

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents an analysis of relevant literature on media audiences with the focus on an interpretive community model, which bears a lot of resemblance to the community of Radio Maryja listeners.

Moreover, taking into account that Radio Maryja is a religious broadcaster, there is a need for examination of the notions on religion and media as well as sociological theories of religion with regards people within a community, with a primary interest in studying its behaviour.

Lastly, position and role of Catholic Church in Poland will be discussed for it is essential to the understanding the role of Radio Maryja on the Polish media market and its status as religious medium in the broader society.

EFFECTS MODEL

According to John Corner (2000), it was the notion of influence and power that was the main interest within mass media scholarship. Until recently, the audience was associated with the imaginary of a mass, thus implying lack of identity and easy target. Which is why, the relationship between media and the audience, scholars saw in terms of hypodermic needle, accepting one-way system of connections. Frankfurt School contended 'culture industry' was a broader context of this 'effects' tradition and turned masses into culture industry's object and not the subject (Adorno, T. 1991). Although it is acceptable to suggest audiences are exposed to multitude of messages, arguing they hold influence on one's actions is underestimating one's intellectual abilities. David Gauntlett (1998) argues that the future of effects model has to depend on employment of qualitative studies, which could reject the conservative and inferior assumptions of audiences, in favour to more open-minded and sympathetic views. Scholar's attitude towards audience debate helps to realise that the audience is not a brainless crowd but a social community. This angle will be useful for further

research, as it does not reject the idea of influence but shifts the notions about the audience. It will be interesting to find out how listeners perceive themselves against the main arguments of the debate in Poland which develop around the manipulation and brainwashing of the ‘mohair berets’¹.

INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITIES AND HOOVER’S 700 CLUB

The criticism of hypodermic model of audiences drew on the distrust of the democratic as well as its concern quantitative methodology used for data gathering irrelevant. The lab environment could not lead to unfailing results, since it did not provide scholars with a natural context in which people were using media. Particularly important for progression from ‘effects’ model was theoretical framework put forward by academics that used social and semiotic factors as a way of looking at the audience (Hay, J., Gorssberg, L. & Wartella, E. 1996; Lindlof T. R. & Meyer T. P. 1998) as well as applying the concept of interpretive communities that derives from literary criticism. It was pioneering by looking at the audience as community of ‘not so much a group of individuals who shared a point of view, but a point of view or way of organizing experience that shared individuals’ (Fish, S.1989: 141). Following that, community members referred to assumed categories system in relation to the surrounding world and strikingly provided similar reading of texts, as if they were in consensus on how to understand media content. That was not for owing to the self-identity with potential text but rather collective act of interpretation within the particular interpretive community. Any socio-demographic factors, starting from school, football team one supports or political preferences to ethnicity, gender or social class, instantly make an individual a member of an interpretive community. Those communities are not necessarily linked but are a result of one’s life experience.

¹ Refer to press coverage by daily broadsheets such as *Gazeta Wyborcza* or *Rzeczpospolita*. *Gazeta Wyborcza* has on-line portal dedicated to the issue, called *Father Rydzyk and Radio Maryja*. On the other hand, *Rzeczpospolita* has more conservative views than liberal *Gazeta*, it still maintains critical views on Radio Maryja. It is also worth looking at articles from weekly magazines *Polityka* and *Wprost*. On the whole, press coverage focuses on Rydzk and mohair berets – radio listeners and sympathisers, people vulnerable and easy to manipulate.

The interpretive community research also investigates areas of media and religion, as the 'community' is the main concern to the religion (Lindlof, Thomas, R. 2002). Stuart Hoover's study (1988) focused on 700 Club's viewers and their religious experiences in modern world. Members of 700 Club were asked to describe their 'faith histories' and how such religious broadcasts contributed to their spiritual consciousness. As he contends about the audience:

'For all of them, religious television is an input in their lives on which they have a sense of *perspective*' (ibid: 208).

