

Acceptable Boundaries for Radical Expressions in Japanese Reality Shows

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Abstract

In recent years, it has become challenging to broadcast extreme content with violent and grotesque expressions in Japan owing to the changing values of younger viewers and stricter regulations imposed by organizations, such as the Broadcasting Ethics and Program Improvement Organization. This cleaning up of variety programs has led to a decline in their attractiveness, resulting in viewers avoiding television and choosing other sources of entertainment. Additionally, many viewers wish to watch radical content, as they did a decade ago. Therefore, this study aimed to analyze viewers' boundaries of acceptable extremism using a questionnaire survey. A representative survey of 103 people aged 18–24 years, who are considered to be the most tolerant of extreme content, was conducted. The results revealed that staging violence involving areas close to vital parts of the human body could lead to serious injury and were unacceptable, whereas staging minor violence involving non-vulnerable areas, that included filth with mosaic, were generally acceptable. Therefore, the former case is not acceptable to be aired in any program, while the latter is considered acceptable if aired in a scrambled format.

Keywords: radical expressions, reality show, broadcasting ethics, ethical boundary analysis, questionnaire analysis

1 Introduction

This study attempted to clarify the boundaries of acceptable extreme expressions for viewers that would lower the attractiveness of variety programs in television broadcasting and result in a decrease in viewership. This chapter defines terms, such as variety programs, relevant organizations, and market trends.

1.1 Definition of variety programs

A variety program is a genre of television (TV) programming that combines several types of entertainment: talk shows, news reporting, documentaries, sketch comedy, musical performances, quiz contests, competitions, talent shows, and shows featuring extreme stunts, food, travel, trivia, magic, and audience participation. Originally, variety shows were distributed by broadcast media. There are two types of variety shows, namely sitcoms, which are scripted, and live shows. The term "variety show" was coined in Japan and is known as "reality show" in English-speaking countries [1].

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1.2 Market trends for variety shows

Figure 1 shows the change in the TV actor rate (the percentage of the total number of people who performed the relevant activity for at least 15 min per day) over a 5-year period [2]. The figure depicts that the TV actor rate has been on a downward trend since 2005, decreasing by approximately 15% over the 25-year period from 1995 to 2020. This is evidently related to the spread of smartphones and the Internet, but the number of people who use TV to obtain information is decreasing, and the significance of TV is waning.

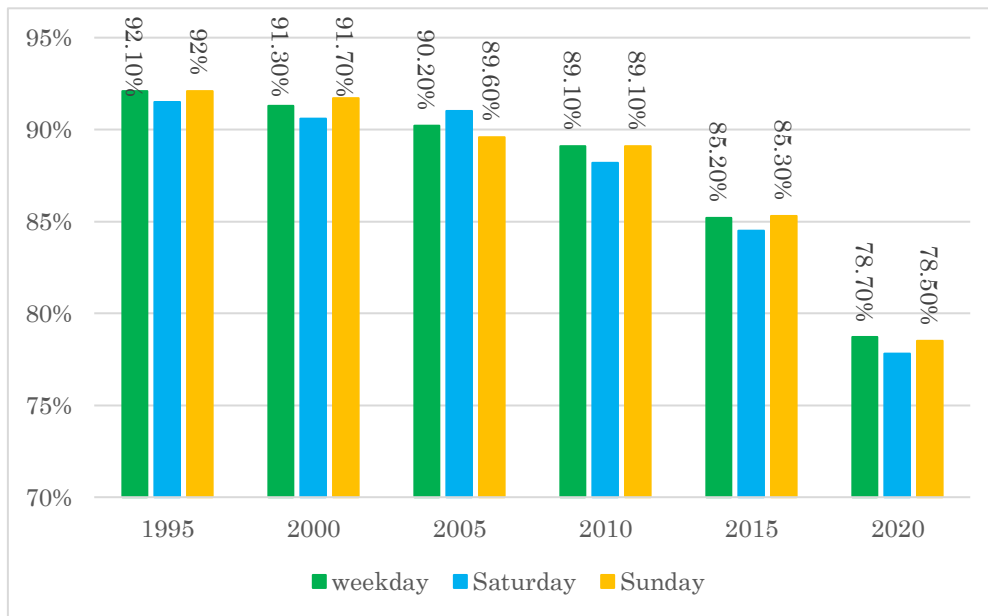


Figure 1: Percentage of TV Actors (Source: Reference [2])

Figure 2 shows the graph of annual HUT (total household viewership) trends in television broken down into two periods: the first and second halves of the year. This figure summarizes the viewing trends of those who watch TV for entertainment or as a hobby. As shown in the above graph of TV viewership rates, there is a downward trend every year, indicating that people's interest in TV is decreasing.

