

## TRADITIONAL TELEVISION AND ITS ROLE IN A DYNAMIC MEDIA FIELD

### ULOGA TRADICIONALNE TELEVIZIJE NA DINAMIČKOM MEDIJSKOM TRŽIŠTU

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#### *Abstract*

*Technological as well as economical and political changes in society provoke dynamic changes in media systems. That is why in Europe de-regulation and re-regulation of the broadcast system started. One reason for this is that new media systems with purely commercial aims have substituted for the previous media system of public television only. In this way a dual media system has formed, characterized by the activities of public television as well as private commercial stations.*

*In changed circumstances, the characteristics of public service television that had formerly been very strict and noncommercial have evidently been modified. Beside economic and political changes of the broadcasting we could detect technological changes. New technologies brought the new platforms which should be part of traditional broadcasting system. It is most important that we research new technologies in the context of quality content that can be offered to the public, and also to think about television as an institution which is an important component of the social cultural and political system.*

*The aim of the paper is to explain the importance of the economic success as one of the basic segments of the national communication system. Additionally, the necessity of the technological developments that will support television in its special role in the dynamic media field would be discussed.*

#### *Sažetak*

*Očito je, da se medijska okolina značajno promjenila u tehnološkom, ekonomskom i političkom obziru. To su i razlogi za deregulaciju i re-regulaciji elektronskih medija. U mnogim prilikama su komercijalni sistemi zamijenili predhodne sisteme sa isključivo javnom televizijom. Tako se formirao dualni medijski sistem, koji oblikuju komercijalni i javni televizijski akteri. Javna radiotelevizija postaje važan sudionik na slobodnom tržištu.*

*Za europski medijski sistem karakteristične su aktivnosti kako javne televizije tako i privatnih komercijalnih postaja. U novonastalim prilikama došlo je do promjena karakteristika javnog televizijskog servisa, koji je u prošlosti bio ukrućen i nekomercijalan.*

*U medijskoj okolini promatramo ekonomske, političke i tehnološke promjene. Promjene u tehnološkom razvoju donose nove platforme koje moraju biti uključene u tradicionalnu radioteleviziju. Vrlo važno je promatranje promjena u tehnološkom razvoju u kontekstu nove kvalitete, koja je pružana javnosti.*

*Televizija je tako institucija koja je sastavni dio društvenog, kulturnog i političkog sistema.*

*U članku želimo predstaviti nužnost ekonomskog uspjeha i promjene u tehnološkom razvoju, koji su tijesno povezani sa ostvarivanjem javnog interesa medija.*

## 1. Introduction and Background

Mass media have a very important role in the process of change; they are both the creator and the product of changes in society. Certainly, their role in the construction of our present time, as well as our future, is highly significant. Broadcast media play a central role in the functioning of modern democratic societies, in particular in the development and transmission of social values.

The broadcast media, particularly television, play an important role in our lives. Many authors question whether traditional media are justified in their fear of losing their role on account of the increased use of the internet. Internet and new technologies (new media) are in reality in the media market but they will only be dominant if they are able to take over the role of traditional media. At the moment, there is no reason to be afraid of the possibility that the internet could replace »classical« television, but it is inevitable that television includes the internet and other new technologies in its services if it wants to remain a significant subject in the media market. Additionally, media function as an important component of the economic system and their economic success is one of the basic segments of the national communication system.

Mass media can be seen as an important factor causing social changes. Interpreting events can mean the production of secondary events and also social changes which, seen after a time, are most likely an effect of the understanding of events (according to the interpretation of the media) and not only of the sole event. Therefore, we cannot deny that the mass media play an important role in the construction of our present and future situation.

In the history of mass media research, we can find different interpretations of media influences. We speak about three different periods. In the early years,

