FILOSOFIJA. SOCIOLOGIJA. 2010. T. 21. Nr. 4, p. 320–330,

Different models of interaction between audiences and television: the Lithuanian case

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The article presents television studies based on the analysis of data of TV meter surveys from the Baltic countries (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia) and Scandinavia (Norway, Denmark). Despite the fast processes of globalization affecting television, it remains first of all a national phenomenon, and individuals within each nation state tend to relate to television in different ways. The differences are caused by demographic, socioeconomic and cultural factors. The different models in which audiences relate to television, measure and quantify it are discussed using Lithuania as an example.

Key words: mass media sociology, TV, public opinion, public policy

INTRODUCTION

Television studies are a fast-growing field constantly gaining popularity. It has become an important part of our daily lives and is playing an increasingly important role in our perception of the world. Despite the fast processes of globalization affecting television, it remains first of all a national phenomenon, and individuals within each nation state tend to relate to television in different ways. The differences are caused by demographic, socioeconomic and cultural factors. In my mind, a systematic television analysis requires establishing the key categories, or types, of television stations. Otherwise, the process will be too fragmented, scattered and very difficult to establish the patterns and draw conclusions. There are different types of channels in the area of television within each country. They differ in the ways they emerged during the formation of current television landscapes and their primary sources of income. Their ambition and behaviour are also different. Talking about different types of television channels, Žygintas Pečiulis identifies two ways of grouping TV stations (Pečiulis 1997):

a) based on the ownership and relation to the state;
b) based on the programming style.

He identifies three types of television channels, based on the ownership structure – public broadcaster, commercial television, and pay TV. He also shows the differences among the typical viewers for each type of television and the revenue formula:

a) public broadcaster. Viewer: a citizen. Formula: pays even if doesn't watch;
b) commercial television. Viewer: consumer. Formula: pays when does laundry, not when watching;
c) pay TV. Viewer: a fan. Formula: pays for what he watches.

Based on programming styles, Pečiulis identifies three types of channels:

a) universal: institutional, commercial, family and female, experimental;
b) thematic: movies, sports, music, information, culture, other specialized;

c) programs for foreign territories (ambassadors). Examples: BBC World, TV Polonia, TV5.

I used this differentiation as a starting point for my logic of grouping TV stations. However, I wanted to take both approaches into account simultaneously and also to have more weight ascribed to the country of origin (national vs. external) and the type of license for distribution (national terrestrial vs. limited penetration / cable satellite). As a result, it was most logical to group all channels into four segments:

1. National commercial broadcasters.
2. National public broadcasters.
3. Thematic and regional terrestrial commercial broadcasters.
4. Cable and satellite channels.

SEGMENT 1: NATIONAL COMMERCIAL BROADCASTERS

These are commercially owned TV stations that received national full-format licenses when the deregulation and commercialization of television took place within an individual country. Today, they most often dominate viewing time among mass audiences in the Baltic region. This segment has an exclusive position as the licensing mechanism controls the number of such channels on the market; at the same time, they are only to a small degree threatened by the segment of cable and satellite channels coming from the outside. As to the ownership, in most cases these are the TV stations that are partially or completely owned by international media groups. They are guided by commercial interests in the first place, with the main source of income coming from advertising. In relation to the viewers, they have a silent pact – to deliver what audiences want in exchange for airing commercials. They are different from public broadcasters in company philosophy – with commercial interests in mind, these channels are achieving higher viewing shares using less people and a smaller material base compared to public broadcasters. Appreciation by the mainstream audience is the key success factor in order to achieve dominance in the viewing shares and translate it into commercial success by gaining adequate investment from advertisers. Since most of these channels are owned by international companies which are trading on the stock market, quarterly, half-year and annual financial results are important factors shaping their behaviour.