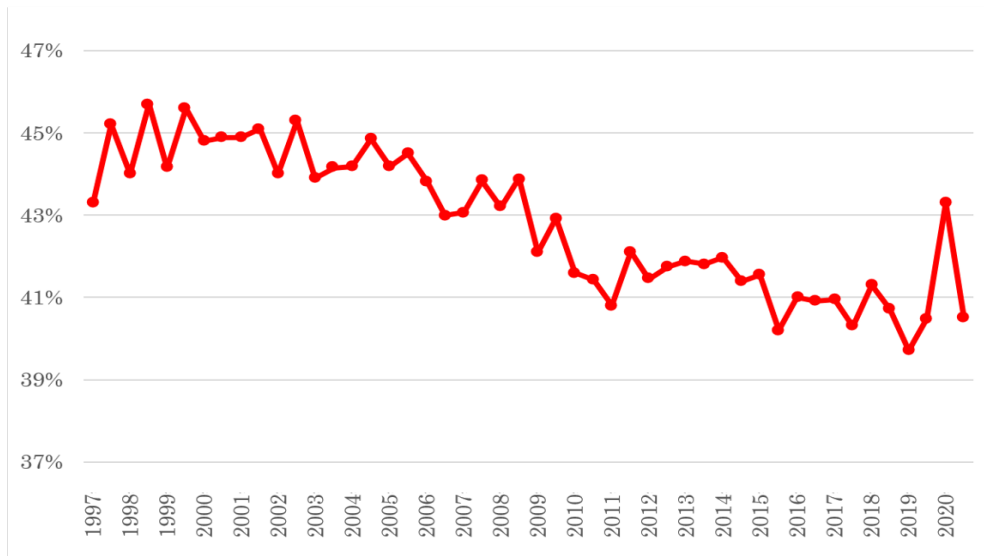


Figure 2: Annual change in the total household viewership (HUT) (Source: Reference [3])

Figure 3 shows the results of a survey conducted by ORICON STYLE in 2015 on the appropriateness of restrictions on broadcasting ethics. The survey notes that in recent years, different opinions were raised as follows: 1. restrictions on TV have the advantage of not adversely affecting viewers, and the current regulations are appropriate and 2. there are several disadvantages of tightening regulations, such as the reduced pleasure of watching TV.

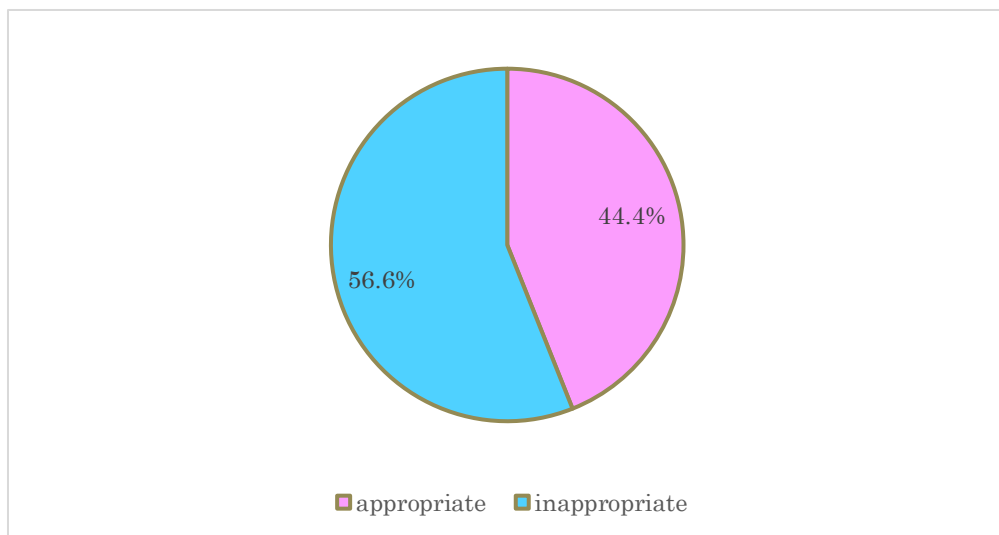


Figure 3: Results of the survey on the appropriateness of current TV regulations. (Source: Reference [4])

Those who agreed with the opinion that the regulations are not appropriate believed that "The regulations are too strict, and all programs have the same content," "If too many regulations are implemented, programs will become boring, and people will turn away from TV, which

will be a real downfall," and "The broadcasting organization is too sensitive" [4]. Against this background, 55.6% of the respondents answered that restrictions on TV are not appropriate, apparently exceeding the number of those who considered them to be appropriate. This indicates that a large number of individuals are seeking viewing pleasure, despite the presence of extreme scenes in programs.

