

An Ethnographic Study of Audience Viewing of the Telenovela- *Kumkum Bhagya* at Selected Sites in Ghana

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Abstract

Although telenovelas originated outside Africa, they have gained so much popularity in some African countries with Ghana not being an exception. This popularity has led to the emergence of a new phenomenon of viewing telenovelas at domesticated but open television viewing sites such as hair salons, grocery stores, cafes, gaming centers among others. Since this phenomenon has brought about a gathering of individuals at a common assembly ground, there is the need to explore the ideas that shape meaning making and the kind of interactions that take place. This paper investigates the culture that surrounds the immediate viewing of the Hindi produced telenovela-*Kumkum Bhagya* at selected sites in Winneba- Ghana. Using the theory of Popular Culture through an ethnographic approach and anchored on interviews, participant observations, and focus group discussions, the paper reveals that viewers of *Kumkum Bhagya* cut across various classes on the social ladder reiterating the assertion that, in Africa, everyone irrespective of their sex, age, religion, or ethnicity patronizes popular culture. Also, the findings of the study which were grouped into pre-viewing culture, viewing culture and post-viewing culture revealed that the culture that surround the viewing of *Kumkum Bhagya* are made of planned and unplanned activities which are all geared towards a successful telenovela viewing at the selected sites.

Keywords: television, telenovela, *Kumkum Bhagya*; popular culture, third places, culture, ethnography

Introduction

In today's world, television can be seen everywhere. In most cities, it is nearly impossible to pass by a street without seeing a shop, a bar, a restaurant or even an office without a television (Adia, 2014). Ofori-Birikorang (2014, p. 2) asserts that in several locations across Africa, people who do not have televisions at home resort to visiting domestic spaces or emerging spaces that traverse many urban locations, annexed to bars and restaurants where television is beamed on giant screens in open spaces that would welcome them to enjoy the viewing experience. Such spaces are termed as 'third places' (Oldenburg, 1997). Oldenburg (1999) posits that these third places encourage informal interactions, serve as neutral grounds, are easily accessible and possess regulars who welcome newcomers with playful tones. Most television programmes that draw viewers to such third places include telenovelas, soccer and Nollywood movies (Ofori-Birikorang, 2014).

Telenovelas as a genre of television programme is one of the most popular forms of entertainment in the world. They are melodramatic fictional television series produced from Latin America, the United States of America, India, and Brazil (La Pastina, Rego & Straubhaar, 2003). However, they originated from Latin America where they started as graphic novel representation of classic literature and stories. They have very defining endings that allow the kind of narrative closure which is usually between 180 to 200 episodes depending on their popularity (La Pastina et al., 2003). They also "offer their audience dramas of recognition and re-cognition by locating social and political issues in personal and familial terms" (Lopez, 1995 cited in La Pastina et al., 2003, p. 2) and thus making sense of our complex world.

According to Antwi, Amoabeng, Anning and Antwi (2015), telenovela is possibly the most successful drama format in the history of television and this can be attributed to the maximum social interactions it generates both internally and externally. Miller (2010) avers that because telenovelas are cost effective not only for domestic audience but exports too, they (telenovelas) became popular among producers and network executives in some parts of the world. La Pastina et al. (2003) also state that telenovelas are designed to attract a wide viewing audience of men, women and children. They are also able to catch and maintain the attention of a faithful audience throughout the 180 to 200 episodes (Machado-Borges, n.d.). The plots of telenovelas may conform to real-life seasons and holidays and often introduce fashion products, approach debatable subjects, and comment (in a realistic or parotic way) on contemporary social issues (Machado-Borges, n.d.).

Adia (2014) indicates that telenovela viewers can use the programme to reinforce their self-esteem since it can serve as a link to the experiences of others through which they can explain their own existence. Furthermore, telenovelas can also provide values, images, rituals, symbols and models that act as reference points for those who are always in the process of constructing their identity, for example adolescents (Adia, 2014).

Due to the effects that telenovelas have on their audience, they are shown at strategic 'prime' times of the day. Toure (2007) points out that the slot between 7:00 and 8:30 p.m. is synchronised with people's free time most especially women and youth and as a result, most telenovelas are given those slots which are deemed "primetime". The idea of primetime is that, it will provide the largest possible audience (Antwi et al., 2015).

