



Political discourse on Polish commercial television. Case of “Fakty” TVN



Dorota Piontek

UNIVERSITY OF ADAM MICKIEWICZ IN POZNAŃ, POLAND

ABSTRACT: The continual growth in the importance of commercial media, as proven by its growing share of the audience market, invites us to scrutinize the ways politics is mediated through these channels. One may assume that the very essence of commercial activity influences the ways and forms of conducting political discourse by these media, and as a result influences the picture of politics. The aim of the article is to point out the shift away from traditional forms of political debates as well as the change in formula of covering political phenomena and events, and political processes by the media, and the specifics of the convergence of television genres, in which politics is present. The article will attempt a reconstruction of medial political reality, based on content analysis and the analysis of the forms of political discourse in commercial television, particularly in news programs using “Fakty”, broadcasted by TVN, as a case study.

KEYWORDS: mass media, tabloidization, political discourse, news, political entertainment



INTRODUCTION

Historically there exists a justified belief that public and commercial media differ in the way they function not only on an organizational or financing levels, but also in how they fulfill the needs of their audiences. Public media has an inherent social utility, whereas commercial media deal in the production entertainment programs aimed at a wide audience. Public media are expected to realize important social goals which should be attained irrespective of economic costs, whereas commercial media must satisfy audience needs in a way that guarantees broadcaster success in terms of profit. Public media are supported by legislature in collecting means to fund its operations (obligatory licence fee), while commercial media have to fend for themselves and earn their money from audiences and advertisers, who by nature are independent and free, and are continuously making choices and decisions to whom they want to support. This is more or less the outlined difference between the two types of media, and allows us to think in practical dimension as to how they act in the field of political communication. Intuition whispers that public media are





Dorota Piontek

obliged to cover politics fully and honestly and without bias, while commercial media may deal with politics when they come to the conclusion that there is – trivially said – money to be made.

The question then arises whether politics and the political process may be interesting enough for commercial television audiences, that the station editors decide to put politics into their program agenda. A preliminary glance at the program output of commercial stations that have a general remit (mainly TV Polsat and TVN) suggests that they deal with politics out of an obligation merely to deliver to their audiences the news of a day. Saying it in other words, the general characteristics of particular news outlets offered by commercial broadcasters show that the only place politics is present are news programs. However, a more keen analysis of program supply leads – at least in the case of TVN – to different conclusions.

POLITICS AND ENTERTAINMENT

From the very beginning, the biggest commercial television stations in Poland have differed in their approach to politics as a topic of their outlets. Right from its birth TV Polsat has kept a distance to politics, while the fathers of TVN did not hide their ambitions to compete with public television in news and social-political journalism. After 1995 presidential elections, when TV Polsat emitted election coverage under symptomatic title “The Ring”, this station for a long time desisted from any flirting with politics, limiting itself to not too popular news program “Wydarzenia” (“Events”). The situation changed in 2005 with the arrival to the station of Tomasz Lis. Employing the service of one of the best known and most respected political journalists in Poland was seen as an essential step in trying to change and attract a more, at least from a marketing point of view, desirable audience, issued from necessity of changing the image of the station and from desire to gain more appreciated, from a marketing point of view, audience. In a battle for a younger, better educated, richer and urban audience TVN was in the lead, a winner.

However, politics as offered by commercial stations, with their rivalry over audience figures never in doubt, cannot be limited only to news programs. A tendency in Polish media in the last few years to junction politics and popular culture is worth noting. Politicians have increasingly started to behave and express themselves in a way which is more typical of heroes of show business than politics. They publish books, not to better explain or to bring the political process closer to citizens, but to promote themselves and make money, and by so doing achieving a status of *celebrity*. Press conferences are more and more like a show, in which formal issues significantly outweigh substantial ones. In other words, politicians enroll themselves in popular culture. It is therefore only logical that they as well as their activities become interesting for those who have created this culture.

The portrayal of politics, then, especially in commercial media, has moved towards entertainment, although entertainment formats in general do not deal with



politics directly. There are some exceptions, of course; political fictions in the form of reality novels, movies and series about politicians and politics, or even “political” version of “Idol”. In other words, politics and politicians have become heroes of soap operas, talk-shows, satirical formats and alike.

