

How reality tv participants function as a reference group essay sample



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A reference group is a group which serves as a framework, benchmark or a standard of comparison for assessing or shaping behavior and other sociological characteristics of people. (Corbetta and Patrick 2003) Reference groups are deemed as models that people emulate in their activities and decision making which they apply to real life. Reality TV participants and contestants function as a reference group by showcasing themselves as representatives of ordinary people to which viewers can relate to, successfully capturing similar attributes and personalities with the way people decide, behave and act. Reference groups are used for evaluating and understanding the nature, character, personality, predilection, essence and identity of a given group.

While reality TV programs post themselves as a genuine representation of reality, where actions are unscripted, natural and unpredictable just like in mundane situations, they are actually carefully and meticulously designed to shape a cast that can serve as a reference group for a particular audience. For instance, the reality TV “ Big Brother” whose popularity spread across Europe, America and Asia had been adopted to fit the unique traits and circumstances in their localized versions. Participants are carefully selected to represent a cross section of the general local society coming from various walks of life (socio economic status, gender, religion, profession, etc) in which the Reality TV will be aired so that viewers are able to identify with the participants. Hence, the typical theme adopted by Big Brother is to emphasize and promote the uniqueness of being English in England, American in the US, Chilean in Chile, Filipino in the Philippines, Swedish in Sweden, or Egyptian in Egypt among others. In most instances like in the

Big Brother, the viewers partake in deciding who among the participants will stay or leave, which obliquely allows them to contribute in shaping the cast and the reference group in the show. (Biressi and Nunn, 2005)

Still in some countries, variations of Big Brother are adopted to further segment the market to which the casting of the reality TV will be used a reference group. For instance, Big Brother Teen Edition was created to organize a reference group that targets or caters teenagers or young adults. By cleverly casting participants under a certain category, the TV reality participants can effectively serve as a reference group for a market segment, which the show is particularly directed at. Incidentally, product attributes, activities and lifestyles associated with this age group is intimately integrated in the overall theme of the reality TV. In most instances, the cast as a reference group are often used as a marketing tool and channel to understand the consumer behavior for the particular group that they represent. Thus, in the end “ casting” or the selection of participants to create a reference group targeted to specific viewing market is at the core of the production of a reality TV.

References

Biressi, A. and Nunn, H. (2005). Reality TV: realism and revelation. Wallflower Press

Corbetta, P. and Patrick, B. (2003). Social research: theory, methods and techniques. Sage Publications.