Telenovelas in Ghana

For several years, fictional stories like telenovelas have dominated primetime programming on most of the television stations in Ghana (Adia, 2014). Telenovela in Ghana became prevalent in the 2000s but in 1997, TV3 aired Televisa's *Esmeralda* (Antwi et al., 2015). Most of the telenovelas broadcast on the Ghanaian media are either Mexican or Brazilian in origin which are adapted and adopted into English language. Sometimes they are left in their indigenous languages and subtitles in English are provided to aid the audience in understanding the plot. Some telenovelas that held most Ghanaians glued to their television sets in the late 1990s included *La Gata*, *Rosalinda*, *Second Chance*, *La Usurpadora*, *Cuando Seas Mia* and *Sunset Beach*.

Kumkum Bhagya is one of such telenovelas that attracted the attention of most Ghanaians in the late part of the year 2015. It is an Indian telenovela which was broadcast by Zee TV and was premiered on the 15th of April, 2014 in India. It is loosely based on the novel, *Sense and Sensibility* by Jane Austen. *Kumkum Bhagya* is about a woman, Sarla Arora, who runs a marriage hall and lives with the hope of seeing her two daughters happily married. Pragma, the elder daughter, who is practical, hardworking and committed to supporting her family, teaches at a college to ensure that her mother's earnings are enough to cater for the family. Bulbul, the younger daughter is vibrant, smart, stylish and a complete dreamer. The telenovela follows the lives of the two sisters, their hopes, dreams and aspirations.

In Ghana, *Kumkum Bhagya* was premiered by Adom TV on the 2nd of November, 2015. It is shown five times in a week between 7:30 pm and 8:30 pm and is mostly followed by a chat room discussion in Twi (an indigenous language in Ghana). On Sundays, an omnibus is shown between 12pm and 5pm. In many parts of Ghana, audiences of *Kumkum Bhagya* are mostly seen at some domesticated but open spaces such as bars, hospitals, restaurants, grocery stores (supermarkets), salons and gaming centers enjoying the viewing of the telenovela. Following the popularity, success and controversies surrounding *Kumkum Bhagya*'s massive audience reception, this paper investigates the kinds of interactions and performances that take place as viewers of the telenovela gather at three selected domesticated but open sites in Ghana. One theoretical lens through which individual's viewing experience of telenovelas in Ghana can be well appreciated is the theory of popular culture.

Popular Culture

To better understand the culture that surrounds audience viewing of telenovela at the selected sites, it is important to explicate popular culture as it is depicted in the telenovela. Nafihu (2014) indicates that one of the effects of globalisation on culture is the growth of popular culture. The term "popular culture" holds different meanings depending on who is defining it and the context within which it is being used (Storey, 2009). However, it is generally acknowledged as the culture of the people that prevails in a society at a point in time (Delany, 2007). Before one can properly elucidate the meaning of the term, he/she must first break down the term into "popular" and "culture". Williams (1983) as cited in Storey (2009) gives three definitions for "culture" which will be the basis for this study. In the first definition, he states that culture is a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development. This definition is in tandem with that of Gans (1999) who defines culture as goods, ideas, practices existing for education, aesthetic sake, spiritual training, entertainment, recreation and many others. Raymond Williams further gives a second definition of culture as a particular way of life of a group of people. This definition looks at how a group of people dress, the food they eat, the language they speak among many other social makeups. Finally, he refers to culture as the various works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activities. These artistic activities may include telenovelas, poetry, novel, ballet, opera, and fine art (Storey, 2009). Out of the three definitions, the second and third provide a better understanding of the concept of popular culture and very relevant to this paper. Storey (2009) further suggests four definitions of the term "popular" to include well-liked by people, inferior kinds of work, work deliberately setting out to win favour with the people and culture actually made by the people for themselves. In all the definitions, the common theme is "the people" and this is what has influenced many scholars in defining the term "popular culture" (Hall, 1998).