As an example of this type of programming format was the first ever Polish political fiction series “Ekipa” (“The Crew”), produced and emitted in 2007 in TV Polsat. The program, set in contemporary Poland showed the hidden aspects of politics in its functional and human dimensions. Showing fictional characters and events, though still relating to the realities of Polish political life, the series created an ideal world in the sense that the main characters were idealists who, having the instruments of power, acted ideologically and were motivated by social, not individual interests. It is not clear why the series did not fulfill its commercial expectations and did not become – so far – a source of inspiration for similar popular production: was it too idealistic and too far removed from perceptions and evaluations of politicians made by ordinary people, or were there screenplay shortcomings, or was it the lack of tradition of such a program format in Poland, or was there simply a lack of interest of the audience of TV Polsat.¹

It is worth emphasizing that this kind of production, though in essence entertainment, plays an important role in the way politics is covered by the media. Popular media become a point of relevance for shaping the identity of viewers, disseminating patterns and systems of values. They define the attributes of a good citizen (e.g. through character depictions in soap operas) and shape mental images on how social institutions (e.g. authorities, medical service, police) should work.

As Dan Nimmo and Robert Savage (1990, p. 7) wrote,

the images conjured up and projected by the media help to shape and reshape the images held by the audience. In other words, the public imagination is in part the imaginary experiences afforded by the popular media. Since those imaginary experiences seek to tell us, among other things, who we are, who others are (and are not), how we can resolve our differences (or ignore them) through preferred procedures and directions, and way some differences ought to be resolved in a particular way and other differences in still other ways, the popular media also reflect much of the political imagination.

We may assume then that there is dependence between the way the media cover politics in their entertainment programs and the way they cover politics in news programs. This dependence is mutual: presenting politics in a certain way, the me-

¹ This lack of success may be explained by the structure of TV Polsat audience (age, education, location) and its possibly different expectations towards television offer. But it was simultaneously sold together with *Gazeta Wyborcza*, a leading Polish daily newspaper, whose readers have an above average interest in politics. The program did not find success among this audience either. It is worth mentioning that the premiere of “Ekipa” coincided with a parliamentary election campaign. One may ironically say the only beneficiary of the soap was Donald Tusk, the winning prime minister, whose sudden metamorphosis at the end of campaign was very similar to the figure of the prime minister in the movie.



Dorota Piontek

dia create cognitive frames which have to be adhered to when reporting politics in the news. It must be understandable and attractive for viewers who have the choice and ability to change a TV channel any time. On the other hand, strengthened by news programs, the perception of politics and politicians is duplicated in entertainment formats. It is not reasonable to build a cognitive dissonance among viewers, as it could lead the audience to switch service provider, in this case the broadcaster.

When politicians start to behave as celebrities, they expose themselves to all disadvantages of that status. They are no longer treated with respect. They become an object of interest to people not because of their political activities, but because of the fact that they are well known. Politicians become an object of jokes, they even help to create them if they are able to keep a distance to themselves. Very popular programs, like “Szymon Majewski Show”, with an ideologically engaged presenter with a clear sense of mission, keep distance to (meaning dull and not attractive) politics shape perception of politics and their importance is growing. Audience, disgusted with politics and politicians, took a fancy to him, sharing the same attitude and keeping it in mind when voting. Jarosław Kaczyński, former prime minister, had good reasons to say that his party lost the elections in 2007 partly because of Szymon Majewski and Kuba Wojewódzki.²

Political journalism in commercial television more frequently and more persistently adopts from entertainment. “Talking heads” programs have been replaced by political talk shows, where the personality of the guests, their manners, self presentation abilities and their experience in front of the camera are valued more than their competence or their knowledge of the problem at hand. The list of invited politicians is thus pretty short, and their behaviors and statements predictable. After all, very often the intention of journalists is to compose guests of talk shows in a way that guarantees tension and dramaturgy similar to what is present in “Jerry Springer Show” (keeping all differences in mind). The reactions of the studio audience may influence the interactions between the host and his guests and the guests themselves. Statements of guests are accompanied by film materials assembled in entertaining manner. It is thus possible to talk about a convergence of television genres: political journalism and the classic talk show. A politician takes place of the common people, and the success of the program depends on the personality of the anchorman and the efficient choice of guests.

