Theses of PhD Dissertation

Television and learning

Role of television and post-classical documentaries in the informal learning of cultural public employees

Author: Attila Zoltán Kenyeres

Thesis adviser: Dr. Erika Juhász



UNIVERSITY OF DEBRECEN

Doctoral School Of Humanities

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The objectives of the dissertation, the delimitation of the subject

Transmission theories examining the effects of media communication and the reality of media messages, according to which communication is a linear process in which the sender directly generates feelings, attitudes or knowledge towards the recipient that are no longer capable of providing a proper view on the relationship between media, reality and the audience. Unlike previous media theories of mass media culture - built on a research in the dimensions of ideological, political and economic aspects-, the recent media ones that include the neo-Durkheimian theories aim to examine the role of popular culture and focus on the ritual functions of the media. According to the Durkheimian theories, the most important task within the media research is to analyze the symbolic aspect of communication. Nowadays, the individual interprets the various moral problems of society through the media mediated rites and myths and choose the explanations they find acceptable. Durkheim's theories were reinterpreted in the 1980s, and so were in the field of media research as well, where the goal was to understand the order of society, morals and collective identity. Based on this theory, there is no point in questioning the representation of reality when it comes to evidence shows (documentaries) through tabloid/post-modern media either. Movies, radio, television, tabloid press and modern mass media all create social drama, in which viewers are made part of rituals.

The phenomenon can also be observed in documentaries, often dramatizing the elements of nature: dangerous tornadoes are approaching, a "scientist" fighting for survival in the primeval forest, struggles of life-threatening predators and their victims, etc. At the same time, realistic events are also included, however in many cases their framing is only subject to ritual needs. Based on these, documentaries are not references to reality but answers to other psychological needs of the viewers — as identified by the neo-Durkheimian ritual theories. For example, questions about whether the world around is safe; what are the dangers that we need to prepare for in different life situations.

For many decades now there has been a serious ongoing debate in the domestic and international scientific literature on the function of informative-educational television and the contemporary post-class documentary films that are based on spectacular elements.

The role of television and documentaries in everyday learning is acknowledged by most of the Hungarian and international literature (see Postman, Kozma, Durkó, McQuail, Nagy, Buckingham, Share, etc.). However, according to several researchers, the main function of the television is to entertain and to escape from thinking; it is definitely not to disseminate knowledge (see Pintér, Giovanni, Luhmann, Metzger, Flanagin, Henning-Vorderer, etc.).

Others believe that it is up to the recipient and their intentions as to whether they only want to be entertained or actually learn from these movies (see Lafollette, Geller et al., Young, Donohue, Aldridge-Dingwall, Van Dyke, etc.).

In the context of contemporary and post-classical documentaries, a variety of criticisms are defined by literature, based on content analysis. In these literatures, it is commonly assumed that filmmakers approach the presented themes not primarily from the didactical, but commercial aspect, sacrificing scientific authenticity and professional dissemination on the altar of entertainment, spectacle and sensation (see Bourdieu, Fürsich, Dijck, Metz, Lafollette, Pitts, Dingwall - Aldridge, Steemers, Palfreman, etc.). Therefore, these films primarily entertain the viewers, they are spectacular, but in the end, the recipients do not learn much from them (see: Kardos, McElvogue, Giovanni, Horak, Scott 2003, Leistyna, Agrawal, Pintér, Luhmann etc.).

Digital imaging, computer-generated images (CGIs) in the post-classical documentaries are severely criticized by literature, as they seem to be so lifelike that they could be used for compiling fiction and reality, affecting learning negatively (see Sontag, Gardner, Young, Hornig, Prince, National Science Foundation, Black, Frank, Jeffries, Dubeck and others, Dijck, Metz, etc.).

Parts of the scientific literature consider post-classical documentaries and the interviewee themselves in many cases as misleading and untruthful. Many

researchers point out that in several cases people with dubious academic reputation, not recognized in their profession appear in these films as scientists and in some cases actors, directors and producers are also interviewed as experts—only because the theme of the given fiction (mainly sci-fi) matches the theme of the documentary (see Metz, Parker, etc.). Such phenomena emphasizes the necessity of critical attitude from the viewer's perspective (see Metz, Meyers, Bourdieu, Domokos, Parker, etc.). The role of critical attitude is particularly important due to the spread of online video sharing portals and social media as it is easy to distribute pseudoscientific "documentaries" with uncontrollable backgrounds on these platforms.

