

# Non-professional Activity on Television in a Time of Digitalisation

## *More Fun for the Elite or New Opportunities for Ordinary People?*

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### Abstract

This article presents an empirically based examination of how the Norwegian television industry incorporates audience activity and audience-generated material, and of how audiences respond to the opportunities presented. It explores three main research questions: First, how extensive is audience activity on television? Second, to what degree do different television activities correspond to familiar patterns of social stratification? And third, is there any evidence for the view that digital feedback channels, such as SMS and the Web, provide access to television for new groups of people? To investigate these questions, a case study of the Norwegian media market has been carried out, based on two data sets. The extent of audience activity is examined through a representative audience survey conducted during a period of two weeks in 2004. The second data set is a one-week survey of Norwegian television output on the six Norwegian-language channels in 2005.

**Keywords:** broadcast television, audience survey, output survey, media hierarchies, SMS-based formats, audience activity.

### Introduction

Because television was established primarily as a large-scale, capital-intensive industry, it came to depend heavily on professional competence, both behind and in front of the camera. Still, throughout its history, it has also had a use for contributions from people who were not media professionals – that is, from social, cultural and economic elites, as well as “ordinary people”. The former came to be associated predominantly with “serious” news and current affairs programming; the latter, with entertainment fare such as competitions and game shows. Researchers concerned with source-journalist relationships have investigated non-professional activity, and some attention has historically been accorded to ordinary people in entertainment (Whannel 1990). Generally speaking, however, non-professional participation has been fairly incidental to television research.

Today, the relationship between media institutions and their audience is changing in quite fundamental ways. A shift from the “passive” audiences of mass media to the

“active” users of digital media such as the Internet and mobile phone is central and has been much discussed (e.g. Allen 1998, Livingstone 1999, Jenkins 2006). Cross-platform media combine different media platforms to offer both traditional audiencehood and a degree of formative activity in programming (Syvertsen 2006, Ytreberg 2006). In particular, television audiences are invited to send SMS or MMS messages to television programmes or to visit the programmes’ websites. The tendency toward engaging audience members to be more active in the media is not confined to digital media adds-ons. It is just as evident in docusoaps and reality television. Indeed, some of the most internationally successful television formats of the early 21st century, such as *Big Brother* and *Pop Idol*, have combined audience participation with cross-media applications added to the formats (Jones 2004, Roscoe 2004).

Media industry executives, media regulators, media analysts and public opinion on the media all seem to agree that the emergence of digital media implies a lasting and important shift in terms of audiencehood and the ways it should be conceived. The media industry is currently focused on how to promote and exploit the trend toward non-professionals’ digitally aided activity in the media. In this process the role of non-professional activity has taken on a new saliency; audience members become more active contributors and user-generated content is awarded a more prominent place in the schedules (Sundet & Ytreberg 2006, Maasø et al. 2007). Nevertheless, basic knowledge of the extent to which people in general use the opportunities provided, and the social stratification of audience activity, seems scarce. The research literature contains valuable qualitative studies (e.g. Bakøy & Syvertsen (eds.) 2001, Livingstone & Lunt 1994, Priest 1995), but no larger-scale overview of the degree to which people are active across television’s range of genres and platforms.

This article presents an empirically based examination of how the Norwegian television industry includes audience activity and audience-generated material, and of how audiences respond to the opportunities presented. It explores three main research questions: First, how extensive is the audience activity; is there any evidence for the view that being on, responding to or interacting with television is becoming a normal and everyday occurrence? Second, to what degree do different television activities correspond to familiar patterns of social stratification? And third, is there support for the view that new feedback channels, such as SMS and the Web, provide access to television for new groups of people?

## Methodology and Case

In order to investigate these questions, a case study of the Norwegian media market has been carried out, based on two data sets. The extent of audience activity is examined through a representative *audience survey* conducted during a period of two weeks in 2004. One thousand two hundred thirty-two respondents aged nine years and older were interviewed over the telephone.<sup>1</sup> This survey provides data on whether, how and how often members of the public responded to invitations, submitted material or actually appeared on television. The second data set is a one-week *survey of Norwegian television output* in 2005. Included in this latter study is the programming on six channels: the public and commercial public service channels NRK and TV 2, the second and smaller channels of these two (NRK2 and TV 2 Xtra, later renamed TV 2 Zebra), and two niche commercial channels (TVNorge and TV3).<sup>2</sup> This output survey provides an overview of the actual possibilities for television activity in the early years of the 21st century.