SEGMENT 2: NATIONAL PUBLIC BROADCASTERS

This segment is the oldest in all countries: it was the state that launched television in the framework of a national state and targeted its own citizens. This segment traditionally enjoyed rather a long period of monopoly. It is usually financed by the state budget, television fees and possibly combined smaller advertising revenues. Compared to the other segments, it is not only different by ownership (public vs. private) and financing models, but also by the tasks it is expected to carry out. It is rather common that when a state broadcaster receives higher ratings, it is accused of being of low quality. In other words, along with public financing it also gets public expectation to meet higher standards than commercial broadcasters. It is different from country to country and quite often rather subjective when the "criteria" of quality for a public broadcaster are set. Still, in my view, the most common attributes can be associated with the keywords "informative" and "educational" or "intelligent". Traditionally, state broadcasters enjoy the large material base in each country – biggest office buildings, studios, technologies and the highest number of employees. Their success is not measured by the commercial sense alone (if at all), but rather by how successfully they perform their mission.

SEGMENT 3: THEMATIC AND REGIONAL TERRESTRIAL COMMERCIAL BROADCASTERS

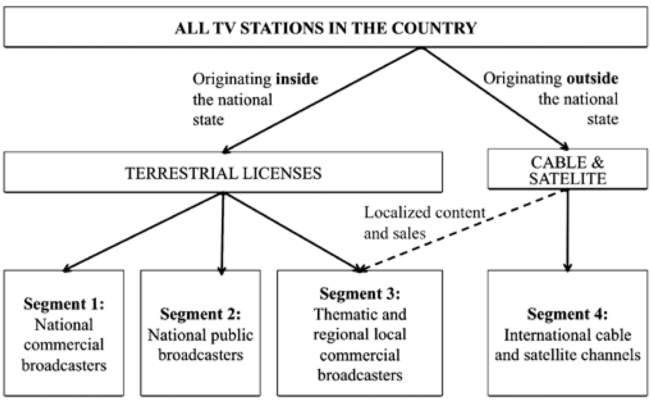
This is a segment very much similar to Segment 1 – they also have terrestrial licenses (can broadcast outside and independently of the cable / satellite universe), i. e. by definition they are local TV stations originating from within the country. The difference is that they may not have a full format license, i. e. are not allowed to broadcast in the same way as national terrestrial TV stations, but rather have to follow a certain central theme (e. g., regional, sports, news, youth, etc.), or may not have an actual national distribution yet (e. g., built from a number of small regional stations). From the ownership point of view, part of them belong to the same owners as Segment 1 channels (commercial broadcasters); in this respect, together they form a family of channels. Although in this case all the drivers and company philosophy are the same as for the main TV station that they are affiliated with, the difference comes from the type of audience they target, i. e. try to talk to: it is narrower, niche, specific in comparison with broad and mainstream for Segment 1. From the viewer's point of view, these channels are perceived as alternative and niche. For these reasons, I keep them as a separate group from Segment 1.

SEGMENT 4: CABLE AND SATELLITE CHANNELS

This is the most international segment in each country. No matter whether it is broadcasting in the local language or delivers subtitled programs, it is more common for these channels to be originating from outside the national state. They are clearly profiled, smaller and fragmented channels within a country. Since the signal is delivered via satellite and covers many countries at the same time, the strength of such channels is a large footprint, i. e. getting a small part of attention within each country, but accumulating large audiences across more territories. These are also commercial players, in most cases with the key difference from Segments 1 and 3 – their revenue is mainly depending upon the fees that come from the viewers in the form of payment for their cable service or a subscription card for a satellite dish. In this case the advertising revenue is only a supplement, an additional income. The main pact between the channel and the viewer is not in getting free content in exchange for advertising, but paying for the content that is matching the interests of the viewer, which are not fully satisfied by free TV stations alone (more channels, more diversity, a bigger number of specific topics covered). In other words – providing more diversity and a bigger choice.

Figure 1 shows the schematic relationship among these four segments.