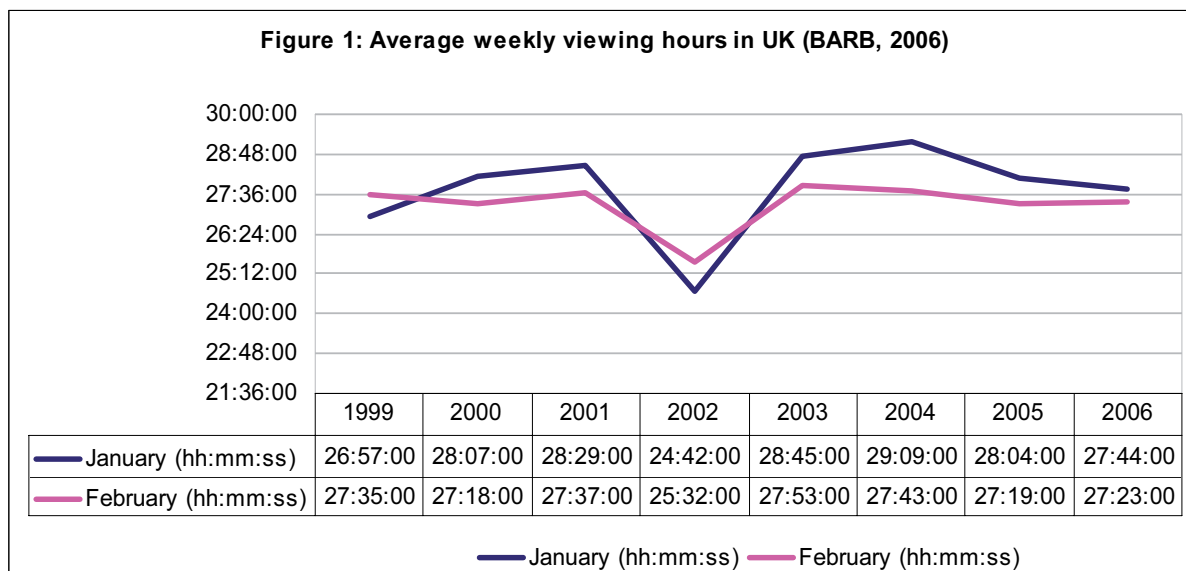
experts asserted that there exists uniform audience reaction to the media. The second period dealt more with the audience and less with the media and experts claimed that audiences perceived media content according to their needs. The approach to »uses and gratification« stresses more attention on the audience and less to media content. Modern approaches claim that media content does not influence all audiences uniformly. Media influence audiences in combination with other institutions in society and they send messages in the context of all the other institutions and according to the expectations of the audiences.

## 2. Television as Important Institution in Society

Among the media of mass communication we notice priorities and differences. Television is now probably the single most important medium for communication. For many, television is the crucial source of information about the outside world. But its importance derives from its role in industrial societies/1/. Unlike many other institutions, television is implicated in processes of change: it is both the creator and the product of change in society. In the field of politics, its treatment and coverage of war, electronic or nuclear arms have had enormous consequences on political organizations and political behaviour. Similarly, its treatment of social issues has provoked many questions about its role in creating, and not merely reflecting, a changing society.

Growing awareness of the nature of the »television medium« and its far reaching and unquantifiable effects have contributed to a major reassessment of its work. Television's output has ceased to be a mirror of society but a subtle view sees it as 'heavily selected interpretation of events, one which structures reality for

Figure 1: Average weekly viewing hours in UK (BARB, 2006)



us, which shapes and frames a world for us to inhabit and accept as real and legitimate, one which sets the agenda within which we are led to discuss the terms of our lives'/2/.

From audience figures we can see that there is still a great amount of time is devoted to TV viewing. Despite the growth of internet television viewing represent the main source of media information. According to the figures of Broadcasting Audience Research Board/3/ (BARB) we can explain that there is a great amount of time devoted to television viewing. In the January 2002 the average weekly viewing time were 23 hours while in the January 2006 individuals devoted 29 hours to television viewing (**Figure 1: Average Weekly viewing hours**).

By examining these figures, it could be believed that television has its important role in our every day life. Even if the entertainment is important element in television viewing, the informative and educational roles are deeply connected with television viewing. It is possible to see television as one of the core political and ideological institutions of modern society. This opens the way to a fuller analysis of its work: an analysis of its agenda-setting function, its part in re-enforcing cultural norms and most crucially, its work in relation 'to those who rule dominant institutions.../4/. For if the broadcast media does not reflect some already achieved consensus, or given 'reality', but tends to select and reproduce those definitions of 'reality' which favour and legitimate existing structures in the society, then their work is part of a process of legitimacy and consensus formation.

### 3. Modern Television

Media must satisfy our needs to be informed, educated, and entertained, and it must provide a picture of the world in our local context. Television is expected to be an important component of the social, cultural, and political system. In the last decade, it has been additionally stressed that electronic media function as an important component of the economic system. Broadcasting is becoming one of the main agents of the free market. Accordingly, to function in the public interest of a whole society, television should be governed by political, social and, particularly in the last decade, economic rationales/5/.

Television has been confronted by many changes in the last decade. Just a decade ago, there was less competition for audience and for advertisers. Regulators imposed many guidelines, including those preventing multiple ownership of stations within the same market and cross- ownership among broadcasters, networks, cable operators, and telephone companies/6/. The potential of new communication technologies, such as broadband distribution, digital television, and direct broadcast satellites, was not understood. Today tele-

vision is facing a unique and rapidly changing environment.

Technology has created convergence among media industries, blending computers, programming and distribution systems. As a consequence, modern society calls for a different system of media regulations./7/ Along with many dynamic changes in the media field, the question arises of how to regulate the convergence. Accordingly, the organisational structure and the mission of television will change in the multichannel environment.

