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From Entertainment to Education: Examining The Great Escape Through the Lens of Entertainment-Education Theory

Wanyu Chen

Xiamen University Zhangzhou Campus, Zhangzhou, China
unailars1@gmail.com

Abstract. Entertainment education is a subsequent topic of research today. Nevertheless, current studies have tended to focus mainly on television dramas, news programs, and offline events. Therefore, the key concern for this study is reality TV shows, exemplified by a well-known Chinese variety show called "The Great Escape". In particular, this study investigates the impact of the show's storytelling structure on audiences' thinking patterns in the context of entertainment and education. Ultimately, the study aims to provide a basis for entertainment-education program producers to use when creating engaging yet educational programs.

Keywords: Entertainment-education, The Great Escape, China, variety shows

1. Introduction

In order to meet the tastes of various viewers, television productions have continuously expanded in diversity, for both themes and structures. They span an array that includes reality series, talent quests, discussion panels, romantic or emotive engagements, and professional scrutiny documentaries. There is an interesting phenomenon based on daily observations – in recent years, among younger generations, offline escape room experiences have become very popular. Initiative by MGTV to debut the show “The Great Escape” in 2019 aligns with their perceptive understanding of the allure inherent in immersive, enigmatical entertainment. A cast composed of famous guests is ushered into elaborately conceived environments reminiscent of escape rooms where collaborative endeavors necessitate the unraveling of convoluted cues for emancipation. Therein lies the significant transition noticed—through its polished execution coupled with creative structuring, 'The Great Escape' transcends conventional escapism embedded within these physical activities. Encompassing narratives replete with sensory impressions alongside dramatized plots greets each episode’s viewers—from antiquarian dilemmas to futuristic imaginings, all scenarios demand analytical prowess, cooperative synergy, occasional vigor, and staying power amongst participants striving against odds. Therefore, the program cleverly presents various real-world cognitive challenges that typically occur in closed environments to a wide television audience. This lively and engaging format, built on interactive communication and captivating storylines, firmly holds the

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viewer's attention. Also, each episode, broadcast nationwide, presents complex concepts in a way that is both accessible and thought-provoking.

The Great Escape intelligently blended entertainment and serious social issues by weaving in modern societal topics such as the war on drugs, the ethics of artificial intelligence, and the dangers of entrepreneurship in its puzzles and plot. This continuum of fusing entertainment and serious social issues engages audiences and sparks ideation about issues in contemporary society. The program also demonstrates, within the current scope of entertainment-education scholarship, that mediated entertainment can act as a vehicle for providing programming that encourages pro-social attitudes and behavioral intentions among viewers, thereby potentially contributing to social change on a broader level [1]. Further, the program creates the opportunity for audiences to not only engage with the story but also actively participate in the problem-solving process, demonstrating television's obviously evolving role in engaging audiences from passive consumers to participants and critical interpreters, which is vital to developing an informed public sphere.

2. Theoretical review of Entertainment-Education theory

The pursuit of entertainment-education (E-E) theory is a complex tapestry of scholarly discussion that has developed into a large interdisciplinary landscape. Within this landscape, the focus includes media narratives that serve a dual role as a source of enjoyment and entertainment for the audience. Core themes of interest in such investigations involve persuasion strategies, processes that are psychological in nature, and narrative structures—considerations that collectively inform content from entertainment sources fulfilling either prosocial goals or educational purposes. From these threads, connections become apparent linking these experiences to a complex set of possibilities merging enjoyment with education goals. In the simplest terms, E-E research is developed from Albert Bandura’s Social Learning Theory which conceptualizes how individuals acquire new knowledge, develop new attitudes, and model behaviors via observational learning. Bandura [2] posited that audiences can learn vicariously while observing the behaviors and consequences experienced by others—especially when the others are characters in media narratives. Through a process of identification and vicarious reinforcement, audiences can internalize the behaviors modeled by positive and negative role models, impacting their social expectations and behavioral repertoire [3]. This importance of observing is a central tenet to reinforce the potential of entertainment media to not only educate but also influence and regulate constructive behaviors in society.

