

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Television

I. Introduction.....	3
II. Different aspects of the phenomenon television.....	3
1. Viewing habits.....	3
2. Advertising.....	6
3. TV as a source for information?	11
4. Problem of TV violence.....	15
5. The future of television.....	21
III. Conclusion	24
IV. Reference	25
V. Bibliography.....	24

Introduction

In the year 1923 John L. Baird was for the first time successful in transmitting an image via cable to a television screen. Surely he would have never thought that this could be the beginning of a new era. Only 13 years later first live pictures from the Olympic Games in Berlin were transmitted to 50 television sets located in public viewing rooms nearby the Olympic stadium.

Today millions of people all over the globe are working on new productions for television. Thousands of stations broadcast every day gambling shows, motion pictures, cartoons, news reports, documentaries, series and talk shows via cable, antenna or satellite to the viewers. 98 percent of all households in the western world have at least one television set and on average everybody spends several hours of his free time watching.

The question arises why we are wasting so much time in front of a flat glass screen showing colorful pictures of distant places and people we have never met before? What influence does this technical device have on us - on our society?

Viewing habits

Since the very beginning of TV scientists have tried to gather data on viewing habits. Surveys are one way to determine what is watched. Far more efficient are automatic systems recognizing what is watched by whom. In Germany the GfK (Gesellschaft für Fernsehkonsum) has asked about 2,000 households to install a little box besides their TV set. This box transmits the viewing data to the TV stations and gives them up to date information on present viewing rates. In the United States a similar system is used but there it is not a single institute but almost every cable operator has its own test households.

The average American adult watched in the 1970s 2.9 hours, in the 1980s 3.1 (see ④ p. 355) and today an estimated 3.3 hours every day. In Germany the numbers rose from 2.5 hours in 1985 to 3 hours on average (see ⑤ p. 108). This increase was primarily caused by the large number of new television stations. Satellite and cable systems are today offering the capacity of over 200 channels. With new digital compression technologies (see page 23) this number will be quadrupled in the next four years. Numerable different programs are now broadcasted in parallel. Television therefore gets far more attractive for the viewer as it is more likely to find an

interesting program. Newspapers have lost tremendously in importance. People spend less time with reading because TV is a far more comfortable information and entertainment source. Radio also lost in importance but still the average listening time equals the radio consumption before the television revolution. Nowadays radio is primarily listened in car (three quarters listen radio while driving) or during working hours (in one third of all offices a radio is playing).

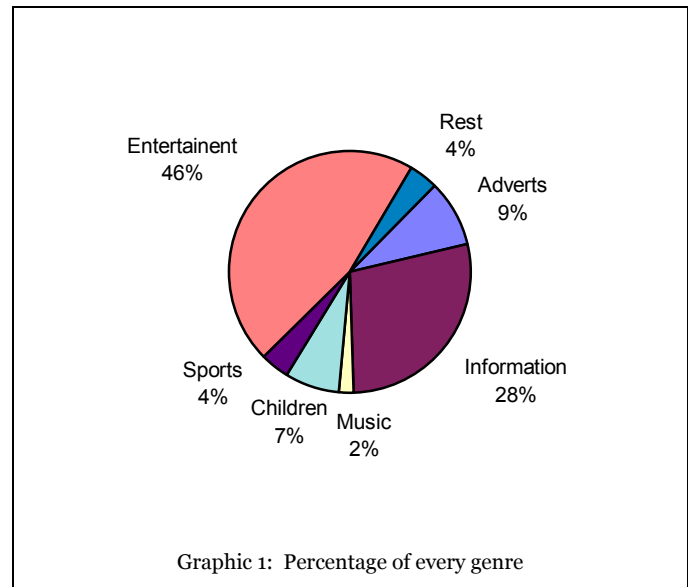
In contrast to the rising overall television viewing time general viewing habits have not changed. Analysts were able to figure out five basic points which have not changed since the beginning of TV studies in the 50s (see ⊕ p. 353):

- 1.** Women watch more television than men
- 2.** Those of lower socioeconomic status (the poorer and less educated) watch more than those of higher SES.
- 3.** People over 50 - especially women - watch more than others
- 4.** The fewer the people living in a household, the more the viewing by individuals.
- 5.** Black people watch more than white people (This point has not yet been proven in Germany. In Europe other ethnic groups or foreigners are not mentioned in the TV rating system).

One of the points says that women watch on average more television than men. One explanation for this general finding is caused by the fact that the majority of women still works as housewife. They spend most of their time at home and often watch television while they are ironing the clothes for example. No joke - an estimated quarter of viewers watching the game show "Der Preis ist heiß" on RTL every morning is cleaning the living room at the same time. Another explanation could be a lack of communication. The husband can talk with other individuals during his work. In contrast his wife often does not know what to do after finishing housework - unfortunately only few have hobbies. The easiest way to entertain oneself then is to watch television. Especially series and talk shows are popular because they compensate the lack of communication. The need for communication is probably also a reason for older people and people living alone or in little families to watch more TV. As there is nobody they can talk or listen to, they listen to the people on television.

For people of lower socioeconomic status TV is the cheapest and easiest way to entertain themselves. Blacks are unfortunately still in the lower class of our society and therefore lack enough money to entertain themselves every evening another way. Visiting a theater, cinema or just a pub always means high expenditures. Television allows you to bring pictures of distant places and interesting people right into your living room by just pressing a button on your remote control. One can sit passively in front of the "goggle box" and consume entertainment at no cost.

