

Changes in Use of Television News and Informative Content and Their Impact on Content Creation. Analysis of Latvian Practice (January–April 2024)

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Abstract. The aim of the research is to establish what platforms and technologies the Latvian audience chooses for consuming television news and informative content, the reasons guiding this choice, as well as the effect of this choice by audience on the creation of content by television channels in Latvia. The theoretical basis of the work consists of theoretical works explaining the media ecology, transformation and convergence of the media environment, theories on the interaction of the media and the audience – the theory of agenda setting, use and satisfaction, as well as a theoretical look at the importance of television in the media environment and the characteristics of its audience.

Secondary data analysis was used to obtain research data, analysing Latvian audience studies, audience television news and informative content usage diary research, as well as semi-structured interviews with responsible specialists of the television industry. The data collected and compiled within the framework of the study confirm that the use and spread of Internet resources and technologies has influenced the behaviour of the audience in consuming television news and informative content. The study reveals important features of audience behaviour change concerning the habits of using television news and informative content, which directly affects the creation and distribution of this content.

Keywords: media, television, audience, information, technology, Internet

Introduction

“Television is dead, long live television?” – the question paraphrasing the slogan of the French monarchy used in different situations – “The king is dead, long live the king!” (*“Le roi est mort, vive le roi!”*), can be asked at the moment, observing the processes of changes in the media environment and evaluating the possibility of the place of cult media-rated television in this ecosystem. The time when television and gathering of social communities for

spending evenings together, entertainment and receiving the latest news remains recorded in the 20th century. This era – the 21st century – has brought changes in the environment created by the Internet, which directly affects the behaviour of the audience, as well as the role and importance of media, including television, in society.

The media landscape is changing all over the world. The latest report of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) “World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development: Global Report 2021/2022” has identified changes in the global media environment, with the audience and revenues of traditional media inevitably flowing to online media, thereby threatening the ability of traditional media companies to operate successfully. The report also draws attention to the rapid growth in the influence and spread of social media, reporting that the number of its users worldwide has almost doubled in just five years, rising from 2.3 billion in 2016 to 4.2 billion in 2021 (UNESCO 2022).

Like others, Latvian society has experienced intensive changes in the use of media content in recent years, and in 2021 internet platforms, news portals and social media overtook television in popularity, which was the most common mass information resource in Latvia since 2018 (Nulle 2022). The popularity of Internet platforms continues to stabilize in the system of Latvian society's media usage habits; however, television content is still in the audience's basket of choices, according to the audience studies of recent years, commissioned by the National Electronic Media Council (NEPLP). Television content in the form of consumption has changed by adding interactive or time-lapse viewing to linear consumption, and, as revealed by the latest study conducted in autumn 2023, instead of a regular television, TV content is received by means of other technologies – computer, smartphone (NEPLP 2023).

Changes in media consumption are determined by global media convergence processes – the fusion and merger of traditional media and the Internet environment. Individuals and society as a whole, actively participating in the Internet environment, promote and create new media usage habits. Consumers are giving up reading newspapers, watching television and listening to the radio in linear time. The most important sources of information of the previous era – the press and electronic media – are being replaced by internet platforms, but the audience often chooses to consume radio and television programmes with a time lag. All these changes were facilitated by the intensive entry of new technologies and devices into everyday life, transformation in media content and form (Zelče 2018, 489–490).

Television channels are currently working as a content creator, meanwhile, the platform through which content is delivered to consumers is no longer just television – society's preferences for consuming this content have changed

(Legzdina 2018), and the audience's adherence to different platforms creates challenges for television content producers.

The study examines how global trends – the spread of different platforms and different technologies – impact the main consumption of television news, as well as informative content in modern Latvia and how changes in audience behaviour affect the creation of television content. The study reflects analysis of audience's choices, which are influenced by the spread and availability of the Internet and technology, as well as the consequences of these processes for work in the creation of television news and informative content.

The aim of the research is to determine what the audience's choices are in television news and informational content in modern Latvia under the conditions of internet platform and technology growth: which platforms and technologies, guided by what reasons does the audience choose in order to peruse television news and informational content, and accordingly – how does consumer's behaviour in television consumption of news and informative content affect the creation of this content in Latvian television channels.

