

# EMOTIONAL FACTORS IN CREATING MEDIA CONTENTS

**Zora Hudíková\***

*PanEuropean University, Faculty of Mass Media, Tematínska 10, 851 05 Bratislava,  
Slovak Republic*

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## **Abstract**

Television program structure is formed of various formats with similar media contents. Producers use various means to attract and maintain recipients' attention, and in this process emotions play an important role. Emotions are essential part of life – of the real one as well as of the media one; they attract attention, arouse curiosity and evoke various states of experiences. In this paper, author focuses on characterization of emotions presented in various television programs, defines their meaning in the context of media content and their impact on social culture and the future development of media production, and predicts possible recipients' reactions to them.

*Keywords:* media communication, media production, television, emotions, program

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## **1. Introduction**

The nowadays television media environment is also a business environment manifesting signs of intense competition. Viewers' attention and fixation to particular television programs provide media with inevitable profits from advertising, thus force commercial television channels to compete for viewers' attention. Their aim is to attract and maintain the largest audience possible. Although television channels do not profit from televiewers directly, they are a highly valuable article in selling of advertising space. It is a direct correlation – more attractive program equals larger audience and consequently higher price of a television channel. "The guarantee of the success on media market lies in turning percipient into devoted user- consumer." [1] In this constant fight for existence, television channels carry out their attack on percipients in two ways: by enlarging the sphere of their influence, which they do by launching new specialised channels and programs that would ensure viewer's attention, or they try to shock, arouse curiosity and to evoke viewer's feelings, which consequently results in the higher number of programs with emotional displays, which nowadays occur in such formats in which they were only marginal before. In spite of the growing importance of the internet,

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\*E-mail: zorahudikova@gmail.com

television is still the major creator of the percipients' reality. Also due to socio-cultural influences, two key functions dominate in television production – to inform and to entertain. Every person on daily basis perceives, sorts and process great amount of information necessary for his work and personal life, and most of them are gained through media. The amount as well as the character of presented information creates demand of finding new methods of its procession, and not only on the level of professional journalism, but also on the level of individual perceiving. D. Petranová states, that “developed critical thinking is characterised by critical perception of information, search for causes and evidence and prediction of consequences, besides that critical thinking is not tendentious and tries to break stereotypes” [2]. Besides the need of being informed entertainment also gains on popularity [3]. As H. Pravdová [4] confirms “contemporary media production is overloaded with genres that are to entertain and lighten the ‘soul’ of percipient”. These functions are penetrating also to such genres that used to be emotionally neutral, objective, serious, based on informing, stating facts and intently selecting relevant and useful information – to television news reports. Television entertainment offers viewers with specific kind of secularised ritual, with specific emotions and mental state. By watching various types of entertainment programs, percipient relieves his own stress and frustration, solves problems and cures his existential emotions [5]. Hence the main commodities of television production have become information and emotion. They capture and maintain viewer's attention and create experience that is spontaneous, immediate and intensive.

In television production great amount of various emotions is presented. Considerable part is expressed explicitly and intensively, some are just indicated. Some media contents are presented as neutral, however still might evoke strong emotions. People watch television programs to gain knowledge and to fulfil their needs, dreams and desires through emotions triggered by such programs. In the presented study author characterizes particular program formats and defines emotions that are evoked by them in the percipients. The characterization of emotional processes is based on the analysis of media production in Slovakia that was carried out throughout 2014. The results are synthesis of analyses of particular formats, researches conducted within partial projects and of knowledge gained from the long-term study of percipients' behaviour.

## **2. Emotions in peoples' lives**

Emotions are evoked by person's activities including the mental ones - the main subject of our interest, since they are essential for television production viewing. At the same time emotions affect process, organisation and dynamics of viewing, process of perceiving, information processing, memory or the level and results of cognitive processes. Emotions are classified according to various criteria and theories.

Generally, six basic emotions with specific adaption function are defined: joy, sadness, anger, disgust, shame, fear. According to the speed of emergence and duration emotions are divided into affects, moods and passions – long lived emotional states. Affect comes suddenly and quickly. It is usually stormy, but subsides quickly; it is triggered by particular impulse and person usually lost control over his behaviour. Mood is a more stable emotional state, characterised by lower intensity. It is not evoked by a particular object; mood can be triggered by impulse, memories, thought or particular affect. It evokes partial emotions and significantly affects memory, motivation, thinking, attitudes, behaviour and other mental functions. The intensity of a mood changes throughout the day. Passion is extremely strong, deep and long-lived emotion that determines thinking and acting of a person and his relationships to people or objects. It always has its particular content and is manifested in general as well as in partial activities.

