

DAD, WHERE ARE WE GOING?:

A STUDY OF A REALITY TELEVISION SHOW IN THE CHINESE MEDIA MARKET

by

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ABSTRACT

Censorship in China controls and constrains Chinese media, including television programs imported from other countries. As such, the reality TV show, *Dad, Where Are We Going?* was censored by the Chinese government, which forbade it to air after three seasons, except online. The purpose of this thesis is to examine both the program's content and its audience reception to better understand why it was pulled from the air and then allowed to reappear online, as well as how viewers interpreted the program. Specifically, this study uses a narrative analysis of the third and fourth seasons of *Dad, Where Are We Going?*, combined with social media analysis of fan posts, to provide insight into censorship issues with this program. This study found that the show helped to redefine traditional gender roles and used a variety of strategic tools to attract its viewers. Furthermore, social media empowered viewers and contributed to the show's popularity. The implications for this study are: First, the major direction of China's TV entertainment market is one of cultural osmosis, meaning that the format of adapting another country's successful television program and mixing it with Chinese social expectations will be repeated because it has proven lucrative; and second, unlike many other forms of voyeuristic reality television entertainment, *Dad, Where Are We Going?* has had positive and lasting outcomes for both its participants and its viewers, both pre- and post-banning. By analyzing these narratives, this thesis provides further implications for the deeper cultural elements, such as child-parent relationships, child-father relationships, China's Two-Child policy, and the ethical concerns over the child reality stars' mental health.

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INTRODUCTION

After China's media regulator previously banned "immoral" shows about time travel, police dramas, and other genres, a reality television program was added to the list. In 2015, the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television of The People's Republic of China (SAPPRFT) banned the show *Dad, Where Are We Going?* from airing on television. This non-violent, family-friendly reality show about parenting featured fathers and their children going on adventures and was adopted from the show, *아빠! 어디가?* also titled *Dad, Where Are We Going?* from South Korea.

The first season of *Dad, Where Are We Going?* aired on October 11, 2013 and showed five celebrity fathers and their children traveling to rural places in China. This show attracted more than 75 million viewers for the first episode of its fourth season (Qin, 2016), and it generated more than 10 million comments on China's most popular Twitter-like microblog (Weibo) (Century, 2013). However, the show lasted for only three seasons on television and had to stop production in China in 2015 due to the accusation that the minors' psychological development might be damaged by "overnight fame" (Qin, 2016). While *Dad, Where Are We Going?* successfully reappeared in October 2016, it is viewable only online. Because of this switch, people questioned why the fourth season of the show was allowed to air on the internet at all if its original banning offense stemmed from the very premise of the show.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Despite publicity about the censorship of *Dad, Where Are We Going?*, the censorship (or “the show,” if “the show” is what you mean) has yet to be studied. This thesis examines both the program’s content and its audience reception to better understand why it was pulled from the air and then allowed to reappear online. Specifically, this study uses a narrative analysis of the third and fourth seasons of *Dad, Where Are We Going?*, combined with social media analysis of fan posts on Weibo, to provide insight into censorship issues with this program.

BACKGROUND

Hunan TV and *Dad, Where Are We Going?*

Even with online options, television continues to be one of the most profitable platforms in China. Many television shows are imported from North America, Europe, and other countries in Asia. By adapting the formats to the Chinese television industry, many television stations “develop specialized programming catering to a specific demographic group for their newly established channels as supplements to the comprehensive programming on the existing channels” (Yuan, 2008, p. 2). Hunan TV station is one of the pioneers that not only imports shows from foreign countries but also combines its own local characteristic with the format-imported shows. By adding more distinguished characteristics to its television shows, Hunan TV and other local TV stations have challenged the dominance of CCTV (China Central Television), which is overseen by a government-funded institution. While people over 45 generally prefer CCTV, young adults tune into Hunan TV—a channel known for its high rate of imported programs (Dongfang, 2011, p. 71). For instance, Hunan TV aired the reality shows, *We Got*

Married, Run of Money, Kasou Taishou, etc, imported from South Korea, United States, and Japan. In addition to these shows 中国最强音(*The Best Voice of China*) was produced by Hunan Television and was based on 나는 가수다 (*I Am a Singer*) produced in South Korea (湖南卫视引进”超级变变变” “三体”将拍电视剧?, 2015). Because of Hunan TV’s success, other TV stations use similar methods (diverse and entertaining content) to attract more viewers. For instance, the dancing show 舞出我人生 (*Dancing My Life*) produced by CCTV is based on *Strictly Come Dancing* held by the BBC and the high-reward, competitive game shows 一站到底 (*Endure in Standing*), produced by Jiangsu station, is based on the American program *Who’s Still Standing?*

Censorship of Hunan TV

The regulation of television differs by country and region. Chinese citizens are allowed freedom of speech and the press; however, there are some strict regulations toward Chinese media. According to Beina Xu, Chinese authorities do have rights to crack down on news or other harmful content provided by Chinese media (Xu & Albert, 2017). In April 2016, the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television of The People’s Republic of China (SAPPRFT) published several new rules “to further strengthen the organization and management of reality TV programs” (*The Issue*). The purpose of *The Issue* is to restrict the Chinese television markets: “Reality shows with celebrity kids are no longer allowed to be produced and broadcast on TV” (“China bans reality shows featuring celebrity offspring,” 2016). People called it the “child free” policy for television. SAPPRFT announced there would be

stricter control on the total amount of minors involved in the reality shows. When minors are involved, reality programs must first pass the SAPPRT first before they are allowed to air. Moreover, the television shows that have celebrities' children cannot be broadcast during the prime-time and second prime-time (after 10 pm). They can be shown only during the daytime, which is perceived as suitable for children. After *The Issue* was published, Hunan TV had to stop producing the fourth season of *Dad, Where Are We Going?*. Besides this official reason, other reasons suggested that the show had a negative influence on children. For instance, audiences complained about the presence of a huge wealth gap in *Dad, Where Are We Going?*. Moreover, negative and hateful comments towards child and father participants appeared online (爸爸去哪儿带来哪些负面影响?2017).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many studies have provided diverse content on reality TV and its effects, such as the representations of race, representations of pregnancy and childbirth, gender and leadership, and fear of crime in reality TV (Hill, 2005; Morris & McInerney, 2010; Murray & Ouellette, 2010; Andrejevic, 2004; Orbe, 2008; Levine & Harrison, 2004; Ouellette & Hay, 2008; Reiss & Wiltz, 2004). These sources define how reality television programs may shape viewers' opinions and their behaviors through the consumption of media. In addition, a glance at the censorship issue in Asia is also mentioned to support this thesis.

Reality TV

Reality TV can be seen as a piece of "raw" or unpolished material that is created for viewers. Hill (2005) explains, "Reality TV is located in border territories, between information and entertainment, documentary and drama" (p. 3). Thus, reality TV consists of a variety of experiences, life-styles, massive information, and fictionalized reality. For the educational function, Teresa Morris and Katherine McInerney (2010) note, "Reality-based birth television programs in the United States warrant close analysis because many women watch these shows to learn about birth" (p, 134). By studying the representations in the birth reality shows, Morris and McInerneys' study illuminated how media constructions help create cultural expectations of birth. In their study, Morris and McInerney point out that "pregnant women share a fascination with reality television" (p, 134). Murray and Ouellette (2010) argue, "The prospect of reality television claiming to provide gripping 'real life' entertainment as well as public service in the form of an elaborate ruse points to some of the overlapping institutional, technological, ethical

and cultural developments” (p. 1). Therefore, by being authentic and entertaining, reality TV has become one of the popular genres among audiences.