1.3 Mechanisms for restricting expressions in variety shows

At present, broadcasting content, which is in violation of broadcasting ethics, on terrestrial airwaves in Japan is restricted by an organization called Broadcasting Ethics & Program Improvement Organization (BPO).

The Broadcasting Ethics Verification Committee manages the autonomy of the broadcasting industry by issuing opinions and views for the purpose of deliberation to improve the broadcasted content and verification of falsehoods and cover-ups in programs [5].

Institutions that broadcast in violation of broadcasting ethics receive corrective guidance from the BPO to change their content accordingly. The authors conducted a telephone survey to clarify the criteria by which the BPO judges broadcasts to be in violation of broadcasting ethics. Specifically, questions were posed to the BPO's inquiry desk regarding the criteria for regulation and making judgments, boundaries of extremism, and broadcasting outside of terrestrial broadcasting. Findings revealed that the criteria and boundaries for regulations have not been clearly defined and that the need for guidance is mainly formulated through meetings based on viewer opinions received by the BPO and reactions on social networking services (social media) and other media.

2 Research Objectives and Methods

The survey in Chapter 1 allowed us to consider that one reason for the across-the-board slump in television viewership is the regulations imposed by BPO and other organizations based on the reactions of some viewers.

Movements that can be described as interventions and interferences in broadcasting by public authorities are becoming increasingly apparent [6].

Furthermore, with the recent spread of scrambled broadcasting, paid distribution, and other broadcasting methods, an environment in which viewers can explicitly choose the programs they wish to watch is being created. By utilizing these methods, it is possible to broadcast more attractive programs to those who feel that the current regulations are excessive and want to watch more extreme programs. In contrast, to realize the broadcasting of programs as described above, it is necessary to identify actions that may be subject to correction by the BPO but are acceptable to several viewers. In other words, it is important to produce and broadcast radical programs while identifying the boundaries that are unacceptable to the audience segment that desires such radical programs.

Ogawa pointed out that this has only been adjusted while being intertwined with public opinion, social background, and mass media interest in the issues at the time [7].

This study conducted a questionnaire survey to investigate the boundaries of acceptable extremism in television broadcasting. Respondents were asked to list 10 extreme scenes that had been broadcast in the past in commercial television broadcasting and to answer whether they were "acceptable" or "unacceptable" based on the assumption that they would watch these scenes. The questionnaire was distributed online to a limited number of people between the ages of 18 and 24 years, and their responses were collected. This age group was selected because it is considered to have the highest level of tolerance for extreme expressions among the wide range of TV viewers. For example, extreme content, such as in videos and games, is regulated as R18 (Restricted 18). Furthermore, we believe that individuals who are older than 25 years tend to be hypersensitive to extreme images owing to their experiences of childbirth and child-rearing.

The idea is that "people feel that their communication influences others, and as a result, they change their attitudes and behavior" [8].

The estimation that "children will be influenced by TV" is transformed into the event of "removing the cause of the influence" (i.e., criticizing to remove the cause) [9].

The survey provides a more detailed insight into the findings in the production of the program and differs from other related works in two ways. First, it includes detailed items, such as "nose crayfish," "slap," "headbutt," and "punch in the face," all of which are acts of harm to the face. Second, the age range of the participants was limited. Television has a wide range of viewers, ranging from 0 to 100 years. However, extremism is rather broad, and multiple dilemmas would arise when conducting surveys on it. Therefore, limiting the age range allowed us to respect the views of individuals with more specific intentions.

For these reasons, we decided to conduct the survey with participants in the age group of 18 to 24 years, gather their responses, tabulate the percentages of "unacceptable" responses by scene and arrange them in descending order, and identify the point with the largest difference as the "borderline of unacceptable extremism." Additionally, we intend to generalize the survey through future efforts to promote the survey to broadcasting ethics.

3 Research Results and Discussion

A total of 103 valid responses to the questionnaire survey were received. The survey results showed that "nasal crayfish, slap on the nose, vomiting (with mosaic), kancho, and clamping technique" were acceptable for broadcast while "headbutt, punch in the face, walking barefoot on fire, sinking a person, and running over a person with a car" were unacceptable. The proportion of respondents who answered "unacceptable" for the 10 extreme scenes were as follows:

- | | |
|------------------|-------------|
| 1) Nose crayfish | : 9 (8.7%) |
| 2) Slapping | : 10 (9.7%) |

3) Vomiting (with mosaic)	: 14 (13.6%)
4) Kancho	: 22 (21.4%)
5) Clamping	: 23 (22.3%)
Boundary line between acceptable and unacceptable	
6) Head butts	: 41 (39.8%)
7) Face punch	: 43 (41.7%)
8) Walking barefoot on fire	: 46 (44.7%)
9) Sinking someone	: 54 (52.4%)
10) Running over someone with a car	: 57 (55.3%)

Questionnaire to determine the level of tolerance for extremism in terrestrial broadcasting.