Fig. 1. Four types of television stations in a country



A natural question is how viewer audiences are split among these segments. Table 1 shows the average distribution of the share of viewing among these four segments among five countries over the period of the last five years, based on the data from TV meter surveys. What we see is that in all the countries the biggest volume of general audience is attracted by Segment 1 (national commercial) broadcasters. Lithuania (56.2%) stands out compared to the rest in terms of the overall size of this segment. Scandinavian countries differ by a stronger position of public broadcaster (30–40% of the general audience) compared to the average of around 15% in the Baltics.

Table 1. Total viewing split by channel segments: a five-year average (national share of viewing; target group: all 4+; 2005–2009)

Average SOV 2005–2009		Segment 1 National commercial channels	Segment 2 Public broadcasters	Segment 3 Local & regional TV stations	Segment 4 International cable & satelite channels
Baltics	Lithuania	56.2	14.4	10.4	19.0
	Latvia	36.5	15.8	20.2	27.4
	Estonia	39.4	16.7	20.2	27.5
Scandinavia	Denmark	32.9	30.2	22.8	14.1
	Norway	35.5	40.9	11.0	12.5

Source: TNS TV meter surveys.

I believe that there are three groups of parameters which, combined with each other, provide the best definition of individual's relation to television:

1. **Overall viewing intensity. It shows how important part of daily routine television plays in a person's life.** In the analysis, it is expressed as ATV (average time viewed) per day during the analyzed period for each individual. This will allow seeing the differences among medium, heavy and light TV viewers.
2. **Viewing distribution among four segments of TV stations – is it mainstream commercial, or offers more alternative choices that a person prefers from the content he is offered.** This parameter is expressed as the share of viewing, attributed to each segment level during the analyzed period of time.
3. **Viewing distribution among genre categories, i. e. what dominant content categories are preferred from the choices offered.** It is expressed as a share of viewing on an individual level among genre categories on the main TV stations in the country.

I made the analysis, based on data from Lithuania for 2009. Since viewing choices and preferences are individual and vary from person to person, the analysis is done on the level of an individual, i. e. it looks into the viewing behaviour of 932 panel members during 2009. I have chosen a **two-step cluster** analysis in order to identify the different patterns of relation between viewer audiences and television, based on three sets of variables described above. The reason for choosing a two-way cluster is the total number of cases in my analysis (932): it is too big to process using the hierarchical or the K-means clustering.

For the results to be easier to interpret, I reduced the number of genre categories used in previous examples by combining them into more aggregated categories. A detailed list of variables used for the analysis, the scales on which the values are measured and the average values in general population are presented in Table 2.

When talking about different types of viewers, Žygintas Pečiulis identified three core categories (Pečiulis 1997):

a) mainstream viewers – the most numerous group. People of various education, but quite often not very high. They are not very demanding. Most favourite programs are entertainment, game shows, series and humour;
b) the second group – wants to enrich their knowledge, get new information, likes critical comments and unexpected points of view. They are more demanding when choosing the type of entertainment – expect professionalism, quality and variety;
a) intellectual elite – the least numerous group. These are people who frequently tune into TV, but they are also the most demanding and the most critical ones. Most often they are not satisfied with the quality of television, but intellectuals have the biggest influence when forming the public opinion on and the strategy of TV stations.

I found this argumentation a useful starting point and kept it in mind when performing my analysis. At the same time, I felt too generalist and also I could not agree on the level of importance ascribed to the intellectual elite in forming the public opinion related to television as well as the strategy of TV stations (especially of commercial and thematic channels).