There are various definitions that have been given by scholars with respect to popular culture (Delany, 2007). However, Parker (2011) states that Storey's six definitions as captured in his book *Cultural theory and Popular Culture* provide the most systematic and diverse views of popular culture. Based on this assertion, John Storey's six definitions would be analysed in order to bring out the various views on popular culture. Storey (2009) notes that one major definition for popular culture is any culture which is widely favoured or liked by many people. With this definition, he looks at the quantitative nature of popular culture where one can look at the sales of books, tickets to a cinema show, attendance to events etc. This definition is limited in the sense that according to Storey (2009, p. 5-6),

...unless we can agree on a figure over which something becomes popular culture, and below which it is just culture, we might find that widely favoured or well-liked by many people included so much as to be virtually useless as a conceptual definition of popular culture.

A second way of defining popular culture, according to Storey (2009, p. 6), is “the culture that is left over after we have decided what high culture is”. Thus, it is a residual category which is there to accommodate texts and practices that fail to meet the required standards to qualify as high culture.

In the third definition, popular culture is likened to mass culture. Scholars who refer to popular culture as mass culture always want to establish the fact that popular culture is a “hopelessly commercial culture” (Storey, 2009, p. 8) which is mass produced for mass consumption with a mass of non-discriminating consumers. This is mostly the African perspective of what consists of popular culture. Barber (1997) notes that in whatever way that “popular” is perceived, it always refers to an existing social category known as “the people”. The concept of “the people” refers to those who are neither the state, the dominant classes, the aristocracy nor the bourgeoisie (Barber, 1997, p. 3). Barber (1987) reiterates that the “people” referred to in Africa always point to a “heterogeneous, fluctuating conglomeration of ethnic, regional, religious, and class groups” (p. 6). Hence, whatever pertains to “the people” is inevitably and continually open to redefinition (Barber, 1987, p. 6). Abah (2009) submits that in Africa, everyone irrespective of their class, education and status consumes popular culture. There is, therefore, no one-to-one correspondence between class and culture.

The fourth definition provided by Storey (2009) is a build-up on the third definition. He states that popular culture is the culture that originates from ‘the people’. This definition acknowledges that the “people” are any other than “the elites”. The idea here is that there is a major difference between two opposing worlds which are the world of the elites of the high class against that of the ordinary people (Strinati, 2004).

In John Storey’s fifth definition, he draws inspiration from the political analysis of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, particularly on his development of the concept of hegemony. Popular culture in this terrain is seen as a site of struggle between the ‘resistance’ of subordinate groups (periphery) and the forces of ‘incorporation’ operating in the interests of dominant groups (elites).

The final definition of popular culture that Storey (2009) brings to bear is one informed by recent thinking around postmodernism. Under this definition, we no longer see a distinction between high and popular culture. Thus, postmodernism blurs the differences between ‘authentic’ and ‘commercial’ culture.

This paper, explicates in this study, the African context of popular culture where the term does not necessarily look at the class struggles but rather concentrates on what functions in the interest of the masses and is accepted by them.

Methodology

This paper is a qualitative study that aims at understanding a human phenomenon (the culture surrounding the viewing of the telenovela- *Kumkum Bhagya* at some domesticated but open sites in Ghana. The study further hinges on ethnography which studies an intact group of people in their natural setting “over a prolonged period of time by collecting primarily observational and interview data” (Creswell, 2014, p. 13). Observational data were collected over a period of eight months (June, 2016 to February, 2017) and in-depth interviews as well as focus group discussions were also conducted with 33 informants. The ethnographic study of the three sites enabled us to engage in a phenomenon of total ‘immersion’ which is a very vital component of ethnography as posited by Lindlof and Taylor (2011).

The study was conducted at three domesticated but open viewing sites in Winneba (a fishing and a University community in the Central Region of Ghana). The sites include two grocery stores (supermarkets) and a hair salon. We purposively sampled these sites because they were easily accessible in terms of their physical location and proximity and social actors were willing to participate in the study as (Ofori-Birikorang, 2014). Though some social actors were reluctant, most of our informants were ever ready to give information concerning experiences on the telenovela at the selected sites.

