
Soap Opera Viewing Motives among College Students in the Republic of Armenia

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Abstract: Soap operas are a popular culture phenomenon around the globe, including the Republic of Armenia (Armenia hereafter), a small ancient and changing society in post-Soviet era. A survey of 292 college students from Yerevan, the capital, as well as the provinces of Armenia was conducted in Yerevan. Employing uses and gratifications theory, this study investigated the students' reported motives in viewing soap operas in relations to their demographics. The survey yielded three motives for viewing soap operas: to pass time, for pleasure, and for stimulation. Analysis showed that provincial students were more likely to watch soap operas to pass time. The study can serve as a foundation for future studies about media use in Armenia and possibly other post-Soviet societies.

Keywords: Armenia, college students, soap operas, survey, uses and gratification, viewing motives

Introduction

Popular culture refers to 'the way of life in which and by which most people in a society live' (Brown & Brown 2001, p. 1). Popular culture, according to Hall (1998, p. 442), is about the culture of working classes and, as such, is 'linked ... to questions of traditions, of traditional forms of life'. Contemporary world economy is global capitalism, and global media its 'necessary component' (Herman & McChesney 2004, p. 10), in that it facilitates 'the emergence of some kind of global culture' broadcast by 'dominant commercial centers' (p. 8). Thus, popular culture is also about 'transformations' and 'the active destructions of particular ways of life' (Hall 1998, p. 443), and global popular culture is about the

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homogenization of traditional cultures (eg Featherstone 1990) through programs such as soap operas.

Soap operas and telenovelas have long been considered a global popular culture that are watched every day by millions of people around the world (Allen 1996, 1995; Rios & Castaneda 2011), including Armenia, thus connecting local to global. Unlike in many other societies where soap operas have been present for a long time, the genre is a post-Soviet hence a relatively new phenomenon in Armenia—an ancient civilization with a unique history and culture. Armenians now watch Armenia-made serial dramas, as well as soap operas or serial dramas from different societies. Serial dramas have become one of the most watched programs in Armenia (Caucasus Research Resource Center [CRRC]-ARMENIA 2013) among viewers of almost all ages, including college students. The genre's unprecedented popularity has led to concerns among researchers and critics about its potential negative impact on the viewer (Mirakyan 2012), yet hardly any empirical study has been conducted on the topic.

Employing uses and gratifications (U&G) theory, this study investigated college students' reported motives in viewing soap operas in relations to their demographics. U&G theory focuses on how people use media and explores the appeal of different types of media content. According to this theory, audiences use media to gratify social and psychological needs. That is, they turn to media when their needs or desires cannot be met in more 'natural' ways (Rosengren & Windahl 1972; Rubin & Rubin 1985). U&G theory has guided numerous research studies of different popular media genres and different demographic groups in many countries, and was widely used with television. According to the theory, viewers derive gratification from three sources: 'media content, exposure to the media *per se*, and the social context that typifies the situation of exposure to different media' (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch 1973-1974, p. 514). Conducted mostly on the general adult population, U&G research has yielded two types of television viewers: an 'instrumental' viewer who uses the medium to seek information and to learn; and a 'ritualized' viewer who uses the medium for diversionary reasons such as to pass the time and to escape or for arousal and relaxation (Windahl 1981). These findings were confirmed by three other studies (Rubin 1981a; Rubin & Rubin 1982; Rubin 1983) and reconfirmed by yet another (Rubin 1984), which concluded that TV viewers are instrumental or ritualized, depending on their motives for watching TV, how much they watch, and the programs that they select. Instrumental (or selective) viewers use the medium to seek information, or to learn, so content is important for them. Ritualized (or habitual) viewers, on the other hand, depend on the television for gratification, and not on particular programs.

Since its inception decades ago, U&G theory has evolved in many ways and has been effectively applied to numerous new media (Rubin 2009; Ruggiero 2000) and across cultures. Current studies, conducted in a number of countries (eg China, Hong Kong, Netherlands, South Korea, and the U.S.A.), have applied the theory to cellular phone (eg Leung & Wei 2000), chatting on ICQ ['I seek you'] (eg Leung 2001), the Internet use (eg Choi, Dekkers & Pak 2004; Roy 2009), Podcasts (eg Chung & Kim 2008), mobile Internet (eg Shin, 2009), text-messaging (eg Grellhestl & Punyanunt-Carter 2012), and social media (eg Leung 2013), to name a few, resulting in 'nuanced gratifications' (Sundar & Limperos 2013, p. 504).