The case of Norway is marginal in terms of market size. Its interest in an international context lies in the way Norwegian media has become something of a laboratory for encouraging audience activity and feedback. Over the past five years, Norwegian television channels have been pioneers with regard to formats that include audience contribution – particularly new SMS-based formats and other multi-platform add-ons (Beyer et al. 2007, Enli 2005, Syvertsen 2006). Three factors may explain Norway's laboratory character. Firstly, Norway rates high in the penetration and use of new media. In 2004, more or less all sixteen to nineteen year-olds had access to a mobile phone, and the penetration among the general public was also high. Four of five people had access to the Internet (SSB 2005: 80).<sup>3</sup> Secondly, Norway rates high in media literacy and political participation. Newspaper readership is exceptionally high, as is electoral turnout and organisational membership (Andenæs 2002, Engelstad 2003). Thirdly, Norway distinguishes itself in terms of media-industrial features. The Norwegian population is small, only 4.7 million, a fact that makes the television market rather unprofitable from the industry's point of view. While the two larger television channels (NRK and TV 2) command a sizable market share, many of the smaller channels have substituted traditional programming with revenue-generating or other forms of audience-produced material (Enli 2005: 120).

In this article we investigate how audiences respond to, interact with and actually appear on television. To describe these disparate actions we have coined the term "media (or television) activity". Lexically speaking, "activity" could be understood as a synonym for "participation".<sup>4</sup> In a media-studies context, however, the concept of participation connotes activity that is relevant within the context of a public sphere and becomes invested with the ideals of participatory democracy (Pateman 1970). The conceptual move from talking about "activity" to talking about "participation" means investing certain actions with political significance. In this article, however, we use the term activity in a looser sense. In our context, television activity includes anything from voting in *Pop Idol* and writing a message to a television programme using SMS to appearing on a high-profile television news or entertainment show discussing political or personal matters.

## **Factors Influencing Television Access**

Research on journalism and news sources has amply demonstrated that elites are over-represented in the media (e.g. Allern 1996). This is not surprising, given the hierarchical nature of traditional television production and the historical struggle of media companies to build social legitimacy. As the number of media outlets proliferates and competition intensifies, however, television channels have increasingly directed their attention towards the likes and dislikes of "ordinary" people. Over the past two decades, a great number of popular formats and genres have widened the range and scope of European television, including formats that allow for audience participation and feedback.

Although this is a significant development, the many factors involved in the production and distribution of television suggest that access to the screen will remain a scarce good. Television programming and television feedback opportunities will always remain stratified to some extent, if only because the scheduling time and attention people actually devote to television is limited. Within the context of this article we wish to point to four factors that influence audience members' possibilities for gaining access to the screen. These factors are gate-keeping, scheduling, genre and channel hierarchies.

In a broad sense of the term (e.g., Bruns 2005: 10ff), *gate-keeping* includes all practices employed in media production to regulate contributions from outside. It is a well documented fact that the production of broadcast programmes involves elaborate procedures of selecting, sifting, scripting and editing, procedures that require extensive professional competence and resources (e.g. Gans 1980, Grindstaff 1997, Ytreberg 2006). Roughly speaking, journalistic and factual genres have developed the most extensive procedures of gate-keeping in order to satisfy relatively strict professional criteria of relevance and balance (Enli 2007). In entertainment television, gate-keeping can also be quite extensive, particularly in genres with a considerable degree of individual exposure, such as reality television. Nevertheless, with the expansion of television genres in the digital era, new formats involving minimal gate-keeping have seen the light of day. This label applies to, for example, SMS-based television formats, whereby practically anyone able and willing to use a mobile phone or computer can get their message on screen. There is, however, a price to pay (literally) for appearing on these shows. Furthermore, the possibility for reaching a substantial audience or making a personal or political impression is severely limited.

This brings us to the second and related factor, that of *scheduling*. Both commercial and public service schedulers currently place programmes carefully in specific time sequences to optimise their chances with audiences (e.g. Docherty 1995, Hujanen 2002, Søndergaard 2003). The possibility for audience inclusion and exposure varies with the format's placement in the sequences. As a rule, programmes scheduled in prime time allow only carefully selected people on screen in speaking positions, while larger groups of audience members may be allowed in non-speaking parts. Conversely, programmes "buried" in parts of the day with radically smaller audiences, such as late nights and early afternoons, allow a wider range of people on the screen, while granting less attention to those who are allowed on.

The third factor that determines access to television and constrains audience activities is *genre*. While the precise nature of various genre hierarchies may be open to discussion and geographical variation, it is clear that both popular and scholarly discourse on media clearly distinguish between higher-status and lower-status genres. Typically, in-depth documentaries, news and current affairs – what Jacka (2003) labels "high-modern journalism" – are placed at the one end of the factual hierarchy while fact-based entertainment and reality programming stand towards the lower end. A similar genre hierarchy may be detected in discussions on cultural value. Genres such as single plays and high-end serial drama are, as a rule, ranked more highly, while various forms of light entertainment genres with obvious commercial motives rank lower in cultural value (Gripsrud 1995). These hierarchies again influence the type of interaction allowed, as well as the social and cultural status conferred upon those who appear in or interact with the programmes. For example, being interviewed as a panelist on a cultural discussion programme grants the audience member more expert status than does being a participant in a dating show (Bakøy & Syvertsen (eds.) 2001).