In many cases post-classical documentaries convey a false image of science, scholarly work, and scholars according to a part of the literature, which identifies these also as a significant problem. Many documentaries have little connection with scientific communities, their research, these only try to avoid the less spectacular but more important areas of science that may be underrepresented, while others appear more often than their actual importance. In documentaries, they often want to make the work done by scientists look much more realistic, for example with organized scenes, manipulated light conditions, ultimately creating a completely false picture in the viewers (see Kilborn - Izod, Dornan, Bourdieu, Palfreman, Frank, Nowotny, Luhmann, Silberman, Holtorf, Metz etc.).

At the same time -in addition to criticisms-, some of the literature also points out that television programmes have a role to play in further learning and exploration (see: Sándor, Presszman, Tomka, Kardos, Szecskő, Nagy, Gunter et al., Forray-Juhász etc.).

The ongoing scientific discussion, as well as the spread of 24-hour information channels, the contemporary and post-classical documentaries broadcast by them justify the implementation of a comprehensive research that reveals the actual role -and refers to it as an inspiration to further learning- of television documentaries for adults (in this case: cultural public employees), while discovering the learning motivations of the viewers as well as the possible dangers of learning from

documentaries. The above mentioned national and international literature criticisms have one thing in common. They are in most cases conclusions, based on theoretical assumptions or on content analysis, which are rarely supported by empirical research results. That is why in our own research we analyzed the problems and the theories described by literature from the viewer's point of view. Accordingly, we searched for the answer to the following questions:

- 1. Who are the individuals that are actually learning from documentaries broadcast on cable TV channels?
- 2. Who are the individuals that are having or lacking any critical attitude in relation to documentaries?
- 3. What background variables can be differentiated between the group of instrumental and ritual documentary viewers?
- 4. How does the viewer differentiate reality from fiction in post-classical documentaries where digital audiovisual tricks are used?
- 5. Who are the ones likely to implement additional learning and self-training activities based on documentary themes?
- 6. What background variables make them feel favorably exposed toward social learning in documentaries?
- 7. What student types can be distinguished along the different background variables in relation to documentaries?

The questions were examined through cultural public employees, a selected group of the Hungarian adult population. Public employment is a special, temporary employment status, in which public employers receive governmental support to provide temporary employment opportunities for people who had been looking for employment opportunities without success for a longer period of time. On one hand, the aim of the program is to address the shortage of workers in the cultural sphere and on the other hand, it is to help public employees successfully enter or return back to the primary labor market. Primarily people living in small settlements were provided with employment opportunities and the goal was to promote the operation of cultural institutions locally. In order to be considered for

admission to the program, the public employee must have at least a high school degree and therefore, be fit for these tasks after completing the professional training. All of these conditions have predestined the people involved in our research, who are primarily from small settlements and have at least a high school degree. The study of cultural public employees was motivated by the fact that these professionals interact with a large part of the population and thus have a strong opinion-shaper role in the life of local communities. Most small settlements have only one cultural scene that could have a significant influence on the community. As a result, the employees of these institutions can also have a strong influence over the members of the closer and wider community. This is supported by the data of the 2015 cultural statistics, according to which in that year a total of 5599 public cultural organizations were operating in the country.

The major interaction role of public educational institutions with the population is indicated by the fact that there were altogether 16,000 art groups with 361,000 members and 14,000 clubs, study groups and coteries with a total of 557,000 members. Another 595,000 people attended training courses organized by public educational institutions, and 1.5 million visits were recorded on various educational programs. In exhibitions and other events, a total of 39.5 million visits were recorded, and several services (such as consulting, event organization) were used 5.1 million times. According to the data of the cultural statistics, a total of 73.3 million visits were registered in the Hungarian public cultural institutions in 2015. These cultural statistics therefore show that public education institutions play a significant role in the interaction with the population, so it does actually matter how the professionals working there (in our case the cultural public employees) relate to television and treat documentaries as a learning tool, as they will, on the one hand, have an influence on the population accordingly and on the other hand, could use these tools in their work with dissemination goals. It is also important to examine what critical attitudes cultural public employees have as opinion-shapers in relation to television and documentaries, since they could be the ones to raise the public's attention to critical thinking in the dimension of learning from media content. This is particularly justified in connection with the transfer of various non-scientific knowledge, which is discussed in details in our dissertation.