Methodology

In order to achieve the goal of the research, several methods have been applied – secondary data analysis, diary method, semi-structured interviews, as well as qualitative and quantitative content analysis, applied when analysing the collected and compiled data.

At the beginning of the research, an analysis of secondary data was carried out for NEPLP annual studies on media use in Latvia, which allows to obtain a common picture of the use of television content in society – compared the data of the last years (2021–2023) on the consumption of television content in Latvian-wide studies with a sample base of $N = 1500$, which is a considerable amount of data and provides an overall insight into the choices of the Latvian television audience. Secondary data has been analysed for the rating data of Latvian television channels systematically conducted by the research company *Kantar* in a certain period of time – in the first quarter of 2024, comparing linear rating data and consolidated data, which includes interactive internet protocol television (IPTV) viewing records. These data highlight the situation in the consumption of television content in Latvian society, which can be determined by quantitative data, when watching content on TV.

Representatives of the television audience have also been involved in the research by using the diary method.

The diary has a good potential to reveal the meaning of people's daily life situations, the influence on actions, allowing to understand events directly from the perspective of individuals (Radcliffe 2018, 188–204).

Using the diary method, it is possible to achieve important research goals:

- getting reliable personal-level information about people's choices and habits;
- getting an idea of changes in people's choices and habits over time;
- causal analysis of changes in personal choices is possible (Bolger *et al.* 2018, 579–616).

Although filling in a diary is time-consuming – it requires both time and concentration, and researchers must expect that individuals may forget to enter data, so the data may be incomplete (Adams *et al.* 2014, 97), however, in diary studies, systematically recorded data and their compilation provides a more accurate picture of daily choices and habits than if these data are asked to be recorded in a one-time questionnaire, where respondents have to remember and evaluate events, thoughts and feelings, sometimes even for an indefinite period of time. In such a situation, the data is subject to all kinds of memory deviations – moreover, the longer the time between the event and its description, the more external factors influence its description (Nezlek 2012, 1–9).

The diary method is applied in studying the media environment. Uwe Hasebrink and Hanna Domeyter, researchers at the University of Hamburg in Germany, piloted the diary method in a study on media use published in 2012 (Hasebrink, Domeyter 2012, 757–779), which Hasebrink referred to also in later publications, continuing to study media use, and paying attention to the possibilities of studying an individual's media use practice or media repertoire. Analysing the diaries, the researchers conclude that the essence of media use cannot be understood only by quantitative data recorded in the diary – the time and duration of media use, the attitudes recorded in the diaries give an important picture, which sometimes give a more valuable overview than behavioural indicators. Furthermore, diary data enables observation of the extent to which online media use threatens traditional media, and researchers conclude that patterns of individuals' media repertoire formation are often more complex than expected (Hasebrink, Hepp 2017).

In order to assess the behaviour and choices of the Latvian audience in the consumption of television news and informative content, as well as aspects related to the attitude towards the availability and importance of this type of content, within the framework of the current research, an audience study was conducted by means of the recording of television news and informative content in semi-structured diaries. 20 respondents took part in the diary study, recording their habits of using television news and informative content for one week or 7 days in the period from 1 April to 7 April 2024.

Respondents noted information about each episode of television news and informative content use in diary forms specially designed for this study, recording not only traditional television viewing, but also reception of television content

on other devices – computer, telephone, etc.; and on various platforms – interactive television, internet platforms, social networks. At the end of each day, unclear or additional information could be marked in a special section for daily notes. Furthermore, the participants were asked to describe their daily rhythm on each day of the study, and in order to receive as accurate data as possible about the use of TV news and informative content on a daily basis, they were asked to continue their usual daily rhythm during the study, without subordinating it to filling in the diary. In the relevant sections of the research diaries, the participants answered the following questions about each episode of using television news and informative content: 1) viewing time (hours); 2) duration of viewing; 3) the watched program (creator, name or description); 4) source (where it is viewed – television channel, internet portal, etc.); 5) motivation; 6) benefit after viewing; 6) the technology/device used; 7) justification for choosing the device.