What is rather significant about these Internet-based technologies, particularly in regards to the genre, is that they have increased access to televised serial dramas. Although these technologies are on the rise in Armenia, access is still limited by sociodemographic factors such as economic well-being, urbanness, and language influences (Pearce 2014). Furthermore, TV was still the most accessible and prevalent medium in Armenia when the present research study was being conducted in 2013, and college students are a particularly good sample for the study because they have chosen to make time for soap opera viewing in

their busy schedules. The section below will provide an overview of U&G theory and research as it pertains to soap opera viewing among college students in particular. Please note that the literature review below is mostly from the 1980s because, as revealed through our literature search, the bulk of the research on soap opera viewing was conducted then when TV was the popular medium and many college students had been identified as ‘devotees of this entertainment genre’ (Rubin 1985, p. 241).

U&G Theory, Soap Operas, and College Students: Literature Overview

To begin with, it should be noted that U&G theory has been criticized for its theoretical and methodological shortcomings, such as not being rigorous enough about the social origin of the needs that the viewer brings to the media (Katz 1987), and for being individualist in its methodological inclinations (McQuail 1994). However, U&G theory has been also praised for effectiveness and for being the ‘most influential’ social science theory (Roy 2009, p. 878) that ‘furnishes a benchmark base of data for other studies’ (Ruggiero 2000, p. 12).

Focusing on college students primarily in the U.S., several U&G research studies have revealed that students seek many different kinds of gratifications from their viewing. Rubin (1985, p. 254), for example, identified four motives: orientation, avoidance, diversion, and social utility. He concluded that the gratifying motives depended ‘both on the use of the program as content and on the use of the program as a medium’. Soap operas are viewed as a medium when watched to achieve gratifications such as enjoyment, and viewed for content when watched to learn about others (reality exploration) or to have discussions with others (social utility). Rubin (1985, p. 255) also concluded that ‘the more [life-]satisfied and [socially] interactive seemed to sense less need for soap opera viewing in their lives’. A research study by Lemish (1985) revealed two additional motives for this group: preference and attachment to a particular soap opera, and time consumption (ie they watched what was on TV at the time). Applying U&G theory with cultivation analysis, Carveth and Alexander’s (1985) study yielded five motives: enjoyment, boredom, reality exploration, escape, and character identification. Perse’s (1986) research study identified five motives: exciting entertainment, habit-pass time, information, relax-escape, and voyeurism. A study by Babrow (1987) resulted in sixteen motives, the top five of which were time consideration, diversion, quality, social interaction, and arousal. The same study also revealed three dimensions of viewing anticipated by students: social pleasure, romantic fantasy, and learning. Rubin and Perse’s (1987) study led to these motives: exciting entertainment, pass time, voyeurism, escapist relaxation, information, and social utility. In a subsequent investigation built on the same research study, and focusing on audience activity and satisfaction with favorite soap operas, Perse and Rubin (1988) found that watching soap operas to pass time correlated negatively with life satisfaction.

Since the present study was conducted in Armenia, the following section will provide an overview of the country’s history, including the media status in general and soap operas in particular.

The Republic of Armenia and Soap Operas: A Brief History

Contemporary Armenia, unlike Historic Armenia, is a small country of about three million population in the southern part of the Caucasus region of Eurasia. Armenia declared independence in 1991, after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and after having been ruled by Soviet Communism for nearly seven decades. The new government abruptly

changed the country's politico-economic system from a centrally-controlled command economy and so-called dictatorship to a free-market/capitalist economy and so-called democracy. This massive shift was particularly difficult for Armenia in that it coincided with other ongoing challenges, such as the horrific consequences of the earthquake of 1988 (Engholm 1989), the conflict with Azerbaijan over Artcakh (Nagorno Karabakh), and economic sanctions by Turkey (de Waal 2003).

