



**Doctoral School
of Social
Communication**

COLLECTION OF THESES

for the Ph.D. dissertation of

József Szayly

Petőfi affair

**Change of youths' perception in connection
with Radio Petőfi from the start of
commercial radios in Hungary up to now**

Supervisor:

Dr. István Síklaki, Ph.D

Budapest, 2016

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I. Research preliminaries, justification of the topic

After the change of the political regime five more years had to pass by to achieve the elaboration of the regulation of the media proposed at the Opposition Round Table Negotiations to be enacted following the first free elections within the framework of a two-third law. In my opinion, the greatest merit of Act I of 1996 (hereinafter referred to as ‘Media Act’) is that it opened the market, i.e. it made it possible to establish national and local commercial radios and televisions. The purposes of this act also included the regulation of the operation of the public service media.

The commercial media started to appear in Hungary from 1997. This was the time when the two national commercial televisions (TV2 and RTL Klub) and the two national commercial radios (Sláger and Danubius) started to broadcast in Hungary. Simultaneously with this a number of local radios and television were granted a broadcasting licence. As a result of the aforesaid, the earlier monopoly of the public service stations ceased to exist and the dual media system already typical in Europe developed.

Despite the fact that the regulation came into existence very slowly, the two public service institutions, the Hungarian Television and the Hungarian Radio, were not prepared for the situation having developed in the market. According to my experience, the new commercial stations began to operate with serious ambitions and great advertising campaigns and acquired the overwhelming majority of the audience, most of all youths, in a very short time.

The next decade was determined by a rocketing technological development. In 2010 the regulation of the media changed in Hungary and Act I of 1996 was replaced by a new Media Act. The Media Services and Support Trust Fund (MTVA), today's largest Hungarian media company, was established for preparing the programs. By the second decade of the new millennium the rocketing spreading of the mobile internet and smart phones becoming everyday devices had a significant impact on the radio listening and television watching habits.

In my research and also in my dissertation I only deal with the field of broadcasting. In practice, too, I have been engaged in radio related activities for more than two decades and my earlier studies, researches and theoretical works are also related to this field. For more than ten years I worked as an employee and one of the managers of Radio Petőfi and from 2006 as a vice-president of the Hungarian Radio responsible for the programs. Consequently, I have detailed internal information regarding the operation of the radio and the processes having taken place in the institution in the past two decades. In the course of my scientific work and research I greatly relied on this knowledge and the aforesaid experiences.

My thesis is focused on the Petőfi station of the Hungarian Radio.

From the change of the political regime to these days Radio Petőfi has undergone a number of changes in the structure of its programs. In the 90's there were several successful and even more unsuccessful attempts to retain young listeners and to engage them to the station in the changing media environment. These attempts could not turn

the tendency of the programs of Radio Petőfi ‘growing old together with its listeners’. Despite the fact that even many pregnant youth programs were introduced at Radio Petőfi (‘Apukám Világa’ with Jenő Csiszár and ‘Kívánságreggel’), the station was much more considered to be the radio of the elderly age group than that of the youths by the turn of the millennium.

A radical change took place in 2007 when the place of the mixed programs of Radio Petőfi was taken at station by a 24-hours musical stream of programs addressing mainly the youths and intending to introduce the most promising talents of the Hungarian and international pop music.

In my essay I present the qualitative researches having examined the change of the attitude of young listeners in connection with Radio Petőfi in the past two decades. I rely on three such comprehensive researches, the first two of which were initiated and managed personally by me at the Hungarian Radio. My control examination, i.e. my focus-group research conducted personally, was based on the results of these researches. Within the framework of my focus-group research I examined the tendencies that have strengthened and the changes that can be detected in the change of the youths' perception in connection with the public service Radio Petőfi by the second decade of the millennium.

A special actuality is added to the topic of my research by the fact that in the spring of 2015 the public television launched a new TV program for young people. The evening program of m2 tries to address under the name ‘Petőfi TV’ the youths watching less and

less television nowadays. With the name of the program, MTVA clearly builds the new television program on the brand of Radio Petőfi having become popular and fashionable within the age group in the past years.

II. Methods used

In quantitative researches related to broadcasting the logging method is applied worldwide. The listenership of the individual radio stations is established by questioning a representative sample of at least 1,000 persons. Generally, the purpose of quantitative researches is to establish how listeners react to the selection and programs of the different radio stations and to the changes having taken place therein. Therefore, here we can speak of the subsequent control of the individual changes.

When launching new radio stations, planning new programs and making preparations for changing the program structure, qualitative research methods are applied in the field of broadcasting for mapping the demands and expectations of the audience. The same method is used for establishing any corrections listeners require to be made in the program of the radio channel they listen to.

Out of the qualitative research methods almost exclusively the focus-group researches are applied in broadcasting. In my opinion, the reason for this is that by this method the expectations, perceptions and impressions of listeners can be revealed extremely cost-efficiently and, at the same time, with proper accuracy and in an appropriately detailed and deep manner. Innumerable feelings and

associations influence people in selecting radio stations. The emotions triggered by the program or by the music played or the person speaking in it, are determinant. Focus-group tests are also excellently suitable for mapping and becoming familiar with all these. Consequently, my own independent research is also based on this.

