THE INTERACTIVE NATURE OF REALITY TELEVISION - AN AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

by

HEIDI PENZHORN

submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the subject

COMMUNICATION

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: PROF M PITOUT
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the following persons for their contributions to the study:

- My supervisor, Prof M Pitout, for her valuable input, advice and recommendations.
- Dawie Malan and Ronél Smit for their assistance in obtaining sources.
- Fatima Velosa for assisting with the language editing.
- My parents, Ekhard and Ina, for their emotional support and interest in the study.
- Deon and Jo-Mari for their support and encouragement.
- My Heavenly Father, for enabling me to undertake such a study.
SUMMARY

This research study explores the motivating factors for viewer participation in the reality television programme, *Project Fame*. It looks at the genre of reality television and its interactive component, arguing that viewers are active in their media consumption. The theoretical foundation of this study is based on the uses and gratifications theory as well as the cultural studies approach to reception theory.

On a methodological level, this study applies qualitative research methods in order to determine what factors motivate viewers to participate interactively in the television programme. Supported by the categories of need gratifications, this study investigates the different gratifications sought and gratifications obtained through interactive participation. In addition, reception theory is used to further explain viewers' active participation and interpretation of media messages in a social and cultural context.

The study concludes that cognitive, affective and personal integrative needs motivate viewers to utilise the interactive opportunities presented by the programme and that viewers expect gratifications from participating interactively. The participants in this study perceived these gratifications as being met through different interactive mediums. Finally, the study indicates that social and cultural aspects influenced the participants' perceptions of the contestants and indirectly affected interactive participation.