This drastic change in direction had many unexpected negative consequences on the society. One such consequence on all post-Soviet republics has been a significant income and wealth inequity (Gevorkyan 2011). In Armenia, in particular, this change has brought about corruption, unemployment, poverty, and an altogether difficult life (Kennedy 2002; Sandholtz & Taagerpera 2005). For example, in 2013 (the year when the present survey was conducted), the poverty rate in Armenia was 32.0%, and it was higher in rural areas (27.5%) than in Yerevan (20.1%); and the unemployment rate was 17% (The World Bank 2016). The dire economic situation has led to male labor migration (Gevorkyan & Mashuryan 2006; Grigorian & Melkonyan 2011), posing a 'threat to [their] existential security' (Payaslian 2011, p. 21). The debilitating impact of these harsh economic realities on Armenian social life has been elucidated in qualitative research studies (Tholen et al. 2012).

The mass media is one of the spheres that was affected by the abrupt socio-politico-economic shift. In Soviet times, the media industry was a government monopoly and state-controlled newspapers were the dominant means of acquiring news and information. In contemporary Armenia, the mix of media and ownership has changed and so has the dominant way of acquiring information. Private television is now king and state newspapers have been deposed almost entirely. In terms of media accessibility, a national study conducted of 1403 households showed that 98% own a TV set and 79% consider it as the most important source of information about current events and news (CRRC-ARMENIA 2013).

As the means have changed, so too have the contents. Media providers now focus on entertainment and not on official news. Television is now the most popular mass medium in the country and the majority of the 'sixty broadcasting outlets' (Kurkchyan 2006, p. 267) are privately owned (Djankov, Nenova, & Schleifer 2003). And 'serials' (the Armenian word for soap operas), local and international, are one of the entertainment programs that these media providers nowadays focus on.

Serials, which can be described as *telenovelas* (i.e., there is a central storyline which eventually comes to an end), are a relatively new phenomenon in Armenia. Media companies first started broadcasting serials with dubbed foreign content in late 2005 to early 2006. In 2006, Armenia produced its first serial titled *Mi Vakhecir/Don't Be Afraid*, depicting the people's struggles in 1991-1992 (Abrahamyan 2006). The majority of the serials are produced in Armenia and in the Armenian language by either Armenia TV or Shant TV, both private, or by the Public Television of Armenia. The viewers' choices, however, also include Russian soap operas, as well as *telenovelas* from Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and a couple of Arabic Speaking countries, all dubbed into Armenian. Serial dramas, which broadcast during the day and during primetime, have attracted viewers of both genders, though more females, and almost all ages. They have become one of the most popular television genres in the country, filling 30% of airtime on some TV channels ('SUMMARY: Soap operas' 2012). According to a large scale national study (CRRC-ARMENIA 2013), soap operas are the second most watched TV program (viewed by 35%) next to the news (viewed by 65%). Further, based on a national survey conducted by the Institute of Political and Sociological Consulting (IPSC 2011), nearly 45% of the participants (50% female) had a more positive than negative view of the genre.

The unprecedented popularity of serials, nevertheless, has led to concerns among some researchers and critics about the genre's potential negative impact on viewers. Serial dramas have been criticized for their overall themes of crime, financial difficulties, and family and/or other relational problems. They have been also criticized for their 'aggressive' and 'violent' contents (Pearce 2011, p. 20); for creating 'a wrong impression about life with sexual, physical and psychological violence' (Gevorgyan 2011); and for 'advocating aggression, domestic violence, misfortune and hard living' (Hakobyan 2012). A concern of specialists in conflictology is that young TV viewers may see serial characters as role models and thus be encouraged to copy 'their behavior, manner of speech, vocabulary' (Gevorgyan, 2011). According to Vahram Mirakyan (2012), a strategic researcher, the danger of these portrayals lies in the fact that the audience and the Armenian serial characters share the same culture, language, and social reality. In other words, the viewer can more easily relate to the characters and portrayed situations.

