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FROM SCREEN TO HOME: HOW SOAP OPERAS SHAPE SPOUSAL COMMUNICATION AMONG GHANAIAN COUPLES

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study explored how soap opera viewing is perceived to shape verbal and non-verbal spousal communication among married couples in the Cape Coast Metropolis, Ghana.

Design/Methodology/Approach: A qualitative case-study design was used. Purposive, criterion-based sampling selected 10 married couples (20 participants in the Cape Coast Metropolis) who watched soap operas at least three times a week for at least one hour per day. Data were collected through face-to-face semi-structured interviews and analysed thematically.

Findings: Participants reported diverse preferences, particularly among wives, and described adopting endearments, polite language and emotional expression from soap operas. They perceived possible benefits, including affection, intimacy, shared humour and fewer disagreements, alongside risks such as insecurity, neglect and unrealistic comparisons. Reported coping strategies included selective viewing, distinguishing drama from real life, open spousal discussion, seeking advice and balancing viewing with other activities.

Research Limitation: The study draws on self-reported accounts from a purposively selected sample of 10 couples in one Cape Coast metropolis. The findings are context-specific and do not establish causal effects or statistical generalisability.

Practical Implication: Couples and counsellors may use critical discussion of televised relationship portrayals to negotiate realistic expectations and communication preferences. Producers may also consider how storylines model relational behaviours.

Social Implication: The findings support media literacy and culturally sensitive conversations about romance, gender roles and relationship expectations within Ghanaian households.

Originality/Value: The study offers a context-specific qualitative account of how viewers interpret and negotiate soap-opera messages within marriage. It applies uses and gratifications theory to relational outcomes, including how communication practices may be adopted, resisted and managed between partners.

***Keywords*:** *Ghana. married couples. Relationship. spousal communication. soap operas*

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INTRODUCTION

Soap operas are popular and influential forms of media entertainment (Zaheen, Khan & Amin, 2021). They attract loyal audiences, particularly women who watch them regularly (Bhattacharjee & Sarkar, 2017). Their melodramatic plots, characters and settings commonly explore love, romance, marriage, family and society. This appeal has prompted studies of their possible effects on viewers' attitudes, behaviours and relationships (Zaheen, Khan & Amin, 2021; Arafat et al., 2020).

One important area is spousal communication, defined here as the verbal and non-verbal exchange of information, feelings and opinions between married or cohabiting partners. Such communication is associated with the quality and satisfaction of marital relationships and with partners' personal and social well-being (Awosan & Iroye, 2023). It may be shaped by personality, culture, context and media use. Some couples turn to media portrayals for guidance about love and intimacy (Ray, 2022); if such portrayals become reference points for judging everyday relationships, viewers may develop expectations that are difficult to reconcile with their own circumstances. Extensive engagement with soap operas may also divert attention from direct communication between partners (Lartey, 2020). Other accounts suggest that viewers sometimes learn from and apply what they watch in daily life (Psychology Today, 2023; Andeso, 2019).

Soap operas may therefore offer constructive communication examples while also encouraging unrealistic expectations, with possible consequences for spousal communication. Recent studies have examined soap operas' portrayals of marriage and their possible role in shaping perceptions of committed relationships (Iftikhar & Yasmeen, 2023). Merritt (2010) similarly discussed how television's romantic portrayals may influence adolescents' expectations, potentially informing their later relationships.

Although prior studies have examined soap operas' portrayals of romance, gender roles and family life, the literature reviewed here leaves an empirical gap concerning how married couples in Ghana interpret these portrayals and negotiate them in everyday spousal communication. Research on individual viewing motives or on the representation of relationships does not fully explain how one partner's adoption of language, emotional expression or relationship expectations is received by the other partner, or how couples manage both useful and unsettling comparisons between televised and lived relationships.