Fourth, and last, television may be said to involve *channel hierarchies*, although these are harder to diagnose with confidence. To the degree that channel hierarchies can be detected, they cross-cut the genre hierarchy. In Western Europe, the heartland of public service broadcasting, social and cultural elites have fought long and hard against commercial "American-style" television, considering it to be of lower value than public service broadcasting (see, e.g., Syvertsen 1992). Although young people have embraced the lighter fare on commercial channels, a certain channel hierarchy remains in place.

For instance, a survey conducted by the Norwegian public service broadcaster, NRK, shows that people rank it as the most trustworthy of the Norwegian television channels (NRK 2005). Broadly speaking, public broadcasters are keen to retain their public legitimacy and reputation for higher quality with more careful editing and gate-keeping procedures. Smaller commercial niche channels, on the other hand, have more often used titillating and populist programming and involved more outrageous performances from “ordinary” people in order to attract attention.

The factors described here tend to determine the extent and forms of individual exposure and status conferred upon contributors and participants. Higher-prestige genres seem to offer the most individualized form of exposure. Although news and current affairs genres include vox pops and eyewitness sound bites, they also rely heavily on interviews in which contributors are the centre of attention. This form of exposure furthermore often involves presentation of the contributor’s status in society, as interviewees are presented with their full names, titles and professional status. Conversely, low-status genres more often rely on a lower degree of individual exposure. For instance, entertainment television often requires large studio audiences, each member of which appears in a rather anonymous fashion – literally on the margins of the television screen.

It seems plausible to argue that the above variables are linked and mutually reinforcing. For instance, “media activity” in the form of being an interviewee on the Norwegian discussion programme *Standpunkt* confers status according to all four variables simultaneously: it runs on the main public service channel during prime time, commands large shares of the prime-time audience, is a high-prestige political forum, and involves extensive gate-keeping procedures. Being a member of a studio audience, or even the less prominent activity of voting on Norwegian *Pop Idol*, on the other hand, involves low prestige for contributors on all variables except schedule placement. This sets the stage for investigating how actual activity is patterned in the Norwegian case. It also invites a special interest in the possible consequences of digitalisation for non-professional activity on Norwegian television. To what degree do the new forms of media activity impact the patterns of social stratification?

In the analysis of the survey data below, stratification is measured in terms of the five key variables gender, age, education, geographical location and income. Our aim is, in addition to mapping the overall extent of activity, to identify social profiles for each type and discuss the degree to which each activity is stratified according to classical elite/non-elite criteria. Is there evidence that newer forms of activity, such as voting via SMS, are less socially stratified than more established forms of television interaction?

## **The Extent of Non-professional Activity in Television**

Our data provides two sets of answers to the first research question concerning how extensive non-professional activity on Norwegian television is. The survey of *television output* shows that a large proportion of current television programming is based on input from non-professionals. If we include only programmes in which contributions from the Norwegian audience members constitute a substantial element – docusoaps, game shows, reality formats, programmes with live Norwegian studio audiences, debate programmes and chat and SMS-based programmes – the six Norwegian channels together broadcast more than twenty hours of such programmes Monday – Thursday and Sunday, increasing to twenty-five to thirty-five hours daily on Fridays and Saturdays. Excluded from the survey were programmes in which participation from the audience was of a

more marginal character, such as news programmes and documentaries. Thus, even within this relatively restricted design, the output survey demonstrates that Norwegian viewers may spend practically every waking moment watching what one may loosely term audience-based programming.

If we look at it from the side of the public, the *audience survey* correspondingly demonstrates that quite a high proportion of the population has actually been included in a television setting. To the simple question “Have you ever been on television?”, more than a third of the Norwegian population – 38% – responded positively, whereas 22% reported having been on television more than once.<sup>5</sup> The same proportion of the population, 22%, said that they had contributed to television programmes through other means (SMS, phone, e-mail, letters) during the previous twelve months. Altogether, nearly half the population (44%) had either been on television, contributed to television or both, while 7% stated that they had filed an application to participate in a television programme. Table 1 presents an overview:

**Table 1.** *The Extent of Audience Activity in Relation to Television (%)*

Type of activity	% of population	
	Total	Sub-category
<b>Have been on television:</b>	<b>38</b>	
In connection with professional position or leisure activity		17
As a member of studio audience		8
As an extra		3
As a participant in a television competition or reality show		2
Other		12
<b>Have contributed to television using mail, the Web or telephone during previous 12 months:</b>	<b>22</b>	
Through sending an SMS or MMS to a television programme		14
Through a programme's website		6
Via telephone, letter, e-mail		5
<b>Have been on television, contributed to television or both</b>	<b>44</b>	
<b>Have filed an application to participate in a television programme</b>	<b>7</b>	

*Note:* N=1 232, respondents may give more than one answer.

Although the 44% covers anything from voting once on *Pop Idol* to being repeatedly interviewed on a main newscast – and although the open form of the questions may have led to some overreporting – it is still remarkable that almost half the population say they have taken part in some form of television activity. Of those who had actually appeared on screen, the largest share by far said they had been on television in a professional or leisure capacity. Being part of a studio audience also stands as a major form of activity, while fewer people had been extras or contestants in competition or reality programmes. A caveat is in order, however, in dealing with these figures. When respondents were asked about the capacity in which they had been on television, the “other” category registered at 12%. This indicates that it is difficult to grasp the precise function each individual has had on television, and that the way we have pre-defined the categories leaves a number of people less than satisfied.