Despite these concerns and criticisms, however, little empirical research has been conducted on this newcomer in Armenia. The present study is significant because it involves an ancient civilization with a unique culture and a 7,500 year-old history and traditional values (Herouni 2004). Unlike Historic Armenia, contemporary Armenia is a small country that was ruled by the former Soviet Union for nearly seven decades, and soap operas as a global culture phenomenon became rampant and popular in the country in post-Soviet era. The study is significant also because it focuses on college students who, as young generation, are considered the future of Armenia. They were born mainly after the country's transition or were toddlers at the time and, as such, grew up watching commercial-based media, including serials. Thus, unlike the older generation Armenians, the young population today does not have non-commercial-based media as a point of reference. Also, as noted before, as a commercial-based global popular culture, soap operas can pose a threat to the particular way of life in Armenia and its ancient cultural values.

However, our goal in this preliminary empirical research study on the topic was to investigate why Armenia college students watch TV soap operas in the first place.

The Present Study

Extending U&G analysis to college students in Armenia, our purpose in this study was to investigate the students reported viewing motives to watch serials and to explore the relationship between these motives and demographic variables. Our research questions were the following:

RQ1: What are the serial viewing motives reported by Armenia college students?

RQ2: How are the reported viewing motives related to the students' demographics?

Methods

Sample

The sample included 409 undergraduate students from different parts of the country, enrolled in the following universities located in Yerevan: Yerevan State University, V. Bryusov State University, Armenian-Russian (Slavonic) University, Khachatur Abovian Pedagogical State University, and Mkhitar Heratsi Medical State University. They were recruited from the

following departments: Journalism, international Relations, Foreign Language, Social Sciences, Architecture, and Other.¹ Verbal permission was obtained from each department chairperson prior to conducting the survey. The study was approved by the University Institutional Review Board prior to the recruitment of any students for the study. The survey questionnaire was administered during the spring semester of 2013 by either two faculty members or two designated student aides. Students who agreed to participate in the survey were given a numbered questionnaire, which they returned to the proctor. Participation in the study was anonymous and strictly voluntary. The procedure took approximately thirty minutes in each class.

Of this sample, 292 (71.4%) contained sufficient data for analysis. Of the 292 students included in the study, 245 (83.9%) were females and 44 (15.1%) were males; 3 (1.0%) participants failed to indicate gender.² Most of the students ($n = 212$, 72.6%) of the study participants were younger than 20 years old; 26.0% were 20 or older; 1.4% did not indicate their age. A large proportion ($n = 262$, 89.7%) of the participants were unmarried; 8.2% were either presently or had been married. Another 2.1% of the participants did not respond to the marital status item. Study participants were classified on residence as either living in Yerevan ($n = 191$, 65.4%), which is the Armenian Metropole, or in the outer provinces ($n = 101$, 34.6%). A large majority ($n = 187$, 64.0%) indicated their monthly family income was less than 120,000 drams, 14.4% indicated incomes of 120,000 drams or more; 21.6% did not respond to the question. (At the time of the study, 400AMD [Armenian Drams] = 1USD; and 120,000 drams = \$300.00 was considered an average family's monthly income.)

The most popular major was journalism (22.6%), followed by international relations (19.5%), and foreign language (15.4%). The social sciences ranked fourth (9.2%) and architecture ranked fifth (7.2%). Other majors were indicated by another 26.0% of the students. These majors had fewer than 10 students per major and included such fields as law, philology, biology, tourism, energetics, computer science, and so forth.

Instrumentation

The survey instrument was a modified version of the one used in a previous study (Perse 1986) that explored U.S. American college students' motivation in viewing serials. To assure its accessibility to all the participants, the instrument was translated into Armenian by two faculty members, both fluent in Armenian and English, and was reviewed again for accuracy by a professional translator. The survey instrument was pre-tested with five undergraduate students to determine its clarity and the amount of time required to complete it. The instrument listed all the following 17 Armenian serials (no international ones) being broadcast during the data collection: *Qaxaqum* (In the Town), *Kargin Serial* (Decent Serial), *Djvar Aprust* (Hard Life), *Harazat Tshnami* (Familiar Enemy), *Kyangi Karusel* (The Carousel of Life), *Yerchap Ser* (Three Dimensional Love), *Generali Axjike* (The General's Daughter), *Ancanote* (The Stranger), *Yereq Kyanq* (Three Lives), *Yexbayner* (Brothers), *Kodrvatz Srter* (Broken Hearts), *Kuyre* (Sister), *Vostikanner* (Police Officers), *Maestro*

¹ Students normally major in an area of study that matches their future profession. The majority of the study participants were in the humanities because, in Armenia, medicine, pedagogy, music, and the humanities are considered 'female' professions; and law, engineering industry, economics, management, and computing technology are considered 'male' professions (Babayan 2001, p. 61).