Focus-group researches are group conversations controlled by a moderator in a given topic. Usually, 8 to 10 persons having been selected as a representative sample based on aspects determined according to the subject of the research participate in the conversation. Following a semi-structured questionnaire (followed by the moderator and not received by the subjects), the members of the group tell their experiences, opinions, feelings and beliefs in connection with the topic. Accordingly, the results of the research are neither representative, nor are they quantifiable data of statistical nature. Focus-group researches provide statements, approaches, opinions, impressions, feelings and characterisations by the analysis of which insight is given into the thinking of the target group in connection with our topic.

III. Results of my dissertation

At the beginning of my research I established four hypotheses for whose control it became, ultimately, necessary to perform even a fourth focus-group control research, which I undertook myself.

Generally, the results of the researches supported my hypotheses. My own control research helped clarify the details and the less unambiguous conclusions, and raised new aspects, as well.

1. Although music is determinant, merely in itself it is not an attractive content for youths.

According to McQuail, media content is the reflection of social and cultural values and beliefs. ‘Historians, anthropologist and sociologists are interested in media content as evidence of values and beliefs of a particular time and place or social group, presuming that generally it reacts to the actual hopes, fears and suppositions of people and reflects a common value. Media content is considered to be a "cultural" indicator, more or less in the same manner as social and economic indicators describing the conditions.’ (McQuail [2003] p. 266.)

The development of the technical environment, primarily the penetration of smart phones and mobile internet (more specifically, their becoming widespread in the examined young age-group), the use of music players, the rocketing multiplication of media (mostly those accessible by the internet) and the excessive selection of these have fundamentally changed the youths' media consumption habits and their expectations concerning a certain, in particular a public service radio program. The impact of the technological revolution having taken place in the past two decades can, among others, be also measured by how dramatically rapidly the media consumption of the audience has transformed – says Mihály Gálík. (Gálík, Urbán

[2014] p. 221.) My research points out that this transformation is even stormier among young people.

From the researches it clearly turns out that if young people listen to the radio on any platform, they select a channel primarily based on whether the channel a) broadcasts at the given moment music corresponding to their interest/mood; b) generally broadcasts music they like.

Young listeners switch to another channel without any problem and almost immediately if they hear in the radio any program or music they do not like.

However, merely because of the music they only choose listening to the radio in the background to expel the silence mainly if they are alone, e.g. in the afternoon, while learning or during travelling or making the morning preparations. To listening to music in a targeted manner the appropriate means are music player devices, YouTube and CD's for them. However, an important function of listening to the radio is providing entertainment and relaxation and making people laugh. If youths choose a specific radio station deliberately, they indicate the 'acquisition of information' only as casual amongst the reasons of their choice. It is true, however, that subsequently they usually found it valuable.

As it is a declared objective of Radio Petőfi to present primarily today's Hungarian music and to select also from the foreign repertoire today's songs instead of the popular ones, the musical selection is determinant when deciding to choose this station. Most of the subjects indicated that they listened to the radio mainly

because of music. Therefore, the hypothesis is true when completed with the following: a demanding, high-standard and clearly segmented musical selection having appropriate accompanying information can be attractive even in itself for listeners.

2. The personalities appearing in the radio have more and more become the attraction of the radio for young listeners by now.

Today, young people can listen to music meeting their taste already anywhere. In most cases radios targeting a broad audience and having, therefore, a mixed or far too popular selection broadcast not the kind of music youths like to listen to, so they rather turn towards radios with a segmented selection, web radios, YouTube, independent music editors and own playlists. However, when selecting a radio station the persons speaking in the given radio, i.e. their speech, style and voice, their relationship with listeners, etc. also come into the picture as important aspects. At the same time, it has also become important that, although own-edited music programs completely meet the taste of listeners, they do not provide any ‘extras’ and, consequently, listeners do not become familiar with new songs; they do not receive any new information in relation to the music and they are not entertained and informed in any other way. Broadcasters, who interrupt the music stream, actually disturb listeners¹; still, they seem to be necessary; only the ideal number of

¹ In the course of the researches it turned out several times that listeners switch from the channel they are listening to not only when a song they do not like is played but also when prose is broadcasted or when broadcasters speak.

the occasions when they speak needs to be determined well. They have to be more than plain announcers but they must not speak ‘too much’, either. As far as possible, the things they say have to be interesting, entertaining and informative and they themselves have to be nice and informal but not pushy and not ‘chummy’.

My research confirmed that persons speaking in the radio are essential for selecting radio stations. Broadcasters, i.e. presenters also identify the radios and they are their important ‘trademarks’ in the eye of young people.

In case of Radio Petőfi the broadcasters are fundamentally nice and much liked people but no outstanding character could be attributed to them. From the focus-group conversation it turned out that in respect of radio broadcasters, too, appearing in the television also ‘together with their faces’ plays a great role in being liked and known and becoming familiar with their personality better.