Most of the observations were conducted in the evening. In almost all the days, we went to the sites about twenty minutes before the start of the telenovela to observe what participants engaged in prior to the telecast of the telenovela. We also observed keenly while participating in the viewing of the telenovela during its telecast and stayed about thirty minutes after the telecast to observe the post-viewing interactions of the social actors. We also took field notes and pictures during the observational process. Overall, we made 42 ethnographic visits to the selected sites.

Both one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions were recorded on an Infinix Note Two with permission of the informants. We ensured that most of the interviews were conducted after participants had finished watching specific episodes. Each informal interview with the participants lasted about five to fifteen minutes. A semi-structured interview guide was used to direct the nature of interview with each interviewee.

Two focus groups were formed comprising seven members each. Each group consisted of informants from similar background. This was done to give the participants the freedom to express themselves without feeling intimidated by anyone not within their peer group. The first group consisted of two males and five females whereas the second group consisted of seven females. We moderated the discussion. Most of the interviews were conducted in Fante (one of the widely spoken dialects in Ghana and spoken by the people within the community)

and later transcribed and translated with the help of a professional translator. Other interviews were, however, done in the English language with informants who could speak and understand it. Finally, data collected were thematically analysed by identifying the patterns and trends that run through them.

Findings and Discussion

The study was based on one research question: what is the culture that surrounds the immediate viewing environment of the telenovela- *Kumkum Bhagya* at the selected sites. As part of answering the research question, demographic information, which covered the sex, age range, educational level and religion of the participants was sought. Out of the thirty-three informants, seven (7) were males, whereas twenty-six (26) were females. Four (4) participants were under eighteen years, twenty-four (24) were between nineteen (19) and forty (40) years, while five (5) were above forty years. Also, twenty-three (23) participants had their educational level up to the Junior High School, seven (7) up to the Senior High School level, whereas three (3) had theirs up to the tertiary level. Finally, twenty-two (22) of the informants were Christians, three (3) were Muslims and eight (8) were Traditionalists.

The demographics indicate that though the numbers under the various demographic categories differ, the informants who participated in the research study cut across all the categories (sex, age, educational level and religion). This supports Abah's (2009) assertion that in most places in Africa, the people that adopt popular culture are not only the "rural folksy types, but a shifting amalgamation of different people as defined by language, ethnicity, occupation and religion" (p. 732).

In responding to the research question, we grouped the culture that surrounds the viewing of the telenovela into three main parts: pre-viewing culture, viewing culture and post-viewing culture.

Pre-viewing Culture

The pre-viewing culture in this study is operationalised as the norms, values and activities that take place fifteen minutes before the start of the telenovela. The pre-viewing culture is made up of the *arrival* and *activities* that take place at the sites prior to the start of the telenovela.

Arrival

In the course of our ethnographic visits, we observed that, especially during the week days, it was children (under 18 years) that came to the sites earlier before the start of the telenovela. Even among the children, the girls that came there were more than the boys. Most of the adults (usually females), however, came to the sites about five minutes to the start of the telenovela. The men, on the other hand, arrived when the telenovela had already commenced. When we interviewed an informant about why she mostly arrived at the site about three minutes to the start of the telenovela, she stated,

You know this place is someone's store and we cannot come and sit here very early all in the name of waiting for *Kumkum Bhagya* to start. The owner has to feel free to do her work so I mostly sit at home and send my daughter who goes to check every now and then to see whether the telenovela has begun. Immediately she sees a particular advert showing, she knows right after that *Kumkum* will continue so she comes over to call me.

In this instance, the rationalisation for arriving at the sites just on time was attributed to the fact that social actors wanted the owners of the sites to get enough space and time to do their work before the telenovela began and, as a result, such participants resorted to relying on their agents to communicate to them (adult participants) on when the telenovela had begun. The men also indicated that they had other things doing for which reason they arrived at the sites later when the programme had already commenced. These men were of the conviction that coming to the sites very early to wait for the telenovela to commence was unmanly. An informant, a male, who had arrived just on time for the programme stated:

Oh! Madam, already most of my friends laugh at me and complain about the fact that I watch this *Kumkum Bhagya* programme which they believe was made for women. So I will make my case worse by coming here very early to wait for them to start. If that happens then that means I cannot walk with them as my friends anymore because I will definitely not be able to stand the rate at which I will be mocked by them... (giggles) already, they call me Mr. Kumkum.

