

**Transformations of contemporary television and the mechanisms of marginalizing
philosophy and emptying the cultural function : a critical approach**

تحولات التلفزيون المعاصر وآليات تهميش الفلسفة وتفريغ الوظيفة الثقافية: مقاربة نقدية

Debdouche Elhachemi ^{*1}

¹ University of Blida 2 Lounisi Ali (Algeria), e.debdouche@univ-blida2.dz

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Abstract:

This study examines the transformations contemporary television has undergone, shifting from a cultural and cognitive medium into an entertainment-oriented platform governed by market logic and audience ratings. It highlights how the liberalization of the audiovisual sector and the growing dominance of advertising have contributed to the marginalization of intellectual and cultural programming, in favor of reality shows, competitive formats, and trend-driven popular culture. The study analyzes these changes through the theoretical lenses of the society of the spectacle, media political economy, and consumer culture. It further explores the implications of this shift for public taste, particularly the diminishing presence of intellectuals and philosophers within television programming. The study concludes by emphasizing the need to restore the cultural function of television through media literacy initiatives and alternative production policies that reconcile mass appeal with cognitive and cultural value.

Keywords: Contemporary television, cultural function, marginalization of philosophy, spectacle society, political economy of media, consumer culture.

* Debdouche Elhachemi

1. INTRODUCTION

Since it was invented, television has had a big impact on how people think and how culture works in modern cultures. For a long time, it has been thought of as a strong way to communicate with large groups of people that brings together different cultures and teaches a lot of different people.

Television has had a big role in spreading culture by making complicated philosophical and intellectual ideas easier to understand and bringing them into everyday life. It has been an important tool for cultural socialization, helping numerous groups in society come to a common view of values, identity, and social reality.

In this context, Williams asserts that early television was not merely a technical medium for entertainment or news, but a quintessential cultural endeavor, associated with the concept of public service and the aspiration to enhance public taste and broaden the public's knowledge. (Williams, 2003)

The initial television programming focused on cultural presentations, intellectual lectures, and philosophical dialogues, with the objective of fostering critical consciousness and linking individuals to public matters.

Bourdieu contends that television, during its nascent phase, served as a conduit for disseminating thought and information into the public realm, enabling intellectuals and thinkers to engage with a broad audience beyond restricted academic circles. (Bourdieu, 1998)

Television facilitated the broadening of public discourse by converting intellectual and theoretical matters into socially pertinent subjects, so reinforcing its position as a mediator between cultural elites and the general populace.

Moreover, television has redefined the interplay between culture and the public by converting aristocratic knowledge into accessible conversation while maintaining its

intellectual rigor. This function allowed television to serve as a pivotal instrument in generating meaning and constructing communal memory, particularly before the ascendancy of digital media, when it was the principal source of information, interpretation, and analysis.

In the same context, it can be asserted that television, during its inception, served a distinct cultural and educational purpose, exemplified by the dissemination of ideas, the encouragement of public discourse, and the fostering of an informed citizenry engaged in social and political affairs, prior to this role undergoing significant changes due to the emergence of market dynamics and media rivalry.

The significant changes in the audiovisual sector, especially due to the emergence of private television channels and the growing emphasis on advertising and competition for audience ratings, have resulted in a functional revolution in television discourse and its social and cultural functions. Television has increasingly succumbed to market dynamics and the demands of mass appeal, resulting in a noticeable decline in cultural, philosophical, and analytical programming in favor of consumer-oriented entertainment characterized by excitement, spectacle, and rapidity.

This transition shifted television discourse from enlightenment and awareness to distraction and entertainment, as the cultural value of programs became determined by their capacity to attract high viewership rather than their contribution to public debate or the cultivation of critical thinking. In this context, Postman characterizes the situation as an entertainment spectacle society, wherein diverse discourses, including political and cultural, are converted into entertainment programs governed by the principles of television presentation, emphasizing simplification and visual allure. (Postman, 2005)

The advertising paradigm necessitated a rapid tempo in television programming, fragmenting information into brief segments to accommodate commercial demands, hence

constraining the opportunity for comprehensive intellectual discourse or philosophical exploration that necessitated time and concentration. Television products are currently designed to promote quick consumerism, so marginalizing serious cultural conversation and diminishing its prominence in programming.