Research situated in Ghana is important because local-language dubbing, cultural norms and patterns of family interaction may shape how imported and locally available narratives are understood. This study therefore uses a qualitative case study in the Cape Coast Metropolis to examine couples' stated preferences, perceived communication traits learned from soap operas, and perceived benefits, challenges and coping strategies. Rather than assuming that findings from other settings do not apply, it explores these processes in their local context. The study takes a relational perspective by considering how viewing may shape spousal exchanges and how couples'

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relationships inform their interpretations of media content. The following research questions and guiding propositions guided the study:

- How do soap-opera preferences vary among married couples, and what factors influence these preferences?

Proposition 1: Married women have diverse and varied preferences for soap operas, depending on their personal tastes, interests and moods.

- What verbal communication traits have married women acquired from watching soap operas, and how do they apply them to spousal communication?

Proposition 2: Married women acquire some verbal communication skills or habits from watching soap operas, and they apply them to their spousal communication.

- What are the perceived influences of watching soap operas on spousal communication among married couples?

Proposition 3: Watching soap operas can influence spousal communication, and couples may cope with these influences in different ways depending on the context and content of the soap operas.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Uses and gratifications theory, associated with Katz et al. (2012), is an established framework in media-effects and audience research (Ruggiero, 2009). It seeks to explain the social and psychological needs that motivate people to select and use media content for particular forms of gratification (Rubin, 1994, as cited in Lim & Ting, 2012). The theory treats audiences as active users who seek content that fulfils their needs and desires (Whiting & Williams, 2013). Although the approach has been criticised, it remains useful for examining audiences' motivations for engaging with media such as television and radio (Lim & Ting, 2012; Ruggiero, 2009).

Applying uses and gratifications theory to this study means considering what viewers seek from soap operas and how they interpret the content. Participants may watch to learn about relationships, identify with characters, experience entertainment and suspense, or interact socially with other viewers. These gratifications do not determine a uniform effect: the same narrative may be interpreted differently and applied, rejected or discussed in the context of a couple's own relationship (Whiting & Williams, 2013). Gender, age, education, income, culture and personality may also shape viewing preferences and interpretations (Whiting & Williams, 2013). The theory therefore provides a useful starting point for examining viewing motives, while this study focuses on how those motives and interpretations are described in relation to spousal communication.

A limitation for the present purpose is that uses and gratifications theory primarily explains why individuals select media and the gratifications they seek; on its own, it does not fully specify how meanings are negotiated between spouses or how one partner's adoption of a televised

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communication style is accepted, resisted or reinterpreted by the other. The present study addresses this analytical gap by examining participants' accounts of viewing motives alongside the perceived relational consequences of those viewing practices. This is an extension of the theory's application to spousal communication, rather than a claim that the theory itself is invalid.

Several reasons account for the patronage of soap operas. They provide entertainment value, serving as a source of amusement, relaxation, and escape from boredom and stress (Omar, 2014). They offer viewers a form of diversion and allow them to immerse themselves in dramatic storylines and suspenseful plots. Also, soap operas serve as a source of information, providing viewers with knowledge, awareness, and education about various topics and issues (Yang & Bailey, 2020). They can offer insights into different aspects of life, such as relationships, social dynamics, and cultural practices. Thirdly, soap operas provide a sense of identification for viewers. Viewers may see themselves in the characters and find comfort or inspiration in their stories. Lastly, soap operas facilitate social interaction among viewers. They provide a common topic of conversation and bonding among friends and other viewers (Omar, 2014). Viewers can discuss plot twists, character developments, and their own interpretations, fostering a sense of community and shared experience.

The Ghanaian Context

One relevant aspect of the Ghanaian context is the popularity of soap operas, including imported serial dramas dubbed into local languages. These programmes typically feature continuing stories about love, family and social issues (Asiamah & Ofori-Birikorang, 2018). Asiamah and Ofori-Birikorang (2018) note that telenovelas such as Esmeralda and Rosalinda reached Ghanaian audiences in the 1990s. Kwode, Agbenyo and Yuissif (2020) relate the spread of these programmes to their availability in Ghanaian media; over time, dramas from Asia and Europe also gained audiences (Asiamah & Ofori-Birikorang, 2018). Viewers may watch for entertainment, information, identification and social interaction (Kwode et al., 2020).