The statement above dovetails into what Morley (2005) indicates that men prefer to watch hard programmes (documentary and news) whereas women desire soft programmes (telenovelas and soap operas) and as a result, men who are found to be avid viewers of soft programmes such as telenovelas are linked with femininity and weakness.

Activities

We observed that some social actors especially children monitored commercials that usually commenced the telenovela which gave them a cue that the telenovela was about to start. Such social actors were conversant with

almost all the commercials that were shown before the start of the telenovela.

Most of the adults that arrived before the telenovela commenced engaged in discussing issues that were outside the reason for gathering at the locations (*Kumkum Bhagya*). Topics discussed mostly centered on their social, political, economic and religious lives. For example, during one of our ethnographic visits, we came across four male social actors who were debating various church activities prior to the start of the telenovela. Upon inquiring about why they engaged in such discussions before the start of the telenovela at the television viewing site, one of them indicated that they mostly watched the telenovela every evening so even if there is any discussion to be done on it, they do it after watching and that if they miss any episode, they visit friends who have watched those episodes for briefing on what they had missed. This allows them to make sense of subsequent episodes when they visit the site the next day to watch the next episode. To these social actors, a gathering at the television viewing site prior to the start of the telenovela was an opportunity to discuss other social issues that are also of great importance to them. Another interesting observation we made was the fact that some social actors (women) used the pre-viewing period to discuss other telenovelas (eg. *Veera*, *Simply Maria*) that they also frequently watch. For example, as one social actor approached the site, she called out to her friend who was already seated and asked, “Did you see what Veera did to Bradev yesterday?” And as the friend responded, she went to sit by her and continued the discussion on what happened in the said episode of the telenovela, *Veera*. For these social actors, it is a normal and culturally acceptable to discuss other topics which may not necessarily be about *Kumkum Bhagya*. The pre-viewing period at the selected sites, therefore, encouraged more informal social interactions with known and unknown faces which is a major characteristic of third places according to Oldenburg (1999).

Another thing that formed part of the pre-viewing culture was social actors’ adjustment to the setting. Some participants used the few minutes before the start of the telenovela to look for a suitable place to sit or stand. At one of the sites, those who came early enough used their chairs to secure a place right in front of the supermarket. According to some informants, because the place is a public site, there is the policy of “first come, first served” where, irrespective of an individual’s age or social class, if the person comes to secure a place and sits or stands there throughout the programme, nobody has the right to ask that person to move or change position.

Some mothers used the pre-viewing period to engage in maternal care attending to their babies’ needs in order to ensure that the babies were either asleep or quiet during the telecast of the telenovela. To these mothers, there is the desire for full concentration during the broadcast of *Kumkum Bhagya* hence anything that needs to be done should be completed prior to the start of the programme. The pre-viewing culture at the selected sites, therefore, encouraged movement and more socialisation before the telecast of the telenovela- *Kumkum Bhagya*.

Viewing Culture

The viewing culture comprised all the activities, values and norms that took place each day between 7:30pm and 8:30pm during our ethnographic visits to the three sites. The range of time (7:30pm - 8:30pm) represents the immediate viewing period when the viewers sit in front of the television set at the sites to watch the telenovela as it begins till it ends. The viewing culture is also grouped into three parts- *adjustment to the television set*, *viewing styles* and *commercial breaks*.

Adjustment to the television set

Immediately the telenovela begins, social actors try as much as possible to adjust themselves to the television set. For example, at one of the supermarket site, participants who were gathered began to find suitable places to either sit or stand in order to get a clearer view of episodes being shown on the television. The owners of the sites were, however, the only people that could ask a person to move away from where he or she was standing. Power through ownership is thus seen at play even as audience viewed the telenovela at these domesticated but open television viewing sites. For example, an informant stated during one of the focus group discussion,

It sometimes becomes annoying but there is nothing we can do about it because you will come here and immediately the telenovela begins, you try to stand at a place that will give you a full view of the screen and all of a sudden, this woman (the owner) will ask you to move away for her friend to put a seat there... you just cannot complain.