Thus, television is no longer a central space for disseminating thought and knowledge as it was in its founding stages. Rather, it has transformed into a marketing platform that produces content that serves market logic more than it serves the general cultural interest. This transformation raises profound problems related to the role of the media in contemporary societies, and the limits of the social responsibility of television institutions, especially in light of the increasing influence of the media in shaping collective awareness and cultural taste.

2. Television and its cultural function in its origins

The emergence of television in the mid-twentieth century was perceived not merely as a source of pleasure, but was also framed within an aspirational cultural and educational paradigm as a medium for sharing knowledge and fostering critical thinking among a broad audience. His upbringing was associated with distinct cognitive and value stakes, positioning him as a mediator in redefining individuals' connection with information and the public cultural sphere. In its nascent phase, television was not solely a technological apparatus that conveyed sights and sounds. Instead, it was perceived as a cultured medium capable of broadening social consciousness and disseminating intellectual discourse from exclusive elites to the general populace, thereby facilitating the democratization of knowledge and its accessibility beyond conventional educational institutions. (Lull, 2000)

In this theoretical framework, Habermas posits that contemporary media have facilitated the emergence of the public sphere, a symbolic arena for rational discourse on

shared concerns, wherein citizens engage with public matters through the exchange of opinions and arguments. (Habermas, 1991, p. 182)

Television, by reaching a broad and varied audience, has enhanced the public sphere by translating intellectual and cultural matters into a universally accessible visual format. McLuhan emphasized that media is not neutral; it actively influences perception and awareness. (McLuhan, 1964, p. 161) Consequently, television serves not just as a transmitter of knowledge but as a significant force in molding audience cognition and reception patterns.

In this context, Coldrey posits that media practice forms habitual patterns of social comprehension, hence augmenting television's function in shaping cultural significance in daily life. (Coldrey, 2004, pp. 115-132)

Early foundational research in television studies has established that this medium, in its nascent stages, extended beyond mere visual material transmission to encompass the development of cultural and intellectual programming aimed at consumers. (Corner, 1999)

Cultural programming is regarded as an integral component of the channel's institutional framework, drawing intellectuals, philosophers, authors, and scientists from diverse fields, and facilitating discourse on cognitive, ethical, and philosophical issues in accessible language that engages the general audience while maintaining scientific rigor. (Gitlin, 1994)

This receptiveness to ideas and culture via television transformed it into a medium for disseminating scholarly information to the general populace, so narrowing the divide between the intellectual elite and the masses. Television served a supplementary function to educational institutions, as numerous cultural policies depended on it to transmit educational lessons and programs aimed at students and children, thereby reinforcing its status as a vehicle for non-formal education and a medium for disseminating scientific culture beyond conventional school settings. (Buckingham, 2003, p. 6)

At this juncture, television emerged as a symbolic extension of the university, school, and library, fulfilling a similar cognitive role and facilitating the extensive distribution of public culture. This initial cultural and cognitive function embodies an institutional perspective that regarded media as a vehicle for social enlightenment and human advancement, which subsequently evolved, in different circumstances, into a primarily recreational and consumer-oriented instrument. Thus, television, in its nascent phase, can be perceived as a quintessential cultural initiative aimed at fostering community consciousness through information, conversation, and critical analysis.

3. Transformations of contemporary television and market logic

The deregulation of the audiovisual sector and the incorporation of market principles in media management have transformed the criteria for media success from cognitive value and substantive content to metrics of viewing and engagement. In a landscape where advertising and audience engagement metrics dictate media performance assessment, media content is generated and promoted primarily for its capacity to capture attention and enhance viewership, rather than for its intellectual rigor or contribution to public enlightenment. This institutional transformation is intricately linked to an examination of the political economy of media, indicating that changes in media ownership impact programming and content trends, with commercial interests and advertising predominating in media production, thereby diminishing prospects for genuine knowledge content. (Herman, 2008, pp. 68-69)

Recent studies have indicated that entertainment media and popular trends not only prevail in the traditional audiovisual sector but have also extended their influence to digital media and social media platforms, affecting audience engagement and the values of participation and knowledge. (Penney, 2022) A study examining the influence of

entertainment content on social networks revealed that such content diverts attention from political or cognitive material, potentially diminishes high-level cognitive engagement, and promotes a format that is readily consumable, thereby undermining profound intellectual discourse. (Prior, 2001)