Soap operas can also offer storylines through which audiences reflect on social issues, cultures, and lifestyles, and they may prompt discussion with family, friends, and online communities. At the same time, critics argue that imported soap operas can circulate non-Ghanaian values and lifestyles and encourage comparisons with foreign settings (Asiamah & Ofori-Birikorang, 2018). Some commentators also argue that imported content competes with local productions for viewers and revenue, potentially limiting opportunities for local talent (Asiamah & Ofori-Birikorang, 2018). Idealised portrayals of romance and family life may encourage unrealistic expectations or dissatisfaction with one's own relationship. These possibilities make it important to examine how Ghanaian couples interpret and negotiate soap-opera narratives rather than assuming that viewers accept them uncritically.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative case-study design to explore how married couples in the Cape Coast Metropolis, Ghana, perceive soap operas' influence on spousal communication. A

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qualitative approach was appropriate because the study sought participants' accounts, meanings and experiences rather than estimates of prevalence or causal effects. The researchers used purposive, criterion-based sampling to select 10 married couples (20 participants: 10 women and 10 men). Eligible couples watched soap operas at least three times a week for at least one hour per day. The researchers report verifying viewing frequency by asking participants to show their viewing histories or records. Participants ranged in age from 25 to 55 years and had educational backgrounds ranging from primary to postgraduate level. Recruitment aimed to include couples from varied socioeconomic backgrounds and more than one community within the metropolis.

The researchers did not obtain formal third-party ethics approval, as they considered it unnecessary for this type of study in the local context. Participants were informed about the academic purpose of the study, and oral informed consent was obtained before interviews. They were assured that identifying information would remain confidential and that their accounts would be reported without identifying them. Potential participants were identified through word-of-mouth referrals from the researchers' personal contacts and acquaintances. These referrals were the route used to locate potential participants; eligibility was determined using the purposive criteria described above. The researchers approached potential participants and confirmed their marital status and soap-opera viewing habits.

Face-to-face interviews lasting 30–60 minutes were conducted using a semi-structured guide with open-ended questions about (a) viewing habits and preferences; (b) motives and attitudes for watching soap operas; (c) perceptions of the realism and relevance of soap operas; (d) perceived influences on communication skills and behaviours; (e) positive and negative outcomes for spousal communication; and (f) discussions of soap-opera content with spouses or others. Projective prompts invited participants to describe how they might react in situations similar to those of soap-opera characters or to compare their communication styles with those of characters. No programme clips were shown, allowing participants to draw on their own recollections and interpretations. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, and field notes were taken.

Interview transcripts and field notes were analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns across participants' accounts. NVivo was used to organise the transcripts and codes; it supported data management rather than replacing the researchers' interpretive work. The researchers compared and discussed their interpretations to examine consistency and refine the themes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are organised according to the research questions that were derived from the literature review. For each research question, the relevant codes and quotes from the data were used.

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Research question 1: How do soap-opera preferences vary among married couples, and what factors influence these preferences?

This question sought to investigate the decision-making processes of married individuals, both male and female, in selecting soap operas, as well as the various factors that influence their preferences. A series of interviews was undertaken with a sample of 10 married couples, wherein the wives were initially questioned regarding their preferences for soap operas. Subsequently, the husbands were also interviewed in order to gather their respective viewpoints. The code that held the utmost relevance to this inquiry pertained to soap opera preference, denoting the specific type or genre of soap opera that the interviewee views or holds a fondness for.

Based on the available data, it was observed that wives reported engaging in the consumption of various genres of soap operas, including Philippine, Indian, Korean, Mexican, and American productions. Nevertheless, they exhibited shared inclinations towards genres such as drama, romance, and themes centred on love. In general, husbands tended to report a more restricted or intermittent engagement with soap operas, yet they acknowledged having encountered segments of 'Akan' translated soap operas through channels such as Adom TV and UTV (Local Ghanaian Channels). One individual observed that individuals engage in the consumption of soap operas for the purpose of entertainment, character identification, and moral instruction.