The viewing of the popular culture- *Kumkum Bhagya* at the various sites thus brings about the display of power which according to most scholars such as Hall (1998) and Storey (2009) is evident whenever popular culture is at work.

As social actors adjusted themselves to the television set, there was the subversion of some particular Ghanaian culture at the sites. In Ghana, great deference is attached to age and social status. A younger person is mostly expected to show appropriate deference when talking or relating to an elderly person. It is also considered as a sign of respect for a child to get up from a seat for an elderly person to occupy it (“Ghana”, 2006). However, this general value was subverted and disregarded when children were seen occupying the few seats at the sites whereas the adults stood during the telecast of the programme. In this case, the children at the site paid no

attention to the fact that the adults were standing whilst the latter, on the other hand, also saw nothing wrong with the children occupying the seats while they stood. This is in line with Storey's (2009) assertion that popular culture gives people the chance to subvert prevailing norms of behaviour within a society.

Viewing Styles

An interesting finding that came out of the data had to do with the manner in which the social actors viewed the telenovela. During the viewing of the telenovela, we observed that men had specific ways of viewing the telenovela which differed from the way women viewed it. Almost all the activities that took place as the audience were viewing the telenovela at the sites were gendered. Men at the sites preferred to watch the telenovela in silence without any interruption whereas most of the women multi-tasked even as they watched the telenovela. Our interviews with the informants further affirmed this when the men kept insisting that they did not see the reason they should come to the site to watch a particular programme and be doing other things. To these men, watching the telenovela with rapt attention enabled them to understand the telenovela "in order not to miss anything".

During the multitasking, most of the nursing mothers interrupted other social actors who stood by them and kept asking these people about what had happened as they took their eyes away from the telenovela to cater to their children. There was always a "shhh" sound which implied "keep quiet" that was made to the women whenever they began to ask questions or talk as the telenovela was ongoing. As Morley (2005, p. 142) states, "it is not that women have no desire to watch television attentively, but rather that their domestic position makes it almost impossible for them to do so unless all other members of the household are "out of the way".

Interestingly, the sites could get very quiet and the look on people's faces gave a clear indication of an immersion into the viewing act. However, just like the sounds that are made by most football fanatics when their team loses or scores a goal, certain exclamatory sounds such as "ahh", "oww", "aaba" were heard in unison by most of the social actors as a response to scenes of the episodes. These sounds indicated the viewers' agreement, disagreement or dissatisfaction with something that had happened in an episode they were watching.

Commercial breaks

During telecast, there were at least four commercials that were shown before an episode ended for a day. When the social actors got very engrossed in the telenovela and they realised that it had suddenly been paused for a commercial to take place, most of them would verbally abuse the producers of the programme as though these producers were within site. In one instance, some social actors were busily enjoying the twist in an episode when a sudden break was given for commercials and one social actor screamed out of disappointment, "The workers of Adom TV are very annoying". To some of our informants, the commercial breaks truncate the flow of episodes and lessen the excitement derived from watching the programme. This, according to them, justified the pouring of invectives on the producers.

Contrary to the pre-viewing period where informants paid particular attention to commercials that came before the start of the telenovela to serve as a cue for the commencement of an episode, informants revealed that they paid less attention to commercials that were shown in-between scenes. This contradicts Mckearny et al.'s (1994) claim that the more social actors got engrossed in a selected programme, the more likely they are to watch and recall commercials that are shown. To the social actors, these commercial breaks gave them the opportunity to engage in other activities before the telenovela continued. At the hair salon, for example, almost all the social actors moved out whenever an advert was ongoing. Some of our informants indicated that they moved out during the commercial break in order to stretch their limbs since they had spent all the time at one position inside the salon fixated to the set. Commercial breaks, therefore, became a socially acceptable time to take a break, relax and even talk to other social actors about previous scenes. The fixated and attentive looks social actors had on as they viewed the episodes were always replaced with smiles and relaxation during commercial breaks.