² The majority of study participants were female because, normally, most young men in Armenia are either in the workforce or serve the country.

(Master), *Tigrani Molorake* (Tigran's Planet), *Mi Stir* (Don't Lie), and *Yntryalnery* (The Selected). The theme of two of these serials is comedy; the overall themes of the others are crime, financial difficulties, and family and/or other relational matters. Students were asked to indicate how many times a week they watched each serial. They were also asked how long they had been watching serials and how much time a day they spend watching the programs.

Serial viewing motives were assessed with 30 statements, three items each that included viewing for relaxation, companionship, habit, pass time, entertainment, social interaction, information, excitement, escape, and voyeurism. Students were asked how much their own reasons for watching serials were like each statement (5 = exactly, 1 = not at all).

Students also marked their agreement (5 = strongly agree, 1 = strongly disagree) with 10 items that assessed serial affinity, or how important they felt serial viewing was to their lives, and serial perceived realism, or how closely they believed that serials mirrored reality. Principal components analysis with orthogonal rotation identified two factors with eigenvalues over 1.0 accounting for 55.5% of the variance. As expected, the two factors represented perceived realism and serial affinity. The perceived realism scale contained 6 items. Typical items were: "Serials present things as they really are in life," and "Serials let me see what happens in other places as if I were really there." The serial affinity scale was made up of contained 2 items, "If the serials were not on TV, I would really miss them," and "Watching serials is one of the more important things I do each day." Items in each factor were averaged to create perceived realism ($M = 1.90$, $SD = 0.87$, $\alpha = .87$) and serial affinity ($M = 1.51$, $SD = 0.81$, $\alpha = .76$) scores.

Results

The first goal of this study was to identify the serial viewing motives of Armenia college students and compare these reasons to those identified in prior studies in the U.S. Principle components analysis with orthogonal rotation identified 3 factors with eigenvalues over 1/0 that accounted for 42.8% of the variance. Viewing motive scores were created by averaging item scores. Pleasure ($M = 1.62$, $SD = 0.63$, $\alpha = .90$), was made up of 12 items and reflected watching serials for entertainment and amusement, as a social activity, and to relax. Pass Time ($M = 2.12$, $SD = 0.78$, $\alpha = .85$), comprised 10 items that showed watching serials to pass time, to fill empty time, and to fill lonely time. Stimulation ($M = 1.44$, $SD = 0.53$, $\alpha = .74$), was made up of 8 items that reflected watching serials because of the sexually appealing characters, to get excited, and to get away from daily pressures.

MANOVAs were conducted to investigate demographic influences on students' serial viewing motives and sources of learning about the world. MANOVA was chosen over *t*-tests in these and subsequent analyses to correct for Type I errors accruing from repeated *t*-tests, plus multivariate statistics provided important additional information, such as overall influence of the factors and proportion of variance accounted for by the factors in the equation.

Serial Viewing Motives and Demographics

Age was dichotomized into those younger than 20 years and those 20 years and older. (The youngest category on the survey instrument was respondents under 20 years of age [72.6% of the sample].) No age differences were found between the two age groups on motivations for viewing serials ($F[5, 282] = 1.26$, ns). Gender accounted for 5.7% of the variance ($F[5, 283] = 3.34$, $p < .01$), presented in Table 3. Bivariate analyses revealed that females were

significantly more likely to view serials to pass the time than males ($F[1, 287] = 8.40, p < .01$). No other significant differences in viewing motives were found.