Various factors influenced wives' preferences, such as the availability of content, language and cultural affinity, production quality, perceived educational value, and entertainment value. The husbands refrained from engaging in extensive discussions regarding their personal preferences, however, they acknowledged the entertainment value and moral significance associated with soap operas.

Married women exhibited a higher degree of enthusiasm towards soap operas, whereas both husbands and wives acknowledged the entertainment value and depiction of real-life issues inherent in these television programs. This finding suggests that soap operas possess a certain level of appeal among married viewers of both genders, while simultaneously maintaining a predominantly female viewership.

The analysis revealed that various factors were ascribed to the preferences for soap operas observed among the participants. The aforementioned factors that exert influence on individuals' preferences exhibit a diverse range and have been determined to possess intricate characteristics. Some of the factors that emerged from the data were:

1. The availability and accessibility of soap operas on different channels or platforms
2. The familiarity and affinity with certain cultures or languages
3. The quality and attractiveness of the soap opera production
4. The lessons and messages that can be learned or derived from watching soap operas
5. The entertainment and enjoyment that can be gained from watching soap operas

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The interview accounts were consistent with Proposition 1: participants described a range of soap-opera preferences shaped by their individual inclinations, interests and emotional states. The following excerpts illustrate these preferences:

> Interviewee 1: *"the type if soap operas I am watching now is prima donnas an opera from the Philippians."*
> Interviewee 2: *"I watch a lot, that of the Indian, Korean, Mexican and Philippines."*
> Interviewee 3: *"I watch mostly American soaps like Days of Our Lives and General Hospital."*

Research question 2: What verbal communication traits have married women acquired from watching soap operas, and how do they apply them to spousal communication?

The second research question sought to examine the acquisition of communication skills and habits derived from soap operas by both husbands and wives, as well as their application within the context of their marital relationships. The code that is significant pertains to communication traits, specifically verbal and non-verbal abilities that are influenced by soap operas.

According to the accounts provided by wives, they exhibited the acquisition of verbal traits such as employing polite language, utilising endearing terms, articulating emotions, and engaging in conversational exchanges. According to the account of a married individual, the regular consumption of soap operas has led to the adoption of the endearing term "my love" when referring to her spouse, resulting in an enhanced state of happiness. Nevertheless, certain spouses experienced feelings of neglect or insecurity when their husbands declined to adopt characteristics emulated from soap operas.

The acquisition of communication traits was not explicitly discussed by husbands. Nevertheless, it has been observed by a certain husband that soap operas have a significant impact on various aspects of individuals' lives, such as their manner of speaking, emotional expressions, vocabulary usage, and even the development of suspicions within marital relationships when spouses imitate the behaviours of soap opera characters. The individual endeavors to abstain from engaging in detrimental actions and strives to foster constructive relationships.

Both partners acknowledged the potential benefits of non-verbal communication, such as signals and coded language, in strengthening their relationship. One spouse specifically emphasised the role of soap operas in facilitating communication between partners through non-verbal cues such as eye contact and physical touch.

Proposition 2 anticipated that married viewers might acquire verbal communication patterns from soap operas and apply them in marital communication, with positive or negative consequences depending on the content and context. Participants' accounts were consistent with this proposition, as illustrated by the following quotations:

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Interviewee 4: *"It has help it a lot especially how we communicate. During the early stages of our marriage, I found it very difficult calling my husband my love but now due to movie I can call him that with much ease and that has brought a lot of happiness to our home."*

Interviewee 5: *"Sometimes he doesn't pay attention to what I say or he doesn't agree with me. He thinks I'm just talking nonsense or trying to copy what I see on TV."*

Interviewee 6: *"I feel insecure sometimes when I see how romantic and loving the couples are on soap operas. I wonder if my husband still loves me or if he is attracted to someone else."*

In general, soap operas appear to offer valuable examples of positive communication role modelling. However, the impact of traits is contingent upon their application and acceptance by an individual's spouse, which is influenced by cultural and relational factors.