As to the extent of Norwegian audience activity, it is interesting to note that the probability of having been on television decreases with age. While more than half the population between nine and nineteen answer positively to having been on television (51%), only a quarter of the population over sixty have had the same experience (26%). This may be explained with reference to media history. People who are now over sixty were born before 1945 and were twenty years of age or older when television became commonplace. They were over forty when deregulation and competition extended the possibilities for being active on television through, for example, game shows and discussion programmes. This age category is the only one that has had the potential of getting on television throughout the whole of Norwegian broadcasting history. It is therefore rather striking that the younger respondents so significantly outnumber the elderly ones with regard to television appearance. That the age group of nine to nineteen years has been on television the most is also a strong indication that this is an attractive activity for this age group and that access is within their reach.

### **The Social Stratification of Television Appearances**

We have now answered the first research question, mapping the general extent of television activity among the Norwegian population. We turn now to the second question: To what extent is this activity socially stratified according to social characteristics such as gender, age, income and education?

#### *Appearing on Television in a Leisure and Professional Capacity: Elites Remain in Place*

Altogether, 17% of the respondents in the audience survey said they had been on television in a ‘professional or leisure capacity’. This category was designed to cover “media activity” in established news and actuality genres, whereby people are drawn in as sources in order to contribute to the on-going narrative of local, national and world events. People who have been on television in certain entertainment genres such as talk shows may also have responded positively to this pre-defined category. The high percentage reminds us that traditional and well known forms of media participation remain high. They may also have been somewhat extended in recent years as the sheer volume of television has expanded massively and the need for experts in various fields has exploded (Enli 2002, Livingstone & Lunt 1994).

When we examine the section of the population who have responded positively to having been on television in connection with a professional or leisure interest, we find that social elites are clearly overrepresented. In this category we find more people living in central areas (Oslo and Central Eastern Norway), more men than women, and people with higher than average income and educational level. If we look particularly at those who have been on television *more than once*, and who report to have been on in a professional or leisure capacity, the elite character of the respondents becomes marked. Table 2 provides an overview.

Table 2 shows that 15% of the men in the survey report that they fit this description, compared to only 9% of women. Education, and hence cultural capital, is the variable that influences the probability of having been on television in this capacity most markedly: While 22% of the respondents with four-year university-level education fit this description, only 7% of respondents with primary and/or secondary school education say they do.

**Table 2.** *Share of the Population who Have Been on Television More than Once, and who State that They Have Been on in Connection with a Professional Competence or Leisure Interest (%)*

Share of total population in this category (N=148)		12%	Deviation from average per cent
Share of:			
<b>Sex:</b>	Men	15	+3
	Women	9	-3
<b>Age:</b>	9– 19 yrs	11	-1
	20–39 yrs	14	+2
	40–59 yrs	13	+1
	60 + yrs	8	-4
<b>Area:</b>	Greater Oslo	16	+4
	Central East counties	12	0
	South and West counties	10	-2
	Northern counties	12	0
<b>Level of education:</b>	Primary	7	-5
	Secondary	10	-2
	University/college up to four years	16	+4
	University more than four years	22	+10
<b>Annual income:</b>	Up to 150k NOK	10	-2
	150k–299k NOK	9	-3
	300k–399k NOK	15	+3
	Over 400k NOK	19	+7

*Note:* N = 1 232

Participants in a professional or leisure capacity are privileged in a number of respects: They have high social status to begin with, and are present in programmes on which participants are usually identified with reference to their status in society. Their function as an expert or informant will further mean they are approached within a television setting of seriousness and respect. Within this category we find those who are active in higher-status programming, and on higher-status channels. For this group, media participation can therefore be said to reinforce their social status. Given that Norwegian news is strongly featured in prime time, those active in this context tend to also be privileged by having access to the largest audiences.

*Being Active as a Studio Audience, an Extra or a Contestant:  
Opportunities for Ordinary People*

Altogether, 12% of the respondents in the audience survey said they had been on television as members of a studio audience, extras or contestants in a competition or reality programme. By far the most common was having been a member of the studio audience (8%), followed by extra (3%), and competition/reality contestant (2%).<sup>6</sup> When we group the three categories together, the profile that emerges is clearly different from the subsection of the population discussed above. This latter group in no sense represents the elite, but rather a much more average and ordinary profile. Table 3 provides an overview:

**Table 3.** *Share of Population who Report to Have Been on Television as a Member of a Studio Audience, an Extra or a Contestant in Competition/Reality Programme (%)*

