



Entertainment Studies – A Perspective

Dr. LIM Kok Wai Benny
Department of Cultural and Religious Studies
Chinese University of Hong Kong
Shatin, New Territories, Hong Kong S.A.R.

Abstract: Entertainment involves generating an external stimulus, be it a positive or negative emotion (or a combination), in a satisfying manner. Entertainment is sometimes associated to the arts. Within the discipline of humanities, there is also the study of popular culture and its impacts on our daily lives. Entertainment is also subsumed under the study of the creative industries and its related discussions of intellectual property and commercial viability. At times, entertainment is discussed within the framework of media studies in the field of social sciences. Falling back on the basic definition of entertainment, this paper seeks to offer a perspective to isolate entertainment as a possible standalone discipline, under the umbrella of Entertainment Studies. Three areas of Entertainment Studies are discussed in this paper, and they include entertainment arts, entertainment management and entertainment industries. Finally, the paper also explores the possible passivity of the audience in the entertainment context.

Keywords: Entertainment; Entertainment studies; Entertainment Arts; Entertainment Management; Entertainment Industries; Popular Culture

I. Introduction

Merriam-Webster has defined entertainment as an activity that provides amusement and pleasure. This definition, in my opinion, is problematic and could be misinterpreted at times. The terms *amusement* and *pleasure* give the impression that entertainment only generates positive emotions, such as making someone laugh or happy. But we know that this is not always the case. For instance, one can be saddened by a touching story on film, or get really upset with the protagonist of a television program. While experiencing such emotions, one is still being engaged or entertained. To be more precise, entertainment involves generating an external stimulus, be it a positive or negative emotion, or both, in a satisfying manner (Bates and Ferri, 2010). If we look closely at what triggers such external stimuli in our daily lives, we can perhaps get a better understanding of the concept of entertainment. Despite being a multi-trillion dollars industry (Zinn, Frank and Kelley, 2002; Walker and Perry, 2014), entertainment has not been studied or researched on extensively. Even as I write this paper, there is a lack of literature on specific discussions of entertainment on its own. This could be attributed to how entertainment has been contextualized so far. Sometimes, entertainment is associated to the arts. Within the discipline of humanities, there is also the study of popular culture and its impacts on our daily lives (Doruk, 2014). Entertainment is also subsumed under the creative industries and the related discussions of intellectual property and commercial viability (Rae, 2007; d'Ovidio and Haddock, 2010; Flew, 2013). At times, entertainment is discussed within the framework of media studies (Fourie, 2001; Biagi, 2011) in the field of social sciences. Of course, the lack of research solely on the concept of entertainment could also be due to the common view that entertainment is a trivial subject that lacks depth (Zipes, 2011). Yet, entertainment is part of our daily lives. Let's consider this: even one who chooses not to participate in the arts, media or the creative industries, one still need some form of entertainment. In this paper, I seek to offer a perspective of entertainment as a possible standalone discipline, under the umbrella of Entertainment Studies, bearing in mind the fundamental definition of entertainment as discussed.

II. Entertainment Arts

"Popular culture is produced by mass media as an entertainment culture. Television, radio, press, movie, and more recently, Internet serve as creators and disseminators of popular culture. Although there are different approaches among the intellectuals toward definition and explanation of popular culture, there is a common opinion that popular culture is oriented to entertainment and is consumed daily."

(Doruk, 2000)

As I have discussed, entertainment is part and parcel of our daily lives. Hence, it is no surprise that entertainment is sometimes studied in the context of popular culture, which is really about the mainstream culture of the general

population at any given time. A large number of people can identify themselves collectively under the context of popular culture (Iadevito, 2014). Of course, unlike the official culture of each individual, popular culture changes over time (Dittmer, 2010). Just a decade ago, the mass media is still a common form of popular culture, where people spent hours a day watching television program. In today's context, on top of the mass media, it is common for people living in the city to be constantly connected to a variety of social media through their smartphones. Board any public transport in the city, and observe the phenomenon of people looking down at their smartphones and connecting to different people or information at the same time. Popular culture reflects our contemporary living and could also influence it (Forbes, 2000; Scollo, 2007). It is therefore understandable that entertainment is often included as one of the important aspects in the discussions of popular culture. After all, activities such as watching television programs, surfing the Internet or staying connected to various social media through multiple devices are part of the mainstream culture of today, and can be very entertaining. Nonetheless, we have to recognize that, by being mainstream, popular culture could be referring to activities that are habitual and the ordinary (Ivashkevich, 2008; Storey, 2014). Watching television programs can be entertaining but it could also be a form of habit. Some people turn on their television set but this activity does not mean that they will be engaged and entertained. The same goes for the ordinary acts of web surfing or staying connected on the social media. This does not mean that one gets entertained all the time by engaging in these acts. Surmise to say, popular culture dwells into how entertainment affects and impacts our day-to-day living, but does not fall back on the basic definition of entertainment – the generation of the external stimuli in a satisfying way.