In *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched*, Andrejevic (2004) notes,

“The rather loosely defined genre of reality TV has continued its rapid growth, . . . at the close of 2002, the genre was still going strong . . . By the first month of 2003 – more than two years after the stunning success of *Survivor* – reality TV was increasing its hold on the airwaves with hits including *American Idol*, *Joe Millionaire*, and *The Bachelorette*” (p, 7).

In addition to Andrejevic’s observations, Orbe (2008) points out several core values of reality shows. The first is competition: Orbe gives examples of the traditional reality shows like quiz shows in the late 1950s, game shows (*Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*, *Deal or No Deal*), matching shows (*The Bachelor*, *Joe Millionaire*, *Next*, *Rock of Love*), etc. (p.348). Another core value of reality shows is “transformative improvements”(p, 348). Orbe (2008) explains, “This type of programming typically involves individuals, or a team of individuals, working with people to achieve dramatic make-overs in terms of weight” (p, 348). One good example would be having people of color in reality TV programs. Andrejevic and Colby (2006) note, “Reality TV seemingly offers the opportunity for individuals to have a direct effect on revamping mass mediated portrayals that have been created through a top-down, centralized fashion” (p, 349). Thus, by presenting a specific race in a reality show, a diverse collection of audience members tends to become more attached to what they see on television. By having the two major values, reality shows, despite often being so scripted and heavily structured by a production team that they are farther from “reality” than what might be conveyed on screen, have continued growing rapidly and become more attached to ordinary people’s daily lives.

Reality TV's Effects

Many scholars have studied the effects of media (magazine, television, the internet, etc.) on the viewers' behavior change. According to Michael. P. Levine and Kristen Harrison (2004), "Sociocultural theories highlight the role of the media in the development of eating disordered behaviors" (p. 390). Their analysis of the cosmetic surgery makeover reality TV genre found that this type of show directly influences average women's desires to pursue "perfect" bodies (Levine & Harrison). Moreover, this study reveals that the cosmetic reality show caused more negative influence on White women (p. 391).

Ouellette and Murray (2010) also explain the reason why people enjoy watching reality TV more than other genres, stating, "What ties together all the various formats of the reality TV genre is their professed abilities to more fully provide viewers an unmediated, voyeuristic, and yet often playful look into what might be called the 'entertaining real'" (p, 5.). Thus, China and many other countries have tried to duplicate this sense of "entertaining real" by producing or importing reality TV shows.

Reality TV brings informal "guidelines for living." Ouellette and Hay (2008) note, "[The guidelines] are not abstract ideologies imposed from above, but highly dispersed and practical techniques for reflecting on, managing, and improving the multiple dimensions of our personal lives with the resources available to us." (p. 2). Steven Reiss and James Wiltz (2004) assert, "Reality television viewers are more motivated by vengeance than are non-viewers" (p. 374). Thus, reality show fans tend to value and enjoy competition more than people who do not watch many reality shows. The authors also raise the idea that "Reality TV is educational in this respect

- but not in the same way as formalized attempts to harness television as a cultural technology capable of disseminating the ‘best that has been thought and said’” (Ouellette & Hay, 2008, p. 3). Therefore, reality TV not only provides entertainment but also can offer useful strategies of problem solving, communicating, and self-control.

Reality TV is not completed without being watched, which means the audience is another important aspect on deciding whether a reality TV show is successful. Orbe (2008) notes, “Significant pleasure in viewing reality TV is generated through group viewing and/or post viewing discussion.” The interaction with other people on reality shows provides better understanding and invites its audience members to engage with the individuals in the show (p. 349). Each media message is produced and will be sold to its customer – viewers. This results in media consumption.

Audience and Media Consumption

Although the audience consumes media, new technology has also made the audience producers as well, fueling the development of audience autonomy. Audience autonomy is the core value of the process of audience evolution. Moreover, audience autonomy signals an increase in power from audiences. Furthermore, Napoli (2011) notes an increase in “the extent to which audiences have the power to be more than mere media consumers, becoming contributors to the media environment as well” (p. 55). Through this power, audiences have the control of when, where and how they consume media in addition to their influences on that media.

Chinese Reality Television Promotes Participatory Culture

Chinese reality television participates in evolving institutional media audiences. Napoli points out the outcomes of the process of audience evolution: “The audiences’ marketplace begins to adjust to the decline in its established conceptualization of the media audience and the rise of alternative approaches to audiences understanding” (Napoli, 2011). Compared to the traditional institutionalized media audience (only exposure to media), the evolving institutionalized media audience includes “Interest,” “Appreciation,” “Engagement,” and “Response.” More interactive contents help to expand the boundaries of the information gathering.

Reality shows have been studied extensively by Chinese media researchers to forecast the promotional future of their reality television market. Hu (2006) notes, “At the beginning of the 2000s . . . the successful launch of *Super Girl* in China leads to various new programs” (p, 20). *Super Girl* is a singing competition show. The show helps many young women achieve their dream of fame faster and easier. Moreover, *Super Girl* has gradually become one of the powerful weapons of the Hunan TV station. In recent years, many Chinese TV stations have started to import South Korea’s reality shows. The impact of the Korean wave has not only permeated popular culture but is also a measure of positive lifestyle for many Asian people (Ryoo, 2009, p. 144). Therefore, having audiences’ desire as an attraction, reality shows are heading to one of their biggest markets – contemporary China.

With the help of rapid economic development, the Asian region has achieved remarkable success in media fields, especially in the broadcasting area. By having a diverse marketplace,

Everette Dennis (1992) notes, “The media in (the?) Asian region has learned to cater for the specific needs of well-defined audiences groups ...” (p, 73-82). However, according to Rubin Barnett (1993), “(In?) No country of the Asian mainland can television be considered an ‘independent’ or ‘pluralistic’ medium” (p, 22-28). Government monopoly of broadcasting is found not only in Communist nations, such as China, North Korea, Vietnam, Laos and Burma, but also in Japan, South Korea, Singapore, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines (p,137). Paul and Wang (1995) point out “in addition to control through ownership, Asian governments usually require a license before anyone can send television signals over the air ... government holds the absolute power in granting, renewing, and revoking a license” (p, 137). Thus, even though Asia’s media markets grow stronger and open wider, its media content is still heavily regulated in Asian areas.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this thesis underscores how visual, oral, and written languages are represented on *Dad Where Are We Going?* Language is not only a tool to communicate with people but also a key to accessing diverse cultures. In the world of mass media, languages, Stuart Hall (1997) notes, “work through representation” (p. 4). In *Dad Where Are We Going?*, there are three types of languages: visual, oral, and written. Visual languages include the physical interactions between the fathers and their children (such as physical gestures, clothing, facial expressions, etc.); oral language consisting of sound, voice, background music, and Foley effects; written language such as subtitles and graphics. Hall (1985) posits that representation is composed of concepts, ideas, myths, or images (p.103). In *Dad Where Are We Going?*, a simple but subtle representation of gestures, spoken language, and eye-catching graphics can trigger “a whole chain of associations” (the relationships between the fathers and their children become closer, and the relationship between the show and its viewers becomes stronger). Those representations can be found in the participants’ conversations, visible emotions, body language, and interactions with others. The reason why I chose to study the different aspects of the show’s production is to distinguish these social actions and their cultural impact from those of other phenomena in the show, such as choice of location or comedic aspects arranged by the production crew.

Encoding and Decoding

Most “televisual language” (Hall, 1973, p.1) makes the encoding and decoding moment happen. When utilized correctly, the implementation of “televisual language,” the

communication process through which an audience gathers information from what is presented via a screen such as a television or a computer, helps producers and content creators present information more efficiently. However, this language can mislead viewers. One of the reasons why *Dad Where Are We Going?* is so controversial is that audience can hold varying opinions about the show's purpose (i.e. whether it is meant to be educational/challenge social values versus being solely entertaining). These opinions develop from pre-existing audience ideals about parenting styles, the potential use of child participants in reality television, and representations of wealth (and whether or not that wealth is being glorified). *Dad Where Are We Going?* contains many cultural signs that carry profound meanings for the individual viewer, such as father – child relationship, China's two-child policy, lifestyle choice, gender roles, etc. These elements are all issues that are the concern of 21st century of Chinese mainstream culture. Thus, it is essential to study and to analyze *Dad Where Are We Going?*'s effects on its viewers and the reaction from critics.