Television, like nothing else before, is a true "mass" medium. Consequently, it has been granted a specific position in a situation which differed from print. There is an expectation to have its position preserved and it has been "granted" the mission of public good. The special position of the medium has been transferred into the special position of the institution of the public service broadcaster. Private broadcasters have functioned in Europe for almost half a century and the legitimacy of the special position of public service broadcasting is very often questioned today.

The old media systems of the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were efficient until the 1980's. In that period television had a national, public, political and non-commercial character. In Europe a period of de-regulation and re-regulation began. This was caused by new media systems with purely commercial aims that substituted for previous media systems with aims for public television only. In this way a dual system was formed. It is characterised by the activities of public television as well as private commercial stations. In changed circumstances, the characteristics of a public service broadcaster that had formerly been very strict and non-commercial have been modified. A process of concentration, which has taken place in many other industrial areas, can also be traced in the mass media. In the process of convergence, the number of economic subjects that work in the field of media has decreased while at the same time the existing larger companies tended to own and control a majority of production and distribution.

### 4. The tradition of Public service broadcasting and economic forces in Europe

In European societies, there is a prevailing dual system of broadcasting, presented by a clear distinction between public and commercial broadcasters. However, according to the literature dealing with public media or specific public radio and television systems, it is obvious that the definition of public service broadcasting is not an easy task. There is no clear public service model in Europe which could be looked upon as a model for all the PSBs in European countries. Public service broadcasters are still the main performers in the European media market.

What the ideal way of driving public service broadcasting in a particular country is is very difficult to say. However, we should take into account that public service broadcasters changed their position and form at the media field/8/. Media proliferated as the competition for both the audience and financial resources increased. Additionally, media focused on the fulfilment of the most basic desires and wishes, but not needs. The reason for main programme changes was funding of broadcasting - commercial funding and direct payment for programs became the main source of media funding. Moreover, market created new forms of cultural practices that essentially differ from the traditional national-elitist definition of culture.

PSB must not become a »ghetto« for content that is commercially unattractive. It must endeavour to attract as many viewers and listeners as possible. The audience must be a warrant that the special position of PSB will be protected in the future, even if we believe that PSB should have in mind the efficiency and rationality in managing and that the market will play an important role.

It is a fact that the role and position of television as an institution in society is changing. Commercialization and the use of new technologies are the most common trends in all PSB in Europe. Public and commercial broadcasters have the same aims. While it seems that commercial networks and PSB behave as two extremely different models in society, similar principles in their functioning are narrowing the gap between them. It is a fact that the role and position of television as an institution in our society is changing. Commercialisation is the most common trend in all PSBs in Europe. Public and commercial broadcasters are striving for the same aims. Treating PSB as a narrow elite and a cultural institution is becoming unrealistic. At the same time, the needs of commercial (non-public) broadcasters have been changed. While commercial (non-public) networks are striving for a stronger position in society and a loyal following, they have realised that their audience wants reliable, entertaining and diverse programming. Broadcasters have to satisfy the needs of audiences (to inform and entertain), owners (profit) and advertisers (to have access).

The main aims in the media environment, which are to realise public good and to be successful in the market, are clearly seen in Channel 4 in the UK, which is a hybrid broadcasting model. Since it has special public service remits and acts in the market, it can be examined as a new model for public service broadcasting in Europe. Although we are aware of special cultural, political and historical circumstances in Britain that led to the establishment and development of the fourth channel (a very different PSB), we believe that a similar formula could work in other European countries as well. It is important that regulators impose special responsibilities on PSB and that all the rules

are strictly established in order not to misuse its advantages in the marketplace.

## 5. Traditional TV and new technologies

The case of digital TV shows us the gap between technology and content. Use of this innovation in TV production was instigated by technological forces and not by the needs of consumers (the audience). The case of digital TV in Europe shows that there is not such a great need among consumers as was expected. Moreover, distribution capacities are hardly fulfilled by quality programs (content). The technology is dependent on production and programming. In American television production, there is an audience need for local products. Localization of formats is becoming the most important issue in international programming (local soaps, local quiz shows). Large production companies sell formats (franchising) which should suit local audiences perfectly (*Who wants to be a millionaire? Big Brother? Soaps?*).

In a narrow sense, TV is a one-way electronic medium for transmitting visual information to a large audience. More widely, it signifies a complex communication system that is intertwined with culture, institutions and technologies. Culturally, it is a mass medium for delivery of information in the form of news, entertainment and advertisements. The flow of information is structured from-one-to-many and from-centre-to-periphery without a meaningful feedback route. Within this system, the audience is merely a passive media perceiver/9/.