The outlining method

The population of the survey of our empirical research was formed by Hungarian cultural public employees, and the sample was represented by 3932 participants of the third phase of the Cultural Public Employment Program. The survey took place during June-July 2016. We applied quantitative methods in the form of a self-reporting online questionnaire. We built the subject based on our research questions. The first question group applied to the definition of the social status of participants in the research. In defining the analyzed background variables, Bourdieu's classical theory was taken into account, according to which three types of capital have an effect on individuals within social spaces: economic capital, cultural capital and social capital. Based on Bourdieu's breakdown, the following background variables were listed for each type of capital: economic capital is the monthly household income; cultural capital is the level of education, the parents' education, language level, the size of the home library; social capital is the type of settlement, the number of households, the number of children and the level of the partnership. We also examined the classification of religion by selfdeclaration. The next question group in the questionnaire was to explore the television watching habits as part of leisure activities (traditional and modern recreational activities, types of knowledge gained from television program types, viewer ranking of television programs, frequency of sources of information and their confidence index). The third question group examined specifically the role of contemporary documentaries broadcast on documentary channels (e.g. Discovery Channel, National Geographic Channel, Spektrum TV): in their honest opinion, do viewers really learn from these - and if they do, what are the learning topics; the didactic efficiency of audile, visual and narrative methods used in films according to the recipient's own admission; viewing platforms; credibility of documentaries; role of entertainment; the critical attitude towards these films. The fourth question group revealed what sort of image these -specifically sciencerelated-documentaries created in the recipient: what scholars represent; what they transmit about scientific work; how credible they seem to the viewers. In the last, fifth group of questions we asked about the role of documentaries in terms of social learning and their impact on further research: who they are watching such films with; do these films come up as a social conversation topic; do they do further investigation in the topic of documentaries - and if so, from what source. The results were analyzed using the SPSS program and the data analysis was done by cross-tabulation with the addition of the adjusted residuals values, including variance analysis and cluster analysis. To examine the role of television and contemporary documentaries in informal learning, the following main concepts are defined in the dissertation: learning dimensions (formal - non-formal informal learning), the forms of informal learning, leisure activities (modern and traditional), documentaries and educational movies, classical and post-classical documentaries, audience of ritualized and instrumental viewing, as well as media convergence and pseudoscience.

Based on our research questions, we set up the following hypotheses:

H1: It is assumed that among the individuals learning from television educational programme broadcasts on television, those with a lower level of education are overrepresented in the case of cultural public employees as well Findings are in line with the results of previous research and public opinion polls.

H2: It is assumed that the ones with higher cultural capital (high level of education, language certificate, large home library) are more critical of the statements presented in documentaries than those with lower cultural capital.

H3: It is assumed that in the case of documentary films, the viewer attitude (conscious, learning-oriented), identified as instrumental by the neo-Durkheimian theories are the typical characteristic of the ones with a higher level

of education, which is in line with the theories and research results, showing that higher education comes with greater everyday learning consciousness.

H4: It is assumed that because of the use of powerful visual and audiotechniques (such as computer-generated digital visual effects) in contemporary, post-classical documentaries, it would be more difficult for the viewer to separate reality from speculation - in line with the literature findings.

H5: In relation to the content presented in documentaries, we assume that higher cultural capital (high level of education, language certificate, large home library) generates more additional learning, interest-driven self-training activities than lower cultural capital, in line with research claiming that higher level of education is associated with higher everyday learning awareness.

H6: It is assumed that the viewing of documentaries as a social, community activity is more frequent among residents of smaller settlements, couples living in domestic relationships, families - in line with theories emphasizing the locality and the family's community-building role.