² Szymon Majewski and Kuba Wojewódzki are presenters of satirical programs on commercial TVN. Szymon Majewski hosts “The Szymon Majewski Show”, a satirical program with celebrity guests. Both Majewski and his guests openly and strongly express their critical attitude towards politicians and politics. The last part of the program, called “Talks in crowd” (which is a paraphrase of a title of a very popular talk show “Talks in the course”), contains parodies of prominent politicians and their behaviors. Kuba Wojewódzki, a well-known anchor with his own program, is also very open in presenting his extreme opinions on the hypocrisy, closed-mindedness and emptiness of politicians, especially those on the right. Both programs are very popular, mainly among young, well-educated and urban dwelling audiences.



TABLOIDIZATION

The conscious activity of politicians, their media advisors, spin doctors, or political public relations specialists make allowances for the needs of a new type of commercial television viewer. Is it therefore possible to talk about an onset of a vicious circle of tabloidization? With respect for needs of contemporary media, politicians focus on images. By delivering images, they strengthen the superficial and personalized perception of politics. That is a characteristic of tabloidization understood not only as specific type of journalism, but also as a specific way of thinking about politics. As Frank Esser (1999, p. 293) wrote, tabloidization as a microscale process can be viewed as:

a media phenomenon involving the revision of traditional and other media format driven by reader preferences and commercial requirements.

At this level it means

a change in a range of topics being covered (more entertainment, less information), in the form of presentation (fewer longer stories, more shorter ones with pictures and illustrations) and a change in the mode of address (more street talk when addressing readers).

At the same time, tabloidization can be understood as a macroscale process. In this sense it can be seen as:

a social phenomenon both instigating and symbolizing major changes to the constitution of society (signs being, for example, attaching less importance to education and more political marketing, resulting in an increase in political alienation). (Esser, 1999, p. 293)

For our purposes the wider understanding of tabloidization is more useful. According to the Norwegian researcher Per Bakke, we can talk about tabloidization of politics and of the emotions. In his work, *From a society of commodity to a society of information*,³ he explains that tabloidization of politics refers to the use of media by politicians (and politicians by media) to make an impression on voters, to attract them, to meet them. This, according to Bakke, may lead to discussions only about uncontroversial issues, which are close to the hearts of the audience, because the point is to shorten a distance between the politician and his/her voters. Bake also points to how media dispositioning themselves influences the agenda setting process. Media dispositions may be, one should add, of a commercial or an ideological nature.

Tabloidization of the emotions, according to Bakke, means that some events are treated by the media not as they are, but as something more, something different.

³ Original title: *Fra varesamfunn till informasjonssamfunn*. Edited in 1999 by Solum in Oslo. All references to Per Bakke concept see: A. Pensar, Displaying tabloidization: analysis of *Dagens Nyheter* media coverage on the schoolshooting of Dunblane and the school hostage drama of Beslan. Published on the Internet in January 2006.



Dorota Piontek

He uses the example of sport,⁴ but it also means the moving of private tragedies and sorrows to a public sphere. Describing it as *tabloid culture*, which is typical in the western world, he raises the point that feelings are defined not by those who are in the position of experiencing those emotions but by other people. Emotions become an object accessible to everyone and in different ways, which is not only morally questionable but also evokes a question from where the demand for such news originates.

So far the process of tabloidization has been analyzed in the context of media (newspapers) called tabloids. But increasingly it becomes obvious that higher quality media are subject to the same tendency. Thus an analysis, consistent with Esser's demand, of news programs, which are basically part of the concept of opinion journalism ("serious" journalism), will allow us to answer a question: To what extent the process of tabloidization applies to "Fakty", the best Polish news program, in opinion of many experts.

Tabloidization takes place when, as Howard Kurtz put it, three tendencies occur: an overall decrease in journalistic standards; a decrease in hard news as political and economics and an increase in soft news as sleaze. Scandal, sensation and entertainment; a general change (or broadening) of the media's definition of what they think the voters need to know to evaluate a person's fitness for public office (1993, p. 147).

According to Frank Esser, tabloidization is a process, which means it takes place over a long period of time. Thus it should be examined from a long term perspective. Significantly it also means a spill-over of tabloid news values from the popular to the quality press, e.g. the adopting of a popular media agenda by quality media. Therefore quality media should be examined instead of tabloid media. In Esser's opinion, the process of tabloidization is not internationally uniform and takes place in specific cultural and historical conditions.

According to accepted definitions of tabloidization, we may separate several elements present in medial texts subject to the process of tabloidization. These are: theme, type of information, actors, location of an event, and time devoted (duration). These dimensions were used in research on news program "Fakty", broadcasted by TVN in a period January 23 to March 29, 2008. 21 editions were analyzed.