The participants for the study were approached individually, taking into account personal contacts, as well as using the personal contacts of the participants already approached for the diary study. All participants were adults, aged 26–76: three participants were under 30, seven were 31–40, two were 41–50, seven were 51–60 and one was 60+. Seven men and 13 women participated in the study. The participants were informed that the questionnaires were anonymous and that the results would be used in compiled form. To describe the data, the research participants were assigned a random number. The data recorded in the diaries were collected in *Excel*, where the data of each participant was entered and a summary of the data of all participants was created for further data analysis. Quantitative and qualitative content analysis was used to analyse the data

After receiving audience data, 5 semi-structured interviews were conducted. To supplement information on television ratings research and to obtain information about changes in the behaviour of the television audience that can be detected in the data, an interview was conducted with Oskars Rumpēters, director of media research clients of the research company *Kantar*. To establish how changes in the use of television news and informative content by the audience in Latvia currently affect the work on television, leading employees of Latvian television channels who are competent to provide information on adapting the production of television news and informative content to the audience's interests and choices in consuming this content were interviewed. Interviews were given by:

- Head of LTV News Service Iveta Elksne;
- TV3 Group Latvija Programme Director Elīna Jēkabsone;
- TV24 Programme Director Rūdolfs Ēķis;
- ReTV Editor-in-Chief Inga Gorbunova.

When using the interview approach in research, the selection of the interview sample is always important: the interviewees must be oriented and informed about the data and problems that the researcher is investigating (Gubrium *et al.* 2012, 9). Interviews with Latvian television channels LTV, TV3, TV24 and ReTV employees responsible for the creation of news and informative content elucidate the perspective of television professionals on specific problems raised in the study regarding changes in audience habits that refer to the production process of television content, as well as give the opportunity to hear real solutions, which are already being carried out or planned in television newsrooms, adapting the production of news and informative content to changes in audience behaviour.

Results

The habits of the audience in receiving and consuming television news and informative content are related to the spread of the usability of the Internet and technology, as well as acquiring information on several screens and on various platforms – the media consumption behaviour of the audience has changed, which is recorded by Latvia-wide studies, including audience representatives and television industry professionals. This can also be observed when evaluating the data obtained and analysed in the work study.

The analysis of secondary data carried out as part of the study, which outlines the overall situation in the country in the consumption of television content, yields the conclusion that the Internet has significantly affected the role of television as a medium in society. The analysis of television rating data and an interview with a rating researcher reflect the changes in the behaviour of the Latvian audience in television consumption and reveal that the most common use of television in Latvia is the interactive television, i.e. a platform that permits watching of the content with a time delay and which requires the Internet.

The characteristics of the audience's behaviour, which has been influenced by the popularity of using the Internet and technology, are convincingly revealed in the diary study conducted by involving the audience. The choice of the diary method was justified, because the diaries provided a relatively large amount of data: 20 participants, noting their habits of watching TV news and informative content for seven days, provided data for a total of 140 days, recording them in real time and not according to memory or self-assessment, as the questionnaire method would provide. In addition, as researchers Hasebrink and Domeyer concluded in a study of media usage on the basis of diary entries, this is a suitable method to record the data which suggests how much the use of online media threatens traditional media and shows the individuals' usage patterns of

the media repertoire (Hasebrink, Domeyer 2012). The diary-based study confirms similar conclusions – the media use by individuals today is a complex process that covers a wide area by simultaneously consuming multiple media, platforms and technologies, literally growing up with content-consuming devices on a daily basis.

The multi-functionality of the audience in the consumption of various information resources and the use of screens has significantly changed the production process of television and the news and informative content produced by it. The interviews given by the responsible employees of Latvian television channels can be evaluated as expert interviews, as they allow us to learn about the behaviour, experience and strategy of television as a company, adapting to changes in the consumption of television news and informative content. In the assessment of professionals responsible for the media, the work of television is changing fundamentally, from the content creator of one platform and one device nowadays turning into an information resource of many different devices, thus complicating the work of both the television services and the work of television journalists. As dense as the supply of information consumption is today, the work of a television journalist extends far beyond the boundaries of the television airwaves and airtime.

The TV industry has been adapting to changes in audience behaviour for several years. The news and informational content produced in television newsrooms can no longer be related only to television as a medium – the television newsroom is only the creator of this content, but its distribution is related to various popular and demanded by the audience platforms and devices.