H7: We assume that the cultural public employees that are learning from documentaries do not form a unified, homogeneous group, but clusters of viewers can be separated by different attitudes and motivations: the ones with conscious learning and the others ruling out documentaries as a learning tool.

Results listed as theses

In the theoretic part of our dissertation we will review the theoretical findings and scientific experiments found in relevant and decisive Hungarian and international literature, systematize the dimensions of learning and place the activity of learning from television in these. In the empirical unit, we explore the leisure activities of cultural public employees, positioning television within such activities and examine the role of television among the sources of knowledge. We analyze the role of documentaries in learning, with specific reference to science-related knowledge. We explore the credibility of documentaries as a learning tool, as well

as looking into their function in the search for additional information and learning. Finally, we examine the clusters that can be separated within the respondents in the dimension of learning from documentaries. A novel approach to our dissertation is to specifically explore the potential of documentaries in everyday learning, as the analyses so far have examined the educational role of media and / or television in general, rather than just contemporary, post-classical documentaries on popular channels. Testing content-based documentary theoretical hypotheses from the recipient's side is also an innovation, including the didactic methods (visual, audible and narrative elements) of these films, critical attitudes towards documentary films as learning tools, and the potential dangers of learning from such films. It is also a novelty to explore the impact of documentary films that generate additional learning activity and to investigate how these films influence the viewer's idea about science. No national research has been carried out on this subject so far, therefore our work is unique in this regard. Its volume is also remarkable, as we analyzed almost 4000 people.

During our research, we obtained the following results along the hypotheses:

In our first hypothesis we assumed that among the individuals learning from television educational programme broadcasts on television, those with a lower level of education are overrepresented in the case of cultural public employees as well Findings are in line with the results of previous research and public opinion polls. This hypothesis has been justified. Analyzing our results by background variables, we demonstrated that interest in documentaries broadcast on educational channels is determined by the individual's educational level. In addition, we revealed the self-classification of religion, the relationship status, the number of household members, the type of settlement and the significant role of income. We found that documentary films broadcast on educational channels were mainly consumed by individuals with a lower level of education (having no language exams, only high school degree), the ones claiming to be religious, non-married couples, four people living in the same household, those with an income between 101 and 150 thousand HUF per month, parents with two children and

people living in cities. They proved to be the most overrepresented in comparison to the average in the whole group within the surveyed cultural public service employees. Our findings confirm the research data of the Mass Communication Research Center, which revealed that documentaries were more likely to be watched by those with a lower level of education. Our results confirm the tendencies of the level of education in Nielsen's 2014 research, which showed that the majority of the viewers are the ones with a lower level of education. Based on the totalized annual survey data of the examined Hungarian dissemination channels, the majority of viewers (37.8%) had primary or lower education and only 15% had a high level of education.

In our second hypothesis we assumed that the ones with higher cultural capital (high level of education, language certificate, large home library) are more critical of the statements presented in documentaries than those with lower cultural capital. This hypothesis has also been justified. We have demonstrated that the critical attitude towards documentaries (in a sense that whether it comes to the recipient's mind that they would question the content or if they believed any of the information to be false) was clearly typical for men, people with higher level of education, owners of large home libraries, the ones living in larger settlements or alone, single people, those claiming not to be religious or being actively engaged in religious education among the studied cultural public employees. The lack of critical attitude – in the same sense- was typical for people with lower level of education, women, the owners of small home libraries, the ones living in smaller settlements, the ones being in a relationship (especially married couples) within the studied members of the target group. Analyzing the intensity of perception shown by the interviewees in the documentaries, the level of the language proficiency also proved to be an explanatory factor: People without a language certificate were underrepresented among the ones observing the title, scientific degree and disciplines of the interviewees. Thus, our hypothesis proved to be true: the cultural capital of an individual influences their critical attitude in the relation of documentaries - at least in the case of the cultural public employees