Complemented by the intricate framework of narrative theory, understanding how story structures effectively augment persuasiveness is further deepened. Emphasis placed upon "immersion," wherein audiences are found to achieve a psychological state thoroughly engrossed in the universe of the tale, reveals significant reduction of critical rebuttals and oppositional analysis among viewers once transported thusly. That engagement with entrenched messages becomes more profound both emotionally and cognitively is manifested from this observation [4]. The engaging storyline, relatable characters, and gripping pacing create an immersive experience that allows viewers to grasp complex ideas and moral lessons in a natural, enjoyable, and rather than didactic way.

To examine pertinent conceptual areas in aesthetic education, theorists have proposed some valuable analytical models. Most notably, scholars have proposed the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which suggests media-based attitudes, perceived normative behavior, and perceived control of ascribed and enacted behavior can lead to behavioral intentions and behaviors. Nurturing theory, on the other hand, considers longer stretches of exposure to a consistent theme or mode of expression in the media as a way to influence one's perceptual reality of societal views, over time.

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From comparable experiences, it is important to highlight that entertainment education is not only opposed to fleeting persuasion in some contexts, but it can also create persistent cultural shifts and attitudinal change. Considering these perspectives together provides a rich theoretical base for organizing carefully considered entertainment education methods, throughout the life of the education material from design to practice to follow up. Studying stories and learning together with reflective practice can provide engaged practitioners (as either researchers or educators) with potential embeddedness for material design that connects the base theory with practical usability.

Further, narrative designers of entertainment education models can has studied ways to develop strategy in character development and emotional engagement, and include interactive experiences, which can be positioned seamlessly within entertainment learning conversations. These types of intentional design will not only allow for enjoyment of the learning experience but also develop cognitive and instructional engagement, which can provide greater leverage to affect attitudes and behaviors.

3. Practical application by Entertainment-Education theory

Concerning its applied domain, Entertainment-Education finds extensive deployment across myriad sectors—notably within the realms of health communication ventures, social transformation campaigns, and initiatives in international developmental communications. Public health communication therein houses numerous empirical examinations assessing the effectiveness with which diverse entertainment mediums—television drama series, radio soap operas, contemporary music videos, and modern digital influencer contents among them—successfully convey crucial insights about reproductive well-being, HIV/AIDS prevention strategies, vaccination imperatives, family planning methodologies, and management regimes for non-communicable diseases [5]. One often-cited example is the long-running Indian television series "Hum Rog," which skillfully weaved together themes of gender discrimination, access to education, and family dynamics, successfully igniting a national dialogue and raising awareness of these pressing social issues [6]. Similarly, the Tanzanian radio drama Twende na Wakati (“Let’s Go With the Times”) was instrumental in promoting family planning practices and challenging prevailing stereotypes [7]. Beyond health, Entertainment-Education plays a pivotal role in development communication. Scholars including Tufte, T [8]. have posited that these strategic approaches serve utilitarian purposes in fortifying social agency—an augmentation of civic engagement becomes apparent among disadvantaged cohorts therein—with community discourse enrichment and advocacy for equitable frameworks accompanying sustainable advancements ensuing. Embedded frequently within programs are participatory design facets; local communities' involvement during the creative endeavor ensures relevance and cultural harmony, thereby elevating transformative efficacy and tangible consequence discernible.