Table 2
Means, Standard Deviations, and F-ratios for Motives and Attitudes towards Viewing Serials by Gender

Scale	Gender				$F_{(1, 287)}$
	Female ($n = 245$)		Male ($n = 44$)		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
View serials to pass the time	2.18	0.78	1.81	0.74	8.30**
View serials for pleasure	1.63	0.62	1.52	0.70	1.27
View serials for stimulation	1.44	0.48	1.47	0.75	0.18
Serials show reality	1.91	0.87	1.83	0.90	0.32
Importance of serials	1.49	0.78	1.60	0.98	0.74

** $p < .01$.

Place of residence also influenced viewing motives differences between Yerevan and provincials, accounting for 3.9% of the variance in attitudes ($F[5, 286] = 2.84, p < .05$). Bivariate analyses presented in Table 4 indicated that students from the provinces were significantly more likely to view serials to pass the time ($F[1, 290] = 6.19, p < .05$) than students from Yerevan; viewing of serials was significantly more important to them as well ($F[1, 290] = 7.03, p < .01$).

Table 3
Means, Standard Deviations, and F-Ratios for Motives and Attitudes towards Viewing Serials by Residence

Scale	Residence				$F_{(1, 290)}$
	Yerevan ($n = 191$)		Provinces ($n = 101$)		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
View serials to pass the time	2.05	0.79	2.29	0.75	6.19*
View serials for pleasure	1.59	0.66	1.68	0.61	1.20
View serials for stimulation	1.41	0.52	1.50	0.55	1.71
Serials show reality	1.83	0.87	2.03	0.86	3.57
Importance of serials	1.42	0.75	1.69	0.94	7.03**

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Discussion

Results of the present study show that Armenia university students' reported motives for watching serials are: to pass the time, for pleasure, and for stimulation. These findings are more or less consistent with the findings of previous empirical studies that involved U.S. American college students (ie Carveth & Alexander, 1985; Perse 1986; Rubin & Perse 1987; Perse & Rubin 1990), as well as other adult groups in the U.S. and abroad (eg Compesi 1980; Greenberg et al. 1982; Greenberg & Woods 1999; Livingstone 1988). Previous research on viewing motivations yielded two types of viewers: instrumental and ritualized (Windahl 1981; Rubin 1981a; Rubin & Rubin 1982; Rubin 1984).

Participants in the present study tend to be mostly ritualized (or habitual) viewers: they watch serials to pass the time (eg when they have nothing better to do, because of a lack

of better programs on TV, because it allows them to escape or get away from what they are doing); for pleasure (eg to relax, to be entertained, and to discuss them with others); and for stimulation (eg because they find the serials sexually appealing or exciting, and because they help them feel less lonely). That the study participants watch serials for diversionary reasons concurs with previous research (Rubin 1985). Focusing on audience activity and satisfaction with favorite soap operas, a study (Perse & Rubin 1988) showed that watching soap operas to pass time correlated negatively with life satisfaction. Nonetheless, based on the conclusion drawn by an earlier study (Greenberg et al. 1982), individuals turn to soap operas because of difficulties or dissatisfaction with their own lives. In other words, that the present study participants view serials for diversionary reasons, may also have to do with the people's difficult life, especially in post-Soviet era. Young Armenians' displeasure with their current impoverished and insecure way of life, especially in post-Soviet times, is well documented (eg Payaslian 2011; Tholen et al. 2012; Keshishian & Harutyunyan 2013). It is not surprising, therefore, that they turn to serial fiction as a way to escape or divert themselves.

Participants in the present study are also instrumental (or selective) viewers. Instrumental viewer uses the medium to seek information and to learn, so content is important for them (Windhal 1981). Participants' endorsement of statements such as, 'Serials present things as they really are in life,' 'Serials let me see what happens in other places as if I were really there,' 'I would feel lost without serials to watch on TV,' and 'Serials show life as it really is' implies that viewers believe that serials mirror reality. This finding may be influenced in part by serials such as *Kyangi Karusel* (The Carousel of Life) and *Mi Stir* (Don't Lie), which are allegedly based on real life incidents. This finding may also reflect the role that serials have in discussing important social issues such as corruption; the economy and the transition, and their impact on individuals; personal financial difficulties; or a daughter's refusal to accept a traditional marriage that cannot be easily talked about in political forums.