we studied. The result is made particularly relevant due to the emergence of pseudoscientific video footage spread primarily over the Internet. In connection with these, based on these results we can assume that those with higher cultural capital may be less exposed to the impact of such documentaries because they are more likely to recognize such films. This issue however requires further research. In our third hypothesis we assumed that in the case of documentary films, the viewer attitude (conscious, learning-oriented), identified as instrumental by the neo-Durkheimian theories are the typical characteristic of the ones with a higher level of education, which is in line with the theories and research results, showing that higher education comes with greater everyday learning consciousness. This hipothesis of ours has also been justified. Along background variables analysis, we found that the ones categorized as instrumental viewers were influenced primarily by gender, age, type of settlement, parental status, number of children and the size of the home library. Although, the differences found did not seem to be significant in connection with the level of education, still, the ones with higher level of education, large home library owners, couples living in loose relationships and men were overrepresented for every single related question. Therefore, our hypothesis was justified: instrumental viewing was more typical for the ones with higher level of education among the cultural public employees studied. Our results also confirm previous research findings on documentaries, which proves that adults with higher education have a higher learning disposition.

In our fourth hypothesis we assume that because of the use of powerful visual and audiotechniques (such as computer-generated digital visual effects) in contemporary, post-classical documentaries, it would be more difficult for the viewer to separate reality from speculation - in line with the literature findings. This hypothesis was not proven correct. The majority of respondents (87.2%) stated that they could partially or largely differentiate real-life recordings from computer animations. Almost 22% of them deny that the various manipulated recordings would make it difficult for them to tell the truth from speculation in these documentaries. The overwhelming majority (83.8%) of the cultural public

employees found the literary presumption partially or not at all to be true, according to which it would be difficult for them to distinguish truth from speculation in manipulated recordings. This hypothesis therefore is not fulfilled. Our fifth hypothesis assumed that in relation to the content presented in documentaries, we assume that higher cultural capital (high level of education, language certificate, large home library) generates more additional learning, interest-driven self-training activities than lower cultural capital, in line with research claiming that higher level of education is associated with higher everyday learning awareness.

This hypothesis has been justified. In connection with the content of documentaries, cultural capital proved to be a background variable influencer for further learning (level of education, language level, size of home library), and apart from this, so did the gender, number of children, relationship status and type of settlement. In the theme of documentaries, there is an over-representation of people with high cultural capital, men, ones without children, single people and people living on their own, as well as residents of larger cities, among the analyzed cultural public employees, engaged in additional learning activities and self-education. Our data matches the results of other research, examining what the effects higher level of education has on further learning.

Although it is mentioned by Pusztai in the cases of university students —not adults-that students with lower qualifications are more likely to avoid extracurricular activities, based on this point of view, looking at further voluntary learning that is inspired by documentary films as a kind of "extra" learning activity, we found that higher education is a plus, as it involves more voluntary studying. Surveys analyzing adult learning habits have shown that adults with higher education have greater willingness to learn, which is also proven correct in relation to the study on documentaries and the post-learning activity.

In the sixth hypothesis we assume that the viewing of documentaries as a social, community activity is more frequent among residents of smaller settlements, couples living in domestic relationships, families - in line with theories

emphasizing the locality and the family's community-building role. This hypothesis was also fulfilled. In relation to documentaries, relationship status, type of settlement, number of children, age, number of household members and also the gender of respondents proved to be a background variable that has an influence on the need for social learning. With reference to documentaries, within the individuals practicing social learning, the over-represented ones are the married couples, people in relationships, women, those living in smaller settlements, large home library owners and parents with three children. The type of settlement, as well as the family therefore proved to be a community-forming strength when viewing documentaries. Our results indicate the strong role of the local community and family in relation to documentary viewing, which is in line with the literature focusing on communities that emphasize the locality (village, neighborhood) and the family's community-forming role.