The generation of the external stimuli has also been discussed in the context of the performing arts. How do we differentiate performing arts events that are meant for entertainment or otherwise? The difference lies in the primary purpose of the performing arts, which gives precedence to the artists' vision. For entertainment, it is clear that the primary function is to allow the audience to generate satisfaction and pleasure (Chartrand, 2000). The performing arts, on the other hand, focus more on the artistic direction and the freedom of the artists to express certain key messages (Arrowsmith, 2002). In other words, the performing arts are mainly artist-centric, while entertainment is audience-centric. Entertainment arts, therefore, refers to satisfying content with the primary intention to communicate the external stimuli to, and to invoke emotional responses from, an audience. This definition is able to clarify several grey areas within the context of the performing arts and new media arts, etc. For instance, a scriptwriter in the context of the performing arts is one who writes with a clear artistic vision as the primary intention, whereas in entertainment arts, a scriptwriter writes with the intention to entertain the audience. The keyword here is primary intention. I am not implying that a scriptwriter who writes for entertainment has no artistic vision. It is merely the order that matters. The same applies to directors and choreographers, when they create the semiotics. Beyond the performing arts, new media arts have always been associated with entertainment. This definition of entertainment arts immediately segregates the technical and technological aspects from the user-experience aspects of new media arts. The user-experience is what determines the external stimuli derived from the new media arts. Game design, for instance, is a form of entertainment arts, whereas game technology development is not.

III. Entertainment Management

"The state presence and effective support are necessary if cultural production in Singapore is not be reduced to the level of simple manufactures, since cultural production and the symbolic values they stand for are part of the larger symbolic life of the city-state itself that cannot be commercialized. In this regard, arts development in terms of museums and art schools, among other institutions subsidized by the state, represents a good start - but it is just that, a start."

(Wee, 2002)

In order to examine the concepts of entertainment management, there is a need to first review the concepts of arts and cultural management, where *management* is not a straightforward process. The quote above provides some insights to the concepts of arts and cultural management. Cultural production in itself has got symbolic values in life and such values cannot be measured in terms of financial success. There is a certain function of the arts in society (Metallinos, 1996; Rothenberg, 2014) and the recognition of this social function allows many arts organizations to operate in a non-profit and charitable mode. To manage the arts and culture is therefore not as straightforward as just providing sound management practices to generate maximum revenue for the organizations. The quote also suggests the possibility of sustainability in the long run, and that government subsidies ought to only be a start. The sustainable development of the arts and the culture will require the managers to be effective mediators, who does not only manage but also bridge the gap between the arts and the audience (Anderton and Pick, 2002). In order to achieve this long-term sustainability, arts and cultural managers must constantly push forward the importance of arts in our daily lives and make clear the arts' societal functions.

Entertainment, on the other hand, is already a part of our daily lives. The taste and the interest of the content evolves over time but generally, entertainment is here to stay. The role of the entertainment manager is, therefore, more straightforward. As I have mentioned, entertainment is ever evolving and the taste of the audience could

change. An effective entertainment manager must be aware of new trends and possibilities, and when necessary, bridge or introduce them to the audience. A specific focus on entertainment management does have its advantages. It directs us to research on areas such as entertainment policies, which is really all about policies involving entertainment content, with a clear consideration of the audience. This differs from cultural policies, which focus more on the development and the integration of the arts in our daily lives. The clear segregation of the entertainment and cultural policies can also provide the explanation as to why the arts (artist-centric) should not be regulated but the content of entertainment (audience-centric) could be. Only when there is an audience in mind, then it is possible for regulations and restrictions to take place. For instance, pornographic films are created for the entertainment of adult audience, and it makes absolute sense to restrict the access of such content to only adults. The focus on entertainment management also gives priority to entertainment arts and the development of talents in this area. Entertainment managers must be equipped with the skills to market and to brand the talents of entertainment arts. In the same light, entertainment management also differs from the concept of media management, which focuses on the effective management of the platform for information and communication. In summary, entertainment management involves the effective facilitation and development of the entertainment arts and its talents.

IV. Entertainment Industries

“The collection of bodies that exist globally, which provide products that have a primary purpose of engaging or captivating an audience is the entertainment industry.”

(Moss, 2010)

This definition of entertainment industries by Stuart Moss is the closest one that relates to the fundamental definition of entertainment. In this section, I am not attempting to provide an alternative definition. Rather, I hope to provide a perspective on the entertainment industries, which dissociates from the cultural and creative industries. Historical data has shown us that the cultural industries were a direct response against entertainment and the mass media (Kirby, 2000). First and foremost, being part of people’s daily lives, the mass media in Europe was manipulated to be the voice of dictators and their propaganda during the second world war. The arts within the cultural industries were then the tools to archive societal issues and to provide commentary of the war and the dictators (Hartley, 2005). Years later, with the rise of Hollywood in America, the cultural industries was once again brought up as a response against entertainment, which was then accused of dumbing-down the culture (Roberts, 2004). This divide between cultural industries and the entertainment industries has already been widely discussed for several decades. Interestingly, in the last decade, there has been a growing attention on the creative industries, which seems to have subsumed the entertainment industries, as well as the cultural industries. These two industries, which have been at odds since the beginning, are finally able to unite in the grand narrative of the creative industries, which has been acknowledged for its potential to contribute to the nation’s gross domestic product (Towse, 2014). The concepts behind the creative industries are rather straightforward. It focuses on human creativity in the development of viable and functional innovations (Potts, 2011). Such innovations will then bring about direct contributions to the economy.