The religious broadcasting here is a point of reference, a window on world audience uses to learn about their religion or expand knowledge even more. 700 Club represented to the viewers values of the authentic faith due to the sense of tradition and preservation Pat Robertson² called for on air. In addition, Hoover learned the audience showed strong conservative roots and therefore electronic church was providing them with stability in much more religiously diverse America. More importantly, viewers' choices were somewhat caused by the quest for the Truth, believed to be lost through processes like secularisation and atomisation of society. Another factor discovered through the empirical work was the fact that viewers related their faith histories with the renewal of community that the programme gave them. Lastly, in the chapter *What Attracts People to Televangelism* we read:

These ministries have self-consciously lodged themselves at the centre of individuals' experiences of dissonance, frustration, and need in the cultural crisis of recent decades. They see a role for themselves in addressing the tensions between the traditional cultural symbols and a wider culture now 'out of control' (ibid: 103).

Many scholars in America saw the emergence of fundamental religious movements as signs of Great Awakening (McLoughlin, W. G. 1978) and it was believed that mass media would play a significant role in upcoming cultural changes (Berger, P.; Wade, C. R. 103). As stated above, leaders like Robertson understood today's society and provided with rationalisation of

² The leader of 700 Club.

life in order to build a 'new culture' (Hoover, S. 1988:28). Ideology of apocalyptic chaos and downfall of the modern, found their subscribers among frustrated, sometimes lost in new circumstances individuals.

Although, study was conducted in 1980s it still has valuable insights on the religious broadcasting and its audiences. Arguments that Hoover proposed could help with finding out whether Radio Maryja's listeners consider the radio to be a cultural window on the world as well as last bastion of real faith even if both Radio Maryja and 700 Club differ in content and address audiences of different nationality, and different socio-political backgrounds. There won't be a doubt that the sense of belonging to the community plays an important role for listeners of Radio Maryja and finding if they had the chance for further commitments with the religious radio station would tell more about the people. Similarities are noticeable in turning to the fundamentalism by both broadcasters as well as their audiences. Despite the cultural differences in both countries, there is the common ground of modernism resentment among people that find contemporary world out of control. Thus is why, it will be interesting to learn if Radio Maryja's audience is seeking new ways of accessing the reality and whether the reasons are similar to those mentioned in the study of electronic church.

SOCIAL SCIENCES, MEDIA AND RELIGION

Publications touching on issues of religion and media appear in unrelated journals across many branches of social science, psychology and anthropology due to the lack of the cross-discipline dialogue (Stout & Buddenbaum, 1996; Hoover, 2006). Stout and Buddenbaum (2002) as well as Hoover (2002) claim lack of consistent contribution to the field of may be a result of irrational and emotional foundations religions are formed on, which in turn could discourage academic discussion.

However undeveloped the field may be, Hoover (2002) recognised three distinct frameworks that shape contemporary literature on religion and media. The first model called

by Hoover essentialism attempts to situate media within religion. Hence, it looks at ritual side of media consumption like watching football or participating in live events (Carey.1988, Price. 2000). Other studies from this branch claim that religious awareness has been lost and superseded by media (McLuhan, M. 1962). The second area of interest took the hypodermic needle model as the pattern, which analyses influence of media on religious communities. Primarily, the paradigm looks at the emergence of televangelism and the possible 'effects' on the audience i.e. church attendance versus electronic church, propaganda and manipulation of people (Schultze, 1990). Third outline investigates the structures and powers of religious media as well as tries to relate the phenomena to the traditional religious formations (Hoover, S. 1988). Having taken all the concepts into account, this study does not fit to either. It will most probably, find a place between second and the third model; combining the influence theory with analysis of media structure in order to understand Radio Maryja's social phenomenon. Charisma of Tadeusz Rydzyk and folk religiosity displayed on air reminds somehow the televangelical movement in America. Thus, mentioned work of Hoover (1988) will be useful for the research.

The concern within the social sciences regarding religion fundamentally include questions of religion's role in people's lives and its diversity. In his writing on the subject Emile Durkheim learned that although there are no clear links between different religions, there is a common denominator for most of beliefs. He outlined a border dividing life into two categories – the sacred and the profane in which people lead their lives. What is more, Durkheim saw in religion an ability to consolidate the society or community, thus religion's role would have to be central to society's life. In *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* Durkheim (1912) provides the definition on what is the essence of religion:

A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden - beliefs and practices which unit into one single moral community called a church, all those who adhere to them...by

showing that the idea of religion is inseparable from that of the Church, it makes it clear that religion should be an eminently collective thing (ibid: 47).