Audiences today have ever-increasing ways to receive content – more than ever before. Audience members use different platforms and technologies, assemble their use in different ways, and even use several technologies at the same time. The reach of technologies, devices and platforms has become available on a daily basis and makes the use of media progressively convenient, while the flow of content is becoming increasingly dense and complex, and it is irreversibly changing the requirements of content creation and distribution, creating new challenges for TV news and informative content creators.

Below is a schematic visualization of the flow of TV news and informative content, which depicts the path of content from television to the audience today, taking into account the availability of various platforms and devices employed by the audience and confirming the need for content creators to use them all to reach the audience.

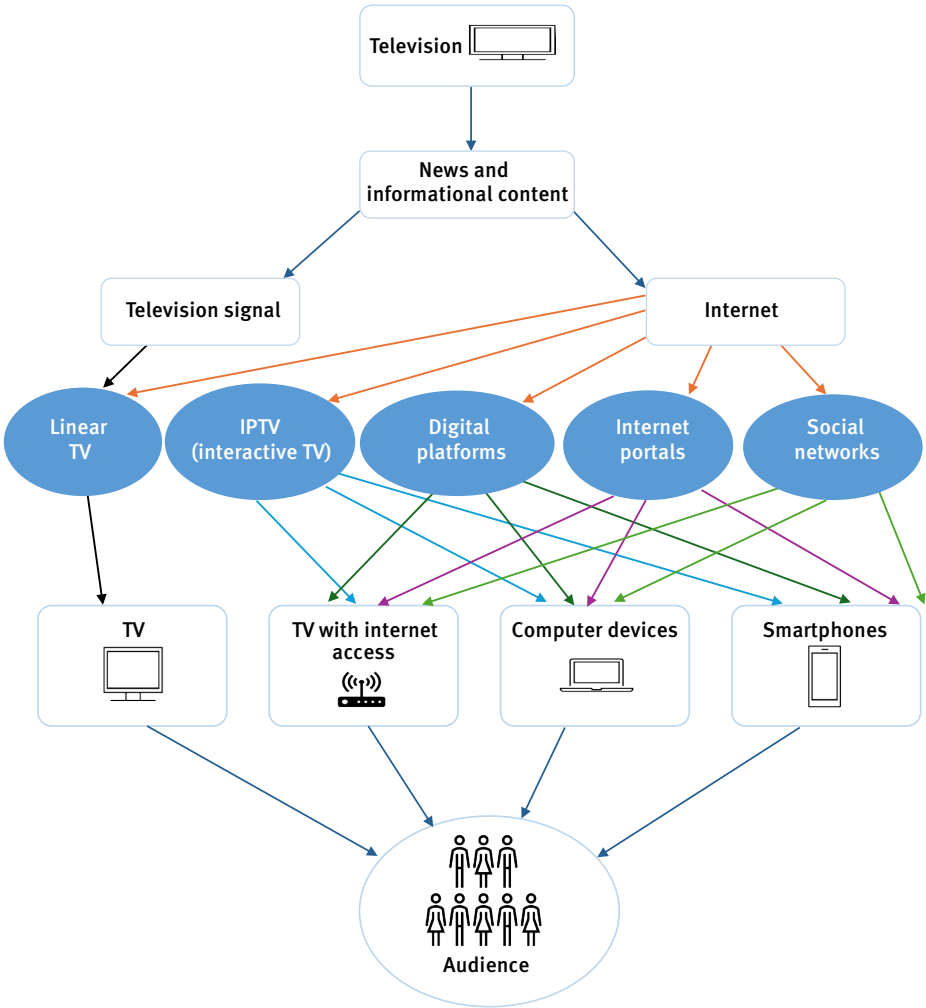


Figure. The path of TV news and informative content from television to audience

Conclusions

In the course of the research, a convincing influence of the daily usability and spread of Internet resources and technologies on the behaviour of the audience in the consumption of television news and informative content was confirmed. The change in the behaviour of the audience is endorsed by the audience studies conducted in the country and the television rating data analysed in the study, the review of the daily usage habits of TV news and informative content of the audience representatives, as well as by interviewing industry professionals

whose responsibility is the creation of TV content. Moreover, the study confirmed the impact of changes in audience behaviour on the creation of television news and informative content.