According to their focus and complexity emotions are divided to lower and higher emotions (feelings). Lower emotions are mainly determined by the activity of the basic signal system and are mainly triggered by instincts. They respond to the need of satisfying of the most basic life needs. Among lower emotions are elementary experiences of pleasant and unpleasant evoked by colours, sounds, scents, somatic impulses or sensing one's own self. Higher emotions – feelings are solely connected to humans. They are part of person's activities and relationships; they differ in intensity and duration. A feeling reflects relationship of a person to the outer world, his activities, other people, and also to himself. Generally, following classes of feelings are distinguished: intellectual feelings (they emerge during the process of learning, thinking, creative solving of problems; they manifest as the sensitivity to new and as the strength of opinion, but also as puzzlement and doubts), moral feelings (related to moral principles and rules; the subgroup of judicial feelings felt when performing activity directed by law), social feelings (expressing relationship between people in work and in personal life, e.g. feelings of sympathy, respect, solidarity, humanity, etc.; specific subgroup is formed by personal feelings – self-love, sensitivity to insults, praise or reprehension), aesthetic feelings (feelings of beauty, generosity, but also of disgust or meanness) and worldview feelings (general attitudes, stable worldviews, e.g. the feeling for humour, irony, noble and tragic).

In media production both lower and higher emotions are presented in various forms and situations. Recipient's attention is mainly captured by affects, which serve as an attractive subject of art programs, but are also used in news and current affairs programs. For explanation of the differences in information processing, the crucial role is played by the information theory of emotions by P.V. Simonov. According to this theory, positive and negative emotions are variously combined in experience, depending on the intensity of individual's need for information. Positive emotions – pleasure, is experienced when getting great amount of information, negative emotions – suffering, disgust, when getting lack of information. The relevant factor of this theory is whether this

need for information is stable and long-term (one's need to achieve the target, gain education, etc.) Emotions also motivate to reconsider one's own efficiency and might lead to positive change. According to activation theory, emotions have strong mobilization and facilitation functions, and lead to the use of the most effective way of achieving one's target. This effect is stronger with lack of information, weaker with abundance of it [6].

### **3. Emotions in television production**

Emotions presented on a TV screen are positive or negative. Both forms encourage watching television production - various target audiences are attracted by various programs, or the same target audience by watching television in various times may satisfies various needs. Positive emotions contribute to develop inner lives of percipients - their virtues; they can serve as an impulse for creative work. Emotions are very often presented as a part of people's interaction. In television production not only are these types and forms of people's relationships presented, but also evaluated, and optimal solutions for various situations and problems are shown. By this way, criteria for judging of the real interpersonal relationships are built in percipients. They also serve as a relevant source of impulses for experiencing the relationship to one's own self. However, great deal of attention and interest is mostly captured by negative emotions. They are more attractive because they bring a number of ambiguous alternatives and unanswered questions to which percipient cannot find the answers by himself.

The recipient can watch the following types of programs on a TV screen: news reporting, sports news reporting, sports magazine, sports live broadcasting, magazine shows, live shows, talk shows, game shows, reality shows, galashows. Defining demonstrations of emotions linked to the particular types of programs, is based on observation and semiotic (content, text and picture) analysis of Slovak TV programs: RTVS, TV JOJ, TV JOJ -- PLUS, TV JOJ -- WAU, TV MARKÍZA, TV MARKÍZA -- DOMA A TV MARKÍZA – DAJTO, TA3. Methods of logical analysis, induction and deduction were employed. The research was undertaken in 2014.