Institutionally, TV encompasses a complex combination of network and independent broadcasting firms (cable, satellite, and over-the-air), syndicated program producers and providers, advertising agencies, home electronics and equipment manufacturers. Furthermore, it involves regulatory bodies and other government agencies.

TV and the internet can be integrated (converged) in a variety of ways. The internet can carry conventional TV signals, Web pages can incorporate small video windows, TV sets can be used as computer monitors, broadcasters can insert Internet data in the vertical blanking interval, Web pages can carry content complementary to conventional TV channels, and cable modems can connect households with the internet, among other possibilities.

However it was estimated already in late 90' that content would be dispersed across a number of different media (platforms) main public service content remains at the terrestrial channels.

### 5.1. Limits to growth of new technologies

Although there is huge technological potential, there are social limits to the growth of the internet which seem to be crucial. 60 percent of the world population

of the 6 billion has never used a telephone and 90 % have never used a computer. Additionally, 3 million survive on less than \$2 per day.

There are many limits to expansion: limits to leisure time, to audience and to funds. Given the fact that the audience is at any given point finite and that it is difficult to see how the present 7 hours of television a day can be significantly enlarged, the endless addition of channels can only lead to an endless subdivision of viewing, in which more and more offerings fight for fewer and fewer users. In this sense, it is not technology but economics that becomes decisive. Time is an extremely important controlling factor: time to produce and to consume.

New technologies are usually competitive and their effects are not always easy to predict. What will not change is the time it takes to either produce or consume entertainment. Despite more rapid communications, a play by Shakespeare or a concert of Bach or Beethoven cannot be shortened. The time it takes to create a story and write a movie, book, play or television program will not change. Costs of creating continue to be very high, because talent will always be in short supply. The multiplication of distribution channels, where there is a finite amount of leisure time, a finite audience pool and finite funding for production can only result in a world of limitless reruns.

Television produces a very demanding audience that wants to be entertained and is passive at the same time. Some authors argue that interactive entertainment on the Web or elsewhere can never be substituted fully for conventional television because it cannot satisfy the need to be entertained passively. We often are not as effective at amusing ourselves, even with the tools of our community and culture, as another is entertaining us. Interactive TV may actually be less appealing to people if they must invest more energy and imagination.

## Conclusion

The main aim of the paper was the explanation of the importance of economic success and technologic developments in the traditional broadcasting system. Accordingly, we wanted to stress that economic criteria and the usage of new technologies are important for fulfilling the public role of broadcasting.

Digital television is in full swing in European media systems. That swing will have to be confirmed by new high quality content which is vital in cases where justification for large investments is required. It is most important that we research new technologies in the context of quality content that can be offered to the public, and also to think about television as an institution which is an important component of the social cultural and political system.

In the last decade it has been even more strongly

stressed that electronic media function as an important component of the economic system. But to be successful in this component it must fulfill the special mission given to it at the outset. Therefore, economic success is closely connected with the special mission which is the keystone of its function. Television must satisfy our need to be informed, educated, and entertained and to put together a picture of the world in our local context. Additionally, television must take advantage of new technological developments that will support it in its special role in the dynamic media market.

Economic forces have brought many changes to the media market. Public broadcasters have begun to count their audiences and think about ratings. They realize that public television should not become a »ghetto« for content that is commercially unattractive. Public and commercial broadcasters have started to achieve the same goals: to acquire the largest possible audience through different platforms.

The use of new technologies was a very important step for television as an institution in society. The greatest value of new technologies is their capacity to deliver the shows and movies, the news and entertainment – qualitative content that people have always demanded.

We should not deny that there were some steps of technological development which were greater than expected. The fact is that technology is the framework in which a television system can work. However, it is not the most important element in the television and media system. Technology is successful only as a support to creativity and to qualitative content. Television will remain an important institution in society which will support creativity, creative ideas, talents and will be part of our social structure.

In the future the traditional media (conventional television) will depend on technological development to offer quality content through different platforms. Production must be qualitative and distribution efficient and rational. Additionally, it is extremely important that audiences can get localized and personalized content.

Three principles drive successful television. First, that technology should be used to support ideas and not vice-versa. Second, that the most successful media – even, and especially, those of global companies – are local media. Finally, that the audience should have direct access to the greatest possible choices of services and products.

There are many trends which dictate the speed of today's media development. The most important »push« is economic rationality, because even public broadcasters have to take into account the demands of media market. Accordingly, the economy that will have the greatest say in today's media. The addition of new technologies to its traditional services is the most important step when looking for niche markets. The successful formula is to get as many niche markets

as possible, which is feasible through new platforms. Therefore, new platforms are a necessity for all the public service media, but the question which arises is this: should new platforms be part of public service broadcasting? Building as many platforms as possible is probably the only way to remain in the media market.

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