Research question 3: What are the perceived influences of watching soap operas on spousal communication among married couples?

This question investigated the positive and negative impacts of soap operas as perceived by married individuals, specifically wives and husbands, and explored the strategies they employ to cope with these effects. The pertinent codes encompassed both positive and negative effects on the institution of marriage.

The spouses reported various advantages, including decreased instances of disagreements, heightened levels of emotional closeness, strengthened bonds through shared humour, and acquisition of valuable insights into their relationships. However, they also encountered emotions of insecurity, neglect, or dependency. In order to effectively manage their emotions and adapt to challenging situations, individuals employ various coping mechanisms. These strategies include engaging in selective viewing habits, recognising and appreciating cultural disparities depicted in media content, fostering open lines of communication, seeking external guidance, and maintaining a harmonious equilibrium between different activities. The analysis revealed several key positive outcomes or impacts of watching soap operas on family communication:

1. Mitigating disputes or conflicts with their spouses
2. Enhancing the level of intimacy and affection within marital relationships
3. Strengthening the comprehension and collaboration with their spouses
4. Enhancing the levels of happiness and satisfaction within marital relationships

The husbands engaged in a discussion that focused on a reduced number of impacts, while also recognising the potential for both beneficial and detrimental effects. One male spouse expressed the belief that soap operas had a beneficial impact on his marital relationship by enhancing

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communication and fostering a stronger emotional bond. Nevertheless, he observed that the emulation of characters' behaviours should not be indiscriminate.

In general, the act of watching soap operas has been found to have both positive and negative effects on couples' relationships. The mindset adopted during the act of watching, the application of lessons in a compatible manner, and the utilisation of coping strategies appear to be crucial factors in optimising the advantages while minimising the disadvantages.

The interviewees have also coped with these impacts in different ways. Some of the coping strategies are:

1. Being selective and critical of what they watch and learn from soap operas
2. Being aware and respectful of the cultural differences between soap operas and reality
3. Communicating openly and honestly with their husbands about their feelings and opinions
4. Seeking advice or guidance from other sources, such as friends, family, or professionals
5. Balancing their time and attention between watching soap operas and other aspects of their lives

Proposition 3 anticipated that soap-opera viewing could have both positive and negative perceived influences on spousal communication, and that couples might use different coping strategies depending on the content and context. Participants described both kinds of influence and several ways of managing them, as illustrated by the following quotations:

> Interviewee 7: *"I feel insecure sometimes when I see how romantic and loving the couples are on soap operas. I wonder if my husband still loves me or if he is attracted to someone else."*

> Interviewee 8: *"I have learnt how to dress well because sometimes when you dress well your husband will admire you more."*

Discussion

The findings obtained from the analysis of research question one indicate that married individuals, regardless of gender, exhibit varying preferences for soap operas, which are influenced by personal factors. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that they do exhibit certain shared interests pertaining to emotional, relational, and social aspects. Female spouses exhibited higher levels of enthusiasm towards soap operas, whereas male spouses indicated more sporadic viewership. However, both genders acknowledged the entertainment value and the portrayal of real-life issues in these television programs. This observation is consistent with recent studies on the appeal of gendered

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soap operas, as well as their function in meeting social needs. Ahmed (2012), discusses how soap operas address women in particular, appealing to those who value the personal and domestic world. The study notes that women typically use soaps as a way of talking indirectly about their own attitudes and behaviour.

The researchers discovered that female characters portrayed in soap operas tended to be youthful, unmarried, and belonging to the upper social strata. Additionally, these characters were depicted as professionals, typically encountering minimal challenges in balancing their work and personal lives. Additionally, a comparative analysis by Zaheen, Safdar, and Bhatti, (2022) examines the effects of soap operas on television viewers, highlighting how female characters are portrayed as assertive and decision-making authorities in many soap operas. The study suggests that these portrayals can influence viewers' perceptions of gender roles and expectations. The authors contended that this distorted depiction has the potential to engender feelings of misrepresentation among women, ultimately resulting in dissatisfaction with their personal circumstances.