Share of total population in this category (N=144)		12%	Deviation from average per cent
Share of:			
<b>Sex:</b>	Men	10	-2
	Women	13	+1
<b>Age:</b>	9–19 yrs	19	+7
	20–39 yrs	12	0
	40–59 yrs	12	0
	60 + yrs	6	-6
<b>Area:</b>	Greater Oslo	17	+5
	Central East counties	14	+2
	South and West counties	8	-4
	Northern counties	10	-2
<b>Level of education:</b>	Primary	10	-2
	Secondary	10	-2
	University/college up to four years	12	0
	University more than four years	14	+2
<b>Annual income:</b>	Up to 150k NOK	14	+2
	150k–299k NOK	10	-2
	300k–399k NOK	12	0
	Over 400k NOK	13	+1

Note: N=1 232

As Table 3 illustrates, those who say they have been a member of a studio audience, taken part as an extra or been a contestant in a competition or reality programme have few distinct features that separate them from the population in general. There is an over-representation of females, but this is modest, and there is no marked profile in terms of income or education. In academic studies the term “ordinary people” is often used in quotation marks, with good reason. Still, it is worth noting that in strict socio-demographic terms, the people who have been on television in these less prominent roles actually represent a cross-section of the Norwegian public. These contributors appear as “anyone”, or “ordinary people”, not by virtue of some specific status external to the media, and they fit the socio-democratic description of the average Norwegian.

When we examine criteria other than the strict socio-economic ones, we find that younger people and those living in central areas have a greater likelihood of having been on television in these minor roles. We have already noted some reasons age may influence television appearance. Geography is another key factor for explaining who has been on television as studio audience members, extras or contestants. A person from Oslo and its surroundings is more than twice as likely to have taken part in one of these roles as is someone from the South or West region. This can no doubt be explained by the fact that being an extra, competitor or studio audience member requires personal attendance at the doors of a television studio, and these are predominantly located in and around Oslo.

In particular, there are many opportunities to be part of studio audiences. In the autumn of 2005 the second largest Norwegian television channel, TV 2, alone invited

people to partake in seven different programmes as studio audience members. Not surprisingly, Friday is the absolute peak of the week regarding the possibility of being a member of a studio audience. All major talk shows and game shows are aired with a studio audience, and in our sample week, a large proportion of the prime time shows on the main national channels NRK and TV 2 were produced with such an audience. Thus, the opportunities are manifold and have been used by a significant proportion of the population.

The role of the studio audience involves very limited visibility, and next to no individualisation, in terms of presentation of the members' identities and societal status. This is television activity with minimal exposure. Its main function is to represent or "double" the audience collective (Qvortrup 1991). Even if studio audiencehood offers little in the way of exposure, it provides an opportunity to go behind the scenes, unravelling the secrets of television production and experiencing its aura (Couldry 2000). For some it may also be attractive to be able to do this without exposing or exerting themselves extensively.

### *Contestants in Competition or Reality Programmes: Select Ordinarity*

Being a contestant is a well established form of non-professional activity, traditionally associated with quiz and game shows. More recently, the international rise of reality programming has expanded this role category. Our output survey demonstrates that there are two rather new genres that, in volume, make up the greatest bulk of participant-based programming on Norwegian television. One is reality television, while the other is SMS-based television (which is discussed in the next part).

In only a few years, reality programming has become a central genre also on Norwegian schedules. The six television channels surveyed showed a total of eleven different Norwegian-produced reality programmes during the survey week. Table 4 presents an overview.

Reality programmes are fairly complex in terms of the kind of exposure they offer (Andrejevic 2004). On the one hand this is a genre that reaches large audiences, largely in prime-time slots. The programmes involve a fairly high degree of both individualisation and visibility. These contestants are the centre, or at least a centre, of attention. On the other hand, this activity remains within an everyman category: The contestants' societal status is not emphasised much, for instance first names are commonly used. The competence required has as much to do with social skills and common sense as with factual and academic knowledge. And this is a low-status genre, associated in the public domain with scandal and denunciations.

Being a reality participant is hardly a high-status form of activity when compared with being a news interviewee, for example. However, one might say that the latter are privileged among the "ordinary people" who seek out studios, wanting to take part in a television programme. Even if reality television output in Norway is significant, only 2% respond to having taken part in either a competition or reality show.<sup>7</sup> Clearly, the combination of large output and modest levels of audience involvement points to the extensive selectiveness of reality television gate-keeping. Getting on-screen requires not only taking an active initiative vis-à-vis the programme's producers; one also has to pass through a casting and audition process in competition with others, and the programme can only accommodate a limited number of contestants. Reality and competition gatekeepers make partaking in such programmes a much more high-threshold form of activity