Table 2. Variables used for cluster analysis

Detailed description of category	Scale		
	Type	From	To
Group 1 – intensity of total television viewing			
Total TV – average time viewed – minutes per day in 2009	Ration	1	958
Group 1 – channel categories			
Category 1: national commercial stations [LNK, TV3, BTV]	Interval	0	100
Category 2: public broadcaster [LTV & LTV2]	Interval	0	100
Category 3: local niche stations [TV6, PBK, Lietuvos Rytas TV, TV1, 11K]	Interval	0	100
Category 4: all other – cable and satelite channels	Interval	0	100
Group 3 – genre categories on local stations			
News	Interval	0	100
Series and movies	Interval	0	100
Talk shows and telenovellas	Interval	0	100
Animation	Interval	0	100
Entertainment	Interval	0	100
Educational	Interva;	0	100
Game shows and music	Interval	0	100
Other interests	Interval	0	100

During the analysis, I found the best way to group cases into nine clusters–models (see Table 3 for the results). For a clearer interpretation of the results, I also arranged the models into four logical blocks that define the overall direction of relations between a person and television:

BLOCK 1 – INTELLECTUAL (12% of cases) – only model #1. It very clearly differs from all others.

BLOCK 2 – MAINSTREAM (41% of cases) – models #3, #4 and #6 – with a clear focus on local commercial TV stations, but within a group the models differ by the overall intensity of interaction with television (ranging from model #3 with a 25% lower average time viewed than that of the general population, to model #6 with a 29% higher average viewing time). They also differ according to the content expectations and the position of the public broadcaster (being strongest in model #3 and weakest in model #6). This decline of the importance of the public broadcaster among the models is also mirrored in the declining importance of the news content in the respective models.

BLOCK 3 – TRANSITIONAL BLOCK (26% of cases)

This block contains two models – #5 and #8. Both models are similar in terms of a weak role of the public broadcaster, with commercial channels on similar levels as in general population, but with an increasing importance of alternative channels. They also show very weak content expectations related to the news and are focused on two key content categories – movies and series (model #5) and animation (model #8). I called it transitional since people in this group can be moving towards both – more mainstream models (e. g. kids when they grow up and move from animation towards a broader spectrum of content) and vice versa – people who do not find sufficient offer on the main commercial and public broadcaster channels can be moving towards the models that are stronger focused on niche channels.

BLOCK 4 – FOCUS ON ALTERNATIVES (20% of cases)

The block contains three models – 2, 7 and 9. For all of them, a common characteristic is to have higher viewing shares concentrated in the segment of local and foreign niche channels. Model 2 is also somewhat similar to Model 1 in terms of relationship between commercial and public broadcasters. Model 7 is the smallest one (only 2%) but always emerges as a separate cluster without respect to how many clusters are identified during the analysis.

The core blocks that were identified during my analysis share some similarities as well as some of the differences compared to the basic groups of viewers mentioned by Pečiulis (2007; 2006; 1997).

Although I started from a complete scratch, the most vivid block that was identified was the 'intellectuals' who have a completely different taste and viewing behaviour compared to the rest of the audiences. It is not the most numerous block, either. This is very similar to Pečiulis' argumentation.

The mainstream block was also rather clear. Where the difference occurred was that in my analysis it became evident that there were substantial differences within the mainstream block as well, and it should be treated as a block of different ways in which audiences relate to television, rather than a single group.

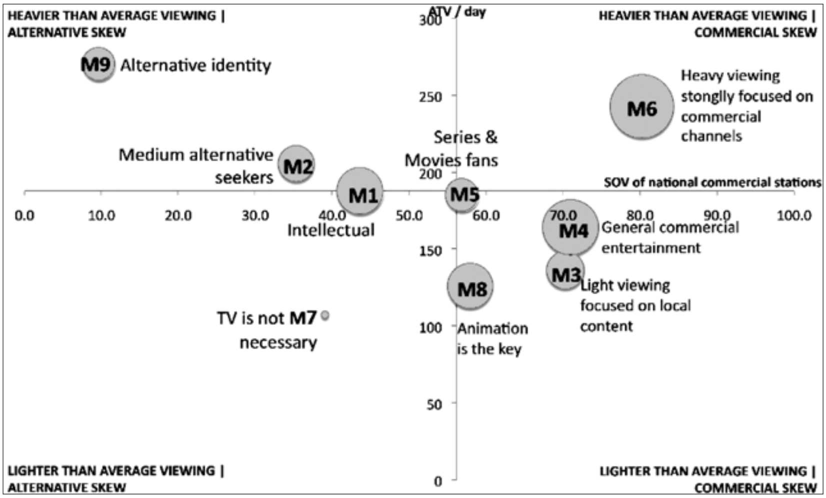
Table 3. Nine models of TV and audience relations (Lithuania, 2009)