Despite the clear potential and successful applications of Entertainment-Education (EE), it must be confronted with both theoretical and practical challenges that require consideration. A line of critical scholarship, taken by theorists such as Dutta, M. J. [9], examining the possibility of Entertainment-Education being appropriated by the powerful suggests a critique. It can be seen that the most common critiques are that it is sometimes taken up by the powerful as a way to strengthen the existing socio-economically powerful systems and hegemonies, then poses only shallow solutions rather than driving deep, real social change that targets the causes of social inequities. Evidence indicates that the formative efforts based on Entertainment-Education were particularly vulnerable to a complex mix of audience-level influences; amongst them were all the expectations or degree of audience identification to characters, realities that the audience interpreted, culture in that

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context, and economics, including their biased the worldview. A conclusion can be reached about these intervening variables: they might significantly limit the utility and trajectory of interventions across a diversity of culture and people [4]. Last but not least, a large gap exists in investigating the empirical effects of Entertainment-Education over time. Many studies document positive cognitions within short-term measures, but there is a lack of thorough long-term studies that evaluate sustained behavioral change and ongoing effects of the work [10]. Additionally, ethical conversations about message design, stereotypes, and unintended consequences should always be considered.

Methodologically messy and ever-evolving, the field of entertainment education (E-E) is adopting a variety of research designs in terms of rigorously evaluating both processes and outcomes of E-E content. The methodological demands required for a comprehensive analysis of such phenomena involves psychological mechanisms within narratives about social impact; therefore, doing research has been a consensus suggesting that the nature of entertainment education requires multiplicity of investigation methods.

At the quantitative level, randomized controlled trails (RCTs) and systematic social survey studies play a vital role in quantifying change in behaviours and attitudes and helps in identifying causal relationships. RCTs are frequently held to higher regard by academics due to an ability to verify that they are evaluating effects that are isolated from the content, using comparison conditions of either treatment and control under controlled settings. From the examples encountered, it became obvious in an RCT of the Nigerian drama series Shuga, where those that had a regular and consistent viewing behaviour effected a decrease in behaviours that supported gender-based violence while simultaneously increasing the intention to get HIV tested [4]. The studies would also confirm that carefully constructed narrative entertainment content can indeed have measurable benefits for public health, and highlight the importance of such rigorous experimental approaches for programs to demonstrate their impact validity. That being said, longitudinal studies looking at audience data provide additional benefit, as they not only look at audience behaviours but also mark the immediate and ongoing effects of the entertainment content.

The use of qualitative methods aimed at analyzing outcomes has resulted in interesting insights about an audience's interaction with Entertainment-Education (E-E) scripts. By using non-traditional methods of data collection, such as in-depth interviews, semi-structured group discussions, and ethnographies of consumer behavior, an in-depth understanding develops concerning how audiences interpret, absorb, and incorporate the communication strategies embedded within entertainment experiences. Mechanisms mapped to emotional responses to characters, empathic shared conversations, or peer discussions appear to stand out, providing depth to our understanding about effect differences. For example, in focus groups, there are instances when cultural values, personal life trajectories, or interpersonal experiences alter message reception of health and social topic discourses, which allows producers to modify future campaigns for specific target groups.

Moreover, processes of text analysis position themselves as a vital and constant action in examining the media environment itself. By thoroughly unraveling framework layouts of storytelling, character development, and symbolism, scholars can discern what impacts intentional decision-making has—including archetypes, systems of narrative choreography and reminiscent parallels—through the prerecognitive themes of education [11]. This research also illustrates an opportunity to create a bridge between the production of creativity and audience reception, and how the tiniest of narrative structures can have a ripple effect on a programs' overall persuasive power.

At the same time, advances in computational science and big data analytics are emerging a burgeoning paradigm shift in methodological innovation. From social media to online communities, media entities have the potential to harvest a wide range of audience-created data sets to capture

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real-time audience engagement primarily from entertainment and educational content. Notable are the increased presence of approaches specific to network analyses, sentiment analysis, and the additional innovation of natural language processing where researchers examine the organic diffusion of education messaging among digital ecosystems; and even better, discover insights into emotional engagement to triggering plot moments in the story space and anytime evolution conversations take place. Envisioning the described analytic technologies above lays out dramatic opportunities for examining E-E campaign dissemination beyond their original airing, showcasing viral pathways and peer process that are often missed using traditional approaches.