Dad Where Are We Going? can also be defined in terms of encoder and decoder. Hall (1973) notes, “. . . the degrees of ‘understanding’ and ‘misunderstanding’ in the communicative exchange depends both on the degree of symmetry/asymmetry between the position of encoder-producer and that of the decoder-receiver . . .” (p.4). Thus, when there is an unequal situation happening between encoder and decoder, the message will be misunderstood. In *Dad Where Are We Going?*, there are many misunderstandings in this communicative exchange that happen among both the participants and the audience. The show's producers serve as the encoders because they control what the participants do and what the audience sees; in this regard, the

participants are both joint encoders and decoders in that they react to the producers' control but also convey their own messages to the audience through their visible actions on screen while the audience remains solely in the decoder capacity to receive those messages. The producers arrange the mission plans; participants react to and interact with the plans; and viewers can join in only through watching the edited show, leaving them unable to see the entire process of production, meaning they are not privy to thousands of hours of behind-of-the-scenes footage that might further impact their opinions on the show itself. The audience's ability to decode is strictly controlled in this way more so than how the participants are being controlled by the producers. For example, an audience member might change their viewpoint on whether or not children should be participants in reality television shows if they saw hours upon hours of cut footage of children crying or not being "camera ready." Thus, a full chain of events/the story becomes edited pieces that attempt to influence the audience watching, whether that means influencing social conventions or by simply entertaining. Moreover, encoding and decoding not only exists between encoder and decoder; it also exists between decoder and encoder. When viewers give feedback to creators (via message board postings/social media interactions as well as professional criticism), those messages carry a code of audience reception and response. In these instances, encoders become decoders; the show producers must then weigh financial aspects of audience demand and potential improvements to critical response versus the implementation of their own creative vision for the show they are making.

The process of mass communication is represented by the cycle of encoder - message - decoder. Interestingly, in media, this loop can be seen as producer - distribution - consumer. Hall

(1973) argues, “The ‘message form’ is a determinate moment;” for *Dad Where Are We Going?*, the producers’ message takes the form of a reality series meant to be viewed either on television or online (p.31). One of the reasons why *Dad Where Are We Going?* is so popular among audiences is because of its “plot.” By using the appearance of a non-scripted plot, every precious learning moment among participants is placed in front of viewers in a natural way; of course, this is a carefully constructed process that is quite far from what would take place in daily parent-child interactions, making it far from natural; after all, the central conflict of the show highlights how difficult parental responsibilities are for the fathers involved. During the process, moments of “encoding” and “decoding” happen. The purpose of the show is to educate young parents about how to take care of their children and to persuade young parents to spend more time with them. The conceptualized game elements coded into the show help to achieve this goal by making the difficult aspects of parenting seem fun and heartwarming. Hall (1973) notes, “Before this message can have an ‘effect,’ satisfy a ‘need’ or be put to a ‘use,’ it must first be appropriated as a meaningful discourse and be meaningfully decoded” (p.30). Thus, *Dad Where Are We Going?* implements a complex encoder/decoder experience, setting it apart from the experience produced by a formal educational documentary or lecture show; instead, its message requires it to take the unique form of an outdoor/adventure reality television show.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS & METHOD

The research questions for this thesis are based on the content and viewership of *Dad Where Are We Going?*

RQ1: What are the narratives in season three and four of *Dad Where Are We Going?*

RQ2: What are the narrative components that stay the same and what are the components that changed after the show's ban?

RQ3: How have audiences received/interpreted the show?

Methodology

This study utilized a narrative analysis which is a tool that functions through understanding and communicating. Labov & Waletzky (1967) describe narrative as “one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which actually occurred” (p.12). Besides serving as a collective of past events, narrative can also be seen as a reflection of human behaviors. Therefore, a narrative analysis is used in this thesis to examine the show *Dad Where Are We Going?* There is a diversity of narratives in the show, and this thesis evaluates three main types: textual, structural, and interactional analysis.

Textual narrative analysis “[emphasizes] the content of a text” (Riessman, 2005). This type of narrative analysis focuses on *what* content is said rather than *how* this content is said. *Dad Where Are We Going?* attempts to mimic realistic situations; therefore, the characters' lines need to seem natural. For that reason, it becomes necessary to study naturally formed conversations. Structural analysis focuses on the way a story is told. Riessman (2005) explains that “a teller by selecting particular narrative devices makes a story persuasive” (p, 3) In the show, based on

children's natural non-acting behaviors, some of them may say something selfish or behave rudely, but their portrayal depends on how the editors cut the stories and re-composite them. Directors often create montages to show how a child who makes mistakes at the beginning will truly realize his/her faults and ultimately learn a lesson. Thus, an educational goal will be achieved. Interactional analysis emphasizes on the conversation between storytellers and listeners. Riessman (2005) notes, "attention to thematic content and narrative structure are not abandoned in the interactional approach, but interest shifts to storytelling as a process of co-construction, where teller and listener create meaning collaboratively" (p, 4). In *Dad Where Are We Going?*, there are many interactive moments that allow the content creators to communicate with their viewers.

Sample and Conducting the Research

To explore prevailing ideologies in *Dad, Where Are We Going?*, this study used a narrative analysis of the third and fourth seasons of the show, which aired from July 2015 to October 2016, totaling 24 episodes. Secondly, this thesis examined audience reception, analyzing 300 viewer comments posted on Weibo (A Twitter-like blog, a widely-used social media platform in China.) and news reports (including *Chudong Evening News*, *Beijing Business News*, *Hunan TV News*, *BBC News*, *Legal Daily News*, *New York Times*, etc.).

Sample: Text

Dad, Where Are We Going? is an imported reality child-parenting show. The Chinese television market refers to this show to as an encyclopedia of the 1980's (meaning that its primary audiences and the adult contestants featured are all from the generation born in the early

80's). In traditional Chinese culture, women are the ones who take care of the children and 1980's housework. This show places men in the roles of both "father" and "mother". Based on the show's design, there are a few sessions that requires the fathers and their children to find places to live, cook meals and compete with other fathers to finish the mission, etc. The purpose of this show is to educate parents on how to bring up their children (跟着《爸爸》有"肉"吃. n.d.).

The purpose of this show is to educate parents, especially those who were born in the 80's, on how to raise their children. As mentioned before, all father participants are current famous celebrities in China. To make the best show, the program crew first spends eight months looking for the proper celebrity families. The standards for selecting children require the child to be age four to six. Any child under the age of four cannot finish the missions that will be given in the show, and any child who is seven or older must behave maturely. Then, the filming crew goes to many different regions in China to pick only six places to film. Filming locations must be rural places away from big cities, but these locations cannot be too far away from cities, because the children might not be tolerant of long-distance travel. To make the reality show "reality," there are no retakes during the shooting process. One thousand hours of footage can make only one episode of the show. There are 40 different cameras operating during the filming. Before the final editing, there is a ten-person group who spends countless hours watching thousands of hours of footage in order to gather fun and interesting moments to edit. This process takes around four to five days to complete.

This analysis of *Dad, Where Are We Going?* is guided by the examination of what narratives that make the show unique and how gender roles are portrayed in the show's narratives via different Chinese cultural representations. The success and popularity of this show comes from the perspectives of its target audience, marketing skills, media platform, and new media consumption. Hunan TV uses multi-media platforms, its important asset, to attract its target audience. For instance, the use of Weibo, WeChat, interactive-advertisements, games, etc. fuel the success of *Dad, Where Are We Going?* (Ren, n.d.).