THE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF "FAKTY"

Each issue was divided into easily separated items. In 21 newscasts there were 177 such items. Their number in each particular edition was similar and ranged from

⁴ Football games of national teams, for example, are often shown in media as events being a continuation of past experiences. Every time when Polish team plays against Germans, some media recall Second World War or the Grunwald Battle of 1410 (won by Polish and Lithuanian troops), and footballers playing against Sweden should take revenge for invasion in 17th century. Football games are reported not just a game but as serious, almost deadly fight for moral advantage.



8 to 11. Two exceptions were noticed and both were devoted to one particular subject.⁵ Each item told one story. Each item was categorized in four different dimensions: theme, actor, location and duration. *Theme* of an item was defined as a main topic/subject of reported story. Themes were listed in the following order: politics, economy, social issues, human interest, sensation (accidents and crime), popular culture and entertainment, and sport. The category of social issues related to stories which may be interesting and important to the general public, and human interest stories focused on stories, deeds and problems of ordinary individuals with little attachment to the public.

The themes defined as above, determined the type of news. Distinction was made between *hard* news and *soft* news, which is common practice. The first of these related to events of systemic significance, mainly from political and economic areas. The second type of news consisted of entertainment, accidents, sport, popular culture and problems of human interest. One still should notice that not every piece of information from the political or economic realm was defined as hard; there were several cases when in one item covering politics that the two types of news appeared, joined up or twined. Assumption was made that dominance of hard above soft news would indicate tabloidization.

Actors appearing in an item, e.g. participants of reported events were taken as second dimension of tabloidization. They were grouped in following categories: politicians (of different levels), experts, officials (individuals acting in the name of organs of administration, social organizations; lawyers, police officers, civil servants), journalists working for media organizations other than TVN, basically acting as experts), ordinary people and celebrities. The more frequent appearance of actors of lesser importance than so called serious actors would suggest tabloidization.

The third dimension was attached to location, understood as a place where reported event occurred. A distinction was made between national and international (out of the country) location depending on the main focus of the story. Dominance of national events would be a determinant of tabloidization of news.

The last dimension of tabloidization was concerned with time spent on reporting an event. In common perception there is a correlation between time devoted to a story and its systemic importance (longer time means higher seriousness). However, after examination of production techniques used in news programs this conviction seemed to be controversial. One needs to distinguish between, let us say, objective or systemic significance of a particular event and the significance given to it by the media. In such a situation it is length of time combined with the hard or soft character of an event that decides about tabloidization and this dependence can be expressed as follows: the more time given to soft news means a stronger tendency to tabloidization of news program.

⁵ January 24, 2008 – catastrophe of troop plane CASA; March 2, 2008 – presidential elections in Russia.



Dorota Piontek

Usually it is presumed that hard information relates to events connected with politics and economy. It occurs, however, that sometimes information from this sphere is in its essence soft, because it does not touch political or economic processes, but issues of, for example, a personal nature, which do not weigh from perspective of political system. Hence it is not a theme but a way it is grasped that decides whether a piece of information was counted as the first or second type of news.

The tendency of complex framing of leading theme in news programs is more and more visible. For example on February 12, 2008 one of leading themes of “Fakty” was the Olympic Games in China. The item started with information about decision made by the Olympic Committee of the United Kingdom on a ban on formulating any political statements by British sportsmen. Then it smoothly moved to handle relations between politics and sport, and ended in remainder of the Berlin Olympic Games in 1938. It is not an exceptional case, on the contrary – it illustrates persistent tendency in a way of producing information items. It also explains that in many cases data do not always sum up.

Themes

In the examined newscasts of “Fakty” stories that related to social issues were slightly dominant (49 items of 177). They dealt with moral questions (dress code as cultural code, celebration of Easter), historical issues (letters from the Warsaw Uprising), medical problems (lack of money for specialist medical procedures), or scientific. Politics was a leading theme in 46 items focused on current political events, but with a special emphasis on personal relations between actors, not on systemic analysis. Issues of ordinary people and dramatic incidents (accidents, crimes) completed the list of most frequently touched subjects (Fig. 1).