Presumably recognising the above or as a result of a lucky coincidence, some broadcasters of Radio Petőfi were also given roles in Channel M2 of the Hungarian Television during the time having passed by since the research. In March 2015 (demonstrating the strength of the Petőfi brand) an evening program was launched for young viewers under the name Petőfi TV. Also the broadcasters of the radio can present programs on Petőfi TV. Radio Petőfi should utilise this possibility better in order to make its broadcasters more well-known, popular and identifiable for its target audience.

3. Young people already listen to the radio not primarily to acquire information but rather to be entertained.

Until the beginning of the 2000's radio was the fastest information medium. Today this position has already been taken over by the content providers accessible on the internet both in terms of accessibility and the sharing possibilities of the communicating party. The community websites further strengthen this in such a manner that the primary forwarder of the information (for the youths) is not the producer of the content but the acquaintance sharing it on the community website. Acquiring information from the radio plays rather an orienting role among young listeners. If they need information, first the internet comes into their mind. News programs broadcasted regularly in the radio rather have a daily program organising and orienting effect. They indicate the passage of time and if young listeners hear in such programs any news important for them, they know what to check on the internet.

So listening to the radio has changed from the earlier acquisition of information accompanied by entertainment to mainly entertainment. This is supported by these researches, in which the subjects defined listening to the radio primarily as a background and accompanying activity. Listening to the radio in the background and as an accompanying activity means much rather entertainment or, as mentioned several times during the researches, only the interesting pieces of information count.

4. By now Radio Petőfi has become for youths not only a public service radio channel but also an accepted any popular brand.

Not only that for young people Radio Petőfi is not merely a public service channel, but by 2014 it completely faded out of their common knowledge to consider and to identify it as a public service radio. In their view, Radio Petőfi has become a music channel, a bit different than the others. They notice and appreciate its public service and mainly its cultural activity but they did not, in any context, define the channel as a public service radio when mentioning it either directly or spontaneously. At this point it is worth lingering upon the change that has taken place regarding the definition of public service in the past two decades or upon the lack of such definition. I myself dealt with this topic already in my study of 2008: 'In our dynamically changing age the exact and detailed definition of public service is still missing. Although media experts and scientist have made innumerable attempts to provide such definition since the regulation of the national media coming into existence, neither the trade nor science can boast of an accepted definition.'

Naturally, several of the concise definitions are socially accepted by consensus. Public service has developed for satisfying the common needs of the society; it is financed from community resources and each member of the community can have his/her share of it, irrespective of his/her social and pecuniary situation. This service is mostly financed from taxes. The basic aim of the public service

media is to contribute to maintaining the open social dialogue by eliminating the deficiencies of the market. It is a rightful endeavour that the media financed from community resources should offer to the community the identity of belonging to the nation, to the political community. Public service media is a provision of contents that generally helps the members of the community find their way in the society.

Maybe the role and the duty of public service have never been of such a great significance than nowadays. In the increasingly broader provision of contents there will be more and more scrap and harmful media content among the vast number of valuable contents and information. This particularly upgrades the value-showing and orienting function of public service, which function also helps find one's ways.' (Szayly [2008] p. 226-229.)

Satisfying the demands of youths is a priority public service duty. The European Union, too, encourages changes putting the youth to the fore at European public service program providers. The thematisation of the channels has become increasingly typical worldwide because the sphere of interest of the individual age groups has grown more and more different. Accordingly, in my opinion, public service can be examined in view of the entirety of the provision of radio programs, studying the channels Kossuth, Petőfi, Bartók and Dankó together. In my opinion and according to my research, young people can primarily be reached through a musical selection and, even more, by means of pop music programs

they like, because they are interested principally in music. We can also say that they almost exclusively consume this cultural product.

By now Radio Petőfi has become an accepted and popular brand, which is proudly listened to and is considered to be a standard in musical life. The Petőfi brand already indicates a stage, too, where Hungarian performers appear at festivals visited by youths.

The programs of Radio Petőfi are in line with the age group but the channel does not itself as a radio of young people. This, for that matter, does even good: every research has proved that it annoys the target audience and makes it rejective if a radio wants to say whom it is for, even if the particular person is a member of the target audience and even if he/she is not.

In the past nearly 10 years a fundamental change has taken place in the perception of youths in connection with the Petőfi brand. Simultaneously with my research, also the professionals of MTVA operating today the Petőfi Radio Station may have drawn similar conclusions. When they decided to launch a popular television program for youths at the beginning of 2015, they presumably gave the name Petőfi TV to the evening program of the m2 channel because they trusted that the age-group's positive judgement of the successful Radio Petőfi will attract the youths before the screen of m2, too, in the evenings. Radio Petőfi has become an inevitably strong and attractive brand by the second decade of the new millennium, as confirmed by my research, too. To see, however, if the Petőfi brand is really strong enough to make also a new public

service television program popular, could, anyhow, be the subject already of a next research.

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