gathered data, the chapter also makes recommendations for both academia and media practitioners.

5.1 Summary

The continuous rise of reality television around the world has transformed it into a feasible universal sensation with appreciable intensity (Skeggs & Wood, 2012) as reality formats provide an endless fresh supply of new existing formats for non-professional actors (Hill, 2005). It has also been established that one aspect of reality television show, which is dating reality shows, is now a big deal on most television stations. The background of this study is that Ghana is no exception to this reality shows airing practice, even though dating show genre is not dominant on the screen. Hence, the focus of the study was to assess life experiences of television viewers' perspective and connection with reality show contestants, a case of *Date Rush* show (season five). It sought to enquire viewers' motivations for watching *Date Rush* show, how they do perceive *Date Rush* show, and the nature of interaction between viewers of *Date Rush* show and the contestants of the show. In order to achieve the above-mentioned objectives, the following research questions were asked;

1. What are viewers' perspectives on the *Date Rush* show?
2. What are viewers' motivations for watching *Date Rush* show?

3. What is the nature of the interaction between viewers of the *Date Rush* show and the contestants of the show?

A detailed review of the literature was conducted, which served as the foundation for critically analysing the findings of the study. Concepts were used to organise the literature that was analysed. There was extensive review of literature that served as foundation upon which the findings of this research were critically analysed. The research was a qualitative study (Creswell, 2014) which was based on case study (Yin, 2014). These allowed the researcher to study the phenomenon in-depth. A total of thirty (30) participants took part in the study. These participants were purposely selected using the purposive sampling technique (Creswell, 2014). Self-developed interview schedule was used in collecting data. The interview data were transcribed, coded and analysed thematically. Findings were discussed in relation to the research questions.

From the thematic analysis of data from four phone call interviews and three focus group discussion, the researcher came up with 12 themes to answer the three research questions. The themes that answered the first research questions were *lack of originality, source of revenue for the station and an influx of foreign culture*. With regards to the research question two, entertainment, education, status seeking, interactions and identification of contestants were the themes generated to answer the research questions. Finally, themes such as *narrative engagement, social media engagements, online interactions and face-to-face encounters* answered the research question three.

5.2 Main Findings and Conclusions

The key findings from the data analysis led to several conclusions. This is outlined under the three research questions this study sought to answer.

In tackling the first research question which sought to find viewers' perspectives on the *Date Rush* show established that the viewers saw the show *for its lack of originality, an influx of foreign culture and source of avenue for the station*. The majority of viewers have a skeptical attitude toward the reality TV show's veracity. They are bothered by the misrepresentation of reality show, but not to the point where it interferes with their regular viewing of their favorite reality TV shows. Additionally, the data established that viewers believe in consuming the provided content without giving much thought to the controversy over the legitimacy of TV reality shows. *Date Rush* show in as much as it educated and entertained, it had its shortfall in the eyes of the public or viewers. Again, the study can conclude from findings that although the entertainment aspect of the programme offered to viewers was appreciated by the majority of the viewers interviewed for this study, nevertheless, that erroneous impression about the show seen and non-align with our culture should be disabused. The data also revealed that most of the contestants of *Date Rush* show contest for the media hype and also in the viewers' mindset, it was contrary to the Ghanaian culture of finding a life partner.

The second research question which sought to examine viewers' motivations for watching *Date Rush* show; the finding showed that the *Date Rush* show served as a source of entertainment, for education, status seeking, opportunity for interactions and identifying with contestants. The data shows that *Date Rush* show formed an integral part of the active viewers since they admitted that the show entertained them largely. One would have expected that since the reality show starts in the night and eats into

late night people would not have patronise it, nevertheless, because of the joy and excitement, viewers gained from it, they made time to watch it. The data revealed that viewers perceive the programme as an escape from daily routines or daily problems while to some others, watching it is just for media companionship. Yet, others would see it as just reinforcing their values. Using the needs category, it is possible that some viewers see the programme just as an avenue to seek knowledge and express interactions. Some viewers were so engrossed in the programme and contestants that they interact with them as if they were close to them.