Similar to affinity toward television, found in other studies (Greenberg 1974; Rubin 1979, 1981b, 1983), the emphasis in this study was placed on viewing serials (not television *per se*) and reflects the participants' endorsement of the following statements: 'If the serials were not on TV, I would really miss them' and 'Watching serials is one of the more important things I do each day.' This finding may imply that watching serials is a significant activity in many Armenian students' daily lives and that these viewers count on serials to fill their day to some extent.

Results of the present study also revealed that females are significantly more likely to view serials to pass time than males. That females view serials to pass the time (ie for diversionary reasons) more than males, may imply that Armenian society in general provides females with fewer extracurricular activities or venues for entertainment. This is, in part, because Armenian parents tend to control adolescent girls more strictly (Ghazarian, Supple, & Plunkett 2008, p. 610), a situation that could encourage females to watch serials as a way to pass the time and fill idle hours. That females are more likely to view serials to pass time, may also be due the society's expectations of women than males. For example, at puberty, females are expected to grow up and take on responsibilities. Thus while men are traditionally expected to support the family, household management in Armenia is generally a woman's domain. Such an expectation in a society with a poor economy which has led to male labor migration (eg Gevorkyan & Mashuryan 2006; Grigorian & Melkonyan 2011), can only increase females' responsibilities in taking care of the family. Such a situation could be exacerbated by an unemployment rate of 41.5% among females (and 31.8% among males) ages 15-24 (The World Factbook 2014), making it more likely to facilitate serial viewing as a way to pass the time in general and among females in particular.

Results of the study indicated that viewing serials is significantly more important to students from provinces than to students from Yerevan. This, according to M. Khalatyan (personal communication, September 9, 2016), has to do with a few interrelated factors. To begin with, most students in Armenia prefer to study in Yerevan, where most Armenian academic institutions, especially prestigious ones, are located. In this way, they are likely to be afforded new opportunities, new contacts, and more possibilities. To study in Yerevan, however, provincial students who live far away, either have to rent a place in Yerevan or live with a relative there. Either way, they have to overcome obstacles such as financial difficulties, unfamiliarity with city life, and homesickness. Coping with homesickness may be particularly difficult because the Armenian culture, which values children (American Field Service [AFS]-USA 2016), also teaches them to depend on their parents and the family unit for solidifying cultural values and individual identity (Bakalian 1993; Ohanian 2007). Given all these, consuming more television, including serials, is usually a practical solution for coping with homesickness. Thus, although the findings of the present study revealed no significant differences in viewing motivations based on monthly income, the country's overall poor economy (eg Tholen et al. 2012), especially in rural areas (IFAD 2014; The World Bank 2015), is such that it makes serial viewing to pass the time appealing. Both female students and students from provinces are likely to watch serial drama because it allows them to get away from the harsh realities of contemporary life on a daily basis and in an affordable way.

Serial Viewing Motives and Culture

Seen through the lens of U.S. viewers' uses and gratifications, the study showed that Armenia students' viewing motives look much the same as the motives of U.S. students of the 1970s and 1980s. This might be due to the fact that the survey instrument used in the present survey, which was mainly the same instrument that had been used in a previous study (Perse 1986), did not consider culture as a possible influencing factor. And that might be a difference that makes a difference. Culture, according to Jandt (2007, p. 427), is sum total of ways of living, including behavioral norms, linguistic expression, styles of communication, patterns of thinking and beliefs and values of a group large enough to be self-sustaining transmitted over the course of generations'. Following Hofstede's (2001) value orientations, Armenia, unlike the U.S. and many other Western societies, has a 'collectivistic' culture that places high importance on family and extended family, and on respect for the elderly ('Countries and Their Cultures' 2017). Further, due to cultural and/or economic reasons, Armenian households tend to be multigenerational with one TV set that serves as the main source of information and entertainment. Consequently, family members do not generally experience TV viewing in generational isolation, but rather in an intergenerational context. They engage in co-viewing, including when serials are broadcast, making serial viewing a collective activity and a part of the people's daily life. In this context, and because of the role of the elderly within the family structure, parents and grandparents are likely to choose what the rest of the family, college students included, watch. Thus, deference, rather than choice, may be a motivation in viewing serials. In other words, viewing motivations can be influenced by the viewer's culture. Although U&G theory does not address the role of culture *per se*, a few scholars have noted its significance albeit implicitly or in passing. For example, according to Windahl (1981), one's viewing motivation may be derived not only from needs, but also from one's externally enforced constraints; and such constraints may include cultural rules and expectations. One's motivations may also be influenced by 'the social context that typifies the situation of exposure to different media' (Katz, Blumer & Gurevitch 1973-1974,

