

Nov 04, 2016 by *Adam Clayton Powell, III*

“OMG!” Among New Programs From VOA ^[1]

WASHINGTON --- Voice of America rolled out a series of new programs at a briefing here this morning, highlighting “OMG!”, a new youth-oriented program aimed at China, where, according to its host, it is sometimes called “OMG: Oh My Lady Gaga.”

“OMG!” is designed to teach American slang to young viewers in China, and host Jessica Beinecke said it launched as a travel series, originally titled “Baijie Speaks English,” because Baijie is her Chinese name. Then, she said, they learned “Baijie” is the title of a well-known pornographic novel in China, hence the name change. Of course the association with the novel may have added to the buzz about the show.

VOA research shows the series became a hit with the episode titled “Yucky Gunk,” about “all of the gunk that comes out of your face.” That episode triggered 1.5 million hits, according to the network, and the series was off and running, in a very different direction. Rather than attempt to describe “Yucky Gunk” in detail, we direct curious readers to watch the episode on YouTube, where the series has an entire channel. Suffice it to say this is not your grandfather’s VOA.

The “Yucky Gunk” Episode

Beinecke said viewers now submit questions by emailing homemade videos – some shown this morning were quite funny – and the program is generating a significant response. During a visit to the Ohio State University, she said she sent out word over the Internet that she was at the student center, and within fifteen minutes ten Chinese students had joined her, tipped by emails from friends.

“OMG!” was shown as part of a VOA briefing today on “New Outreach Tools and Technologies,” covering the Internet, social networks and direct programming to mobile telephones.

New programs and platforms have increased the network’s audience to 80 million on radio and 70 million on television, according to Steve Redisch, VOA’s Executive Editor. That is most of the 187 million unduplicated weekly audience claimed for all of U.S. international broadcasting. Researchers note that some of the data are less than entirely precise – try surveying a war zone – but they said the trend is toward a larger audience.

Some of that was driven by news: Redisch said recent developments have driven much larger audiences to VOA Burmese programming, and the VOA Burma web site traffic has quadrupled. Joan Mower, VOA’s Director of Development, pointed to Somalia, where VOA broadcasts reach close to 80% of all adults in the country.

Some was also driven by improved distribution: VOA now claims 38 million viewers in Indonesia, where Norman Goodman of VOA’s Indonesian Service said its broadcasts are now

carried on eight of Indonesia's eleven national television networks and on more than 250 local radio stations. And VOA's audience is up sharply in Kenya, according to William Bell, VOA's Director of Research, following the decision by that country's leading FM station to start carrying VOA programs.