A critical analysis of popular culture journalism reveals that media coverage centered on entertainment and popular cultural policies has transitioned from a marginal aspect in contemporary digital landscapes to a fundamental component of public discourse production. A recent study on "Popular Culture Journalism and News" highlights that political and cultural media coverage in the context of blended news-merging entertainment and politics-exhibits new dynamics. News that leverages popular culture has integrated into the political communication process; however, this process also reveals the prevalence of commercial imperatives and the simplification of content to align with contemporary audience consumption patterns. (Jörg Matthes, 2023, pp. 8-9)

This content production process leads to a growing prevalence of entertainment culture and ephemeral media trends, undermining intellectual and philosophical discourse that necessitates critical thinking. The commercial imperatives that dictate the media landscape facilitate the dominance of light programming and popular content over cognitively enriching programs, resulting in diminished opportunities for profound cultural discourse within the public sphere and undermining the media's function as a conduit of knowledge that enhances social and political discourse, thereby elevating public awareness. Consequently, educational and critical priorities frequently diminish in comparison to those focused on attraction and profit, rendering the examination of the market economy's influence on shaping desires and knowledge a crucial subject for comprehending contemporary media and cultural transformations.

4. Mechanisms for marginalizing philosophy and emptying culture

The evolution of the audiovisual landscape, coupled with the prevalence of market logic and media globalization, signifies that the substitution of cultural programs with reality shows and competitions transcends a mere formal alteration in television production; it represents a profound transformation in the very function of the media medium. In the context of this transformation, (Debord, 1967 p. 12) Guy Debord posits that contemporary society has evolved into what he terms "the spectacle society," wherein images and media representations supplant genuine experience and authentic meaning, and social interactions and cognitive aspects are substituted with relationships predicated on visual display and consumption. This visual representation prevalent in media content aims not just to capture attention but also to generate "view worth" that may be transformed into a marketable commercial commodity. (Debord, 1967, p. 15)

This analysis aligns with Douglas Kellner's assertion that modern visual culture has transformed into a theater that generates what he terms "media spectacle," prioritizing excitement and ostentation over critical analysis and the dissemination of profound knowledge. (Kellner, 2003, p. 3) In this setting, reality programs become platforms characterized by competitiveness, suspense, and contrived drama, elements that captivate the audience's attention temporarily, yet may divert people from significant cognitive or social challenges. (Kellner, 2003, p. 5)

Recent studies indicate that this form of media production diminishes focus on significant cognitive matters, including cultural, political, and intellectual discourse, substituting them with ephemeral events that primarily enhance viewership metrics, thereby prioritizing market logic over cultural substance. (Dai, 2023, p. 6)

Recent critical studies in media globalization reveal that reality television programs, which have gained popularity in recent decades, have not only reinforced the supremacy of

entertainment logic over conventional programming but have also impacted the audience's cultural and social value systems. Numerous studies have indicated that these programs, frequently created using pre-existing or replicated templates from other cultures, elevate consumer and entertainment standards at the detriment of educational and cultural norms. (Nweke, 2023, pp. 2127–2128) In this context, research in Arab nations reveals that television channels, in their effort to compete with Internet platforms and digital audiovisual media, have diversified their entertainment offerings without adequately considering central cultural values or adapting them to local cultural particularities, resulting in a significant decline in the profound cultural presence within the programming landscape. (Sabry & Mansour, 2021, pp. 88–92)

Furthermore, research indicates that reality television significantly influences value systems within families and society, as it frequently portrays behaviors and events that contradict the dominant cultural values, resulting in a "value crisis" characterized by diminished critical thinking and an emphasis on consumerism and sensationalism over profound and reflective behaviors. (Nabih, 2015, pp 75-98)

This trend underscores that television has ceased to be a medium that enhances public knowledge or broadens the audience's cognitive perspectives, instead functioning as a mechanism that fosters ephemeral consumption and transient entertainment, aligned with market interests and profit-driven motives dictated by advertising and financial gains. (Kellner, 2003, p 15)

Consequently, culture is now disseminated only during marginal periods, if at all, while thinkers and intellectuals have been supplanted by figures of triviality and media sensationalism, who are commodified as media products that garner substantial viewership despite their content's lack of intellectual substance. Television discourse has globalized, as contemporary research suggests, resulting in the incessant generation of entertainment that

undermines knowledge. Consequently, content value is assessed not by its capacity to enhance awareness or foster critical thinking, but by its effectiveness in eliciting immediate audience engagement and participation. (Lee & Kim, 2021, pp. 55–56)

In this context, contemporary media sociology indicates that this pattern illustrates a larger struggle between the principles of the commercial market and the role of media as a cognitive and cultural platform, with the former frequently prevailing to the detriment of the latter in modern programming.