**Table 4.** *Norwegian Reality Shows on Norwegian Channels, Sample Week, November 2005*

Weekday	Time slot	Channel	Title
Monday	18:40-19:10	TV 2 Xtra	<i>Become a Movie Star</i>
	20:00-22:00	TVNorge	<i>71 Degrees North</i>
	20:30-21:30	TV3	<i>Top Model 2005</i>
Wednesday	17:45-18.15	TV 2 Xtra	<i>The Farm</i>
	18:15-19:10	TV 2 Xtra	<i>Garbage Dump</i>
	20:00-20:30	TV 2	<i>Become a Movie Star</i>
	20:30-21:40	TVNorge	<i>1950s Boarding School</i>
Thursday	17:45-18.15	TV 2 Xtra	<i>The Farm</i>
	18:15-18:40	TV 2	<i>Become a Movie Star</i>
	20:00-21:00	TV 2	<i>Dating Farmers</i>
	22:45-23:45	TV 2	<i>Garbage Dump</i>
Friday	17:20-17:50	TV 2 Xtra	<i>The Farm</i>
	18:15-19:10	TV 2 Xtra	<i>Dating Farmers</i>
	20:00-21:00	TV 2	<i>Become a Movie Star</i>
	21:45-22.15	TV 2	<i>Become a Movie Star</i>
Saturday	14:30-16:30	TV 2	<i>Become a Movie Star*</i>
	16:30-18:00	TVNorge	<i>71 Degrees North</i>
	16:30-17:30	TV 2	<i>Dating Farmers</i>
	16:40-17:10	TV3	<i>Extreme Makeover</i>
	18:30-19:30	TVNorge	<i>The Biggest Loser</i>
	19:10-20:30	TV3	<i>Extreme Makeover</i>
	19:30-20:35	TVNorge	<i>1950s Boarding School</i>
	20:30-21:30	TV3	<i>Top Model 2005</i>
	20:35-21:35	TVNorge	<i>FC Nerds</i>
Sunday	16:00-17:00	TV 2	<i>Garbage Dump</i>
	20:00-21:00	TVNorge	<i>The Biggest Loser</i>

\* In the TV schedule this is listed as three programmes divided by commercial breaks.

than being part of a studio audience. In so far as one might talk of status differences here, reality and high-profile game show competitors are the elite of the ordinary.

Taken together, the results from the audience survey clearly indicate a correlation between an activity's status and its social profile. Professional or leisure activities answer to most traditional descriptions of the media elite: Male, urban, highly educated with a higher than average income. These are the most visible roles, the most individualised, and includes participants who are able to take their societal status with them onto the television screen. They also take part in programmes scheduled during prime time on high-status channels with access to large prime-time audiences. Inversely, younger people with an average education and income dominate the lower-status activity of being a contestant, extra or studio audience member. Their degree of exposure is more limited, sometimes severely so, and they reach smaller to marginal audiences.

### *Applying to be on Television*

The audience survey also provides information on those who have applied to be on television. 7% of respondents said they had applied at least once in their life to par-

ticipate in a television programme. Here the initiative rests with audiences, while the producers' share consists in advertising and providing opportunities to join in. At any given time a number of calls are out for people to participate in television programmes, most notably in competitions, docusoaps and reality programmes. In terms of their social characteristics, the people who have applied are not very distinct. Respondents from all ages, regions and social strata report having applied to be on television. Some groups are slightly overrepresented: The typical applicant is more likely to be a man than a woman, and is more likely to be a young adult (age group twenty to thirty-nine) than a member of other age groups.

The current spread of activity-based output in both television and other media settings is largely a supply-led development (Syvertsen 2006, Sundet & Ytreberg 2006). However, the figure of 7% is high enough to suggest both that this development requires significant audience initiation, and that audience members are lining up in significant numbers to figure in activity-based programmes. As previous studies have shown, many people are clearly attracted to television. Patricia Joyner Priest (1995, chs. 4-5) interviewed forty people who had participated in talk shows. She used the concept "moths" to describe people who had no particular cause but who were drawn to the medium, to the idea of being on television. Similar, a study of the Norwegian *Blind Date* identified a group of people who were active to the degree that they could be said to be pursuing television activity as a leisure interest or even a second "career" (Bakøy & Syvertsen (eds.) 2001, Syvertsen 2001, see also Livingstone & Lunt 1994, Hibberd et al. 2000).

### Activity in Cross-platform Television

The "enhancement" of television by means of new, digital platforms is a much-discussed international contemporary feature of the medium (e.g. Caldwell 2000, Jenkins 2006, Siapera 2004, Seiter 1999). Norway has followed the international trend of adding a Web presence to programmes and channels, and has taken a leading position internationally in the combination of television and mobile telephony (Beyer et al. 2007, Enli 2007). As opposed to most current digital television, the television and mobile combination offers a return channel with writing opportunities, as do mail and message services on the Web. Generally speaking, these return channels represent a set of new facilities for audience response and interaction with television. Media institutions encourage and covet these kinds of contributions; they are perceived as a form of "community building" that may enhance loyalty and audience identification with the programme (Maasø et al. 2007, Sundet & Ytreberg 2006).

Our audience survey shows a considerable combined use of television with other platforms. 22% of the population reported to have responded or communicated in a television setting using other media platforms at least once within the previous twelve months. The most common platform is SMS and MMS (14%), followed by contributions through Web sites (6%) and telephone, letter or email (5%) (see Table 1).<sup>8</sup> These figures attest to the relative importance of mobile-phone interactivity in Norway, relative to Web use.