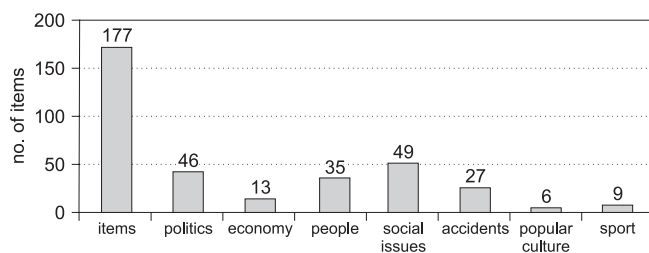


Fig. 1. Distribution of themes in items

Source: author.

Figure 2 shows the proportional share of particular themes in information items. It is clearly visible that economic issues understood in terms of macro and micro levels did not attract much attention, although it was a hot time of strikes of custom officers and counteraction of truck drivers.



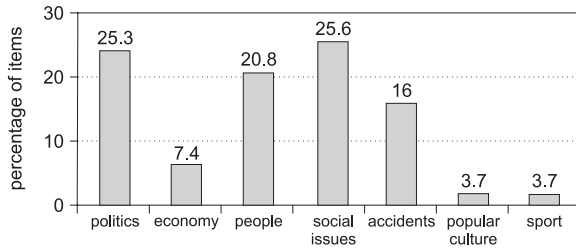


Fig. 2. Proportional distribution of themes in items

Source: author.

An explanation may be very simple: economic problems are complex and need some knowledge going beyond the personal experience of a viewer. This makes them less interesting for the audience. Stories about dramatic events are worthy of note. There is nothing surprising in that considering the audience’s feeling of identification on the one hand and sensitiveness to negative information on the other. In negative incidents usually ordinary people are involved what strengthen this feeling.

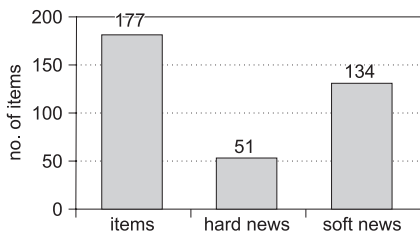


Fig. 3. Distribution of soft and hard news in total number of items

Source: author.

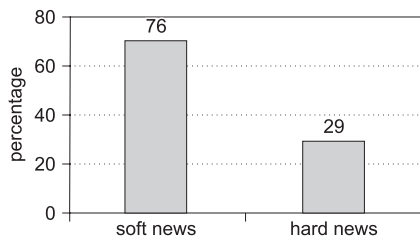


Fig. 4. Proportions of soft and hard news in newscasts

Source: author.

Study of the relations between hard and soft information leads to following conclusions; considering the total number of items, soft news firmly dominated over hard ones (Fig. 3). 134 of 177 items should be counted among soft, although some part of them referred to political and economic areas. Stories concerning people, experienced and seen from the perspective of a particular, usually unknown individual, were the most frequent. The perspective of an individual person is not reserved to human interest stories. Politics in eyes of the reporters of “Fakty” is also an arena of relations between individuals, not of decisions or processes concerning and engaging whole society or its essential parts.

The advantage of soft news becomes even more obvious when the relation is expressed in percentage. Soft news constituted 76% of the total covered in “Fakty” compared to 29% of hard news (Fig. 4). They do not sum up to 100 because in some items there was a mixture of an analysis of a problem and of personal questions, not to say gossips (heard rumors). That is why they were included in both groups.



Dorota Piontek

This mixture of subjects and ways they are reported is shown in Fig. 5. Reporting politics or economic issues does not necessarily mean, what was mentioned earlier, that they are treated as important and serious (politics and love, President Putin as a dream of all Russian women, or human, personality conflicts between president and prime minister in Poland). Reporting politics as political process still dominates, but these 12 items of “soft” narration of politics are worthy of consideration. Further research will enable a conclusion to be made as to whether it is exception or a steady tendency. I think, however, that we may assume that the continuing personalization of politics should be seen as a trend, not an exception.

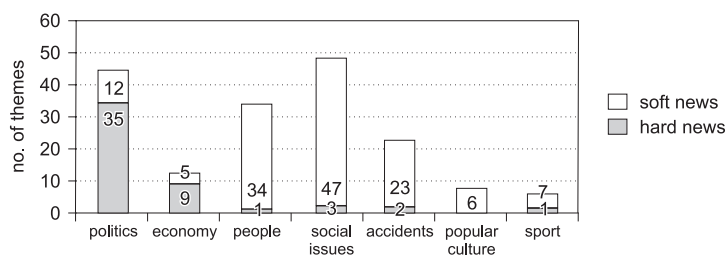


Fig. 5. Hard and soft news in accordance to themes

Source: author.