Sample: Viewer Comments

This thesis analyzes 300 viewer comments from *Dad, Where Are We Going?*'s official Weibo account, father participants' Weibo accounts, news reports, and scholar reports. Sina Weibo, the most popular and influential social media platform in China, has been pushing the show and making it a more interactive narrative for audiences. The official blog of the show has more than 5.8 million followers. The second season of the show reached 10 million followers on Weibo. This audience exceeded the audience for the World Cup, which had only seven million viewers (《爸爸去哪儿》微博阅读量破100亿 创中国微博之最. 2014). Moreover, comments on *Dad, Where Are We Going?* can be divided into two categories: one side holds negative opinions, and the other side holds positive views. Those ideas are from either child education experts or ordinary audience members. Also, this study analyzes the type of posts audience members leave, a tone of viewer comments, and the kinds of questions and answers viewers have.

CHAPTER ONE: NARRATIVE FRAMEWORK FINDINGS

The finding session is divided into three portions. The first portion talks about which narratives remain the same before and after the show's ban: the language (visual and oral languages) and social media. The second portion includes the narrative frames that changed after the show's ban, including the characters (show's participants) and media platforms (TV and the Internet). In addition, the viewers' comment section is discussed separately because the content of the comments changed depending the change in the show's content.

Narratives Remain the Same

Advertising Through Stickers - Framing Visual Narratives

Attracting the child demographic group and their parents in order to generate sales becomes difficult for a child-parenting reality show. However, by designing creative pop up stickers, *Dad Where Are We Going?* has won its audiences' vote. In order to cater to audiences' commercial-free demand, the TV show presents most of the advertisements in a subtle way to hide the true nature of being a product placement. For example, a series of animated product brands or products themselves appear in the right corner of the screen at the beginning of the show. The use of jumping, shining, and flipping animation engages young viewers. Besides the product placement, many cute designs related to participants' conversation were placed properly on screen. For example, in season four, episode one, the participants are asked to cook local foods. The father Dong and the daughter Arale are assigned to make a bread called "nang." However, Arale mixes it up with the word for "wolf," which is pronounced as "lang." Thus, two

hand-drawn stickers of a wolf and bread periodically pop up on the screen with a close up of Arale's pondering face.

The pop-up stickers are not only drawings and photos but also Chinese pop culture words and descriptions. One of the pop culture phrases is, "I feel my body got hollowed out (I feel drained)." This phrase is used to describe someone is extremely tired. Another example is to be an "old driver." This phrase means people who have rich experiences in specific fields. There are automatic motion capture cameras in each participant's bedroom, which will follow the participants. Many of the father and child participants played around to make the camera follow with them. Therefore, they are "flirting" with the camera. *Dad, Where Are We Going?* targets young audiences, the show is not only using the currently popular culture words but also creating them at the same time.

However, the language drawback of being less logical becomes one of the highlights of *Dad, Where Are We Going?* The non-scripted conversations, dialogues, and situations successfully reflect the "reality" aspect of this TV genre. In *Dad Where Are We Going?*, even if all the participants speak Chinese, there is still a big gap between the father participants and their child participants. For instance, one of the child participants, Arale, has contributed many trendy phrases, which include: "There are so many toys, yet I only have two hands," "Daddy, that chicken is huge" (she says this while pointing to a sheep), "My mom will marry me to you after I grow up," and, "I feel so sad because my pants ran away."

Along with the matched sound effects such as bubbles popping, animal noises, or Kung Fu style sound effects, the show has become a visual handbook for young parents. The name of

the show (*Dad, Where Are We Going?*) in Chinese has another meaning: “Where does dad go?” It reflects the social phenomenon that working parents do not have time to take care of their children. One of the father participants says, “There are 365 days in a year, and I am at work for 360 days.” The name of the show is formed as a question to ask children “Where does your dad go?” It asks fathers, “Where do you go when you are not with your son or daughter?” Many father participants had no idea how to communicate with their children their priorities at work and the conversation between them experienced a dramatic change after the show was produced.

Gender Roles in Reality TV - Dialogic Narratives

Through dialogue in *Dad, Where Are We Going?*, the show addresses gender issues and the noticeably and unequal dichotomy between genders in China. Women are portrayed as the weaker sex in Chinese history, movies, novels, and television. Thus, it is a challenge for *Dad, Where Are We Going?* to portray contemporary perspectives on gender issues. In an interview with Dikui Xie, the director of *Dad, Where Are We Going?*, he mentioned, “Boys should be more than girls based on the original South Korea version” (爸爸去哪儿. *n.d.*). Due to the rural filming locations, the test was considered harder for female child participants compared to male child participants. For instance, in season three of *Dad, Where Are We Going?*, episode eight, the finding houses session starts. Each family has to look for a place to stay, and the results of which show the audience members a cultural difference in the perception of gender. Xia, one of the fathers who is also Canadian, participates in the show with his daughter (making her one of only two girl contestants during that season). When Xia and his daughter find that their housing choice is less-than-ideal, a father-son group offers to give up their good housing because of the

notion that Xia's daughter is too delicate for the harsh conditions. This offer is based on a cultural assumption that Xia's daughter is weaker than the boy contestants based on her gender. Xia, who does not hold the same viewpoints about gender as his Chinese counterparts and is presented as more open-minded because of this, refuses the offer by explaining that his daughter can handle the rough conditions just like the boys do. This exchange between Xia and the other father participants poses a challenge to traditional gender norms in China in that boys are expected to weather unexpected circumstances and are to be stronger than girls by default.

Social Media in Reality TV -Meta Narratives

In the Weibo posts, fans talk about both father-child relationships and the celebrity fathers. For example, after the first season of *Dad, Where Are We Going?* aired, a famous actor Zhang Wen sent a tweet on Weibo to one of the child participants, asking, "Would you like to have dinner with me when your hair grows to your waist?" Chinese culture tends to use abstract subject to describe feelings. The phrase "When your hair grows to your waist" means when a little girl grows up and turns into a beautiful woman. Lei Huang, another actor/director stated "I will take care of my daughter, and she will not miss her mom for three months" (J. n.d. 疯狂综艺). Indeed, *Dad, Where Are We Going?* does create a shared-parenting, or "sharenting" trend in China. Based on a BBC news article, "Sharenting allows people to proudly show off their children to friends and family across the world" (*What is 'Sharenting' and should we be doing it?* 2016).

At the end of season four, a hashtag that translates to "Li Dong cried" soon took the number one trend on Weibo and other searching sites. Li Dong, one of the few adult participants

who did not actually have any biological children (these types of participants are affectionately referred to as “intern dads” by the production), realized that the end of season four meant that he would no longer be able to spend the same quality time with his “intern daughter,” Arale, who he had been partnered with by the crew. Though they were not actually related, Li Dong and Arale had become fan favorites by the end of the season, and many viewers were saddened to goodbye to their favorite father/daughter duo. Dong posted a Tweet about how much he missed Arale: “Arale, even though I am not your first father, you will always be my first daughter” (#董力哭了 # - 微博. 2017). As of 2018, 370,000 people liked this post; 2000,000 people shared it; and 20,000 people commented on it, spawning the hashtag “Li Dong cried,” not to mock him but to show that many felt empathy for a young man who had been given the opportunity to act as a parent, developed a paternal affection for his charge, and had to return to his regular life without her. This public display of fatherly devotion touched many hearts and reinforced the show’s premise that parent-child bonding was valuable and necessary for fathers, even for someone like Dong who has no children of own but might become a parent one day. Since Dong is a fencing athlete, many of his followers responded: “Dong is as calm as a mother who can take care of his daughter, as cool as a fencing athlete who can protect his daughter.” From media dominated roles to more and more user-generated content, active audiences want to have more power than they did previously. Given that viewers are essential for creating a trend, social media performs a necessary function in audience participation. Likewise, since audience participation plays a crucial role in developing a show’s content, audiences shape social media into one of the show’s narratives.