p. 514); that the ‘social context’ (which by extension refers to a society’s cultural tendencies) can influence one’s viewing motivations, is illuminated by other scholars (eg Allen 1995; Ang 1982; Leal 1986) with regard to *telenovelas* and melodramas. Rubin (2009) points out that ‘cultural nuances’ pose challenges and opportunities, suggesting that researchers create methods that are ‘sensitive’ to the culture in which they conduct their research.

Study Limitations

Participants of the present study were college students who lived mostly in the capital, thus the findings cannot be generalized to the country’s entire population. Also, the instrument employed in the survey did include a list of Armenian serials, but it did not take other aspects of the culture into consideration.

Conclusion and Suggestions for Future Research

The study extended the application of U&G theory and methodology to contemporary Armenia, a small country in post-Soviet era where TV serials are a relatively new though highly popular phenomenon that has hardly been empirically researched. Thus, the present study can serve as a foundation for future studies about media use in Armenia and possibly other post-Soviet societies. Findings of the study broaden our understanding of motivations to view serials by pointing to demographic factors such as place of residence (ie capital vs. other provinces), which is in turn linked to Armenia’s larger socioeconomic situation. The study findings create directions for future research.

As noted before, the present study did not consider the role of culture, or, as Raymond Williams (1958, p. 281) calls it, ‘the way of life as a whole’, in one’s viewing motives. Future research could use culture-specific survey instruments that take into account cultural subtleties (eg one-TV and multigenerational households, and the role of the elderly), in order to determine viewers’ motivations to view serials. Considering that serials are watched by viewers of both sexes (although more females than males) of almost all ages, future research could conduct interviews to determine different generations’ views of serials (eg the elderly who lived under the Soviet system who lived when there were no serials on TV, and the young generation who grew up watching the genre in post-Soviet Armenia). In light of serials’ perceived negative themes addressed by previous research (eg Mirakyan 2012), future research could employ content analysis to investigate the kinds of cultural values that specific Armenian serials and/or imported soap operas reinforce; and whether or how that content may threaten the traditional values of Armenia, a country that has been labeled as ‘cradle of civilization’ (Lang 1970). Future research could interview producers of serials to determine what inspires the themes they select. Further, using cultivation analysis (Gerbner & Gross 1976), future investigation could scrutinize the role serials play in the viewers’ perceptions of reality, especially vis-à-vis their viewing motives and viewing habits. Given the importance of children and the youth in the culture (AFS-USA 2016), and because serial viewers in Armenia include children as young as four years old, future research might include interviews and/or observations of this population to explore their motivations to view the genre and its possible impact on them.

With the rise of Internet-based media in Armenia (Pearce 2014), future research could examine Armenia college student motives in using these technologies (eg smartphone, instant messaging, Podcasts, iPad, and iPod), compared to similar studies conducted in other countries. Also, as noted before, Internet-based technologies increase access to serial dramas

and other televised programs. Also, since the genre has a long history of viewer involvement (Lemish 1985), and use of social media for connecting with others may also lead to the programs having greater influence on their viewers, future research could explore college students' use of social media as a way to discuss the programs, connect with other viewers, and express their thoughts about plot directions.

Finally, given Armenia's collectivistic and family-centered culture and since each medium has its own conditions of attendance (eg stationary TV set vs. smartphone), future research could focus on a comparative analysis about Armenian college student motives in viewing the genre on the Internet-based technology vs. TV. As noted before, Armenian households are multigenerational and have one TV set. Thus TV viewing becomes an event that brings the family together where they all watch the same serial being broadcast; hence a more family/community-based context. Watching serials on smartphone, on the other hand, can take place privately and almost anywhere (eg at home, on the bus, and at the library); hence a more individual-based context. Ultimately, future research could explain whether Internet-based communication technologies help reinforce or harm this ancient society's culture.

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