More and more, scholars are advocating for research designs that incorporate mixed methods together, along with multi-level methods [12]. The combination of quantitative methods focused on impact assessment and qualitative work that studies the audience or uses computational analytics provides a more complete understanding of how E-E works, as it measures the specific effects as well as the complicated social context that exists in bringing about the effect in the first place. This methodological pluralism facilitates taking a stance of methodological rigor and adds value to the findings for producers, policymakers, practitioners, and others interested in designing E-Ethat is both rigorous and resonates with a particular cultural context.

When one looks comprehensively at the current state of research in entertainment education, it is evident that there is a robust bank of research literature with depth of theoretical thinking supporting impactful applications in multiple contexts such as public health and social change. However, it is evident too in this research pursuit, there are real limitations: a noted slant toward assessing short-term impacts at the expense of longitudinal studies that examine long-term effectiveness; and a shortage of cross-cultural comparisons to understand factors of cultural specificity; and increasing scrutiny regarding unintended consequences within the study of audience engagement, and ethical issues in the process.

In order to develop knowledge in this field, there are a number of areas of focus that might be explored in future studies: undertaking rigorous international comparative studies to disentangle universally applicable principles and factors unique to culture, and cultural contexts; introducing longitudinal cohort methods, which by nature are intensive, to provide measures of persistence in behavior change; engaging in rigorous investigations of the psychology of audience engagement - specifically through descriptors like transportation, identification, and parasocial interaction, across platforms and media; and engaging in scholarship that critically examines the political economy underlying the making and distribution of entertainment education.

Concurrent with these pursuits lies the call for both scholars’ and practitioners' active exploration relative to emergent interactive media mechanisms' peculiar affordances—be virtues embodied by virtual reality tales, adaptive interactive gaming constructs, or transmedia storytelling enterprises. From enhancing immersive qualities through fostering personalized engagements towards engendering scalable pedagogical entertainments, adherence surfaces paramount. In embracing these focal points, prospects arise elevating said field's theoretic profundity concomitantly conferring practical import, thereby contributing auspiciously towards crafting efficacious equitable responses befitting pressing global predicaments.

4. Findings and analysis: when Entertainment-Education theory meets The Great Escape show

The Great Escape program artfully integrates socially relevant themes into its storytelling, giving audiences space for deep reflection on real-world issues through the lens and experience of viewing. This narrative form typical of television drama represents the essence of social learning theory in

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that people learn by observing the actions and results of the behavior of different people in certain contexts. The celebrity participants in the program are relatable role models, and the decisions they make and the values they promote have a modeling effect on the viewing audience..

In particularizing the narrative progression within episode three of the third season, titled “The Angel Enigma,” an unfolding revelation takes place. The appellation "Tao Angel House," upon closer scrutiny, in reality, denotes a leisure environment accessible without impediments, specifically devised for the diversion and engagement of children with disabilities. Through collective endeavors in disentangling treacherous conundrums, it can be observed that eventual resolution among renowned participants culminates in their volition to rejuvenate luminescence across the confines of this playground thus conceived.



Figure 1. From season 3, episodes 1 to 2

The story structure and character relationships do an exemplary job representing the idea of social inclusion, invariably suggesting that happiness is an acceptable feeling regardless of physical abilities. Accordingly, this representation is a prompt for viewers to embrace greater inclusion and understanding for disabled persons. A further example is provided by an episode from the sixth season called "Mystery in the Tube-Shaped Apartment," which details the heartbreaking experience of Tao Xiaoming, who is forced to live in horrific conditions due to a history of violent domestic abuse and bullying at school. It is then clear that a need for adolescent mental health support and an understanding of the law is particularly important. While the audience watches the Special Investigation Team follow clues through a web of intrigue, the experience is not just about enjoyment; there is, however, a further level of implicit teaching about social issues, like bullying and domestic violence, and the intention to support a greater understanding of these issues.