As audiences are gradually becoming consumers and producers, more and more user-generated media content starts to fill the blank space where the traditional media cannot reach. For example, many Weibo users post their own pictures when they were small hoping that they could do better if they had a chance to join *Dad Where Are We Going?* Also, many parents post their child's picture and tag the *Dad Where Are We Going?*'s official Weibo account or some keywords that relate to the show to represent how much they love their child and want them to grow up happily and healthy like the children in the show. Both the audience and media materials have transcended to a higher and more advanced level. Napoli (2011) notes, "These interactive infrastructures facilitate the flow of information not only from content providers to audience members, but also from audience members to content providers" (p.88). Therefore, audience's information system ought to upgrade itself simultaneously. For example, in season four, there is a live video on Weibo before father and child participants go to sleep. This session asks father participants to tell stories and interact with audiences through live videos. Napoli mentions, "Old models are breaking down, and new ones are emerging to supplement" (Napoli, p, 115). The term "old model" refers to celebrities who are famous and far to reach, whereas "new model" refers to celebrities who are just like ordinary people in your friends' list.

Narratives That Have Changed

Referring to the second research questions, to what extent did these narratives change before and after the show's ban, there are two narratives altered after the ban. The first one is the show's participants and the second one is the media platform. The participants downgraded from

famous celebrities only to young but handsome celebrities and average family's children. The platform moved from television to the Internet.

Characters Participants in Reality TV - Interpersonal Narratives

Dad Where Are We Going? displays a new situation that two teams of non-related participants team up to compete with related participant teams¹. The biggest content difference between seasons three and four is the participants. In order to cater to audiences' demands and make the fourth season more interesting, the directors of *Dad Where Are We Going?* decided to add the "intern dad" and children from more average income families into the new season.

"Fresh and handsome" is the demand. Compared to the famous celebrity fathers (who are above 35), the younger and handsome "intern dad" participants catch more attention from young female viewers. One of the intern dads is Li Dong. Dong was born in 1993 and is a 6-foot-tall fencing athlete. According to current data, Dong's social media followers increased from 4,000 to four million within four months of joining the show. Dong commented in his Weibo post, "Who knows what happened?" (R. 2016). Another intern dad is ZhiLie Huang, who was born in 1982 and is a famous pop singer in both South Korea and China. By having a nice appearance, good characteristics, and a myriad of skills, Dong and other intern fathers have soon become the charming characteristic for audiences.

¹ In seasons one, two, and three, all the participants of *Dad Where Are We Going* are either popular actors or famous athletes along with their children. However, in the fourth season, the participant group divides into three celebrity fathers and their children, and three less famous celebrity athletes who are childless are paired with children selected from the general public.

In addition to adult participants, child stars also contribute to the interpersonal narratives created in *Dad Where Are We Going?* Acting “cute” is more important than showing skills. Reality TV does not need a knowledgeable child participant, instead, it needs a talkative, active, and constantly positive child. New child participants in season four of *Dad Where Are We Going?* also raised a huge amount of attention. For instance, Yahan Cui (Arale) and YiHang Li are the two child participants who are from average income families. They were chosen by the filming group out of other children. Before *Dad Where Are We Going?* Arale was a just a child model for clothing and only had a hundred Weibo followers. However, after the show, Arale’s Weibo followers increased to around four million (经纪人讲述：我如何把萌娃打造成明星？. 2017).

Having a conventionally attractive face helps a child star’s journey. Compared to Arale, Yihang does not appear that active during the show. However, one may wonder why *Dad Where Are We Going?*’s filming group picked a slightly quiet boy as another new child participant. The answer is obvious: Yihang looks similar to a famous, handsome, and young pop singer named Han Lu. By having a similar appearance, Yihang was lucky enough to participate during the show.

Dad Where Are We Going? had all celebrity father participants along with their own children from the first season to the third season. Besides the banning issue, it is essential to study why the filming group implemented this intern father and average children plan in the fourth season of *Dad Where Are We Going?*

Referring to the third research question, how audiences have received/interpreted the show, there are two types of voice toward the show. Due to the change of father participants (intern dad), some audiences believe that *Dad Where Are We Going?* brought many positive influences to the Chinese media market and to young parents. However, other people consider that the show carries many negative media effects which would lead to an unpleasant result to the minors. Is educational influence greater than entertainment factor in *Dad Where Are We Going?* There are two distinguished groups that contribute to the educational orientation stereotype in the show.

Media Platforms in Reality TV - Narrative Format

Mango TV has to consider the different platform and formats through which to air their narratives: TV or the Internet? Based on *The Issue*, in order to protect the minors' mental health, *Dad, Where Are We Going?* had to move its competitive platform to the internet. This change is a double-edged sword. After transferring to the internet, *Dad, Where Are We Going?* has been translated into many languages for people who are from different countries to view. Many people left comments of how much they love the content. The show is not only famous in China, but also across the world. However, many scholars are worried about whether all the impact that the internet brings to Chinese audiences is good. "Statistics show that although the Chinese TV news industry is starting to exhibit global influence, many scholars are worried that the popularity of the Internet may be draining TV news audiences" (Dongfang, 2011). By having more access to information, the internet will pose a big threat for TV viewing and change audiences' habits and their behaviors with new online channels.

Audiences' Interpretation in Reality TV - Textual Narratives

Feedback is an essential portion in a mass communication circle and audiences are usually the feedback sender. *Dad, Where Are We Going?* has two avenues in this feedback loop: Who composes the target audience, and what does the target audiences want from the show? The first component is, “public opinion is a reflection of majority beliefs.” The second component describes “Public opinion is an aggregation of individual opinions.” Glynn, Herbest, Lindeman, O’Keefe, and Shapiro note, “Public opinion is found in the clash of group interests” and “public opinion reflects media and elite influence” (Glynn, Herbest, Lindeman, O’Keefe & Shapiro, p. 13-16).

Individual Desire for Fame

After *Dad, Where Are We Going?* aired, not only did the number of followers for the celebrities’ Weibo accounts go up along with their public perception and fame, so did that of the child participants. The child participants started to have their own Weibo accounts that are managed by their parents to keep in touch with the audience members who like them because of the show. In February 2017, Li Dong, the fan favorite “intern dad,” was invited to a Lantern Festival held by China Central Television (CCTV). Previously, only people who contributed a great deal to society or actors who are viewed as culturally significant would get invited. In other words, CCTV, by inviting a reality television stars to this event of cultural importance, is gradually acquiescing to “public taste” to gain more views. Yi Sha (another father participant) joked on a talk show about how hard he worked before *Dad, Where Are We Going?* to grasp public attention but with little success, and now he is more famous since his son caught that

attention easier. Sha added that because of reality television, he can just sit down, rest, and enjoy the rest of his life without the struggle for fame he had before he joined the show (周刊哔哩哔哩排行榜. 2017, June 14).

However, in contrast to Li Dong, other athletic father participants chose to further pursue their sport-related professions after the show. For example, Shi Ming Zou, a professional boxer and former Olympic champion, was honored as the Malta Tourism Image Ambassador on February 27, 2017. The Chief Marketing Officer of Malta Tourism Authority Carlo Micallef explains, “As the best boxing athletes in China, Zou’s positive and sunshine image matches Malta’s knight spirit” (Chen. 2017, March, 3). Micallef believes that this action will encourage more Chinese people to travel to Malta and to know its culture. Besides this, Zou further explained on his blog: “one day I will become the worldwide boxing champion to encourage many people who are like him to pursue their dreams” (Zou. 2017, April).