“While the definitions of cultural industries usually focus on the production of texts and symbols, the concept of creative industries puts an emphasis on the creativity involved in a specific production process.”

(Sandoval, 2014)

In an earlier paper, I recommended the possibility of establishing a clearer relationship between entertainment and the creative industries (Lim, 2014). The focus of the creative industries has always been on creativity, which basically means the creation of new ideas. This offers a rather vague situation because the context of creative industries requires the creativity to be a useful one so as to be able to contribute to the economy. Innovation, which simply refers to the successful implementation of the new ideas (De Beule and Nauwelaerts, 2013), allows creativity to be quantified against its economic contributions through the viable outputs (Anyanwu, 2004). In this context of the creative industries, cultural industries seem to be rather dissociated. First and foremost, it makes very little sense to relate arts to creativity. The production of arts can be creative but if we look at the primary function of the arts, it is never for the sake of creating new ideas (Oakley, 2009). It is the voice and the vision of the artist that matters. Next, cultural industries often reject the commercialization of culture (Fulcher and Scott, 2011) and hence, create a natural opposition with the key intention of the creative industries. As compared to the cultural industries, the entertainment industries seem to have a better fit with the creative industries. After all, in order to generate something entertaining, there must be some form of human creativity involved. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the creative process is still considered secondary in relation to the generation of the external stimuli and pleasure in the audience. Furthermore, a replicated content, with no new ideas, i.e. no creativity, can be equally entertaining. While both the creative industries and entertainment industries are often associated to the development of the economy in the areas of jobs creation and commercialization, the fundamental success of creative industries depend a lot on the different bodies coming up with creations that are functional and viable

whereas for the entertainment industries, as Moss's definition suggests, the underlying success depends on the various bodies involved in producing the entertainment content for the audience.

V. The Passive Audience?

The audience, though being at the end of the entire chain, has got huge influence in the cultural production. Even within the context of arts where it is artist-centric, and production precedes and influences consumption, the audience has got opportunities to react and to respond to the works. In the case of the creative industries, the outputs are produced according to the needs of the consumers (audience). At times, the outputs can also influence and generate the demand of the consumers. Very often, the production equates the consumption. Nonetheless, this is not definite. For instance, Pebble released a smartwatch in 2013 that created a mainstream demand for such watches worldwide. Pebble was launched as a result of crowdsourcing, which requires payment before production. Subsequently, Samsung and Apple also launched their own unique version of smartwatch, where consumers are allowed to pre-order. This example shows that consumption can sometimes precede production in the creative industries. Within the conditions of entertainment industries, it seems logical to assume that production always precedes consumption. The entertainment content must first be produced before the audience can enjoy it. However, being audience-centric, the entertainment content is often produced with an intended expectation of the audience's responses and reactions, which indirectly affect the consumption patterns. While production still precedes consumptions, this expectation from the audience does bring the production and consumption timeframe closer.

The audience is very important for entertainment. Without an audience, the basic possibility of generating an external stimulus is non-existent (Moss, 2010). The audience's taste and interests over time could also have a huge impact on the production patterns of entertainment and its content. Bearing in mind such active roles of the audience in the context of entertainment, I will like to propose that the audience can sometimes be rather passive in the equation as well. As discussed so far, the primary intention of the producer matters in differentiating between the arts, creativity and entertainment. However, the primary purpose is never communicated to the audience. In a way, the audience will never know whether a film they have just watched is meant to be entertaining or artistic. Some audience will expect the film to be entertaining, while some will expect it to be artistic and thought provoking. On the other hand, some just seek for the experience. Such passivity will continue to blur the lines of entertainment from the cultural and creative industries. It is precisely this vagueness that protrudes the importance of entertainment studies as a possible standalone discipline.

VI. Conclusion and Recommendations

Despite being a part of our daily lives, and worth trillions of dollars, entertainment (and its scope) has not been clearly defined, sometimes, even unclear. The basic function of entertainment to generate satisfying external stimuli to the audience must be considered in the discussions of entertainment, even when the definition seems to trivialize it. I must clarify that it has never been my intention to downplay entertainment, especially after spending years of research in this area. Going back to the fundamentals, in my opinion, has got more advantages than disadvantages. It allows entertainment its proper treatment and a possibility to be studied and researched on as a standalone discipline. The rethinking of entertainment as presented in this paper triggers some further possibilities. First and foremost, with entertainment arts clearly defined, it is now possible to reconsider the training and development of talents solely for the entertainment industries. Secondly, the focus on entertainment management takes away the many issues surrounding arts and cultural management, and the technicalities of media management. It offers a new realm in entertainment marketing, branding of the entertainment talents, and the observation of new trends in terms of content development. Finally, the segregation of entertainment industries from the creative industries allows the industry, to place creativity secondary, and to go back to the basic purpose of producing or generating content that engages and captivates the audience.

VI. References

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