		Intellectual 12%	Mainstream block 41%			Transition to alternatives 26%		Focus on alternatives 20%			
		M1	M3	M4	M6	M5	M8	M2	M7	M9	All
		Intellectual viewing	Light viewing focused on local content	General commercial entertainment	Heavy viewing strongly focused on commercial channels	Series and movies fans	Animation is the key	Medium alternative seekers	TV is not necessary	Alternative identity	
Number of cases in cluster % of cases		115	94	136	155	130	111	91	19	81	932
		12	10	15	17	14	12	10	2	9	100
Intensity of television viewing	Average minutes per day	188	136	164	243	185	126	206	108	270	188
Split between TV segments	Commercial channels	43.6	70.3	71.0	80.2	56.9	57.9	35.3	39.0	9.7	56.1
	Public broadcaster	38.9	21.0	14.5	11.1	8.4	5.5	12.3	8.0	2.4	14.3
	Local and international niches	17.5	8.7	14.6	8.7	34.7	36.6	52.4	52.9	87.9	29.6
Split between agregated content categories	News	38.9	24.5	19.4	16.7	13.4	8.0	25.1	11.5	27.0	20.7
	Series and movies	13.8	14.3	27.2	23.2	39.7	21.4	19.9	13.3	28.7	23.8
	Talk shows and telenovellas	7.0	8.3	6.0	14.8	5.8	6.1	4.9	13.0	9.0	8.1
	Animation	1.6	2.6	6.1	12.6	10.6	41.8	4.4	6.6	3.1	10.7
	Entertainment	13.2	19.6	19.6	14.1	13.4	10.2	17.8	27.5	15.4	15.5
	Educational	12.5	12.0	11.4	7.9	8.0	5.3	15.4	6.4	8.3	9.8
	Game shows and music	9.6	15.4	6.2	8.0	4.4	4.0	6.4	6.1	5.0	7.2
	Other interests	3.4	3.4	4.1	2.6	4.7	3.3	6.3	15.9	3.5	4.1
		Indexes vs all									
Intensity of television viewing	Average minutes per day	100	73	87	129	98	67	109	57	144	
Split between TV segments	Commercial channels	78	125	127	143	101	103	63	70	17	
	Public broadcaster	273	147	101	78	59	38	86	56	17	
	Local and international niches	59	29	49	29	117	124	177	179	297	
Split between agregated content categories	News	187	118	94	81	65	38	121	55	130	
	Series and movies	58	60	115	98	167	90	84	56	121	
	Talk shows and telenovellas	86	103	74	183	72	75	60	160	112	
	Animation	15	24	57	118	99	390	41	62	29	
	Entertainment	85	126	126	91	87	66	115	177	99	
	Educational	127	122	116	81	82	54	156	66	84	
	Game shows and music	133	213	86	110	61	55	88	84	69	
	Other interests	84	83	101	64	114	80	155	391	85	

The other two blocks were also different from what Pečiulis called "the second group of viewers". In my analysis, I called these blocks "transitional" – two groups of people who are different from both intellectuals and mainstream due to rather narrow and specialized expectations from television and "the focus on alternatives". The difference of "the focus on alternatives" from the "second group" lies in the individual models that belong to this block. One of them is indeed a good match to "the second group" – model #2, but the other two are rather different.

Figure 2 shows the graphical map of nine models, representing the size of each type of relationship as well as relative distances between the models on the axis of the average viewing intensity and orientation towards the mainstream national commercial channels vs. the alternatives (public broadcaster and cable & satellite channels).