CHAPTER TWO: AUDIENCE RECEPTION NARRATIVE FINDINGS

Positive Interpretations

Reality TV presents informal “guidelines for living” (Ouellette & Hay, 2008, p. 2). As an early child-parenting reality show for the “’80s generation,” *Dad Where Are We Going?* breaks the gender stereotype that men are responsible for work and women are responsible for taking care of children. In addition to challenging gender norms, the show has initiated a new style of parenting, promoting that men should participate in early childhood education and demonstrating that both parents should balance the love between multiple children.

Balancing Parenthood: Children, Education, and the One Child Policy

Reality TV is capable of disseminating culture in its special way – delivering knowledge and information by using entertainment. In this thesis, an analysis about parent - child relationships suggest that no matter how fast China’s economy develops or how many Western elements flood into China’s cultural circle, child education is still the core value in contemporary Chinese society. *Dad, Where Are We Going?* discusses the trends in child-parenting in an entertaining way: How to educate a child? How to balance the love between two children? How to love a child? With the departure of the One –Child Policy, the Two-Child Policy has arrived and thus requires a new style of parenting that older parents are unfamiliar with. How do parents balance the love that they give to the first child with the love they give to the second child? For this change, *Dad, Where Are We Going?* Provides a positive example. In season three, episode eight, Nuo Yi considers that his dad, Ye Liu, loves his sister (Ni Na) more than him. Ye explains the reason why he cares more about Ni Na is because Nuo Yi is older and should take more

responsibility to be tough enough to protect Ni Na. Though this response might not appear positive, Nuo Yi feels better after being comforted by Ye, finding purpose in his big brother role. For Western audiences, a similar situation can be found in the “middle child syndrome:” “It describes the feelings of neglect and isolation thought to afflict many middle-born children” (Specktor, 2017, December 25). Therefore, the middle child is more likely to be ignored by his or her parents, and they are more likely to be very troublesome in order to catch their parents’ attention. Though the Liu family’s situation only involves two children, the dis-equal between the amount of love/affection felt by children in a multi-child household still applied, regardless of birth order. In both Western and Eastern countries, especially the first child is given more responsibilities, and the youngest child is spoiled and has fewer constraints. However, China’s two-child-policy makes the first child feel like he or she is the middle child that is no longer the favorite of their parents. However, in *Dad, Where Are We Going?*, many participant fathers have two children, so they have become a model of how to balance their love towards their children for viewers. This representation helps to normalize the Two-Child household and alleviate fears of the “one love” myth in younger people, both for siblings themselves and those becoming new parents.

For Society: The Power of Example

As mentioned before, the world of mass media is a micro political landscape. It has its own political leaders and audiences. Some scholars believe that “Public Opinion is not so much a function of what individuals think as a reflection of how their opinions are cultivated, crystallized, and eventually communicated by interest groups” (Glynn, Herbest, Lindeman,

O’Keefe & Shapiro, p. 15). As the show demonstrates its positive influences on Chinese society, the Consulate General of Sweden in Shanghai releases its “Dad” program in 2017. One of the outstanding sessions of this program is a photograph gallery show of “Chinese fathers.” The goal of this program is to call for the society to revisit the role of the father in modern China. Johan Bävman, a famous Swedish photographer, photographed a series of Swedish fathers during their maternity leave (Sweden has a policy of encouraging parents have 480 days with paid maternity leave and father’s maternity leave counts to 90 days). Those images became the “Swedish Fathers” gallery show and are exhibited around the world. Due to the success of the “Swedish Fathers,” the “Chinese Fathers,” a similar version of the previous photography show, was presented in Sweden and Shanghai from July to August of 2017 (千帆, 2017). Another positive social activity is called “Dad, where are we going - Arbor Day.” On March 10th 2017, in the Chong Ming district, Chang Xing elementary school held an outdoor activity on Arbor Day. The theme of this activity is “plant the green, fly the hope.” During the activity, fathers and their children learn how to plant and water trees together. After the planting session, fathers and children go to collect strawberries, and children pick them and put them into their father’s mouth to show how appreciative they are to have such a wonderful father (崇明区长兴小学举行“爸爸去哪儿”植树节体验活动. 2017).

For Parenting

In *Dad, Where Are We Going?*, the most directly “political participant leaders” must be the father. They work as an interest group to spread firsthand the realistic information about their experiences on educating children and how they are educated by their children. The name of the

show (*Dad, Where Are We Going?*) in Chinese has another meaning, “Where does dad go?” It reflects the social phenomenon that working parents, particularly fathers, do not have time to take care of their children. One of the father participants laments, “There are 365 days in a year, and I am at work for 360 days” (Together With Dad S3 Documentary EP10 [Television series episode]. 2015, September 18). While reflects the questions children might have about the whereabouts of an absent parent, it asks fathers: “Where do you go when you are not with your son or daughter? Is that place more important than your child?” While at the same time, the show addresses absentee parents by showing how to take better care of their children and be more present in their lives through positive example as entertainment. Guo Qing Cai, a famous Chinese musician, also participated on the show as a father. He was born in 1968 and had a low-key life. Before *Dad, Where Are We Going?*, many Chinese audiences did not know he was married and has a five-year-old son, Qing Qing. For this, Cai explains, “In the past 50 years, I have been suffering under the Star aura. As a star, it is normal to have people who like you and also hate you. Someone says that I am a cream niche (a phrase meant to describe a man who is obsessed keeping his appearance), and some people say that I have sexual orientation disorder.” Cai continues, “However, attending the fourth season of *Dad, Where Are We Going?* is a good decision. My life needs a shift” (Wang, 2016, December 27). Cai mentions that the show gives him an opportunity to be with his son happily and less stressful under public observation. He says, “I choose not to escape this time.” By having a good trip with Qing Qing, Cai has learned how to face the difficulties in this society, and he needs Qing Qing to learn how this society thinks of his father, too. Cai used to tell his son that whenever someone asks who his father is,

Qing Qing was not allowed to tell anyone. Qing Qing used to cry a lot because of this; however, Qing Qing now can confidently tell everyone that his father is Cai. During an interview, Cai tells Qing Qing, “After *Dad, Where Are We Going?*, everyone will know you, some will like you and some may not, can you accept that?” Qing Qing’s answer makes Cai feel proud. He says, “Dad, do not worry, I do not care if other people hate me. I am not afraid as long as you and mom love me.” Cai also mentions that he would like to write a book on how to educate children in the future (China Hunan TV Official Channel. 2016, October 16).

Besides celebrity fathers, many parents have learned about parenting after they watch *Dad, Where Are We Going?* For example, one of the Weibo users tagged “*Dad, Where Are We Going?* Season Four” and posted “I love Arale so much ... I miss my little boy ... my deer baby ... please do not grow up.” Another user commented “heaven god, please give me a son like Anji and a daughter like Arale.” “I love *Dad, Where Are We Going?* It is not because how handsome the father participants are nor how cute the child participants are, it is because of love.” Another user stated “After watching *Dad, Where Are We Going?*, season four, even if I am still young, I want a child now” (爸爸去哪儿超话, n.d.).