Several studies have revealed that television audience can be divided into two basic groups, the "Information Group" and the "Entertainment Group". Members of the "Information Group" are searching

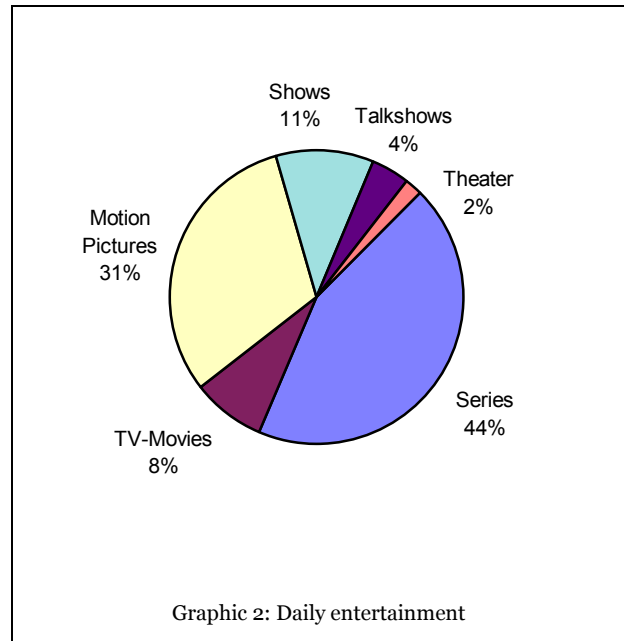


actively for programs like documentaries and news to stay informed. Their viewing time is below the average as they consider television primarily as a source of information. Other activities like reading books, hobbies or sports are more important. Members of this group are generally above-average intelligent and work in higher academic jobs.

The majority of viewers belongs to the "Entertainment Group". They want to be entertained or amused and are more likely to switch between channels until they have found something interesting for them. This phenomenon is called zapping - a new hobby for television viewers (see also page 11).

As the second group forms a clear majority of the population the program is primarily based on entertainment shows or series. Referring to graphic one only 28 percent of the daily program is dedicated to information in news, documentaries and reports. 1994 a survey in Bavaria among average television viewers revealed that 51 percent were strongly interested in news. Only 37 percent were very interested in motion pictures, 22 percent in series (see © p. 255). Though many say to be more interested in news, an increasing number of viewers does not watch them at all. In its infancy television has been a source of information. Today 46 percent of the daily program is dedicated for entertainment (see graphic one).

Entertainment has outrun every other television genre. Today game shows, series and movies are more successful than ever before. The most fundamental change in viewing habits was not the increasing average viewing time but the increasing demand for easy to consume entertainment. Today more people are leaving it up to TV to entertain them and therefore made it to their primary spare time activity. On average one third of the individual free time is spend with watching TV (see © p. 106). Twenty years ago peo-



ple preferred going out for dinner, visiting friends or other activities. But over the years the importance of the little "goggle box" increased and cinemas, restaurants and theaters complained about decreasing incomes. Many feared the danger of a television viewer society. A society where the only form of communication remains watching talk shows. A society where watching a documentary about romantic sculptors is called culture and watching sports a strenuous happening. Fortunately more and more people are today realizing that there is something beyond the wall of their living room. Other spare time activities are again on the advance. In my opinion this is a step in the right direction.

Advertising

Running a TV station is very expensive. The audience asks for better entertainment and networks all over the world need billions of dollars every year to finance their game shows, live sports coverages, news magazines, motion pictures, etc. For example the German TV station RTL needs on average every minute 3,900 DM (see table 1). Most expensive are sports events with about 20,000 DM per minute. Relatively cheap are motion pictures with 2,100 DM per minute on average (see table 1).

In recent years overall costs have risen dramatically. Especially prices for sport events are today almost unaffordable (for example the television license for the German "Fußball Bundesliga" costs about 200 million DM every year). Competition in the television market has grown radically. More and more new stations are opened. Every stations wants to snatch the best films and life events from its competitors and therefore offers enormous sums of

RTL Expenses			
	1990	1993	1995
News	2,500	3,600	4,700
Sport	2,800	9,300	20,000
Entertainment	2,000	5,300	6,000
Movies	1,300	1,800	2,100
Acquired Series	1,400	1,300	1,200
Total	1,600	3,400	3,900

(Per minute costs by genres in DM)
Table 1

money. As a result the market is empty - all series and feature films are sold but the high demand for new programs remains. Unfortunately the big studios can only produce a very limited number of new feature films. New series, game shows, documentaries, magazines, daily soaps and TV-movies have to be produced to satisfy the stations demand for new programs. In the United States about 18 billion dollars have been invested directly by television stations for in-house productions. Germanys most-watched station - RTL - alone invested 630 million DM in 2,600 productions. ARD invested about one billion.

So how can all this be financed? The industry has discovered television as the ideal medium for advertisements already 40 years ago. Because it employs motion as well as words, graphics, sound and music, television is a valuable medium for adverts. No other medium is as effective in showing how quickly an automobile can accelerate, how drinking the right beer can make new friends or how romantic smoking a cigarette in the wide country can be. The largest advert medium not only in Germany but also in Europe is RTL. 1994 RTL made gross advertisement revenues of 2,803 million DM (see table



Graphic 3: McDonalds "BigMac" spot

2). 172,844 spots have been shown in 3,974,769 seconds which equals to 46 days adverts non-stop (see ③ p. 23 and table 2). Prizes for a 30 second spot on RTL start with 840 DM and can go up to 105,000 DM. For example the average prize

for 30 seconds during the daily soap "Unter uns" costs 25,500 DM (see "RTL Preise 1996").

