

Evaluation of American Version of Big Brother – The TV Reality Show

The reality show Big Brother was originally conceived for television by Dutch television series writer John De Mol in the year 1997. The concept of the show is based on 12 to 15 contestants living in an isolated house for three months, completely cut-off from the outside world, 24 hours under camera surveillance by Big Brother, an imaginary character controlling the show with the help of a host, who visits the contestants inside the house every week.

Since 2001, when American version of the show was launched on CBS channel, it has been hosted by Julie Chan and 143 people from different social strata of the society have participated in it. In Season 1, the show used the original Dutch format but from Season 2, it has undergone a change of rules keeping the original format intact. It is currently the number one reality show on American television, although during its inception the idea was ridiculed by critics.

The HouseGuests, as the contestants are known in the show, compete with each other to avoid eviction from the show and finally one of them emerges as the winner of the \$500,000 prize money. In Season 1 the HouseGuests voted secretly against each other every week and the HouseGuest with the maximum combined eviction votes of the HouseGuests and public had to leave the house. Finally, at the end of three months, the winner from among the last two contestants was chosen by public voting. This public voting system did not find favor with the viewers, who had to call a premium charge telephone number to cast their vote and the eviction rules were changed from Season 2. (Big Brother Access)

Under the changed format, a Head of House is chosen every week by the HouseGuests and he is responsible for maintaining discipline in the house and nominates two HouseGuests for eviction. The remaining HouseGuests then go to the Diary Room one by one and cast their vote to eliminate one of the two nominated HouseGuests. In case of a tie up, Head of House has the veto to break the impasse. The tenure of a Head of House is from one eviction to the next. Among the two last contestants, the winner is chosen by votes from the evicted HouseGuests. A tie here is broken by taking public votes. (Davidson, 2010)

The commercial success of any television show depends on its public rating and the producers of Big Brother are tempted to sensationalize the show -there have been instances when the HouseGuests got carried away by their emotions, resorted to foul language and enacted some objectionable scenes - but are restrained by the censors to keep a balance between decency and vulgarity in dialogues and scenes. Although the show is recorded live only selected footage which can be of public interest is shown, as it is not possible to accommodate the twenty four hour recording on a one hour show. (Big Brother, 2009)

The show is a mixture of a soap drama and live reality show. The HouseGuests are given broad guidelines about the rules of the show and their roles in the show are broadly defined. Within the loosely knit format of the show, the HouseGuests are free to enact their character. There are no screenplays, no scripted dialogues and no retakes for the HouseGuests. This leads to so many objectionable dialogues and scenes and the producers have to censor them in the larger interest of the viewers. (Davidson, 2010)

Living with unknown people, cut-off from the outside world and under constant camera surveillance can be a nerve wrecking experience and the HouseGuests are bound to lose their patience and

sometimes even their sanity. This human factor has been very effectively enshrined in the show by the creative genius of John De Mol. The suspense of eviction combined with the backstabbing and the treachery played by the HouseGuests is what keeps the viewers glued to the television week after week. This precisely is the reason that despite its earlier debacle, the show is on television for the past thirteen years and has a worldwide presence and viewership. (Lawson, 2002)