#### **3.1. News reporting**

News reports bring information about various events important, useful or interesting to percipient. News is generally created by professionals working at a media organisation. They are a reflexion of society's life (although selective), its culture, major values, opinions and ideas. Although its primary function is to inform about actual events, nowadays these events are presented as stories with stable structure and rules of telling. Percipients watch news reporting for various reasons (motivations) and with different intensity of perception. These factors have influence on what will capture their attention, what will they remember and the way they process it, what will they later recall and how they would interpret

it. The way of perception of the media content is also determined by cognitive and mental abilities of a percipient, by his actual mental state and the context of perceiving the content. News reporting is the genre in which emotions should be presented at the lowest level, since principles of news reporting are factuality, neutrality, objectivity and informing [7-9], and therefore news should be emotionally neutral. However, the above mentioned information theory of emotions can be applied also in this situation. Moreover, it is connected with evaluating of the information saturation of presented news. The current trend of news making is based on the principle of presenting stories, which consequently makes them emotional. According to I. Ramonet [10], if percipient feels a real emotion during watching news, he would also evaluate the information that triggered the emotion as true. In news reporting, most of the topics reported as stories are various civic and social events, as well as catastrophes and tragedies. Story of an 'ordinary' man is always connected to some emotion (whether positive or negative). What emotions are actually evoked in recipient by such way of informing depends on how the issues are related to him – his relevant plans, experiences and actual mental condition.

### ***3.2. Sports news reporting, sports magazines and sports live broadcasting***

Sports news and sports live broadcasting are specific genres of programs which allow viewer to officially express his feelings; expressions of feelings might even be required, and not expressing them is seen as a violation of the expected professional style. These programs are watched by stable percipients – fans, who experience with their favourite teams or sportsmen/sportswomen the feelings of stress and nervousness during matches and races, feelings of enthusiasm, joy or even euphoric happiness when winning, feelings of anger and hatred (towards rivals, referees, but also to own players), or of empathy when losing. Particularly interesting for viewers are various world contests and championships of favourite sports (e.g. football, ice-hockey, athletics, or Formula 1, UEFA championship) and Olympic Games (both winter and summer). These contest are watched not only by regular viewers of sports programs, but also by major part of society that joins in watching sportsmen and sportswomen (and also commentators) and in witnessing world records being break. From the emotional point of view, the most interesting thing is the effect of multiplying of the commonly shared feelings of joy and happiness when winning, and of sadness when losing at public places (pubs, bars, stadiums or squares). This effect of crowd psychology occurred in the past only in stadiums, nowadays it is a traditional ritual, e.g. during the Ice Hockey World Championship. O. Mikšík states, that mental activation and excitement grow proportionally to importance of a match and uncertainty of victory of the own team – in this lies the highest experiential value of sport matches when compared to other types of entertainment. The higher the experiential value for a percipient is, the stronger are manifestations of enthusiasm or opposition during the crucial moments of the match. During specific situations mainly negative

emotions might grow into verbal aggression or mocking of opposition, which might have character of excitement, anxiety or anger [11]. Interesting phenomena is also that of Slovak – Czech rivalry, when these kinds of ‘brotherly’ matches are perceived very sensitively, and losing or winning is valued as a matter of whole nation. In 2014, Slovak television channels during the Ice Hockey World Championship used this rivalry and were bringing live reports from pubs where fans of both teams were mixed. The level of expression of emotions in sports commenting varies according to the kind of sport. Generally, it can be stated that nowadays the tolerance towards spontaneous behaviour and expressions of enthusiasm during commenting has grown comparing to the past; the greatest excitement can be seen during football and ice hockey matches. Commentator must know how to express his feelings naturally, yet appropriately, and how to stay calm in stressful situations. Moreover he should be able to switch between these two states, i.e. to swiftly change from natural expressions of excitement to professionalism while commenting the match.

### **3.3. *Current affairs programs***

There are various kinds of current affairs programs to be found in the program structure of Slovak television channels. According to J. Koščo, these kinds of programs bring “not only information but also arguments with direct effect on emotional, rational and theoretical level of consciousness” [12]. A. Tušer emphasises that while in news reporting the time urgency is essential, in this kind of programs it is the social urgency that dominates [7, p. 109]. There are various kinds of current affairs programs. It can be a program in which presenter only introduces the reports, or a program, in which presenter introduce the topics and audience learns more from the live dialogues going on the studio; in this kind of current affairs program news plays the minor role. These programs are either polythematic or monothematic.