Audience preferences in consumption of TV news and informative content in modern Latvia, in the context of the increasing usability of internet platforms and technologies

The form of consumption of television news and informative content in society has changed: interactive television has joined the consumption of linear content, which has become the most popular type of television in Latvian households, – informative and news programmes are consumed with a time lag, as well. Not only television is used for consuming TV news and informative content, but also Internet platforms – portals and social media. TV news and informative content is no longer consumed only in video format – likewise, the audience receives news in written format, which can be found on Internet platforms, whilst being authored by television. One audience member uses several different platforms to receive TV news and informational content.

The consumption of content for the audience is no longer connected to one device – the TV, the content is received and used on different screens, computers, tablets and smartphones have joined the television. Most often, the use of the device is related to convenience and availability at the given time and situation, the use of other devices is often justified by the possibility of receiving television content outside the home. One audience member may use several different devices to consume television news and informational content.

TV news and informative programmes are more often viewed on television, and their fragments – on social networks and Internet platforms. The choice of programmes is more often deliberate, motivated by finding out current events, opinions, information, but the reception of TV news and fragments of informative content is more often related to accidental attention while browsing Internet portals or social media. The choice of informative resources is related to the device used to receive the content.

In general, the audience consumes programmes, fragments of TV news and informative content of various lengths, but shorter video materials (up to 30 min. in various categories) are consumed more often than long ones. One member of the audience tends to consume different television news and informative content, devoting different amounts of time to it – the same viewer tends to choose programmes longer than 30 minutes, and consume short television informative content – fragments. The duration of content consumption is most often related to the selected device.

Nowadays, the audience of television channels and programmes, or its interests can no longer be evaluated only according to the current TV audience

accounting procedure in Latvia – the TV meter methodology is a measurement of TV screens, but it does not measure all viewing, as other screens that are measured by internet measurement methods are not included.

However, the TV meter methodology is currently a generally recognized method that has not yet been approved for total TV+Internet measurements and the implementation of which will require additional funds. Meanwhile, the behaviour and interests of television audiences should be assessed by combining measurements of television and Internet platforms used by channels.

The influence of audience behaviour on the creation of TV news and informative content

Television news and information content creators not only create linear television content, but also reach audiences on other platforms by creating and using television channel web portals, digital platforms on the internet, and social media accounts. These platforms, like television, are provided with news and informative content on the daily basis. The Internet and social media are used as tools to reach, retain and engage with audiences.

In order to reach the audience on other platforms, special content is planned by the editors of TV news and informative content – it is created both specially, informing about events, creating insights into the programme, offering live broadcasts, etc., as well as deriving content units from the content already created for television. The production of short-content units from television content is more often used, since parallel content creation is associated with additional financial and human resource capacity.

Starting with TV news and informative content on the Internet and adapting it to other devices, not only the TV set, the range of tasks related to the technical preparation of the content increases for televisions – the content must be adapted for use on different platforms and devices so that all television materials are visually enjoyable and easy to view. The specifics of using the Internet require subtitles, a special graphic design that can also be seen on small screens, etc. to be used for TV materials.

In order to grasp and sustain the audience's attention, television news and informative content creators currently have to work on several different media platforms simultaneously. The range of responsibilities assigned to creators of TV informative content has increased – each participant must create content not only within the framework of his programme, but also provide materials – photos, texts, video, if necessary – a live broadcast signal – including Internet platforms used by television. This has significantly raised the professional requirements for producers of TV news and informative content.

Creators of television news and informational content recognize that a discussion is taking place in journalistic circles about the value and circulation of

information in today's conditions, evaluating whether to post professionally conducted television informational work on Internet platforms, or to promote the profits of large technology companies and the popularity of social platforms. However, at the same time, it is recognized that such steps can be taken into account the behaviour of the audience and the choice to remain on these platforms. Therefore, the use of Internet and social network platforms for the distribution of TV news and informational content provides venues for appealing to the audience and is considered an additional opportunity to inform the public, in particular, providing a chance to deliver reliable news and informational content to the public.

Television professionals do not agree with studies that predict disappearance of the television audience and the difficulties of traditional media in adapting to the environment of new technologies. Instead, they demand that, within the framework of data collection and research, attention should be paid to the changes in the distribution of television content, which have been affected by the behaviour of the audience, following the development of the Internet and technology. Today, when evaluating television audience and channel distribution, the reception of television content on other platforms should also be assessed.

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