Actors

Participants (actors) of the events reported in “Fakty” are the next variable to be examined in the analysis of the extent of tabloidization of this news program. Within the reported stories about 60% of actors were ordinary people and officials. The other groups included (in order) politicians, experts and celebrities (Fig. 6). Journalists other than from TVN station appeared basically as experts (military, sport). In the examined period the number of items containing appearances of celebrities was heavily influenced by the death of very famous Polish actor Gustaw Holoubek. It is, therefore, difficult to conclude whether this value is of temporary significance or whether it suggests a steady tendency. To resolve this question further research is needed.

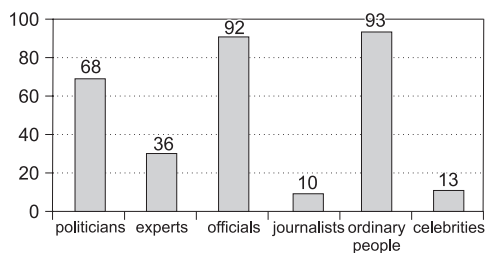


Fig. 6. Distribution of actors in items

Source: author.



When we look at the percentage share of particular categories of actors in news items, the dominance of ordinary people and officials is clear (Fig. 7). Politicians are present only when current political affairs are discussed. Oddly enough, the frequency of their presence is relatively low – in accordance to common sense assumptions – in comparison to the respective percentage of celebrities. It should be stated once again that conclusions about the presence of this group of actors should be a subject to further research, especially when it is taken into account that they have significant importance for discussed tendency. The poor presence of known persons might have resulted from the fact that in the given period, only two meaningful events in popular culture took place: the nomination of “Katyń”, a movie by Andrzej Wajda, for an Oscar, and the death of Gustaw Holoubek. Richness of Polish political life, permanent tensions and turns of action, and entering into the role of celebrities by politicians may be another explanation, as much as the will to maintain some standards, still distinguishing news journalism from sensational and gossip. Tensions and turns in Polish politics are themselves a separate and interesting plot for further research, being conducive by conducting permanent campaign so typical for contemporary political marketing.

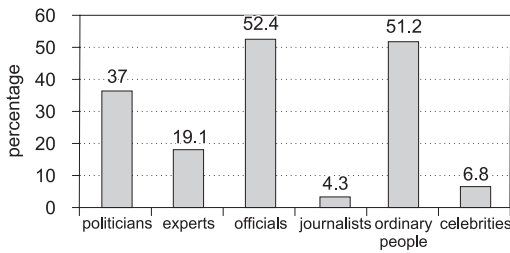


Fig. 7. Proportional share of actors in items

Source: author.

Location

Location of a theme is another determinant of tabloidization tendency in news program. In the examined editions distinct advantage was taken by coverage dealing with national events (Fig. 8). As much as 126 items (of 177) referred to what was going on in the country. It is worth underlining that reporters of “Fakty” very often go out of Warsaw. There is no focus on the capital, so characteristic of other countrywide media.

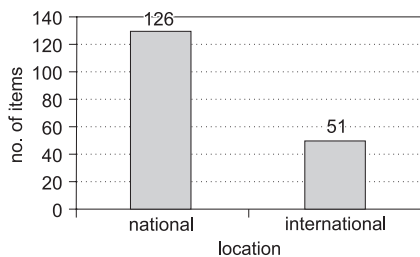


Fig. 8. Distribution of location of covered events

Source: author.

However, in news dominated by politics Warsaw is a main place of action, while social issues, issues of ordinary people and accidents are shown from the perspective of different places, very often small towns and



Dorota Piontek

countryside. Considering the socio-demographic characteristic of TVN and “Fakty” audience this statement seems to be interesting.

Proportional share of national and international news (Fig. 9) suggests that audiences are interested in what is going on near them – and commercial media must react for what may be interesting for their viewers.

