

Parallel Session 15: Science on TV and radio: quality, quantity and new trends

WHERE HAS SCIENCE GONE?

**THE MEDIAZATION OF SCIENCE ON TELEVISION BETWEEN
1961 AND 2000**

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Abstract

In this paper the first results will be presented of a content analysis of medical television shows on Dutch tv between 1961 and 2000. The main question of the study has been whether or not the use of scientific information in the media has changed from 1961 onwards. This question is posed to the background of processes of scientification and mediaization of culture. From the analysis of the speaking time of experts, journalist and lay people in medical tv shows the conclusion is drawn that three different periods of medical television can be distinguished: a scientific, journalistic and lay period.

Key words: Scientific knowledge, mediaization, medicine.

Context

In the ongoing modernisation of society two developments could be identified: scientification of culture on the one hand (e.g. Hagendijk, 1996) and mediaization of culture (e.g. Thompson, 1995, Altheide & Snow, 1991) on the other hand. In relation to science and media the question can be asked how those two developments relate to the representation of science in the media. Is there, for example, a scientification of media content or a mediaization of science in the media? Or does that vary over time? In order to start answering questions like these, an explorative longitudinal study of media content has been conducted, asking the question whether or not the use of scientific information on Dutch television has changed in the period 1961-2000. In this study medical television shows have been taken as exemplary for science on tv (e.g. Durant, 1992). The theory of 'extended mediaization' (Thompson, 1995) has been taken a step further by defining mediaization as a journalistic order in which references and narratives of journalism and lay people are dominant over references and narratives of scientists and professionals. Leading to the hypothesis that a mediaization of medical science on tv has taken place between 1961 and 2000.

Methods

In this research content analysis, of a stratified sample of non-fiction Dutch medical television shows between 1961 and 2000, has been conducted. The content has been analysed on the level of the TV show as a whole and on the

level of the statements per actor within the show. More than thirty variables were used, concerning classical news factors on the one hand and references to science and other sources on the other hand. In total 77 medical shows were analysed from 7 different medical non-fiction series, leading to 7242 statements.

Results

One of the main indicators of a changing content of medical television is the amount of speaking time several actors are given in medical television shows. The frequency and the length of statements of three different groups of people were registered: experts, journalists and lay people. The category of experts consists of scientists, doctors and other medical professionals and the category of lay people consists of patients, family and amongst others members of the general public. As Figure 1 shows the distribution of the average speaking time between the three categories of actors has changed considerably between 1976 and 2000¹. In the seventies experts were the dominant actors in medical television shows, together with lay people. At the end of the nineties these positions have reversed: lay people are now the dominant actors in medical tv shows, with experts in third position and journalists in the middle. In the eighties this new division of speaking time between the three categories started to emerge and stabilised in the nineties. After 1982 no person appeared in the tv shows anymore in the role of scientist.

Conclusions

On the basis of this empirical research of the development of the average length of the speaking time of different groups of actors, can be concluded that three different periods of medical television can be distinguished in the Netherlands. The first period, before 1976, could be labeled as the scientific period, followed by a journalistic period between 1981 and 1988. This journalistic period seems to be a transition period towards the third period, which could be labeled as a lay-period. These results can be an indication of a changed 'factuality regime' (Hagendijk, 1996) from science, through journalism, to a lay frame of reference in medical television. This leads to the provisional conclusion that the mediatization of medical science on tv indeed has emerged. This is a provisional conclusion; mediatization also depends on the content of the statements of the several actor in medical tv shows. The second part of this research will therefore be focussed on what the different actors are saying on medical television between 1961 and 2000.

Notes

¹ To conduct an analysis of the speaking time of the actors between 1961 and 2000 was not possible, due to the availability of the data. Medical television shows were only recorded and archived in full length from 1976 onwards.

References

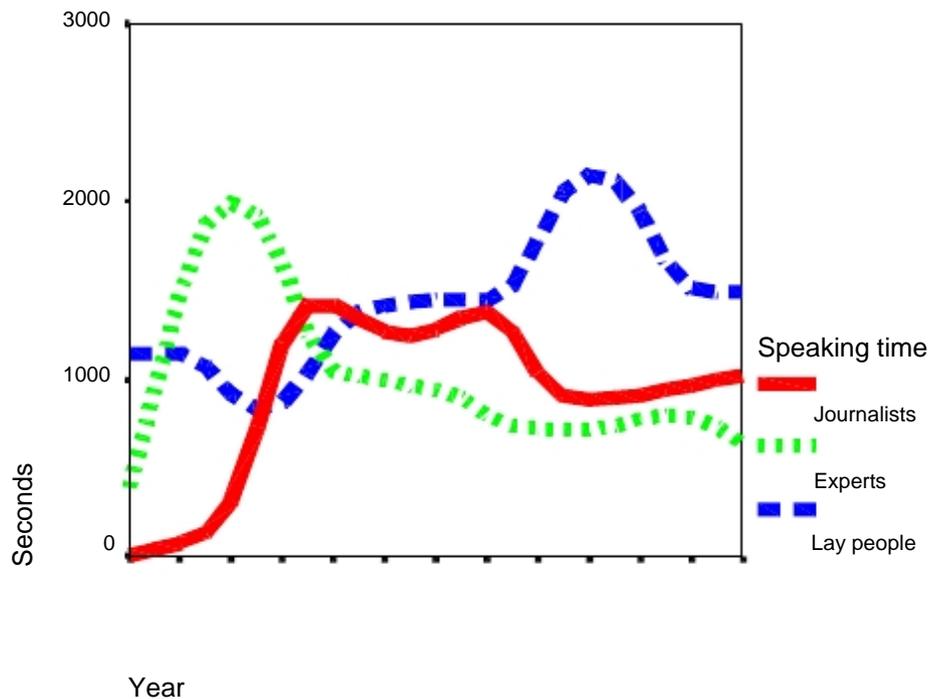
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Figures and Tables

Figure 1: Speaking time of experts, journalists and lay people in medical television shows on Dutch television between 1976 and 2000.



Development of the speaking time of experts, journalists and lay people. The average speaking time of experts decreases ($\beta = -.373$, $p < .05$), of lay people increases ($\beta = .357$, $p < .05$) and of journalists does not change a lot ($\beta = .267$, ns). Time series on basis of T4253H smoothing.