5. The repercussions of television transformations on the audience

The alterations in the Algerian audiovisual landscape, particularly following the advent of private television channels, have resulted in a media style that prioritizes entertainment and visual appeal over substantive analytical and cultural content. Many Algerian channels have come to rely on fast programs, attractive images, and fast pace, with the aim of attracting the largest possible number of viewers, which was directly reflected in the cultural taste of the audience.

Certain private Algerian channels predominantly emphasize entertainment programming, competitions, and superficial talks characterized by visual stimulation and simplistic language, while notably lacking in-depth discussions or content that fosters critical thinking. This sort of programming positions the viewer as a passive consumer, absorbing content without critical analysis or responsibility, aligning with Sartori's observation regarding the evolution of humanity into a visual entity that engages more with visuals than with concepts. (Sartori, 2001, pp. 12–15)

This influence is distinctly observable in the manner social and political issues are presented in certain bulletins and talk shows, where emphasis is placed on imagery and immediate emotional events, such as live scenes or brief reports, without offering historical

context or comprehensive analysis. Complex subjects are sometimes distilled into brief scenes or abbreviated utterances, which constrains the audience's capacity for critical understanding and adds to the oversimplification of media reality.

Conversely, Algerian public television fulfills a dual function. It aims to deliver cultural and awareness-raising programs, particularly during national and religious events, while simultaneously being shaped by the principles of imagery and visual allure, especially in news broadcasts and talk shows, where emphasis is placed on immediate visuals and rapid event dissemination. This assertion corroborates Silverstone's perspective that television restructures daily existence and alters the perception of reality, as occurrences acquire significance and value when broadcasted on television. (Silverstone, 1994, p. 45)

The preeminence of imagery is apparent in the coverage of certain Algerian channels of sporting and artistic events, where emphasis is placed on ostentatious and emotive elements, such as crowd reactions or thrilling moments, rather than on analytical discourse regarding sports or culture. This method fosters emotional engagement with content, rather than prompting the recipient to analyze and critique.

The growth of digital platforms associated with Algerian broadcasters has become increasingly apparent. Brief and succinct snippets have emerged as the favored medium of publication, owing to their elevated viewership rates. Nevertheless, they frequently lack profundity and critical critique. This results in the formation of an audience model that rapidly consumes content and engages with it emotionally, neglecting its intellectual or cultural aspects, as noted by Castells in his analysis of the impact of the networked community on information reception patterns. (Castells, 2009, pp. 3–5)

Consequently, it can be asserted that Algerian channels, akin to other channels in the Arab world, participate to differing extents in altering the cultural preferences of the populace. The prevalence of imagery and the quick consumption of media present significant

obstacles to the cultivation of critical thinking, necessitating a reevaluation of programming policies and the function of media in education and enlightenment.

6. DISCUSSION

The prior examination of audio-visual programming changes indicates that the concern extends beyond a mere alteration in the "forms" of material; it signifies a fundamental shift in the media's function and the standards for its assessment. When "viewing rate" becomes the sole metric of success, the media medium shifts from a purveyor of knowledge and a catalyst for public awareness to a platform for generating ephemeral engagement that can be converted into advertising revenue. This aligns with Debord's theories on "spectacle society," wherein imagery supplants meaning, representation supersedes experience, and the audience transforms into a consumer of the spectacle rather than an engaged participant (Debord, 1994). Kellner's notion of "media spectacle" further substantiates this view by emphasizing sensationalism and contrived drama at the expense of thorough examination, hence sidelining significant intellectual and cultural matters.(Kellner, 2003)

From the standpoint of the political economy of media, these changes validate Herman and Chomsky's assertion that the media are influenced by a financial and advertising framework that alters content priorities to cater to the market rather than to disseminate information. (Herman, 2008) Advertising does not finance cultural initiatives with a restricted audience; instead, it endorses programs with broad appeal, so establishing a systemic bias towards readily accessible and rapid entertainment. This thesis aligns with Napoli's (2019) examination of the economics of attention, wherein "audience attention" is commodified, and programming is governed by the principles of attention management instead of knowledge management. (Napoli, 2019, p 52)