In their study, Ndayi and du Plooy (2019) conducted an analysis on the portrayal of gendered disparities in the depiction of men's and women's association with marriage and childbearing within the business and economic domains of the South African television soap opera Generations. The researchers discovered that male characters were portrayed as individuals responsible for successful business leadership and actively engaged in socio-political matters, whereas female characters were depicted as supportive participants who were deemed incapable of autonomously and effectively contributing to the accumulation of wealth. The researchers reached the determination that the program did not effectively address and challenge traditional beliefs regarding women's rights and roles in the context of business and economic transactions.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that there exists a body of research that does not support the notion that soap opera viewing has detrimental effects on women's self-perception and empowerment. Several studies have indicated that soap operas can serve as a means of entertainment, pleasure, instruction, and motivation for women, particularly in developing nations where they encounter numerous difficulties and limitations.

Furthermore, several scholarly investigations have examined the potential impact of soap opera consumption on the dynamics of marital communication and the decision-making process regarding family planning within the context of married couples. In a study conducted by Sharan and Valente (2002), an assessment was made on the effects of a radio drama series in Nepal that aimed to encourage family planning practices among couples who were in the reproductive age range.

The researchers discovered a notable increase in the likelihood of women who were exposed to the program believing that their spouse supported family planning and engaging in discussions about family planning with their spouse. Additionally, it was discovered that the level of

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communication between spouses at the initial stage was linked to the subsequent utilisation of family planning methods, regardless of exposure to the campaign. It has been suggested that the promotion of couples' collaborative decision-making could serve as a viable approach to enhance the utilisation of family planning methods.

In a similar vein, the study conducted by Lee et al. (2013) investigated the impact of South Korean soap operas on the perceptions of marriage and childbearing among female viewers in Vietnam. The study revealed that Vietnamese women exhibited an inclination towards marrying Korean men and opting for smaller family sizes as a consequence of their exposure to South Korean soap operas. Additionally, it was discovered that the association between exposure and preference was mediated by spousal communication.

The findings for research question 2 suggest that the perceived relationship between soap-opera viewing and communication differs across participants. Wives more readily described adopting verbal traits such as endearments and emotional expression, while husbands did not explicitly describe equivalent adoption, although one participant noted that soap operas may influence speech, vocabulary, emotional expression and suspicion. Participants also described non-verbal cues, such as eye contact and physical touch, as potentially supporting communication. Overall, the accounts suggest that the relationship between viewing and spousal communication depends on the content, how it is interpreted and applied, whether a partner welcomes the behaviour, and its cultural relevance. These findings underscore the importance of critically examining media messages about gender roles and intimate relationships.

The research findings indicate that married women have adopted certain verbal communication characteristics through their exposure to soap operas, and subsequently incorporated them into their communication with their spouses. The effects of this adoption, whether positive or negative, are contingent upon the specific context and content of the soap operas. This discovery aligns with prior research that has examined the influence of soap opera consumption on women's communication abilities and patterns, as well as their marital partnerships.

Livingstone (1988) conducted a survey encompassing a sample size of 1,000 British viewers of soap operas, wherein it was discovered that these individuals engaged in soap opera consumption for a multitude of motives. These motives included but were not limited to seeking an escape from reality, desiring a sense of realism, establishing a connection with the characters, engaging in critical analysis, utilising problem-solving skills, integrating the soap opera into their personal lives, experiencing emotional catharsis, and seeking entertainment.