Lastly the question three looked at the nature of interactions between the viewers and contestants of the show. It had four (4) themes two from the viewers' point of view; *narrative engagement and social media engagement*. The data showed that some viewers of the study had PSI going on with their preferred contestants as well as interactions on various social media platforms. Whiles from the contestants' point of view interactions between the contestants and the viewers happen in the form of *online interactions and face to face encounters*. The data again revealed that although contestants in a away had some unplanned public interactions with their fans they sometimes made time to interact with each other as time goes on. They did this via face to face and social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook and direct messages.

The study concludes that reality-TV provides a tool of self-identification as the viewers identities are reinforced by the content they watch on the *Date Rush* show as well as enjoy the feeling of watching other people's live through the lens of the camera.

5.3 Study Limitations

Firstly, the scarcity of literature on television reality shows in Ghana posed a challenge to the researcher as it became difficult to find valuable reference materials for the research.

Restrictions on Covid 19 made the one-on-one interview impossible and unadvisable with the Contestants of *Date Rush* show. They insisted on a phone interview in order to protect both parties. Additionally, it was difficult because their season had just completed at the time of the interview, which meant that they had a busy schedule.

Also, it was quite difficult getting *Date Rush* contestants of season five on board to participate in the research. I sent a formal direct message on Instagram outlining my intentions to contestants of season 5 and within a week ten responded. The researcher would have wished to have ten (10) representatives but could only get four (4) because of the terms and conditions that some had and the unwillingness to partake.

In spite of the above limitations, the study has critical implications for future studies, audience studies and for the dating reality show genre.

5.4 Recommendations for Industry

The study recommends that the producers and the television station in general should ensure that *Date Rush* show is maintained and even introduce more dimension or segment contestants live interactions with some viewers in the studio or respond to some of the comments by viewers, that could make the show more interesting or entertaining since it is a major source of entertainment to viewers.

The study also recommends that the producers and the television station of the *Date Rush* show educate the general public about the major essence of the show. The findings from the show suggest a section of the general public has doubts about the reality or originality or authenticity of the programme, and such perception has the tendency to affect the credibility of the show and the television station in general.

Lastly, the study recommends that there should also be more avenues for viewers to share and comment on the show. It appears that even though viewers interact with contestants of the show but the avenues were limited. It would therefore be prudent if there could be other channels for viewers for better interaction.

5.5 Suggestions for Further Studies

This study serves as a stepping stone for reality television research in Ghana as it motivates academics and administrators to conduct more studies and invest more in reality entertainment.

The study suggests that researchers in the field should look at the socio-cultural and economic impact of the *Date Rush* show on the of viewers and contestants. Since this research focused only on *Date Rush* show, further research could explore the way the show is perceived in comparison to other television shows in Ghana.

Furthermore, future research can also interrogate the criteria for selecting the contestants to the show

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APPENDIX

QUESTION GUIDE FOR FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

SECTION A

A. Background Questions

- Please, kindly introduce yourself
- What is your age?
- Gender?
- Your occupation and how long you have been following date rush.

B. Participants Perspective of Date Rush Show

1. What do you think about Date Rush Show? Do you think Date Rush is realistic?
2. How is Date Rush Show different from other tv reality show?
3. What aspect of the show do you enjoy most?

C. Reasons for watching Date Rush Show

4. Please tell me why you watch Date Rush Show?
5. What kind of feelings do you have when you watch Date Rush Show?
6. To what extent do you find Date Rush entertaining /informative/ educative and relationship value?
7. What other benefit did you gain in watching Date Rush show? How?

D. Viewers Interactions with contestants on Date Rush Show

8. Who is/are your favorite contestants on the show and why?
9. Do you follow your favorite on any social media platform? If so on which platform

10. In what way do you engage with your fav contestants?
11. How frequently do you engage with your favorite contestants?
12. Is there anything else you would like to add?
13. Do you see them as friends? Why

SECTION B

QUESTION GUIDE FOR INTERVIEW

A. Background Questions

- Kindly introduce yourself indicating your age,
- Occupation and
- Level of education.



B. Date Rush show contestants interactions with viewers

1. Prior to your participation in the date rush show what has been your involvement with other reality shows?
2. Why did you decide to be part of season five of date rush show?
3. Kindly describe how your participation on date rush show has influenced your following on social media?
4. If you have gained significant social media following, what is the nature of your engagement with your fans?
5. How often do interact with your fans?
6. What is the nature of your interaction with your fans beyond social media?
7. Do you consider your fans as friends?