ZDF - largest TV station in Europe - only earned 558 million DM in 1994 by advertisements - the majority of its costs was financed by television licenses (GEZ) of 1,437 million DM (see © p. 254). ARD, ZDF and the so called "Dritten" play a special role in German television. They are more or less independent from commercials because they are financed by the television license. Other networks are financing their entire program by adverts. For them the number of viewers determines directly how much money they earn. The number of spots is limited by special media laws allowing for example only every 40 minutes one commercial break during a motion picture (in the United States it is 7 minutes). Prices for spots are variable and therefore set every month or sometimes even every day in relation to present TV ratings.

1994 Advertisements		
	Gross revenues in millions/DM	Number of Spots
RTL	2,803	172,844
SAT.1	2,402	192,814
PRO 7	1,785	170,116
ARD	581	13,172
ZDF	558	11,572
RTL 2	333	123,999

Table 2

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TV ratings in Germany are measured by the GFK (Gesellschaft für Fernsehkonsum). The GFK has installed little set up boxes in about two thousand households in Germany. Every box recognizes what is watched by whom and gives the information to the TV stations.

Viewing ratings determine what is broadcasted. If a program fails to attract enough viewers it is immediately canceled. For example RTL canceled Thomas Gottschalks "Late Night" one year ago. Each show cost about 150,000 DM but managed only to keep 1½ million viewers awake in the late evening. Therefore prices for spots during "Gottschalk Late Night" were very low and RTL lost 70,000 DM which each show. After one year of ever decreasing viewing rates Gottschalk was fired. Entertainers on private networks have to be successful if they want to keep their job.

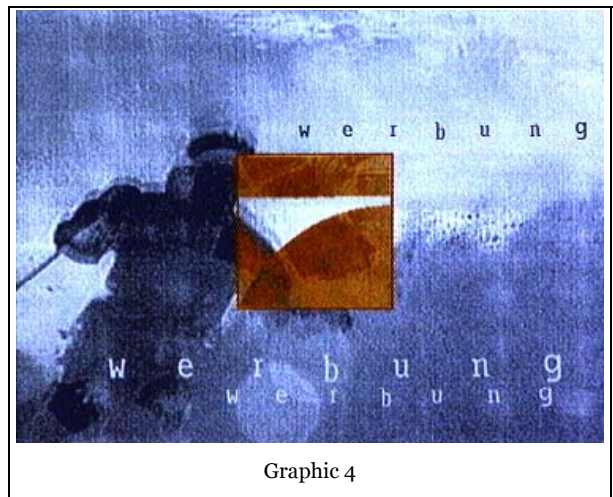
The need for success caused an interesting phenomenon. As soon as one station develops a revolutionary new program the concept is then copied by all other networks. About four years ago Hans Meiser from RTL introduced the first daily talk show (following the example of popular shows in America). Hans Meiser was very successful and soon had a lot of concurrence. Today seven talk shows are telecasted every day. In the United States it is even worse. The number of daily talk shows there can be estimated to 150 (nobody knows exactly)! To reduce costs most talk shows are sharing their studios. Talk guests have to be "recycled" and shown

multiple times in different shows to satisfy the need for interesting topics to discuss. The talk master sometimes even tries to incite an argument between his guests if he thinks that the discussion is not interesting enough for the viewers. The motto here is: every day the viewer can see normal people discussing about a topic in his normal life. On TV he wants something special, something with more passion and action. The argumentation of two talk opponents is irrelevant - only most spectacular insults define the winner of this discussion.

Some private networks also tend to follow the same motto in news or documentaries. Television makers want to attract the viewers with the thrill of danger. Especially a war means high profits for TV networks. For example the American news network CNN had ten times higher viewing rates during the Gulf War than in peace times. People want to know how "their boys" on the front are doing and therefore more often watch television.

No wonder that modern war has become something like a live sports coverage. During the first landing operation of the UN peace mission in Somalia more reporters have been on the beach than soldiers.

In times of war it is very easy to find top reports for the evening news. If nothing interesting happens in the real world news makes need to fabricate



Graphic 4

their own thrilling stories. There have been several incidents where news programs have telecasted wrong information. For instance a documentary on "Stern TV" (RTL) showed an example of illegal child labour in India: a little girl knotted an "IKEA" carpet. It was a lie but the public was enraged and "IKEA" suffered great financial losses.

The need to cut costs on the one hand and to attract many viewers on the other hand forced many channels to produce low quality programs. Especially children programs are not very attractive to advertisers as young viewers still do not have much money. Prices for spots are low and the profit for the stations limited. Therefore most stations are unwilling to invest large sums into quality children programs. It is far more economic to use simple plots with drama, violence and love than spending a fortune on quality educational contents. One minute of the fa-

mous high quality show "Die Sendung mit der Maus" (ARD) costs up to 10,000 DM. Acquired cartoon series only cost 500 DM per minute on average. Therefore private stations prefer to invest in low quality programs if they can also attract viewers. Unfortunately sex&crime always had and obviously will have the highest TV ratings.

Private stations have only one goal: maximum profit at minimal expenditures. Profit decides what is to be broadcasted and quantity is more important than quality. Advertisement is hidden everywhere. Plastic toys of the kids most favorite television heroes are presented during children programs. Adverts for merchandising products are shown throughout the program (in 1994 RTL alone earned 250 million DM by merchandising - RTL caps, T-shirts, CDs, etc. [see © p. 54]). So-called "Star-Hotlines" are the newest trend of the money machine television. Almost every station now offers a telephone hotline with up-to-date information (or nonsense) of its shows (prices for this service vary from 0.30 DM to 4.50 DM per minute).