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Figure 2. From season 6, episodes 1 to 2

Through the utilization of a setting characterized by verisimilitude and stratified suspense, this particular television program efficaciously "transports" its audience into the narrative construct, thereby augmenting empathy along with receptivity to embedded didactic messages. The theory of narrative transportation postulates immersion profound within a story leads to a diminution in critical resistance among audiences, who consequently are disposed towards an emotional resonance and eventual internalization concerning transmitted messages. Observational evidence is provided conspicuously within “The Haunted House,” an episode situated in Season 4; wherein there's observed a thematic evolution from conventional wedding venues alongside ancestral halls into subterranean catacombs meticulously adorned with intricately devised puzzles centered upon motifs aligned with cultural heritage preservation ethos. It emerges palpably as viewers partake in following the exploits of the escape team: engagement expands beyond superficial logical challenge resolution to encompass realization pertaining to both significance and historical valuation intrinsic to cultural legacy conservation matters.

Illustratively, consider “The Haunted House” from the fourth season—a narrative metamorphosis evident from standard matrimonial spaces and genealogical shrines into concealed sepulchral chambers where puzzles ingeniously align under thematic tenets advocating relic custodianship exist. As spectators accompany the expeditionary pursuits of such teams intent on evasion, understanding gradually extends, suffusing appreciation for historical artifacts—a process elevated beyond rudimentary puzzle analytics.




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Figure 3. From season 4, episodes 3 to 4



Figure 4. From season 4, episodes 3 to 4

Similar narrative complexities emerge in the episode "True Friends" from the fifth season, whereby explorations into adolescents' psychological pressures occur through multi-personality viewpoints. To save the "friends" who represent different pieces of Tao Xiaoyu's identity, the actors expose her past trauma. In this way, they encourage the audience to analyze issues related to social and emotional problems, wellbeing, group solidarity, and receiving and giving self-affirmation — a kind of edgy emotional learning with psychological understanding has been fused in an entertainment format.

Essential to propelling the narrative are the complexity of the mechanics of the puzzles embedded in the show; they act as a salient stimulus generating active cognitive interfaces among viewers. Tasks requiring analysis, collaboration, and cross-discipline insights generate contemplation among spectatorship on the episodic path of entertainment. It is through this increased engagement within the episodic context that deeper unpacking and understanding of the learning facets arise in the weave of the narrative.

Exemplified in the fourth season's episode titled "Angel Academy," is an educational exercise required of participants to articulate memorized texts, subsequently subjected to assessments devoid of predictability. Reflection upon the consequential phenomena stemming from the “Guardian Angel Project”—an unintended safeguard excess—is provoked by this regimen. From such instances emerges contemplation among audiences regarding the intricate dichotomies present within protective measures vis-à-vis leniencies, as well as restrictive norms juxtaposed against liberatory environments, manifesting prominently in both domestic and scholastic contexts. Meanwhile, intricately woven into the narrative fabric of Season 6's "Forbidden Games" exists a speculative tale pivoted around digital realms and artificial intelligence manipulation; herein, pronounced engagement with modern discourses on tech-intellectual ethics and human determinism prevails. Observations derived from the escape team's password decryption and subsequent revival of corporeal entities under AI dominion exemplify another principle—a dictum asserting technological advancement ought to elevate humane existence rather than catalyze its estrangement or subjugation —arises vividly. By these means, incisive evaluation pertaining to technology's societal repercussions is spurred.

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Figure 5. From season 6, episodes 3 to 4

In the portrayal of celebritive individuals within the televised program, they are depicted as embodyments of qualities perceived positively—courageousness, collaborativeness, resilience, and intelligence are exemplified. From observations, their reactions amidst fearsome or adverse circumstances function effectively as models of behavior for viewership to replicate. Drawing from Bandura's theory of social learning, this concept of vicarious reinforcement emerges prominently as a principal method by which audience members come to acquire and assimilate behaviors deemed prosocial in nature.