Fig. 2. Map of models – size and distances (Lithuania, 2009)



The axis in the figure crosses on the average values among all cases creating four segments. The size of bubbles in the figure is proportional to the number of cases belonging to each cluster.

Let's explore each model in more detail.

GROUP 1 – INTELLECTUAL

MODEL #1 (12%) – INTELLECTUAL VIEWING

Medium overall television viewing intensity. Heavily skewed towards the public broadcaster (2.7 times higher viewing shares compared to the average among all). Because of the overall dominance of commercial stations they still have the highest average share of viewing (43.6%) split among three commercial stations, but the public broadcaster is very close to that number with only one main and one small secondary channel (38.9%).

These people treat television as a "cool" / engaging medium with news as the preferred content (38.9% share within the target group and index 187 compared to general population). They also expect from television educational and informative programs as well as game shows. Animation is the television content most alien for them.

GROUP 2 – MAINSTREAM VIEWING

The second, most numerous, group consisting of three audience and television relation models that are best described as the mainstream.

MODEL #3 (10%) – LIGHT VIEWING FOCUSED ON LOCAL CONTENT

Lighter than average overall television viewing (index 73 vs. total). Compared to general population, these people are heavier viewers of local national TV stations – both public (index 147) and commercial (index 125). They seem to have no real alternatives or to choose them – the local niche and the cable / satellite segment are of very low importance (index 29). On the content side, these people appreciate game shows and music. They like the general entertainment as well as the educational segments and news. Their attitude towards telenovellas and talk shows is rather neutral – averages similar to general population. What they do not like are series, movies and animation.

MODEL #4 (15%) – GENERAL COMMERCIAL ENTERTAINMENT

The overall television viewing slightly lower than average (index 87). Do not have or find real alternatives in local niche channels or cable / satellite channels (index 49). They treat the public broadcaster just as general population does (index 101) and are most skewed towards commercial channels (index 127). News is of average importance. A much more preferred content is movies and series (index 115), general entertainment (index 126) and educational category (116). The most distant content is talk shows and telenovellas (index 74) as well as animation (index 57).

MODEL #6 (17%) – HEAVY VIEWING STRONGLY FOCUSED ON LOCAL COMMERCIAL CHANNELS

The most numerous cluster (17%). It also represents the second heaviest overall television viewing among all clusters with the average of over 4 hours per day (index 129 vs. average). Viewing is very heavily skewed towards commercial stations (index 143) while the public broadcaster (index 78) and other local and international niche channels (index 29) are not considered to be important. On the content side, the two most heavily appealing categories for this cluster compared to overall averages are talk shows and telenovellas (index 183) and animation (index 118). All other main content categories are on similar averages as in general population. These people are also least inclined to look for content in smaller niche genres (index 63 – the lowest among all clusters).

GROUP 3 – TRANSITIONAL VIEWING

Two models belong to this group – #5 ("Series and movies fans") and #8 ("Animation is the key"). Both models represent the relationship between audiences and television best described as "transitional" since it is typical neither of the mainstream nor of "alternative" ends of the axis, but is rather a position inbetween.

MODEL #5 (14%) – SERIES AND MOVIES FANS

The key difference from the other models is a clear focus on series and movies as the key content these people expect from television (index 167). News is not important (index 65) as are also talk shows or telenovellas (index 72). All other content categories on the main stations are slightly below the averages. They are also slightly more inclined to look for more alternatives in other niche categories.

The overall television viewing is just an average as compared to general population (index 98). So is the viewing of commercial channels (index 101). Since content expectations are focused on movies and series, the position of the public broadcaster is weaker than in general population (index 59); instead, they spend the time that would be given to the public broadcaster on watching other local and international niche channels (index 117).

MODEL #8 (12%) – ANIMATION IS THE KEY

A rather numerous cluster (12%), characterized by one of the lowest overall television viewings (average 2 hours daily, index 67) with a clear focus on animation (index 390). News is the least important among all content categories (index 38). They can also watch series and movies (index 90). All other content categories are of much less importance as compared with general population. In the distribution of attention among the channel groups – the public broadcaster is not interesting (index 38), while commercial channels are on the level of average significance (index 103) with a higher importance of niche channels (index 124).