The transition to reality programs and competitions not only mirrors popular preferences but also plays a role in redefining those preferences through repetition and normalization. Ritzer's (2010) consumer culture approach posits that culture is commodified, with symbolic meanings diminished to pre-packaged, swiftly circulating templates. Recent studies illustrate the correlation between the proliferation of reality television and the encouragement of individualistic inclinations, the pursuit of fame, and the normalizing of theatrical acts as socially acceptable norms. (Ritzer, 2010, p. 12)

From a media education standpoint, a significant issue emerges: the audience's capacity for critical content analysis is diminishing. According to Buckingham (2003), the peril of modern media resides not just in its saturation but also in the lack of analytical and interpretive skills available to the audience. The prevalence of entertainment and "trend" culture renders the audience susceptible to adverse interpretations, since content is engaged with uncritically, undermining the media's intended enlightening role in society. (Buckingham, 2003)

In the Arab context, this issue is exacerbated by television stations' efforts to rival internet platforms by replicating global entertainment formats without thorough cultural adaptation. This results in cultural alienation and a reduction in the availability of substantive intellectual programming during marginal periods. Recent Arab studies indicate that this trend has led to a decrease in the representation of intellectuals and thinkers inside programming networks, juxtaposed with the emergence of "stars of triviality" as lucrative media commodities.

Collectively, these shifts result in a crisis of media values, as the cognitive and educational aspects diminish in favor of consumer enjoyment. Over time, this is manifested not just in program structures but also in societal collective consciousness and cognitive processes, as fast cognition, fleeting emotions, and stimulus-driven interests supplant

profound contemplation and rational analysis. The tension between two logics arises: the logic of the market and the logic of knowledge, with the former frequently prevailing within the existing financial framework of the media.

Nonetheless, it is essential to acknowledge that these shifts incite a discourse regarding public accountability and the need of media education and regulatory laws. The issue is not solely in the media product but also in the lack of policies that promote substantial cultural output and the absence of initiatives to cultivate an audience capable of discernment and critique. Therefore, it is essential to reinstate emphasis on media education and to promote innovative production models that harmonize broad appeal with intellectual merit.

This discussion concludes that the prevalence of reality shows and spectacle culture is not a transient occurrence, but rather a consequence of structural changes in the political economy of media, contemporary consumer culture, and public reception habits and patterns. This necessitates multidisciplinary critical methods (sociological, cultural, educational, economic, philosophical) to reevaluate the media's function and its cultural role in current society.

7. CONCLUSION

The analysis indicates that modern television has experienced a significant shift in its functions and roles, progressively departing from its cultural and philosophical purpose of educating, raising awareness, and fostering critical thinking among viewers, often succumbing to market dynamics, competitive pressures, and audience ratings. Economic and advertising imperatives dictated an emphasis on rapid profit, leading television corporations to prioritize superficial amusement and visual stimulation above substantive cultural and intellectual programming.

This transformation redefined the dynamic between television and its audience, perceiving the viewer not as an intellectual participant in pursuit of comprehension and critique, but as a consumer to be captivated and retained in front of the screen for extended durations. Consequently, initiatives that foster reasonable public discourse have diminished, supplanted by brief, engaging content that prioritizes allure and spectacle over educational and cultural substance.

Restoring television's cultural purpose necessitates a reevaluation of the dominant media production philosophy, transcending the constraints of a limited market approach, and embracing a media paradigm that prioritizes culture and knowledge as fundamental components in societal development. This necessitates the incorporation of substantial intellectual and cultural material that critically examines social and humanitarian concerns, fosters collective consciousness, and advocates for the principles of debate and rational thought.

This restoration necessitates the activation of public and commercial media institutions in fulfilling their social responsibility through investment in cultural programming, support for qualitative creation, and the promotion of media competencies that integrate formal appeal with cognitive depth. Media enlightenment is attained not through exclusive elitist dialogue, but by offering simplified cultural content that retains its essence and can engage diverse audience segments.

Consequently, reinstating recognition of television's illuminating function is a cultural and social imperative amid contemporary media transformations, as television, despite digital rivalry, remains a significant instrument in shaping societal awareness and cultural frameworks. Consequently, the primary challenge resides not in dismantling market logic, but in attaining equilibrium between the demands of mass appeal and the cultural, social, and philosophical functions, thereby ensuring that television fulfills its role in cultivating a

conscious and critical individual who engages in public affairs and contributes to public opinion.

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