In the United States it is even worse. Instead of advertisement spots the industry



Graphic 5: James Bond and his "BMW Z3 Roadster"

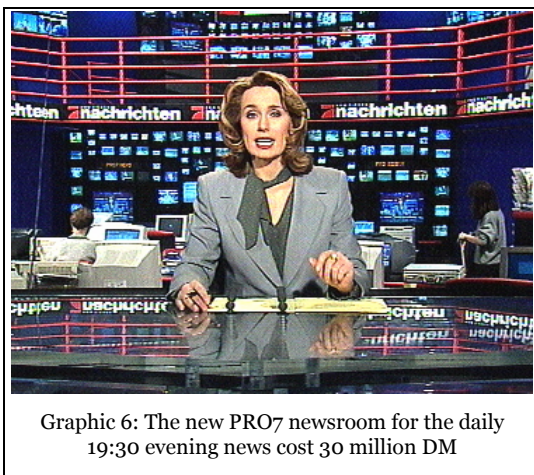
produces entire series and offers them at no cost to television stations. Those series are packed with hidden promotion hints for new products. "Product placing" is very successful on small American television networks which where normally unable to produce their own series. In Germany it is still forbidden to hide advertisement into television programs if it is not marked as

nonstop advertisement show. In motion pictures it is also not allowed but widely accepted. In the latest James Bond movie "GoldenEye" (United Artists, 1995) the "spy of her majesty" drove a "BMW Z3 Roadster" (see graphic 5) and the badies used IBM computers with "OS/2" and drunk Smirnov vodka. It gets more and more difficult to determine what is now the real program and what is advertisement.

Whenever a motion picture is most exciting television stations are placing an advertisement break. Master of commercial breaks is the private station PRO 7. Only 4 advert breaks are normally allowed during a motion picture. Therefore PRO 7 cuts a 4-hour movie into two parts and then broadcasts them as a mini-series with

8 adverts. Another example is the PRO 7 evening news which have been divided into three parts: news, weather and sports. Each part is divided by commercial breaks.

The result of advert omnipresence is a new sport: "Zapping". Since the invention of remote controls it is very easy to switch (zap) to other channels whenever commercials appear to the screen. After browsing through all channels the viewers normally return to the program they have been watching before. But an increasing number of viewers browses through the program until they have found something



Graphic 6: The new PRO7 newsroom for the daily 19:30 evening news cost 30 million DM

that also interests them. Therefore they never finish watching a program but consume only fragments. Especially news and documentaries suffer great losses of viewers by this so-called "Grazing" (see © p. 48) effect - viewers watch everything but never till the end. The consumption of fragmented information is almost as useless as not watching any information program at all.

"Grazing" destroys even the last efforts of TV

networks to have some educational influence on the viewer. It is like watching an incoherent music clip - a slide show with no meaning. In my opinion this is the most dull way of watching television.

But what can be done to stop this advert overdose? There are laws prohibiting the broadcasting of too many spots but fines for flouting this law are hurting nobody. 1995 Sat.1 broadcasted several hours of adverts illegally but was only punished with a 100,000 DM fine although the station had earned millions. To protect the audience from a non-stop advertisement show these laws should be tightened up.

TV as a source for information?

Two centuries ago newspapers and the latest barkeeper story in the neighboring pub were the only source of information. It took sometimes month until urgent news about an upcoming war for example were also heard in the loneliest village in southern Bavaria.

The invention of radio suddenly made it possible to spread news in seconds over the globe. First live coverages of parliamentary discussions were broadcasted. For

the first time everybody could keep up to date with latest events. During World War I movie theaters made it possible to see first visual reports about the outcome of the war. News were now spread in following order.

Radio stations were the first to inform their audience of new top news. Reports on radio were short and often interrupted by music. Studies have revealed that long news reports on radio are fatiguing for the audience as there is a constant need to listen carefully if you do not want to miss anything. Therefore radio broadcasts have been for the most part music entertainment.

Newspapers - which are normally published on the next day - can be read twice and so can go more in depth. The printed press provides for the most part information. Entertainment only plays a minor role in daily newspapers.

Normally every weekend a new newsreel - the so-called "Wochenschau" - was shown in movie theaters. The "Wochenschau" illustrated the news that have been heard on radio or read in newspapers.

Suddenly TV offered the relevance of radio and pictures like the newsreel. The audience is now able to see and hear what is happening in the world. Television - seeing distant places - now broadens the horizon of everybody. The first breakthrough of the new medium was the coverage of the Olympic Games 1936 in Berlin. Only 57 years later television has become the most important information and entertainment medium.

Critics say that television is not adequate as the primary information source in our society. The audience primarily concentrates on pictures and sounds. Overwhelming colors or other distractions take the viewer's mind off the information. 1974 US president Carter held an television speech to the American public. He sat in an armchair by the fireside. It was the time of the big energy crisis and Carter spoke about the coming problems of rising oilprices. Though it had been a good and important speech nobody actually knew what Carter had said. Everybody was talking about the red pullover he wore during the speech (see ⑦ 61+62). In tests following this incident documentaries were shown to several test persons. 80% of them said the shown documentaries were "interesting" and "easy to understand" (⑦ p. 63). But only 20% of them could answer even simple questions about what they had seen.