Additionally, the researcher discovered a positive correlation between the consumption of soap operas and increased levels of interpersonal communication and social engagement among individuals who engage in such viewing habits. In a similar vein, a longstanding study by Carveth and Alexander (1985) conducted a study investigating the motivations behind soap opera viewing

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and the cultivation process among a sample of 200 American viewers. The researchers discovered that individuals who engaged in watching soap operas with the intention of fulfilling social needs and satisfying voyeuristic desires were inclined to perceive their own lives as resembling those of the characters portrayed in the shows. Furthermore, these individuals were more prone to adopting the values and behaviours exhibited by the characters.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that there have been studies that have failed to identify any favourable impacts of soap opera consumption on women's verbal communication characteristics and communication within marital relationships. Several research studies have indicated that the act of watching soap operas may potentially exert detrimental impacts on women's self-esteem, marital satisfaction, and marital expectations. Wiergacz and Lucas (2003) conducted a content analysis on the representation of women in American television soap operas broadcast. The researchers discovered that female characters depicted in soap operas tended to be youthful, unmarried, and belonged to the upper echelons of society.

Additionally, these characters were portrayed as professionals and faced minimal challenges in balancing their professional and personal lives. The authors contended that this distorted depiction has the potential to engender feelings of misrepresentation among women, thereby fostering discontentment with their personal circumstances. In a study conducted by Ndayi and du Plooy (2019), an examination was undertaken to explore the gendered disparities in the portrayal of men's and women's association with marriage and childbearing within the business and economic domains of the South African television soap opera Generations: The Legacy. The researchers discovered that the portrayal of male characters in the analysed material depicted them as individuals responsible for successful business leadership and actively engaged in socio-political activities. Conversely, female characters were depicted as supportive participants who were perceived as lacking the ability to independently and effectively contribute to the generation of wealth. The researchers reached the determination that the program did not effectively address and challenge prevailing patriarchal beliefs regarding women's rights and their roles within the realms of business and economic transactions.

This discovery implies that the verbal communication characteristics acquired through the consumption of soap operas may not necessarily be advantageous or relevant to communication between spouses. The authors additionally propose that the consumption of soap operas may yield both advantageous and disadvantageous outcomes in terms of women's empowerment, contingent upon the specific content and contextual factors associated with these television programs. Hence, it is imperative to engage in a rigorous examination of the messages and connotations communicated through soap operas, while also contemplating the potential ramifications for the lives of women.

In summary, the results obtained from investigating research question 3 indicate that the act of watching soap operas has varying effects on the communication and relationships of married

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couples, as reported by both wives and husbands. Although certain positive effects were observed, spouses also expressed feelings of insecurity, neglect, or dependency resulting from their engagement with soap operas. The mindset one adopts while watching, the application of lessons in a compatible manner, and the utilisation of coping strategies appear to be crucial factors in optimising the advantages and minimising the disadvantages. In general, couples recognise that there are potential positive and negative impacts that can arise. Additional investigation could be conducted to examine particular variables that might be indicative of favourable as opposed to unfavourable relational consequences resulting from the consumption of soap operas.

In a study of 392 married individuals in the United States, Osborn (2012) found a negative association between greater consumption of romantic-themed television and marital commitment. Participants who believed television portrayals of romantic relationships were accurate also reported perceiving higher costs associated with marriage, anticipating greater future costs, and viewing alternative relationship options more favourably. These findings suggest an association between romantic media portrayals and relationship expectations, although the survey design does not establish that viewing alone caused those expectations.

In a study conducted by Lee et al. (2013), the researchers examined the impact of South Korean soap operas on the attitudes towards marriage and childbearing among female viewers in Vietnam. The researchers discovered that Vietnamese women who were exposed to these soap operas exhibited a heightened inclination to marry Korean men and have a reduced number of children. This relationship was found to be mediated by spousal communication, indicating that the level of exposure to the soap operas influenced the preference for marrying Korean men and having fewer children through its impact on communication between spouses.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that not all studies have documented adverse effects of soap opera consumption on women's communication with their spouses. Several studies suggest that soap operas can provide couples with a subject for conversation and promote discussions on delicate topics. In a study conducted by Sharan and Valente (2002), the researchers assessed the effects of a radio drama series in Nepal that aimed to promote discussions on family planning among couples in their reproductive years. The results of their study demonstrated a notable increase in the likelihood of women engaging in conversations about family planning with their partners after exposure to the radio drama series. This suggests that the radio program has a beneficial impact on fostering open communication regarding family planning among couples.
In relation to the manner in which women manage the impacts of soap operas on communication, the findings indicate the utilisation of diverse strategies, including:

i. exercising discernment and scrutiny when choosing and evaluating the content they consume and derive knowledge from soap operas.
ii. acknowledging and valuing the cultural distinctions between soap operas and reality television.