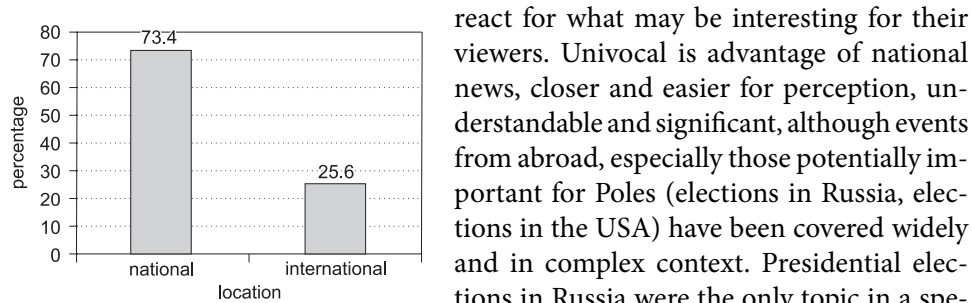


Fig. 9. Proportional share of locations in covered events

Univocal is advantage of national news, closer and easier for perception, understandable and significant, although events from abroad, especially those potentially important for Poles (elections in Russia, elections in the USA) have been covered widely and in complex context. Presidential elections in Russia were the only topic in a special edition of “Fakty” (March, 2, 2008). Not only was a course of political competition discussed, but also countryside life was shown, neighbors of the newly elected president were interviewed, and phenomenon of the popularity of outgoing president Putin was investigated.

Duration

Each outlet of “Fakty” consists of 8 to 11 items on average. Their length is various, although materials between 2 and 4 minutes dominate (Fig. 10). Materials lasting more than 4 minutes happened occasionally and were referred mainly to politics and economy. It is hard to assume, however, that it is a regular tendency, because in the given period there were 10 such long materials and 3 were connected with politics, 4 with the economy, and 1 with popular culture, ordinary people and accidents. Longer coverage related to the stock market, customs officers’ strike and truck drivers reaction to it: such issues are complex and multidimensional. Politics in items longer than 4 minutes was represented by elections in Russia and by tensions between offices of President Lech Kaczyński and Prime Minister Donald Tusk. The accident category was dominated by the catastrophe of the CASA, Air Force plane.

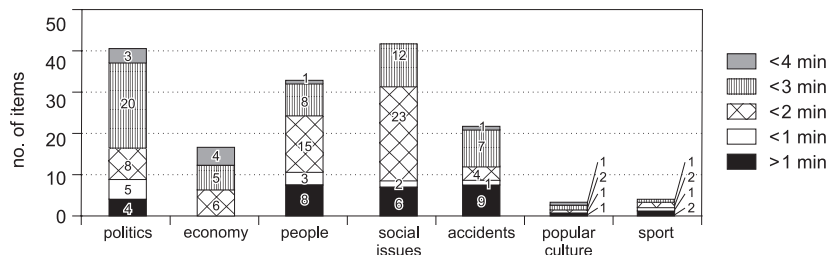


Fig. 10. News length according to themes

Source: author.



Comparison of time devoted to hard and soft news (Fig. 11) shows clearly that the length of particular items is not differentiated in accordance to the importance of a given event. One may expect that insignificant events from the point of view of a social system will be shorter than serious, but it is not proved by the research. The most frequent length of items lasts from 1 min 30 sec till 3 min 30 sec, irrespective of the topic.

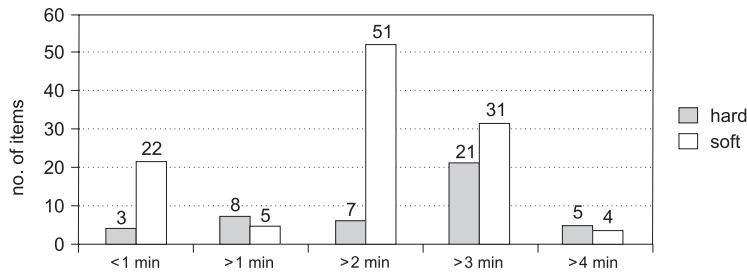


Fig. 11. Length of hard and soft news

Source: author.

Trailer

Television news has a wider regular audience than the printed press. Polish newspapers, essentially not sold in subscription, have to compete for readers every day. Thus the front page is the most important. This problem relates to television news as well, though to a lesser extent: “Fakty” of TVN towers over “Wydarzenia” of TV Polsat and “Wiadomości” (“News”) on TVP (public television). The trailer then becomes very important for drawing and keeping audience attention. In 99 announced issues, 73 dealt with social issues, common people and dramatic events (Fig. 12). They were usually labeled by suggestive titles, so they could be compared to movie’s teasers. Trailers play the same role in news as they do in soap operas and movies.