What could be the cause for this? As I already said pictures distract the viewers attention. Heavy television viewers sometimes even fall into a kind of TV hypnosis - they watch without knowing what they are watching. Sometimes everything is

more important than the information someone wants to give us. We are asking ourselves how much the tie of the reporter could have cost, how the talk master could have become so fat or how complicated running a news magazine must be.

Most television stations try to reduce distractions during their news shows. In Germany ARD and ZDF have been very successful in presenting their news magazines in a mainly blue environment. The audience is primarily concentrated on news and not on unnecessary graphical gimmicks. In contrast PRO 7 tries to be interesting with design details like dozens of little screens in the back of the newsroom (see graphic six on page 11).

Another problem with information from TV networks is the general tendency of many people to believe what they see. Advertisers are using this tendency to influence the viewer with bogus tests. Viewers can see the new washing powder clean easily even the toughest fat stains with no problem. Unfortunately most of these tests are just lies. In times of modern video computers believing in what you see can be very dangerous. Everything can be digitally edited and restructured. Some scandals in the US and Germany (see also page 9) proved that more and more television stations tend to produce interesting news on their own to attract more viewers. It is not surprising that video material is not allowed to be used as proof in court.

Even if video material is not edited it always reflects the subjective impression of the camera man. War can be shown as a romantic adventure with lone heroes fighting against nature and their bloody adversary under the beautifully bright light of heavy gunfire. It can also be shown as a deadly hell with helpless victims bleeding to death in the streets of a once proud and beautiful city. Everything depends on the perspective. News makers are obliged to report objectively and with no emotions. They have to leave it up to the viewer to decide whether the shown event is positive or negative. But news makers are also only humans and therefore tend to say their own opinion. That is why I like watching news from several channels on the same topic. The more different opinions one can watch the more likely is it to see all sides of the story.

Sometimes TV makers are not only subjective. Sometimes they are even pushing certain topics to prime time news or ban certain themes totally out of the program. In Italy one man rules most private networks: Silvio Berlusconi, millionaire, leader of the right wing party "Forza Italia" and former prime-minister of Italy. He used his television networks for his election campaign, praised himself whenever possi-

ble. Berlusconi gave direct order to the news magazines of his stations not to broadcast any positive reports about his political adversaries. The evening news only reported about him. Within some month Silvio Berlusconi was the most popular person in Italy - everybody knew him and his competitors could not stand a chance in the next elections.

Television has much influence on our society. Therefore many people are trying to gain influence on TV. In some countries television is used for propaganda. The government controls the stations and dictates opinions to the audience with all methods of persuasion. To prohibit such misuse modern democracies have passed laws saying that nobody should own more than 49 percent of a television station. Nobody should be allowed to control a station alone.

Nevertheless the number of corporations controlling the market is limited. In the United States Time Warner, Ted Turner, the Disney Corporation, Sony and NBC control most of the television industry. Bertelsmann, Leo Kirch, Springer, CLT, Time Warner and Burda run most stations in Germany. For example Leo Kirch owns 43 percent of Sat.1 and has direct influence on the program (see © p. 36). Kirch is a friend of chancellor Helmut Kohl. He offers his friend very often special talk shows where the chancellor can speak freely about his latest visions for the future of Germany. Kirch also ordered Sat.1 to be "friendlier" to chancellor Kohl and cut back criticism against his political decisions. Of course Leo Kirch and chancellor Kohl can not be compared with Silvio Berlusconi. But the bad thing about it is that it illustrates again how enticing the enormous influence of television on the people can be for politicians - even in Germany most politicians would surely love being backed by a mighty TV network. History has shown that the one controlling the mass media controls the people.

Opinions spread by the media are very often accepted by the audience without rethinking them. The nazis showed with their radio propaganda how effective media can be in the hands of a dictator. Silvio Berlusconi reminded us that the media - especially television - still has the power to dictate opinions. We have to be very careful to protect ourselves from a media dictatorship by great media corporations.

Problem of TV violence

After the second World War TV slowly reached not only its present status as the world's main source of information but also its most popular pastime. In the same

time crimes in the streets and the number of youths being arrested and sentenced to jail rose dramatically (see ① p. 174). Murder rates have doubled in South Africa since the introduction of TV. Crimes were often committed following the examples of television dramas. 1978 the anti-Vietnam-War movie "The Deer Hunter" inspired over 29 people in the United States to imitate the shown Russian Roulette scene. 26 of them died from their injuries (see ① p. 178). In the mid-1980s a 13 year old boy in California has been confessed to killing the father of one of his friends. "Having kicked, stabbed, beaten and choked the man with a dog chain, the boy was asked why he also poured salt on the victim's wounds. 'Oh, I don't know,' he replied, 'I just seen it in TV.'" (① p. 169).

Incidents like this make more and more people fear the possibility of negative influences by violent TV shows. A Times Mirror poll released in March 23 revealed that 72 percent of Americans think TV contains too much violence (see ① p. 168). 63 Percent think that TV crime also encourages crime in the streets. Many people are experiencing a victim effect - they suffer from increased fearfulness becoming a victim. University of Michigan psychology professor on TV violence:



Graphic 7: Sylvester Stallone as Judge Dredd

"The child who has been watching programs with primarily aggressive content comes away with the impression that the world is a jungle fraught with dangerous threats, and the only way to survive is to be on the attack" (① p. 168). Adults are also suffering from this fear. Motion Pictures like "Judge Dredd" (distributed by TOBIS Filmkunst, 1995) where a single man fights in a cruel world for peace and justice - not with words but with his automatic rifle, as judge and executioner in one person - illustrate this public opinion that you have to stand the jungle of our society alone. "Only the strongest will prevail" - law of the jungle and also law of the violent underclass areas of most American and also more and more European metropolitan areas.