The combined use of television and other platforms creates a certain range, in terms of the degree of individual exposure each activity provides within the television output. Letters, faxes and e-mails may be read aloud or glossed; e-mails and SMS messages may be projected graphically. In certain instances, the degree of exposure may be comparable to that provided in news vox pops, for instance. Much of the audience-initiated

activity takes place considerably further out on the fringes of the output or levels little or no personal exposure, however: A significant share of SMS contributions comes in the form of votes; here the individual contributions appear on-screen only as aggregate percentages of those who support a position in a political debate or a contestant in, for example, *Big Brother*. Also, much of what arrives at television production centres in the form of letters, faxes, e-mails and SMS messages never gets aired even if it is, as a rule, paid for by the contributor.

*The Use of SMS: Opportunities for the Young and People in Non-central Locations*

Recent years have seen a rise in Norway of so-called SMS-based television, television formats that integrate SMS messages graphically on-screen, via chat zones or “tickers” that run across the bottom of the screen (Beyer et al. 2007, see Picture 1 for example). In Norway, in only a few years these formats have grown to become voluminous in regard to broadcasting space, and thus deserve special mention. Our output survey shows that such SMS-based television formats, whereby input from (paying) users via SMS and MMS provides the dominant part of the content, constitute an average of fifteen hours daily (or rather nightly) on the six channels taken together – and altogether fifty-five hours in our sample week. The smaller channels have the most voluminous output, particularly the commercial TVNorge and the second NRK channel NRK2, which broadcast up to nine hours SMS television daily: Within the analysed week, SMS-based television formats add up to over 40% of NRK2’s total programme schedule, and over 30% of TVNorge’s total programme schedule.

**Picture 1.** Example of Music Video Jukebox (Svisj) with SMS vote, MMS Pictures and chat (NRK2)



As for actual activity in television enhanced with mobile telephony (14%), some of the responses go to SMS-based programming, some to political discussion programmes. For instance, both major political discussion formats on the two largest broadcasters feature SMS messaging shown along the bottom of the screen (see Picture 2 for example). However, the largest share of messages most likely goes to the most viewed programmes that feature SMS votes, such as *Big Brother* and *Pop Idol*.

**Picture 2.** Example of Current Affair Programme (*Standpunkt*), Featuring SMS messaging along the Bottom of the Screen (NRK1, 22.05.07)



As for the socio-demographic profile of SMS/MMS contributors, a number of similarities can be noted between them and the previous category of extras, contestants and studio audience members. Table 5 presents an overview.

Also, this segment of the population contrasts sharply with those who had been on television in a professional or leisure interest capacity. The young are clearly overrepresented among the SMS/MMS-message senders: While 26% of the nine to nineteen year olds had sent a message in the previous twelve months, this only applied to 4% of those over sixty. Compared to the previously discussed subsections of the population, it is notable that the message-writers do not distinguish themselves at all in terms of gender and educational level. Apart from age, the most marked difference can be found in terms of geographical location; whereas people from Oslo and central areas dominate activity that requires making a personal appearance, the text message return channel is used more frequently in other parts of Norway. 16% of those living in the Southern and Western regions had sent a message, compared to 11% of those living in Oslo and surroundings. Also, the average income of SMS/MMS contributors is lower than for the previously discussed subsections, and particularly low compared to those who had been on television in a professional and leisure capacity. This, of course, is partly due to the fact that younger age groups, many still attending primary or secondary school, dominate this group.

**Table 5.** *Share of Population who Have Sent SMS/MMS to Television in the Previous twelve months (%)*

Share of total population in this category (N=169)		14%	Deviation from average per cent
Share of:			
<b>Sex:</b>	Men	14	0
	Women	14	0
<b>Age:</b>	9–19 yrs	26	+12
	20–39 yrs	19	+5
	40–59 yrs	11	-3
	60 + yrs	4	-10
<b>Area:</b>	Greater Oslo	11	-3
	Central East counties	14	0
	South and West counties	16	+2
	Northern counties	14	0
<b>Level of education:</b>	Primary	13	-1
	Secondary	13	-1
	University/college up to four years	15	+1
	University more than four years	11	-3
<b>Annual income:</b>	Up to 150k NOK	18	+4
	150k–299k NOK	13	-1
	300k–399k NOK	15	+1
	Over 400' NOK	11	-3

Note: N=1 232

As a rule, people who have sent SMS/MMS are younger than those interacting with television through other means, and the age bias becomes more marked when we look at those who have sent multiple messages. While only 4% of the population as a whole had sent more than five SMS/MMS while or immediately after watching a television programme in the previous twelve months, as many as 11% of the nine to nineteen year olds had done so. In short, then, SMS/MMS is used to a considerable extent by young people to acquire a presence on television – but it is a peripheral one, in terms of both the degree of exposure and the relative smallness of the audiences many of the SMS-based programmes reach.