GROUP 4 – FOCUS ON ALTERNATIVES

A group combining three models that represent an alternative behaviour compared to mainstream viewing.

MODEL #2 (10%) – MEDIUM ALTERNATIVE SEEKERS

A medium overall television viewing. Find no sufficient offer in commercial televisions (the SOV index of commercial channel compared to general population is 63), so they are looking for alternatives. The public broadcaster is slightly more acceptable, but still below the average as compared with the rest of population (index 86 vs. general population). These people find best choices on local niche and cable as well as on satellite channels. On national channels they watch the news, educational programs and documentaries as well as another, more specialized content (sports). Entertainment shows are also interesting. What they definitely do not like are talk shows and telenovellas as well as animation. This cluster in a way resembles Cluster 1, but, in my mind, it reflects the key switch to alternative viewing as compared with main TV stations (local and international niche channels are 52.4% of viewing), for this reason I put it into Group 4 – "Alternative viewing".

MODEL #7 (2%) – TV IS NOT NECESSARY

The least numerous cluster which always emerges, no matter what the total number of clusters was selected for analysis. The overall weakest relation to television marks it in general (average time watched per day is less than 2 hours) and to local mainstream commercial channels (index 70) as well as public broadcaster (56). While watching TV, these people do not look for the news on the main channels (index 55), they look for pure entertainment (index 177), a dose of emotions (talk shows and telenovellas – index 180) and most actively explore other smaller content niches (index 391). Their viewing is also more focused on local and international niche channels (index 179).

MODEL# 9 (9%) – HEAVY EXTERNAL ALTERNATIVE SEAKERS

The cluster most focused on local and cable / satellite niche channels (index 297). In this respect, these people are also similar to Cluster 7. However, they are different both in terms of the intensity and importance television plays in their daily routines and content choices. This cluster is the cluster of heaviest television viewers (index 144) who spend on average 4.5 hours daily watching television. At the same time, these people find almost 88% of their content beyond the main local commercial and public channels. The content they are looking for is focused on three most popular content categories on television – news, series and movies. and talk shows and telenovellas.

Received 20 September 2010
Accepted 15 October 2010

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ALEKSANDRAS ČESNAVIČIUS

Televizijos ir auditorijų tarpusavio sąveikos modeliai: Lietuvos atvejis

Santrauka

Straipsnio dėmesio centre – televizijos vaidmuo šiuolaikinėse visuomenėse. Naudojantis TV metrų tyrimų duomenimis Lietuvoje, Latvijoje, Estijoje, Danijoje ir Norvegijoje (duomenis leido panaudti „TNS Global“), sukuriama analizei būtina sistematizuota televizijos kanalų sistema. Išskiriami pagrindiniai televizijos kanalų tipai, nagrinėjami jų veiklos bei santykio su skirtingomis auditorijomis pagrindiniai principai. Kiekybiškai išmatuojamas auditorijų pasiskirstymas nagrinėjamose šalyse tarp išskirtų televizijos kanalų segmentų.

Naudojant Lietuvą kaip pavyzdį išskiriami televizijos ir skirtingų visuomenės socialinių grupių santykių modeliai. Analizuojant empirinius duomenis nustatyta, kad Lietuvos atveju santykį tarp televizijos ir skirtingų socialinių grupių geriausiai apibūdina devynių modelių schema, kuri papildomai grupuojama į keturis blokus: intelektualųjį, masinį, pereinamąjį, alternatyvųjį. Kiekybinis auditorijų pasiskirstymas išmatuojamas taikant devynių modelių ir keturių blokų schemą. Atskleidžiami tokį pasiskirstymą formuojantys socialiniai ir ekonominiai veiksniai.

Raktažodžiai: žiniasklaida, sociologija, televizija, auditorijos