Violence can have many causes: unemployment, a suppressed childhood, drugs, alcohol, loneliness or the loss of visions and ideals. They and many more have in-

fluenced our society crucially. But how can TV be made responsible for this change? What influence does it have?

This is hard to answer. For 50 years scientists all over the globe have tried to figure out exactly to what extent television influences our lives. More than 3,000 studies have been made - most of them unfortunately have not given any new information. Uncountable methods to measure increasing violence have been created. One method was for example to show young kids shows of "Happy Violence" ("Bugs Bunny", "Tom and Jerry", etc.) or a peaceful "Lassie" episode. The children then had to punch a big standup-toy called "Bobo the clown". The researchers wanted to compare the children's aggression after these shows and found out that cartoons made the children more aggressive (see ① p. 169). Another method was to examine the increase in suicide rates of about 3-15 percent following suicide dramas (see ① p. 169). The University of Michigan even ran a longitudinal study for 36 years. 875 children have been observed. The result was, that above average consumption of TV violence often lead into the influence of alcohol and crime in later life (see ① p. 169). Studies on the effect of more and more sex in the television program are still on their way. Analysts are unsure whether an increasing exposure of human sexuality could also have as negative effects as television violence. Normally violence and sex on television are considered to be that same problem and therefore are both summed up to television violence.

Though precise results of the tests may vary, all independent Commissions (not financed by television networks) agree that violence (and sex) on television influences the viewers negatively. It cannot be said to what extent but it is obvious that it does. Children have the instinctive desire to imitate what they see. They learn by watching their parents

and so become easily victims of TV. In many families television has become something like a third parent - many parents leave it up to television to entertain their children (kids favorite pastime is watching TV).

One Day's TV Violence		
	Number of Scenes	Percentage of Total
Serious Assaults (excluding use of guns)	389	21
Gunplay	362	20
Isolated Punches	273	15
Pushing / dragging	272	15
Menacing threat with weapon	226	12
Slaps	128	7
Deliberate property destruction	95	5
Simple assaults	73	4
All other types	28	1

Table 3

Children can not differentiate between reality and fiction. They are faced with an

unbelievable number of violent scenes on every channel. Referring to table three an average TV station in the US telecasts 389 serious assaults per day. Together with gunplay 41 percent of all daily violent scenes can be described as serious. 54 Percent are so-called trivial offenses - crimes we have almost gotten used to (for example the destruction of a bus station). The remaining 5 Percent are for example car crashes or even a magic trick directed to an unwilling person. So almost half of all counted acts of violence on TV vision were serious. No wonder, that many children and adults in the United States are fearing the world outside their safe living room.

Cartoon Violence		
	Acts of violence per hour	broadcasted in Germany on
Dark Water	109	-
Tom and Jerry Kids	88	PRO 7
Looney Tunes	80	PRO 7
Duck Tales	29	-
Beetlejuice	28	PRO 7
Popeye	27	RTL2
Babar	7	ARD / ZDF
David the Gnome	2	RTL
Lunch Box	0	-

Table 4

For years TV networks have only reacted to new studies with their own studies saying the contrary. They say that they are only broadcasting what the people want. If everybody

wants to see violence, the stations will telecast more action shows. If the viewers want shows like the "Wheel of Fortune" the stations will produce more gambling or quiz shows. Furthermore they underline, that drama always has some violent elements (for example can you imagine Shakespeare's "Macbeth" with a king dying from weakness?). In their opinion violence can not be banned from television as we are unfortunately living in a violent world. Most viewers are fascinated by violence - it is entertaining. Especially male viewers want to see heroes and machos on TV: strong man standing every challenge, "Rambos" formed after the ideal of male strength.

Broadcasting stations also reject criticism against their cartoon shows with so called "Happy Violence" (For example when "Bugs Bunny" drops an anvil on "Daffy Ducks" head). "Happy Violence" is meant as a joke and broadcasting stations say that kids surely can tell apart reality and cartoon. Some network spokesmen even mentioned that in their opinion television has almost no influence on its viewers - TV is just a lot of pictures and some sound. A claim that has been proven multiple times not to be true. For example, the industry would not invest billions of dollars in television advertising every year if it was not a successful way to influence the audience.

After the great television networks have ignored the problem for years, they are now starting new programs to reduce violence in their shows. Forced by increasing public anger ABC, CBS and NBC announced a programming reform in 1992. This reform wanted to ban realistic violence, murder and sex from the screen. Violent shows were to be moved into the later evening, new violent-free shows to be created for children. Extremely brutal motion pictures were also to be forbidden and sent back to their producers. Television stations also promised to work closely with parental organizations to improve these plans even more.

Unfortunately only few of these plans have been realized. Violent motion pictures are now shown as "Late Movies" but the production of socially valuable children programs has not yet been very productive. The very primitive but nonetheless successful ninja action fighting series "Power Rangers" (created by a Japanese toy maker who wanted to introduce his new plastic action toys to the market) was the first of a new era. The new heroes in the latest children programs are speaking the slang of the street, ride huge bikes and have a nice shotgun to solve all their problems. Everything is possible: from punk squirrels to monster grannies. Modern cartoons often have more acts of violence per minute than dramas or detective stories (the average for acts of violence per hour is 24). Table number four on page 18 (see also ① p. 172) shows some of the cartoons that are broadcasted every day in the US (and most of them also in Germany). Especially "Happy Violence" cartoons like "Tom and Jerry" or "Looney Tunes" contain very much brutality - normally hidden in slapstick humor.