Drawing on these thoughts, religion is an experience, connecting all, far from an individual encounter. Hence, this theory can be apprehended within much broader scope of media, religion and audiences' theory, and also in Radio Maryja's case. The audience research could reveal which sphere of life does radio belong to: the sacred or the profane. Moreover, a question of how the station fits to Durkheim's definition and whether it reinforces religion as communal activity could be also answered.

Furthermore, Stout and Buddenbaum (1996) point out that media tradition tends to neglect what social sciences have recognised as two models of religiosity – personal and institutional. Unlike mass media academics, sociologists imagine religious audience not only in regards with membership to certain institutions but also consider the ways religion is demonstrated amongst closed community. The depiction of religious audience is only complete when bearing both factors in mind, since 'several argue that personal communities of family, friends, and co-workers create and sustain a religious worldview that is more accurate predictor of behaviour than are institutional sanctions' (ibid: 7). The issue arising here is which model of religiosity does Radio Maryja belong to as on one hand, radio stands for mass media institution and represents voice on the public forum. On the other hand, it is an intimate and individual medium believed to be providing spiritual needs.

POLISH CATHOLIC CHURCH AND RADIO MARYJA

When Catholic faith was introduced in Poland in the 10th century³ so as to avoid German conquest the Polish ruler could not estimate what significance that would have on the future. Reading the Preamble of Polish Constitution one understands the role *God* plays to the nation:

³ Conversion is customarily called the Baptism of Poland. On the Good Saturday, 14th April 966 the Polish ruler, Mieszko I, first in the line of Piast Royal Family converted to Christianity by marrying a Czech princess Dobrawa.

We the Polish Nation...who believe in *God*...Beholden to our ancestors for their labours, their struggle for independence achieved at great sacrifice, for our culture rooted in the Christian heritage...Recognizing our responsibility before *God*, Hereby establish this Constitution of the Republic of Poland as the basic law for the State (1997).

The fragment suggests that faith and structures of Church belong to elementary parts of the Polish 'self'. In order to understand this notion fully, one should refer to historical literature, which describes the history of relationship between the state and the Church from the early days (Davies, N. 1986; 2001; 2005; Roszkowski, W. 1992; Albert, A. 1989). There is no intention to discuss these publications here, as they are not essentially related to the subject of the study. However, it is important to examine the contemporary notions on Catholic Church in Poland and its position within the state. Even though Poland has not endorsed one religion as the official faith, it has signed the Concordat in 1996, giving certain privileges and rights to the Roman Catholics (Pietrzak, M. 1994). What once Polish politician said about the country's religion could not be better phrased and is still believed to hold some truth:

Catholicism is not just a supplement to Polishness, or somewhat its salvation but Catholic faith lies at the core of Polishness, as a matter of fact it is the core within most dimensions (Dmowski, R. 2005: 24).

Amongst publications on Catholic Church in Poland, there are several that may be of greater role in understanding Radio Maryja within the context of Catholic Church. Jaroslaw Gowin's (1995; 1999) books are by far key texts in the subject. Both present answers to, as quoting the author:

How precisely can one explain that despite fears of Church hierarchy, despite hopes of those who see in religion anachronism, despite the expectations of scientists studying the influence of social processes on religious attitudes of modern human – Polish freedom did not caused increase of religious indifference (Gowin, J. 1999: 6).

These themes are the questions to build on in the research, which can extend the knowledge of Radio Maryja's reception, taking into account points like religion and religion's role in forming national identity.