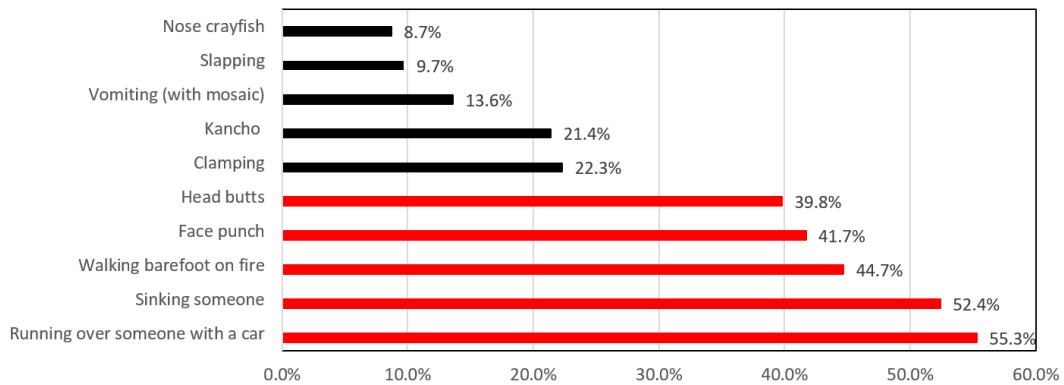


Figure 4 Boundary line of acceptability of extreme expressions based on questionnaire tabulation
(black bars indicate "acceptable"/red bars denote "unacceptable"))

If we define the boundary where the adjacent values in the above items diverge the most as "the boundary of acceptable extremism," it is between "clamping" and "headbutt." Therefore, the five items that received more "none" votes than "clamping" can be considered unethical and impractical to broadcast. This result may be attributed to the fact that even viewers who are highly receptive to extremism would find it unacceptable to perform techniques associated with fatal injuries, such as slapping the eyes or the head. For example, "slapping," "head butt," and "face punches" all cause damage to the head, but only "slapping" was considered to be acceptable. This is because damage to the eyes, the brain, or other vital parts of the human body evokes the image of an irreversible incident, and the program's director needs to pay attention to this aspect when selecting the location and means of extreme expressions. Conversely, it can be said that if extreme expressions are carefully selected, they

will be acceptable to about 80% of the younger generation.

The survey was conducted based on the assumption of commercial broadcasting; however, acceptability may vary depending on the time of day and broadcaster. For example, "nasal crayfish" and "slap" are not likely to be accepted during the hours when children would generally be watching or on public broadcasting stations, such as NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation). In contrast, late-night broadcasts and scrambled programs can broadcast up to the above-mentioned boundaries, and pay channels and Internet distribution systems allow viewers to explicitly choose the programs they wish to watch, making it possible to broadcast programs containing extreme expressions despite the restrictions. However, the number of viewers who supported such programs tended to decrease as the degree of extremism increased.

4 Conclusions and Future Issues

In an attempt to solve the issue of low viewer ratings of TV programs, this study clarified the boundary line between acceptable and unacceptable extreme expressions through a questionnaire survey. We obtained 103 responses from young adults aged 18–24 years, who were considered to be highly receptive to extreme expressions and found that the broadcasting of images of fatal or permanent injuries to the eyes or head was unacceptable. Based on these findings, we propose a policy for selecting appropriate broadcasting timeslots and methods. By producing and broadcasting programs based on these results, outstanding and attractive programs can be broadcasted, leading to higher viewer ratings.

The survey was conducted only among those who were highly receptive to extreme expressions, but it is necessary to conduct one among those individuals who are more or less receptive to extreme expressions, and analyze the differences to understand the acceptability of the expressions in additional detail.

All broadcasters will be required to act based on such "ethics" [10].

Additionally, although the present survey considered only the age of the participants, an analysis based on attributes, such as gender, occupation, and interests, will be essential when considering the airing time, methods of airing, and publicity methods.

Specific viewer information, such as gender and age, can be obtained to analyze viewers' needs and produce more appealing programs based on customer relationship management [11].

Based on the above, we would like to gain insight into more detailed ethical boundaries in the future and disseminate that contributes to the production of variety programs, which will be accepted by a larger number of viewers, and maximizes entertainment value.

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