In the seventh hypothesis we assume that the cultural public employees that are learning from documentaries do not form a unified, homogeneous group, but clusters of viewers can be separated by different attitudes and motivations: the ones with conscious learning and the others ruling out documentaries as a learning tool. This hypothesis is justified, as the population we studied did not prove to be unified in connection with the activity of learning from documentaries. In the case of such films it was possible to distinguish between the group of committed, effective and motivated learners and those who were less committed, nonmotivated and less effective learners. Apart from these two larger groups, we managed to reveal three other clusters, making the overall picture slightly more complicated. Based on the extent of the intensity of learning, further learning activity and critical attitude, we were able to distinguish 5 groups in total: consume learners, committed learners, consume top learners, committed top learners, clusters of non-learners. Furthermore, we revealed in our dissertation that Internet usage and watching television play a leading role within the leisure activities of the cultural public employees, as -in line with national and international research. These mass media instruments are considered as the two main sources of knowledge for these people as per the results, in spite of the fact that their reliability was undervalued when compared to the most trustworthy books, university or other training instructors. We have proved that among the television-related activities of the cultural public employees, watching documentaries play a significant role, as it comes as the third most frequent activity after movies, news and political analyses. Television channels broadcasting educational films only (e.g. National Geographic Channel, Discovery Channel, Spektrum TV) were consumed by the majority of the questioned cultural public employees -76.7%-, therefore we have found that these documentaries are significant factors of knowledge for the cultural public employees.

We have demonstrated that the majority of cultural public employees -based on the neo-Durkheimian theories- belong to the group of ritual viewers (watching these for entertainment, relaxation, as a result of random broadcast selection) of documentary films. A total of 87.3% of them watched these films partially or mainly for fun, without any learning purpose. At the same time, 96.6 % said they could to partially or largely learn from these documentaries. Based on these, we have proved that documentaries are instruments of educational entertainment. Meanwhile, a small group of recipients are the instrumental viewers who deliberately make their selection in advance, watching documentaries with specific learning purposes. The vast majority of respondents watch these films in the "traditional way", i.e. on the television screen, watching them online or via or mobile phone are less typical. We also demonstrated that cultural public employees gained knowledge from documentaries mainly from a specific field of natural science (environment protection, meteorology, astronomy, geography, fauna and flora), followed by household and gastronomic topics, historical, political, cultural and artistic themes. It was also proved that documentaries and series play an important role in the knowledge transfer of science, in developing a point of view by the recipient about science and scientists in the case of cultural public employees. We demonstrated that the individuals watching documentaries on educational channels are much more curious and open in general than those not paying attention to such films. In the dimension of critical attitude, we found that almost 100% of the surveyed cultural public service employees partially or largely trust the statements in the documentaries. The overwhelming majority have never questioned whether what is presented in these movies were actually true and they did not find any piece of false information either. The majority of them - according to their own admission-, observe the institution interviewees represent, but their academic degrees and the field of science are only noticed by few. Overall, the cultural public employees had trust in the documentaries, they mainly trusted their content and the majority did not pay attention to the title of the interviewees. Although all these could be decisive factors in recognizing documentaries that contain pseudoscientific knowledge - our present research did not cover this. We verified the role of already existing knowledge and experience in the case of gaining knowledge from documentaries, as the vast majority of respondents decide whether or not to believe the presented information based on these. It was furthermore revealed that the cultural public employees mainly use the Internet or read books in order to perform further learning activity. We proved that the social dimension is also very prominent in the relationship between gaining knowledge from documentaries, as a significant minority is also watching such films in the company of others.

For most of the respondents, the themes that emerge from these films are shared in conversations, so they also play a part in everyday social activities, showing the media's agenda-determining effect on the dimension of documentary films among the cultural public employees. To summarize the above, we can say that our empirical results showed that television documentaries play a significant role in everyday learning in the case of cultural public employees. For them, television and the Internet are clearly the most important source of information and learning in everyday life. Critical attitude towards documentaries is not typical, which, in turn, poses serious threats due to the emergence of pseudoscientific video footages, primarily on the internet. A further research direction could be the

comparative analysis of the formal, classroom use of documentaries: what are the differences between knowledge transfer through lecture and learning from documentaries. Also, further research is needed in order to find out what background variables are most likely to be exposed to the effects of pseudoscientific knowledge and to see who the "protected" ones are.

For this, the data obtained during our current research could be used to create an excellent possibility to make a comparison. Through media convergence, analyzing the impact the accessibility of over-the-top (OTT) television pay-TV services have on documentaries can also be a promising area of research.



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