The integration of mobile telephony in Norwegian television has created an arena for the audience to initiate activities, largely sociable and flirty chatting, but also discussions of current events (Enli & Syvertsen 2007). It is worth noting that some of these formats deal with factual issues and reach large prime-time audiences. Here, there is usually little room for individual exposure, however messages must be paid for by the contributor and might not be broadcast at all. The chances of getting a personal message on screen are markedly better in SMS-based formats with an SMS chat zone. However, these low-budget programmes are consistently placed outside of prime time, often during daytime, with audiences of modest to marginal size. Thus there seems to be a tradeoff involved in SMS/MMS contribution; some degree of exposure can be had, as well as some degree of individualisation, but not both at the same time. In the case of formats that draw major audiences, it seems that SMS/MMS contributors will have to accept either being bundled into vote aggregates, as with *Pop Idol*, or the strict gate-keeping of Norwegian journalistic discussion formats.

## Conclusion: Stratifying an Increasing Activity

The results of our two surveys point in two main directions: First, that the non-professional audience participation on television is extensive, and second, that it remains socially stratified. When almost half the population has contributed to a television programme in some form or another, and 7% have applied to be part of one, this indicates that audience-based activity cannot be dismissed as something only small minorities do. These results tie in with our output survey showing how crucial programming that features audience contribution is to current Norwegian television. At the same time, the advent of digital media clearly has not meant that access is equal, at least not in a Norwegian television context. Activity still involves social hierarchies along well known and established lines. Elites are overrepresented in the higher-prestige genres, and in terms of exposure to large television audiences. Conversely, lower-prestige roles for smaller audiences are filled with ordinary people, statistically speaking.

Elites obviously have not disappeared. If anything, today's situation illustrates how non-professional activity involves hierarchies, and how this system of hierarchizations expands to include new forms of activity. But as hierarchy expands, tensions and overlaps may become more visible within it. This situation deserves some concluding remarks, on the issues of fame and the issue of expression.

Media activity produces fame, and so it has been in television from that medium's inception. The conventional view of fame centres largely on celebrity, on public figures that who are few and exceptional. At the same time the notion of a generalised "15 minutes of fame", available to anyone, is also well established. Our data suggest that being a television celebrity is a type of fame that is undergoing a transformation, if not a downright devaluation. Being a celebrity on television traditionally meant appearing repeatedly in media-initiated, high-status and high-threshold settings. However, the spread of audience participation demonstrated in this article is clearly at odds with such notions. It seems plausible to say that the celebrity status of non-professionals (and to some extent that of professionals as well) will become more devalued the more the media landscape fragments into a plethora of activity-based formats vying for the attention of audiences.

As for the issue of expression, digital return channels allow "ordinary people" more space and, in addition, expand the possibilities for being active in a television setting for people living in less central and rural areas. The development of new formats and technologies seems at least in part to allow new social groups to be active. This is particularly relevant in cross-media formats that combine traditional television with SMS screening and Web discussion facilities. It seems that we can find different voices coming to the fore on the digital platforms than on the television platform.

The saliency of this development can perhaps be seen most clearly in the political debate programming that features SMS messages running along the bottom of the screen (see Picture 2). Those participating in the television studio are closely sifted and screened in a media-initiated process that lets the few and privileged through. They are at centre stage, literally speaking. On the margins, at the bottom of the screen, are the short SMS messages. Here, one finds the voices of those excluded from the studio – of women, the young and the rural. They have been screened in a much more cursory manner by moderators, whose main function is to keep the dirt away, speaking figuratively. They have little room to express themselves, and what they say is sometimes derided in much the same way as Web-based political discussion forums are. But it remains pertinent to the issue of a right to political expression that those talking by means of SMS belong to other, lower strata of Norwegian society than the elites that dominate the television studio.

## Notes

1. The survey was commissioned by PaP and was carried out by TNS Gallup during weeks 36 and 37, 2004. PaP stands for *Participation and Play in Converging Media*, a research group based at the University of Oslo from 2004-2007, Syvertsen & Ytreberg 2006. Thanks to Kjetil S. Sundet for help with SPSS.
2. As our sample period, we chose seven days in 2005, starting November 9 and ending November 15. This period was typical for its season in the sense that all major reality and makeover shows, as well as studio game shows and talk shows, were still running. Also, no major media events disrupted the standard week's schedule. In our survey each TV day starts at 3:00 AM.
3. **These figures are high compared to those in other European countries. An average of 81% of the households in the EU member states had at least one mobile phone and 58% had access to the Internet in one form or another (LPSOS 2004: 5).**
4. The 1987 edition of the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* defines participation as "to take part or have a share in an activity or event".
5. Sixteen per cent had been on television once; another 16% had been on two to four times, while the last 6% had been on television five times or more.
6. The sum exceeds 12% as some people reported having had more than one role.
7. Although the figure is low, it is interesting that this activity is at all visible in a general audience survey. Possibly, the constant need for television participants in a small country makes this a more prominent feature of modern Norwegian life.
8. **Here the overlap is slightly more significant, as 3% of the population has used more than one type of facility. Less than 1% has used all three types.**

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