Post-Viewing Culture

The post-viewing culture in this study began immediately an episode of the telenovela ended and within the next fifteen minutes before social actors dispersed from the sites. Through the observations, interviews and focus group discussions, we found that the post-viewing time was the period for debates, discussions, commentaries and predictions of events in the current and next episodes.

The one-on-one interviews revealed that social actors mostly organised discussions within the premises of the viewing location at the end of each episode. This according to Adia (2014) can be termed as a direct form of sociability where viewers discuss a television programme at the exact place the television viewing took place as it goes on, or immediately it ends. We observed some group discussions for some days and joined them after we had finished viewing the programme after each field work. A middle-aged woman initiated the discussion in one of the groups. On one such occasion, wrapped in an African wax print cloth from her chest to her toe with multi-

coloured slippers, she moved away from the supermarket immediately the telenovela ended to sit by a rock adjacent it. Interestingly, immediately she sat down, some two social actors joined her and there she raised the topic about what they watched the previous day as a precedence to what they had watched on that very day. Right after initiating the discussion, the other social actors who were also females joined in the discussion and then three other females joined. The discussion became very interesting and it was mostly about characters' behaviours, physical features, dressing and fashion, people's views concerning certain scenes in the telenovela and most times a debate on certain actions by the actors. The five other women who joined were also in their thirties and forties.

During the discussion, any member of the group who assumes the position of a moderator wields power. This is because whenever the debate became intense and there was so much noise, the moderator was the one that determined who should talk and could call for silence. Also, all the members had equal freedom to express themselves. As we joined the group, they made us feel really comfortable and at times when we were quiet, they would ask us about our view concerning the issues being discussed to make us feel welcomed and also indicate the participatory nature of the discussion. This buttresses the point that "regulars" at third places always have the responsibility of making newcomers feel at home through playful tone of language use and inviting them to conversations (Oldenburg, 1999).

In an interview with the moderator of the discussion group, she stated that since they were all married women, the issues they discussed, commented on and sometimes debated were those that affected their daily lives as women. She further indicated that they, in addition, discussed other issues which could lead them to predict events in the next episode. Hence, they always waited in anticipation of visiting the site the next day for events in the subsequent episode.

After an episode of the telenovela had ended, we observed that most social actors at the three sites dispersed to their various destinations while discussing in transit issues in the episodes watched or those yet to come. Through the post-viewing discussions, people are able to get moral lessons, share their life experiences and also seek advice from other social actors.

Conclusion

This study aimed at examining the phenomenon of viewing telenovela at domesticated but open television viewing sites in Ghana. It was hinged on the objective of investigating the culture that surrounds the viewing of *Kumkum Bhagya* at three domesticated but open sites in Winneba- Ghana. First, Audience performances at the sites were not limited to the viewing activity but also included other forms of social interactions that bordered on issues of the locally familiar, thus preparing the viewing sites as grounds for the dissemination and sharing of information relevant to informational needs of viewers and by extension, the community in which the audiences reside. Such interactions facilitated profound levels of socialization among the viewers before and after the telecast of the telenovela. Second, the study revealed the appropriation of narratives of agents to understand and get further insight into the subsequent telenovela episodes. Thus viewing agents, themselves original viewers at the sites, also played the role of acting as the extended bodies and sights of audiences who were temporarily absent but needed to follow the plot in the flow of episodes. Therefore, agency as a communication element was grounded at the viewing sites and was fully utilised by audiences. Third, the paper also revealed a display of power as disguises and anchored on ownership of both the site of viewing and the ownership of the television set. Hall (1998) and Storey (2009) have all indicated how power is deployed in locations where popular culture seems to be at work and becomes a means of rationalising the enactment of activities.

Finally, viewing sites, similar to any other site of social activity, became highly gendered both in the choice of which aspects of the episode to discuss, the kind of interaction to engage in, the forms of courtesies extended to other viewers and the kind of extra-viewing activity a viewer engages in pre-viewing, viewing, and post-viewing performances. Indeed, post-viewing discussions became moments for discussing the relevance of the plot and the narratives of the episodes to their social lives; viewers at the sites learn moral lessons, share life experiences and seek advice from other social actors.

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