In Germany most television stations have started to build up special programs for their young audience some years ago. The Disney Corporation has recently opened the new „Super RTL“ Channel in cooperation with CLT (owner of RTL). It is the first German network dedicated primarily to children. The series shown on this channel can all be compared with the Disney Production "Duck Tales" which is listed with 29 acts of violence per hour in the middlefield of table four. Unfortunately Super RTL shows nothing else than series. Educational programs like the "Sesamstraße", "Die Sendung mit der Maus", "Wickie und die starken Männer", can be found only on ARD or ZDF (private stations say that such programs are too expensive). Another network trying to attract the young audience is PRO 7. About half a year ago PRO 7 introduced its new „Pro Family“ program. But instead of showing more educational programs - like ARD and ZDF - or more entertaining

shows like Super RTL it has continued to broadcast „Happy Violence“ cartoons with dubious educational effects on kids. Nevertheless PRO 7 has been very successful with this program and therefore is presently not willing to reform it. To reduce violence in the afternoon and evening the big private networks have agreed to move motion pictures rated for an audience older than 16 to the late evening or cut the most violent scenes (ARD and ZDF had banned such programs to their late night program already 8 years ago).

For many people this is not enough. They demand a governmental restriction on violent TV shows. Some catholic "extremists" also asked for a total ban of violence and sex on television. Broadcasters should be charged with severe punishments if they telecast pictures of murder or brutality. This demand contradicts to the basic laws freedom of speech and freedom of press - therefore it has yet been ignored by governmental authorities. The prohibition of television violence would be a form of censorship - most people (especially Americans) prefer living with television violence to cutting the personal freedom. Several opinion polls in the United States revealed that a clear majority rejected a law against television violence. I am also of the opinion that this problem cannot be solved with laws.

The American National Coalition on Television Violence has proposed another method for the state to regulate or control violence. A rating system for all television programs could give viewers the opportunity to choose the appropriate shows for them and especially for their children. In the United States a general rating system for television is still on the way. In Germany all private and governmental stations have agreed to expand the work of the FSK (Freiwillige Selbstkontrolle), financed by the movie industry, to judge their program. The new FSF (Freiwillige Selbstkontrolle Fernsehen) has started its work in April 1994 and checked since then 754 programs - 349 of them were rejected and send back for a new cutting or moved to the later evening. Some TV guides like "TV Spielfilm" or "Hörzu" already print the age limits of the FSF and make recommendations for younger viewers. The German movie channel "Premiere" even shows warning labels at the beginning of every motion picture.

Even if all TV channels would mark violent programs like "Premiere" this cannot prevent a six year old to watch an action film rated for 18. Parents are often unable to control what their children are watching. A new system has been presented some years ago. The first prototype was called "Lock Box". This is a system receiving hidden signals of the television stations. The signal contains information about

the present program. If violent shows are to be telecasted, the box will ask for a pin code or it turns the sound off and the screen blank. If the child does not have the pin code it will be unable to watch a television show not fitted for its age. The system will be introduced to the European market with the launch of the new digital television era. During the last Consumer Electronics Fair in Berlin ("Funkaustellung '95") the German media mogul Leo Kirch presented his new "D-Box" System (see also page 23) giving the viewer the possibility to select an individual program by "Video-Near-On-Demand". This system also allows parents to block violent programs from the screen.

Critics are unsure whether this system is the ultimate answer. In many families children are the only ones knowing how to use a video recorder. Why should they not be able to find out the pin-code of the "lock box"? The industry would also be very angry if its often violent adverts are also blocked by this system. Though it may not be perfect, this system is in my opinion the best way to protect children from the dangerous effects of violent television shows. The fascination of violence is for most children unfortunately too big to allow them to decide on their own what to watch. With the "lock box" it is possible for parents to control the viewing habits of their children and to guide them into the right direction. It could be the first step to a small revolution in TV viewing habits. As soon as the TV stations will see, that their action packed violence program is very often blocked by the "lock boxes" they will surely rethink whether it is more profitable to broadcast high quality children programs than being not watched at all any more.

The future of television

The number of television channels has risen over the years dramatically. In the United States special programs can be found for almost every need. I even heard of a fishing and a weather channel. In Germany we already have two music channel and also one news, sports and home-order network each. These little channels only play minor roles in the television industry and always have to fight for survival. For example the new German Home Order Television (HOT) has opened only some weeks ago. It is still unsure whether the German public will accept this form of shopping or if viewers prefer to see the products with their own eyes (In my opinion the channel will not live for long).

But not only new channels are opened every year. Television makers promise us uncountable revolutionary improvements. Pay-TV, Video-(Near)-On-Demand, MPEG, D-BOX, Satellite TV, Multimedia and Interactive TV. Do we need all this? How did we manage to live without it all the time?