From one way (receiving information) to multiple ways (receiving information and sending feedback), *Dad, Where Are We Going?* successfully gains a lot of public attention. The feedback consists of not only audiences but also the father participants. Being a participant, each father’s tweets are the first-hand sources of information and the best way to advertise different products that support the show. Stewart and Pavlou (2002) note, “Traditional measures that were designed for passive media fail to capture the important and differentiating dimensions of

response to interactive communication” (p, 376-396). In season four, there is a game session in which fathers are asked to put on headphones so they cannot hear sound, while their children have to perform words or sentences to make their fathers guess what they are saying. Intern father Dong and Arale’s part made many viewers emotional. First Arale says her intern father Dong is handsome, then she says Dong’s feet are fat by stepping her little feet on the ground, at the last, she says, “dad, you love me so much.” After she spoke out this sentence, everyone stays quiet and the host breaks the rules and says to Dong, “You have to take off your headphones and hear this” (Dad, Where Are We Going Season 4 [Television series episode]. 2016, December). Dong is shocked and moved after he hears what Arale says to him.

Negative Interpretations

Despite the fact that many audiences like the show, there is still a large portion of negative public opinion towards season four. For instance, people label this season as “landscape season,” which means season four only shines because of its young and handsome dad participants. There is no other educational function.

The show played an interview clip of Arale’s confession about her future husband’s type. Arale describes the type of man she wants, and her description is like her intern father. Her intern father, Dong Li, also gives a similar answer: He wants to marry a girl who is like Arale in the future. These interview clips have made a big impact in Chinese public opinion circles. Instead of gaining social approval, this action has the opposite influence on how public opinion sees the show. After this negative message spreads through the internet, a letter written by a pregnant woman was sent to the production group of *Dad Where Are We Going?*, demanding that they

“Stop rendering the couple love idea between Arale and Dong!” The woman questioned the production team of *Dad Where Are We Going?* as follows “Firstly, it is wrong for the show to suggest to audiences that a child can call a stranger ‘dad,’ and sleep with him naked.” There is one episode that Arale sleeps with her Intern dad with only underwear on, and her intern dad helps her to change clothes. “Second, the show’s depiction of the relationship between Dong and Arale is problematic” 准妈妈致信, 2016).

It is shocking how media representations have blurry boundaries between different types of events (political, entertaining, educational, etc.). Pateman (1974) notes, “If we accept that television plays a mediating role, it follows that elections as political events, remain distinct from their presentation as television events. The two are related . . . but they are not immediately interchangeable” (p, 35). Maybe from formal perspective, *Dad Where Are We Going?* cannot be as serious as a political election, but it is still a reality television show rather than an entertaining show. Some audiences do not feel the boundaries between “intern dad” and ordinary child participants are interchangeable as the relationship between a father and his biological children.

DISCUSSION

As mentioned before, this type of reality TV presents informal “guidelines for living” (Ouellette & Hay, 2008, p.2). As an early child-parenting reality show for the '80s generation, *Dad Where Are We Going?* challenges the gender stereotype that men are responsible only for working and should have no place in childcare. In addition to challenging these gender norms, the show initiates a new style of parenting in that men should take a more active role in childcare. Moreover, the show suggests men should participate in early childhood education and demonstrates how to balance the love for multiple children against cultural expectations.

China changed its one-child policy to the two-child policy only a few years ago. However, this change does not please everyone. The hardest parts of two-child-policy are: firstly, how do parents behave correctly and educate their child in a good way to let them accept a younger sibling; secondly, how does a child accept another family member in a welcoming way. Why is having a second child such a big hassle in China? Not all parents explain this situation to their child in a calm way, and many negative accidents can happen after the second child's birth. For instance, in April 2015, a 12-year-old middle school student from Weinan, China, jumped from a building. According to her suicide note, she decided to end her life to spite her parents' plan of having a second child. Similar things have appeared in different forms. An eight-year-old boy was taken to a hospital by his parents, because he was threatening to kill his younger brother in his sleep (初中生跳楼身亡. 2015, April, 3). Many parents beat the first child after he or she refuses having a younger sibling. Even though the first child is still young, they have already developed their own thoughts. The majority of them fear the second child will take away their

love from their parents. Many parents want the second child, but they do not know how to balance the love in order to not to hurt any of them.

Being Digital

In *The Power Under the Hood*, Joseph Turow notes that the marketers' growing power remained hidden from public view. By summarizing the involvement of media agencies during their troubled time and the golden age of developing processes fueled by the Web, Turow asserts the potential advantage of being digital. During question and answer sessions, *Dad, Where Are We Going?* utilizes Quick Response (QR) codes which audience members are encouraged to scan in order to get the answer. Through QR codes and interacting with the live streaming videos on Weibo, more interaction between show participants and audiences are provided.

Gaining Public Attention

Compared to the signing or gaming competition shows, *Dad, Where Are We Going?* is a new show that has no competition element or participants' elimination. The show is an outdoor reality show, thus, no stage, no competition rules, no KO (Knock off) session, and no suspense (some other reality shows usually set up suspense plot during the KO session and let audiences interact with shows to guess who will win). Besides having no KO session, the pace of *Dad, Where Are We Going?* may also be slower than other fast-paced shows which are favored by different gender demographics. However, after the third season, the inclusion of new intern fathers and ordinary children brought back the show's popularity. For example, Dikui Xie mentioned he was worried about how the system of *Dad, Where Are We Going?* works. He got bored when he watched the South Korean versions when two boys encountered a dog while

eating for ten minutes; however, the female directors thought it was fun and cute (专访《爸爸去哪儿》总导演, 2013, November, 14). Compared to men, the show's producers view their female audiences as being more sensitive and having more emotion toward children. Thus, these slow-paced characters are also the winning point among female audiences. As opposite of Xie's worries, *Dad, Where Are We Going?* gains more success due to its female supporters.

Audiences

As audiences are gradually becoming consumers and producers, more and more user-generated media content starts to fill the blank space where the traditional media cannot reach. Both the audience and media materials transform to a higher and more advanced level. Napoli (2011) notes, "These interactive infrastructures facilitate the flow of information not only from content providers to audience members, but also from audience members to content providers" (p.88). From one way (receiving information) to multiple ways (receiving information and sending feedback), *Dad Where Are We Going?* successfully gains a lot of public attention. The feedback consists of not only audiences but also the father participants. Being a participant, each father's tweets are the first-hand sources of information and the best way to advertise different products that support the show. This amazing evolution (new media content and technologies) needs an institutionalized system as a key indicator to analyze different types of audiences. Their engagement, responses, and content production activities should be analyzed in order to explain, indicate, and measure the new consumptions and behaviors. The chapter "The Transformation of Media Consumption," from *Public Opinion*, focuses on "how the new technologies and dynamics of media consumptions feed into ongoing audiences' information systems" (Napoli, p.

88). In “The Transformation of Audience Information Systems” of *Public Opinion*, a series of content “engagement” appears by interpreting an order of audiences’ behaviors (awareness→ interests→ loyalty→ attentiveness) (Napoli, 2011, p. 90-96). The audience’s engagement is highlighted through “exposure-derived,” “appreciation and emotional response,” “recall and attitudes,” “behavioral responses,” and “integrated approaches to audience behavior.” However, the point of content is not only explaining the meaning of the audience engagement but also the operation of the audience’s marketplace.

The reasons why *Dad, Where Are We Going?* has influenced the public in such a big way can also be explained with public opinion theory. The “fresh trend” has swallowed Chinese audiences’ heart since the “Korean Wave” landed in Chinese entertainment market. “Fresh” means young and handsome artists. With the change of audiences’ taste, a new taste of younger and good-looking demand has grown gradually. Thus, by having young and new faces in *Dad, Where Are We Going?*, Hunan TV participates in this new trend. This response here specifically means adding intern fathers and ordinary child participants to its fourth season. Glynn, Herbest, Lindeman, O’Keefe, and Shapiro note, “Public opinion is found in the clash of group interests” and “public opinion reflects media and elite influence” (Glynn, Herbest, Lindeman, O’Keefe & Shapiro, p. 13-16). Even if public opinion is made of individual’s opinions, whoever decides to place the specific opinions on the top trend topic is the key. In *Dad, Where Are We Going?*, the directors of the show have the power to decide what key element they use to portray the father and child participants. These elements are picked based off of the participants’ different personalities. For instance, during season three, a love story between Nuo Yi and Poppy has been

made up and discussed on Weibo. Thus, the editing group starts to show more shots of Nuo Yi interacting with Poppy to make higher ratings. In episode eight, Nuo Yi and Xuan Xuan are asked to go wake up Poppy. When Poppy hears Nuo Yi's cough she gently calls his name with some animated hearts flying around her face. Nuo Yi turns back and looks at Poppy in slow motion with romantic music. All the added-on effects cater to the audience's' desires. In *Setting the Agenda: Mass media and Public Opinion*, Maxwell McCombs notes "Relevance is the core concept defining need for orientation" (McCombs, 2014). Thus, the relevance of a topic to audiences decides the popularity of this issue.

