

A Study on how audience reception affects Professional Wrestling

Wickramasinghe, Hansaka¹ - Department of English

Abstract

The success of a Professional Wrestling or any entertainment medium depends entirely on its reception by the audience. Without listening to the audience's expectations the show cannot exist. Therefore, audience reception plays a major role in Professional Wrestling storylines. While audience reception has been very predictable and manipulatable in the past, the audience reception in contemporary wrestling has turned very unpredictable and confusing for producers of Wrestling shows. There are varied reasons for changing audience receptions among Professional Wrestling fans which span from entertainment values to cultural, social, gender and athletic values of people. This research is concerned with analyzing and understanding some of the prominent changes in values that affect the audience reception of Professional Wrestling and how they have refashioned Professional Wrestling as a product. The critical framework for the research is Stuart Hall's Reception Theory which helps us understand the influence of audience manipulation (Preferred Reading), the rejection of preferred readings (Oppositional Reading) and compromise between dominant and oppositional readings by the audience (Negotiated Reading) in Professional Wrestling. Furthermore, changing audience reception in Professional Wrestling will be discussed by comparing and contrasting audience reception to traditional (Old-School) and modern (New-School) methods of professional wrestling since their entertainment ideals have had differing receptions in the past and in the present. To conduct this analysis, the research will use analyzed examples from wrestling promotions such as WWE (World Wrestling Entertainment), AEW (All Elite Wrestling), NJPW (New Japan Professional Wrestling) and the independent circuit. In conclusion, the deeper intention of this research is to understand how changing values, knowledge bases and perceptions are influencing audience reception in Professional Wrestling and how they have fashioned the changes in the business of Professional Wrestling.

Keywords - Wrestling, Audience-Reception, Old-School, New-School, WWE

¹ hansakanirmal@gmail.com