#### **3.3.1. *Magazine shows***

Magazine shows are shows with a number of reports and presenter’s feeds. Presenter introduces and relates reports into one context and he also hosts the show. Magazines shows are usually pre-recorded, but can also be broadcasted live from the studio or exterior. An interview with a responded can also be included. Reports (or part of the reports) are related to one problem or topic and are pre-recorded. Magazine show is a compact program dealing with one particular topic. Emotions of presenters and reporters are usually neutral; important thing is to show interest in presenting information or hosts’ opinions to percipients. The exceptions are programs based on dialogues, in which presenters try to create relaxed atmosphere (apart from political topics) for respondents as well as for percipients. The exception is the show business show ‘Smotánka’ (TV Markíza), which is a current affair program, but comments and

interviews are presented in emotionally overexposed style – verbal formulations and intonation are exaggerated, at some points even ironic. Percipients' reactions, mainly to investigative topics, vary from satisfaction with gaining advices on similar problems as a percipient has passive compassion with people in hard life situations, to anger and rage of powerlessness, peoples' unwillingness or system's recklessness. Percipients might also feel fear of something similar happening to them. The intensity of the emotions depends on how much the presented problem relates to percipient, on similar negative experiences with it, or on the level of percipient's empathy.

### *3.3.2. Live shows*

Live shows are programs in which presenters brings various information through live feeds or through interviews, live or pre-recorded on the spot. Live shows can be focused on one main topic (monothematic show) or on various topics (polythematic shows), while the only link of the show is presenter. The other important feature is that the broadcasting is live and thus enables viewers to actively participate in the show. On the other hand, this kind of shows might create stress on presenter (if he is not enough experienced, or production of the show is chaotic), and that might be transmitted also on respondents and percipients. This kind of show makes high demands on presenters' competencies – he should poses very good verbal skills, readiness, improvisation skills and stress resistance. The atmosphere of the live show should be pleasant, without any extremely negative situations. If a game is a part of the show, percipient can experience happiness, joy of winning or disappointment of failing (e.g. if he does not manage to call to the studio). Sometimes percipient can be angry if during watching morning shows must leave home before getting know all information, especially if the topic is divided into several feeds and presenters conduct the interview in a way that does not allow respondent to say everything at once.

### *3.3.3. Discussions*

In discussions presenters and hosts lead debate on actual or socially relevant topics – sometimes the topic has both of the attributes. Presenter serves as a partner to the hosts, introduces the topics, polemicizes with the presented statements, coordinates the communication so everyone get the same amount of time to present their ideas, and pushes the debate further if the subtopic is exhausted. In political discussions presenter also serve as a regulator if the discussions turns into verbal fight, and watches the participants to not to talk off the topic and turn their speech into one-sided agitation. The specific type of discussions is election debates taking place before elections (e. g. general election, presidential election, local election or EU election). These debates have specific rules based on the equal approach to all participants (same amount of time, same questions). Mainly during this pre-electoral period emotions are

being openly expressed [13-16]. During this time verbal fights and conflicts occur more often, partnerships turn into confrontation, and talks about work shifts to personal insults and attacks. Facial expressions become more apparent - discussants use for example sneers, wry smiles, eye-rolling, raised eyebrows, sometimes expressions of wonder, surprise or anger are used. Viewers might sympathize with their favourite participants, or they feel hatred towards the representatives of opposition. Polls proved that views of decided voters do not change by watching television discussions, only undecided voters might be influenced [17]. When a perceptive watches arguing politicians, listens to constantly repeated promises and confronts them with reality, feelings of puzzlement, disappointment, dejection, sadness or contempt, disgust and anger may occur.

### **3.4. Entertainment programs**

Entertainment programs form the third group of programs generally broadcasted by Slovak television channels. Their aim is to evoke positive emotions – joy, happiness and relax. Omitting sitcoms, TV series and programs based on improvisation, this study focuses on such entertainment programs, in which presenter serves as a main leader and guide of the program, or as a voice commenting actors' acting. Many of the current entertainment programs on Slovak television channels are franchised from abroad.