The Importance of Public Opinion

Dad Where Are We Going? uses any possibility to increase public attention. For example, the show uses celebrity aperture. The director of *Dad Where Are We Going?* invited Jackie Chen to be a guest and to join some game sessions at the end of season four, in order to be different compared to other shows and make higher ratings. The news title of this action is "Jackie Chen is in *Dad, Where Are We Going?* too." The word "too" increased the rating and caught more attention since the famous international actor Jackie Chen joins the season.

In the beginning, Napoli notes that technological developments fueled audiences' evolution, represented by the changes of media consumptions and information systems, which represents a new audience marketplace. The series of shifts helped change and reconfigure the dynamic between media audiences, media content, and content providers. Napoli (2011) notes, "Thus, the notion of the media audience is very much a contested space, with a diverse array of

institutional interest at stake” (p.118). Therefore, in order to stand out from thousands of similar media content, media providers have to make changes to adapt to this new situation.

Besides the show itself, many social influences shape public opinion. Some examples include cultures, politics, socializations, social norms, stereotypes, beliefs, attitudes, etc. Stereotype is an important fact that adds or even changes public opinion. Different group identities create different stereotypes. “Crucially, stereotypes are socially shared by many people” (Glynn, Herbest, Lindeman, O’Keefe & Shapiro, p. 147). By having very visible identity characteristics, different categories of stereotype groups form. People who are in the same group share same positive values and beliefs. On the contrary, people outside the groups share opposite opinions. There are two distinguished groups that contribute to the educational orientation stereotype in the show. They argue over whether the show’s educational orientation function is bigger than the entertainment function. According to a report from Youth.cn, Xie Dikui, the director of the show *Dad, Where Are We Going?*, notes, “I do not want to do a show that is only to entertain audiences. Instead, I would like people to gain ideas, knowledge, and really know it is necessary to spend more time with their children” (专家: 《爸爸去哪》满足观众探秘心理. n.d.). In another interview, an elementary school student states, “I am a reporter and I am in the fourth grade of elementary school now. I love *Dad, Where Are We Going?*, because it is not only a show to represent how celebrities teach their child and make mistakes for a whole day but also a show that integrates the audiences’ heart with the meaning of the TV content” (对《爸爸去哪儿》节目的评论. 2013).

In recent years, it has become clear that the formation of public opinion is a complicated process. This process needs scholars and scientists to put more attention and understanding of how social influences act to audiences, and how audiences influence them. The media messages are formed before, during, and after shows' airing. The coded messages are delivered to individuals, who are influenced in different ways depending on race, education level, culture, beliefs, and other factors. It is necessary to examine how public opinion has been influenced by *Dad, Where Are We Going?* The show's depiction of children's physical and mental health issues relates to stereotypes and social norms of Chinese society, then in return, public opinion influences the depiction of these issues.

LIMITATIONS

While doing research on the relationship between children's mental health and TV program influences, it is hard to find many relevant articles and topics. There is a gap in the scholarship on how public opinion towards children's health is affected by TV shows. For instance, there are articles about how TV shows cause child obesity, drug usage, addicted behaviors, and other physical influences (Hill, 2005; Morris & McInerney, 2010; Murray & Ouellette, 2010; Andrejevic, 2004; Orbe, 2008; Levine & Harrison, 2004; Ouellette & Hay, 2008; Reiss & Wiltz, 2004). However, there are not many articles that specifically point out how public opinion directly influences minors' mental health.

Another limitation to this project is the translation process between Chinese and English. Chinese language, as one of the significant narratives in this study, is hard to translate to English perfectly. Due to different cultural elements, some Chinese culture words lose their profound meanings after being translated into English. It does not mean that the English language is not good enough to carry the meaning of Chinese words, but the culture behind those words is different. Meanwhile, those words do not make sense in English, because English speakers are not normally cognitive of Chinese culture.

CONCLUSION

Dad, Where Are We Going? has brought a lot of attention and influences from its first episode of the first season to its banned time and to the latest episode of its fifth season. The attentions and influences are both positive and negative, based on different situations. The Chinese television market has a late start on its long journey compared with other countries' television markets. However, with the increase of media consumption and advanced technologies, the audience evolution has been fueled to full tank, which has pushed the Chinese television market to its highest peak.

During the findings portion, this paper explores the different narratives in *Dad, Where Are We Going?*, including characters (participants), media platform, language, popping stickers, sound effects, animations, etc. Through studying the narratives, this paper explores the reasons why the show is successful from the perspectives of new media consumption. Changes among narratives (Intern dad and platforms) prompts a show and TV stations to evolve. By comparing the differences between the third season and fourth season from the show's content, participants, and the internet platform, one can perceive how audiences responded towards the show. In order to cater to new needs from different consumers (audiences), an "intern dad" participant and an average child participant have been set up. After the success of *Dad, Where Are We Going?*, many other similar shows flooded the Chinese TV market and directly copied the show's content. This lack of creativity should be stopped in time. Moreover, audiences make up a large amount of the show. Their comments and opinions do form and change the show. Some people hold that the show is problematic because it uses children as a consumable media, while some

people, younger parents, appreciate the show because it acts as a guide for educating their children.

However, there is an old saying in Chinese, “A tall tree catches the wind.” It means a person in a high position or someone with fame is liable to be attacked. Similar to *Dad, Where Are We Going?* The show was banned after its third season for one year, and then it was allowed to show on only the Internet. By comparing the differences between the third season and fourth season from the show’s content, participants, and the internet platform, one can perceive how audiences responded to the show. In order to cater to new needs from different consumers (audiences), an “intern dad” participant and an average child participant have been set up. This change catches a lot of attention that is newer in both positive and negative ways. The reasons why *Dad, Where Are We Going?* was taken off the air are first, the official reason (attending this show may hurt the minor’s mental health); second, incorrect leadership among children participants and children audiences. Since the child participants are aged below eight years old, they have not developed their mind, which may cause some misunderstanding. Third, after the success of *Dad, Where Are We Going?*, younger parents, show an appreciation for the program because it acts as a guide for educating their children.

Even if the Chinese television market imports many foreign television shows instead of producing more original shows, this step is still essential to the Chinese because of the television market’s lack of creativity and solid production industry foundation. Every foreign television show has to adapt to the customers and local features where it is being imported. This adaptation process is also a transformation process to help original Chinese shows learn and improve from

imported shows. *Dad, Where Are We Going?* has made several changes to adapt to its Chinese audience's needs. By replacing all celebrities and their children with three ordinary people's children, the show has changed the stereotype of "only celebrity's children can be shown on TV." Thus, audiences have more weight in the contemporary media consumption environment. It is the power and demand from audiences that brought back *Dad, Where Are We Going?*

The new platform, the internet, has provided another way of showing the TV program. Based on statistic data, profits and popularity of the show are still growing even if it lost the TV as its main platform. However, whether it is possible that the open Internet will hurt children's mental development still needs to be studied in the future analysis.

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