

Abstract for the Media Mutations 10 conference “The “-tainment” Effect. Cultures and Logics of Entertainment Across Audiovisual and Digital Media.”

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The “-tainment” Effect of Emotions – Producing Emotions in Reality Television.

As Jelle Mast (2016) depicts fittingly, a key notion of reality TV is to take the audience on an emotional journey. Reality TV formats are primarily devised with the intent of creating stories and delivering entertainment by dramatic pleasures to the audience (Mast 2016, 905). The format rules of globally traded TV formats encompass diverse narratives, rules of competition and audio-visual display techniques that provoke an affection and emotional response of the participants and the audience. Following the increasing interest in emotions and affects visible in social sciences (Ahmed, 2004; Gregg & Seigworth, 2010) our research aims to understand the *production of emotions as a commodity* in and by entertainment television.

Based on 12 in-depth interviews with national (German) and international experts of global reality TV formats (production, transnational trading and programming of the formats) our paper examines the practices that shape the production of emotions in local/ national adaptations of global reality TV formats. It aims to analyze how the producers evaluate the entertainment potential of particular allegedly global emotions and how this potential is included in the production process.

Firstly, based on our interview data we will argue, that producers rely on a notion about specific emotions that are globally valid, are bound to global narratives and therefore have a high overall entertainment and commercial value. In the production process producers enable the development of specific emotional repertoires of joy and excitement connected to neo-liberal values of success or competition. Besides that, experts state, global narratives of the desire for a ‘life changing moment’ and positive feeling are used to bind the audience to the TV product.

Secondly, we will describe how producers make culturalistic statements about allegedly local-specific emotional repertoires, they connect again to particular (local) values and attitudes of the audience (see Straubaar 2007). By using production means such as aesthetic, narrative and audio-visual effects they produce local-specific adaptation of globally traded formats. For example, they rely on the assumed feeling of superiority of the audience and introduce local trashy-display forms of the format Pop Idol or Farmer Wants a Wife in Germany. Further producers cast the participants of dating-shows like The Bachelor relying on pop-cultural trends in terms of beauty in order to provoke a feeling of sympathy and empathy on the side of the audience.

Finally, we deliver some concluding remarks regarding the centrality of emotions for the creation of commercially successful locally adapted global dating and casting-shows.

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