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iii. engaging in transparent and sincere communication with one's marital partner regarding their emotions and viewpoints.
iv. consulting external sources such as friends, family members, or professionals.
v. effectively allocating their time and attention between engaging in the consumption of soap operas and attending to other important aspects of their lives.

Thus, it is crucial to critically analyse the messages and meanings conveyed by soap operas and consider their potential implications for women's lives.

CONCLUSION

The following conclusions were drawn based on the findings from the analysis:
Married couples demonstrate a wide range of soap opera preferences influenced by individual preferences, interests, emotional states, and availability. Female spouses exhibit greater levels of enthusiasm towards soap operas, particularly those of a dramatic or romantic nature, whereas male spouses tend to display more restricted levels of interest and engagement. However, individuals of both sexes acknowledge the inherent entertainment value and the depiction of genuine societal concerns.

It has been observed that wives often adopt verbal communication patterns from soap operas, such as the use of endearments and the expression of emotions. These acquired traits have the potential to enhance spousal communication, provided that husbands are receptive to them. However, the experience of being rejected has the potential to induce feelings of insecurity. Husbands recognise the influence of soap operas on language patterns and emotional responses. Soap operas have been found to enhance non-verbal communication between romantic partners.

The act of viewing soap operas yields both favourable consequences, such as reduced conflict and heightened intimacy, as well as unfavourable consequences, including feelings of insecurity and a decline in spousal communication. Coping strategies encompass a range of approaches, such as the practice of selectivity, recognition of cultural disparities, fostering open communication between partners, seeking guidance, and maintaining a balance of activities.

The impact of soap operas on interpersonal communication is contingent upon several factors, including the nature of the content, the level of acceptance from one's partner, the cultural context in which the communication occurs, and the coping strategies employed by individuals. Additional data regarding the perspectives of husbands could offer valuable insights into gender disparities.

In general, soap operas serve to meet social needs and foster communication patterns among married couples. However, it is imperative to engage in a critical analysis of messages in order to thoroughly examine their implications on gender roles and the promotion of empowerment.

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Additional investigation into the distinction between favourable and unfavourable content has the potential to enhance the positive impact on interpersonal relationships.

Implications of The Study

The results of this study highlight the importance of content creators and media platforms, considering the effects of soap opera narratives on viewers' interpersonal relationships and perceptions of gender roles. The implementation of more deliberate messaging strategies has the potential to foster constructive communication patterns while mitigating potential negative consequences.

The findings also point to an opportunity for local media producers to develop culturally relevant storylines that address relationship and family issues in Ghanaian settings. Such content could provide familiar starting points for audiences to discuss communication, affection and expectations within marriage; its effects would need to be examined rather than assumed.

As women adopt communication patterns observed in soap operas, it is imperative for husbands to be sensitised to effectively embrace and support these transformations. Promoting an environment of acceptance may potentially result in enhanced communication within marital relationships.

The coping strategies described by participants may be useful for counsellors, psychologists and relationship educators when helping couples discuss media portrayals, clarify expectations and communicate about insecurity or unmet needs. These strategies should be treated as participant-reported practices that warrant further assessment, rather than as proven interventions.

Future research should examine which soap-opera storylines and communication practices are associated with constructive or difficult relational experiences, and how these patterns vary by gender and cultural context. Although husbands were included in this study, their accounts were less prominent in some of the themes; future work could probe men's interpretations and responses in greater depth. Research with couples in other Ghanaian settings could also show how local social and cultural contexts shape viewers' interpretations of media narratives.

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