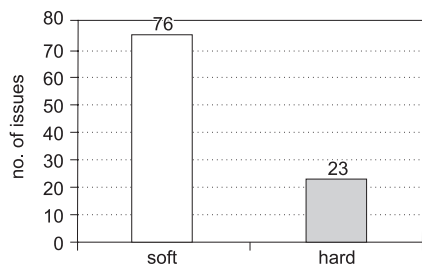


Fig. 12. Distribution of hard and soft news in trailers

Source: author.

To increase the attractiveness of all news, each of them is labeled with separate title. They often appeal to mass culture (promised land, special mission, no way out), use puns or colloquial words. Not always evoked associations were confirmed in the material, but it is not essential. Item titled *information cul-de-sac*, for example, referred to amendment to a radio and television bill and to different concepts on electronic media in Poland. The story, however, is not about accuracy between association and content of news, but about puzzle, attraction of attention or amusement of a viewer. For



Dorota Piontek

these emotions make viewers more disposed to watch the whole edition, not only a part of it.

CONCLUSIONS

Research examined in the paper comprised of a period long enough to treat the statistical information as representative, but too short to explicitly decide whether the news program “Fakty” demonstrates the trend in news towards tabloid journalism and towards tabloid social-political reality. To construct an answer to that problem, one should have comparative data which have not been collected yet. Similar reservations refer to attempt to conclude whether observations relating to “Fakty” may be treated as universal for news programs of all commercial broadcasters, and whether news in public television is similar or different, and if so – what is the essence of the differences. More research is needed and indeed it has been planned. At this time the only thing which is possible to do is to answer a question whether, according to assumptions, tabloidization of “Fakty” is a fact. The answer is positive.

It was assumed that tabloidization takes place when: 1) there is more soft news than hard news, 2) there is more unknown (ordinary) people than politicians as actors of reported events, 3) there is more domestic (national/local) than international stories, and 4) time devoted to soft news is longer than time spent on hard news. In analyzed newscasts all of the basic assumptions were justified, and strengthened still by conclusions reflected from analysis of trailers.

Reconstruction of medial political reality, which appears in “Fakty”, would be as follows: politics, neither national nor, even more, international, does not overwhelm social life in Poland. Events taking place in the country and reflecting lives of ordinary people are more important. Politics is seen through its personal dimension and rotates around individuals and their relationships, not around problems and decisions of a systemic significance. Politics is an essentially closed world, present above all in the capital, although politicians try to make ordinary people – voters – to come to like them. Basically, however, politicians carry on arguments among themselves, and treat citizens-viewers rather as judges than subjective participants of political life. People live their lives and, as a matter of fact, they feel to have nothing in common with politicians. Politicians do not engage in arguments of a difficult nature, they do not explain complex problems of systemic matters, they quarrel about things which are understandable for citizens but have rather little importance for their life. Politicians are self-sufficient in a sense that they do not need others to have a good time, and they are not needed by others (people) to live their lives. This picture is even sharpened by the way politicians present themselves and are presented by media in non-information formats.

Research on the role popular media play in political communication is interesting itself. Two main directions of research may be pointed out, although they are



not separated: politics as a subject of entertainment, and entertainment as a standard of presenting politics. This causes that the division between popular culture and politics, mass communication and political communication becomes less and less clear. And it provides a justification that it is high time in Poland to deal with the way in which the mass media focus on delivering entertainment to their audiences, and hence influencing their perception of politics, and on the political process itself, and its immanent part – political communication.

REFERENCES

- Esser, F. (1999). "Tabloidization" of news. A comparative analysis of Anglo-American and German press journalism. *European Journal of Communication*, vol. 14 (3).
- Kurtz, H. (1993). *Media Circus – The Trouble with America's Newspaper*. New York: Random House.
- Savage, R.L., D. Nimmo (1990). Imagination, politics, and popular media: A thematic introduction. In: R.L. Savage, D. Nimmo (eds.). *Politics in Familiar Contexts: Projecting Politics Through Popular Media*. Norwood New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation.
- Sparks, C., J. Tulloch (eds.) (2000). *Tabloid Tales. Global Debates over Media Standards*. Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc.
- Turner, G. (1999). Tabloidization, journalism and the possibility of critique. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 2 (1).