October 2023 demarcates the boundary of training data. In discrete junctures, discernible assurance and leadership by Yang Mi were demonstrated in her tasks; individual they were, but notably she excelled whilst navigating companions through intricacies of a rite within "The Haunted House Adventure." Huang Minghao likewise manifested an unwavering commitment to duty and adept analytical abilities during "Small Town Oddities," systematically directing team movements—including clandestine maneuvers past monitoring devices—and unravelling pivotal contraptions. Such consistent commendable deeds elevated these celebrity participants into paragons for audiences, considerably young spectators. Through instances modeled behavior against adversity in reality might manifest, qualities extolled proliferating thus into mundane life spheres—provenance traced back therein ultimately to programmatic exemplification.

5. Conclusion and discussion

This systematic analysis identifies four core narrative strategies used in The Great Escape that successfully integrate entertainment with educational objectives, which can be summarized into four parts.

5.1. Thematic narrative construction

Central to each episode is a theme pertinent to societal discourse: themes encompassing accessibility, opposition to bullying, the safeguarding of cultural heritage, ethical considerations in technology, and mental wellness are pivotal. To propel the narrative arc forward with these societal inquiries does the series endeavor; imbedded within the compelling narrative structure are educative messages situated subtly. Viewers, thus, while engrossed by the unfolding drama, may assimilate

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effortlessly values that underpin the storyline. From this can be discerned the seamless integration of moral instruction into entertainment media.

5.2. Integration of immersive environments and interactive puzzles

By the meticulously structured physical environments and skillfully devised interactive challenges, an intensified sense of immersion is achieved—emotional participation being subsequently deepened. Encouraged then is active cognitive interaction, visible in heightened audience engagement; attitudes thus gravitate toward positivity, internalizing the pedagogical themes disseminated therein.

5.3. Behavioral modeling through exemplary roles

The abilities displayed by the people shown, along with their collaboration and positive attitudes in facing challenges, serve as powerful models for social learning. These prosocial behaviors, drawn attention to consistently in the story, not only add support to the audience's understanding of the values modeled, but increase the desire to become a model which is evident in their reaction.

5.4. Narrative structure and emotional resonance

The show successfully navigates the narrative structure with surprising turns, moments critical to the evolution of the story, that lead to endings that reveal the societal relevance to each story. For example, “True Friends” included an exploration of individual redemption alongside mental health; while “Deep Sea Voyage” took a stance against global warming and ecological destruction. These strategies go beyond simple entertainment; they encourage audiences to think, thus, heightening the overall impact of its educational capacity.

In the context of this framework, several recommendations are advanced here about the design and the delivery of educational entertainment programs for future initiatives. Firstly, it is recommended that educational entertainment programs afford a degree of separation from explicit pedagogical instruction and instead infuse educational objectives into the narrative arc and character development to generate an emotional connection. This approach will make “edutainment” a much more realizable opportunity. Also, the suggestion to consider the program features relatable to life experiences for the target population is of essence, whether this relates to social interactions with students in schools, professional experiences, or technology, helps enhance the relevance and emotional attachment to the content. Perhaps there are opportunities to pursue a range of formats, such as offline escape loop opportunities; real, interactive opportunities via social media channel; as well as immediate choices to be made by viewers, which may create a cross media engagement ecosystem that enhances the reach of the programs. Further still, the use sophisticated analytics of crowd response, sentiment analysis of online opinions, as well as other quantitative methodologies provide a means for ongoing monitoring of educational impact and social engagement which would direct ongoing iterative improvement of program design. Finally, while there will always be a fascination with stunning images and narrative drama, we simply must be careful about communicating uncomfortable emotions of fear or violence, while making sure each story communicates positive or constructive principles.

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