Some years ago Pay-TV was said to be the trend of the future. Every television station wanted to build up small subsidiaries concentrating on one special TV genre. Channels for every need: cartoons, movies, sports, travel, home-shopping, etc. Television satellites like the European Astra system are able to offer enough capacity for hundreds of channels. With this number of channels it should be possible to offer the right program for every viewer at any time. To finance this dream the new channels would have been encrypted. Viewers would have to subscribe to the television network and pay a monthly fee to receive a decoder for the encrypted program. Unfortunately only few people wanted to pay high prices for Pay-TV channels and therefore the project was soon canceled. "Premiere" remains to be the first and only Pay-TV network in Germany. The monthly price for a "Premiere" decoder is 48 DM - too much for only one program concentrating primarily on motion pictures and sports. In Great Britain the Sky Broadcasting Network is relatively successful with its "Sky Multichannel System". For about 50 DM per month Sky is offering 18 channels - which almost equals the number of all private channels in Britain. Therefore you need to be a Sky subscriber if you want to watch anything else than BBC. In Germany and in the United States almost all private channels are not encoded and therefore Pay-TV channels are not very popular. It is too expensive because you pay even if you are not watching.

To make the payment system a little bit more fair and attractive all Pay-TV channels are presently working on a so-called pay-per-view system. The decoder recognizes which channels are watched. If the viewer switches to a pay-per-view channel the decoder starts to count the seconds after about 3 minutes of watching an encrypted program. For example watching a motion picture will then cost about 3,- DM.

Another idea of the television industry was to give the viewer not only the opportunity to choose for what program he wants to pay for but also when he wants to see it. This system is called Video-On-Demand or Interactive television. It requires a complicated and very expensive computer and cable system. First of all every household needs to be connected by a powerful glass fiber cable to the television station. The viewer then chooses from a list of programs what he wants to see. His

wishes are then transmitted to the television station. There the desired program is inserted in a digital video recorder and then transmitted via cable directly to the viewer. Everybody can design a personal television program with his favorite shows. The digital datalink to the computers of the television station even makes it possible to browse through a digital shopping mall on the television screen and then send the orders directly to the stores. This system may sound nice but it has one huge disadvantage - costs. The cable system and special TV sets cost about \$2,000 and every minute costs extra usage fees. About 1,000 households are presently connected to such systems in field tests all over the world. No household actually wanted this system. Nobody wants to spend hours for browsing through uncountable program offers just to watch television for one evening. The majority prefers normal "instant" programs.

To reduce costs for such a system German media mogul Leo Kirch introduced his new D-Box project. With new digital compression systems (the so-called MPEG system) it will soon be possible to telecast up to eight channels on one frequency. In summer 1996 a new television satellite will be launched offering 150 free channels (transponders). Kirch wants to use this enormous capacity to offer a system close to Video-On-Demand. Video-Near-On-Demand means that the television station is broadcasting the same program parallel with a time-lag of about 30 minutes on multiple channel. If the viewer misses the beginning of his favorite motion picture he would then have to wait only 30 minutes until it begins again on another transponder. Live sports coverages are also broadcasted on several channels. The viewer then has the opportunity of deciding which camera perspective he wants.

During the "Funkausstellung '95" the D-Box was presented for the first time to the public. I also was able to test it and must admit that I was absolutely fascinated. It was fun browsing through different camera positions during the a Formula 1 grand prix. Furthermore this system not only offers Video-Near-On-Demand. It also has enough capacity for Radio, Video-Games, digital weather forecasts, home-shopping and PC-Software. Parents can also choose special programs for their children and block violent shows. And the most fascinating feature of this system is its price: 500 DM for one set.

At the moment Video-Near-On-Demand seems to be most likely to be realized. It will surely not replace classic television networks but make television maybe a little more interesting. Nevertheless new technologies will most surely not extend our average viewing time. Sitting passively in the living room and zapping through all

channels is not any more so widely accepted as an interesting free time activity. People want to see the real world and not the world of gambling shows, soap operas or love stories.

Conclusion

The influence of television on our society can not be overestimated. Especially children are not able to determine what is reality and what TV fiction. Instead of helping their kids to realize that the television world often has nothing in common with our world many parents neglect teaching their child basic values of morality and the principles of coexistence in a society. The children are grown up by television. "Rambo" shows them that only the strongest will prevail. Silvio Berlusconi assures in the evening news to be the right man for the job. Advertisement proves that only "Daz Ultra" can clean even the toughest stains and the daily teen club on a music channel tells us to wear green trousers because everything else "sucks". Predefined opinions around the clock. Children are most likely to fall prey to the influence of television makers but adults also are easy to influence. Watching passively without rethinking what is watched opens the mind for other opinions, other points of views. Lies broadcasted to millions of viewers can cause dangerous effects and therefore should be punished severely. Laws can not (and should not) help to solve this problem completely as they would penetrate the freedom of speech and freedom of press - any restriction of this basic right would be the first step to censorship, the total control of television by governmental authorities. Instead of passing laws against the dissemination of opinions it should be assured that no single authority can influence a television station alone. It must be assured that the viewer can see both sides of the story.

Over the years television has shown us distant places, peoples we have never seen and cultures we would have never dreamed of. Television allowed us to be with the astronauts during the first landing on the moon, showed us the brutal reality of war and the destruction of nature by mankind. A simple electronic device broadened the individual perspective to a more global view.

Television not only has diabolical influences. If the viewer uses his brain actively, thinks about what he is watching, most negative influences of television would easily be blocked. Parents have to tell their children the difference between reality and fiction and protect them against programs they yet can not understand.

Use television as a window in the world and not only as a dull way of lazy entertainment. And let us not forget that there is a real world outside the living room waiting to be explored.

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Table Number	Reference	Page
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1	Verlag Bertelsmann Stiftung, "Bericht zur Lage des Fernsehens", page 87
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3	BigMac™ commercial, © McDonalds Cooperation 1996; scanned by Klaus Ritter
4	Pro 7 Logo, © Pro 7 Fernseh AG 1996; scanned by Klaus Ritter
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