#### **3.4.1. Game shows**

Game shows are based on people's competitiveness, desire to win and on the psychological principle of co-experiencing emotions together with contestants. Television channels offer quizzes, skill games, children games and so-called spelling games. Most of the game shows are pre-recorded (i.e. more episodes are produced during one day). Contestants experience thrill, excitement, anticipation and joy and happiness if they win, or disappointment, sadness or even jealousy and anger towards themselves if they lose. Perceptives of the show can see this on the facial expressions of hosts. The higher the price is, the stronger the negative emotions are if they fail, but it does not come to open expressions of anger and envy towards the rival. Contestant might also feel shame if he was not successful in coping with an easy task. This failure is usually excused by the quote: 'It's easier in front of the TV screen at home'. Presenter of the show generally acts neutrally, he might express joy of contestant's victory and sadness of rivals' failure, however these expressions cannot be ostentatious, but appropriate of neutral and objective presenting. Similar emotions to those of the contestants are felt also by family members; whether they are a part of audience in the TV studio or viewers at home. People watch TV games to test their knowledge and abilities whether they can meet demands of the TV game. Home environment offers them with security, since no one can see their failure.



### *3.4.2. Reality shows*

Reality shows are specific program format based on presentation of the extreme, mostly negative emotions. They contain the full spectre of emotions – from love and happiness, through sadness and misery, to anger, rage and hatred. There are various reality shows on the market, each with their own rules and principles. Participants are selected by their specific personal features or abilities, and the script is designed in a way which puts participants to stressful situations. In the case of a pre-recorded show, the final result is edited so the dynamics and attractiveness are maintained. Actors' behaviour and experiences are most often presented to percipient through their comments, or through the comments of the so-called 'voice'. Recipient watches this exhibition of behaviour and feelings for various reasons – for the chance to see the behaviour of other people otherwise impossible to see, for nurturing his own self-esteem and increasing self-confidence, for fun – recipient is entertained by the reactions and behaviour of actors, which he finds extravagant or exotic.

### *3.4.3. Gala shows*

Gala shows are programs with a specific role. They broadcast special events to a way larger audience than to just that present at the place of the event, i.e. they transmit the special atmosphere also to households, and evoke feelings of companionship and pride, or of compassion and sympathy. Contents of these programs vary – it can be a live broadcast of a state anniversary celebration, award ceremonies, Miss Contests or fundraising events. Special atmosphere of a gala night is also evoked by the environment (decoration, lights, dress code of presenters, hosts and audience), as well as by the content and the style of presenter's speech. During the charity programs the emotions of dignity and pride, or of passive or active compassion in percipient are often evoked.

Slovak media market is dominated by products based mainly on presenting of strong emotions, various extremities and extravagancies, which are primarily of negative character. Producers bring new programs and formats, in which extreme emotions are purposely evoked not only in the actors, but also in percipients. As a typical example serve reality shows, mainly those of the 'container' type, in which emotions grow with every new series (Farmár hľadá ženu, Mama, ožň ma, Záměna manželiek, or new formats such as Bučkovci, Extrémne rodiny, or Hotel Paradise). TV JOJ has currently started to broadcast American dating show Dating Naked (Adam hľadá Evu), in which participants get rid of all psychological and physical boundaries, including clothes. Another example of this trend is implementation of news reports with extreme emotions to the TV news, which standardly ought to bring emotionally neutral news to not to divert attention from its content.

#### 4. Conclusions

At present, emotions keep their irreplaceable position in all forms of television production, even in such formats that were emotionally neutral in the past. They have become an attention catcher, basis for stories through which percipient is presented with various problems in life. Through the emotional aspect of the program percipient creates connection to the media product. At the emotional level it is also easier for percipient to perceive, understand and remember the desired content. Presented emotions enable viewer to express empathy and compassion, experience feelings of stress and of subsequent catharsis, as well as feelings of anger and aggression otherwise not allowed to be expressed in everyday life. Current trends in television production are to carry the presented emotions to extremes, negative emotions in particular, as if media were competing in bringing up greater absurdities. The other problem is that negative emotions are shown at times, when child viewers are exposed to these kind of contents without any parental advisory. Presenting of negative emotions can also have tragic consequences (e.g. emotions of racism or extreme nationalism can be triggered by such contents, or showing of skinny celebrities can lead to negative emotions such as dissatisfaction with one's own self) [13]. Hence the danger of showing negative emotions (as anger, jealousy, hatred, envy, disdain or disgust) is, that it pushes the boundaries of the society's tolerance, deadens the sensitivity to negative social events and changes them into publicly acceptable norms, and therefore destroys social culture and the whole image of Slovakia in surrounding countries (e.g. the responses on a social network on the reality show 'Farmár hľadá ženu 3', which is based on presenting of embarrassing behaviour influenced by alcohol). Shifts in sociocultural norms and degeneration of society's idols are gradually taking place.

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