Much of academic work on the Radio Maryja tends to follow the ‘effects’ tradition outlined by Hoover (2002). Within this theory, a note deserves article by Ratecka (2006) analysing Our Daily’s⁴ political commentary in relation to God and patriotism. She concludes that the language of the daily relies on the construction of myths, which consider Rydzyk a prophet and Radio Maryja a tool to introduce God’s laws in Poland. The studied column ‘Thought is a Weapon’ proved to be similar to the lingo of Soviet propaganda and urged to realise that:

The year 1989⁵ is not a caesura at all. There still is system hostile towards Poland and Poles. After the Round Table Agreement⁶ there is still a monster of the Michnik⁷ face ruling Poland. The monster, of course hostile to Church, Christ and Christian morality (Bajda, J. 2005).

Like the article points out, mythology referred to imaginary of the enemy. The liberal enemy replaced the Communist regime. Thus, it is interesting to see if the themes of liberal evil will show up in the following research and whether the audience finds these notions reasonable and important in any way.

Moving from the ‘influence’ model Gowin’s *Church in Time of Freedom* (1999) analyses Catholic Church as a whole but also contributes a substantial part to Radio Maryja. According to the author, Radio Maryja represents fraction in the Church called by Gowin ‘closed Catholicism’ that characterised by deep disbelief in democracy and supposes the time of Church’s oppression is not over. Gowin notes that Rydzyk’s preaching bases on the ideas of the continuous uprooting of Catholic faith from Polish identity. Continuing from that point, radio agitates for integration with brothers and sisters in faith but the isolation from modern society so to build alternative civilisation and ‘after the downfall of declining civilisation,

⁴ Nasz Dziennik (Our Daily) daily paper representing the same line of ideology as Radio Maryja and TV Trwam, owned by Tadeusz Rydzyk (see the appendix E for the outline of Rydzyk’s organisations).

⁵ Year of 1989 symbolises democratic transformations in Poland. It was in 1989, when Round Table Talks took place that confirmed the end of Communist regime in Poland.

⁶ Round Table Talks conducted in Warszawa between democratic opposition and Communist government during 1989. Main achievements of the talks are: legalisation of independent trade unions, introduction of the office of President (thereby annulling the power of the Communist party general secretary), formation of a Senate. Consequently, real political power was moved into hands of parliament (Sejm and Senat) and president. The sessions paved the way to a free and democratic Poland as well as the abolition of communism in Poland.

⁷ Editor in chief of Gazeta Wyborcza, daily broadsheet that promotes liberal views in politics and economy.

restore the rule of Truth (ibid: 349)'. What is more, Gowin argues that circles of Radio Maryja believe nation to be God's creation and not History's, therefore attack on Church is as much the same thing as attack on the nation itself. Author also contemplates the idea of schism in Polish Church due to Radio Maryja's disobedience towards the hierarchy as well as the station's right-wing, not so much, evangelical ideology. The research then needs to establish if Radio Maryja listeners identify with ideas of closed Catholicism. If so, do they believe that being Polish means being Catholic? Do they believe that the only way of overcome the death civilisation⁸ is the dedication to Radio Maryja?

Despite the dominating tendency for analysis of propaganda or radio's ideology, there have been few studies that shifted the attention to the people. Even though the primary researches in the studies were not based on the qualitative methods but archival sources or content analysis, they are still worth discussing for their academic conceptions.

A BA study discusses Radio Maryja as sociological phenomenon (Pyziak, P. 2002). The main drawback of it is the fact the author did not pursue the field research but acquired archival sources. Yet, the paper highlights several facts worth further inquiry. Firstly, it occurred to the author that word 'follower' would be more suitable than the 'audience' in relation to people listening to Radio Maryja since they are believed to not listen to other stations. Secondly, the dissertation concludes on Radio Maryja's existential therapy and its strong ties with the listeners. Therefore, it lies in the research's aims to learn whether listeners of Radio Maryja consume other media. Next, the existential therapy and strong ties station has with the listeners seem to be the qualities the station is largely valued for, hence it is predictable to come across this themes during the fieldwork.

Second study, a MA on national Catholicism (Wiatrów, M. 2002) recognises Radio Maryja to be part of the movement. Thesis also debates station's popularity and rejects

⁸ The term 'death civilisation' refers to Rydzyk's interpretation of the West where abortion and homosexuality are socially acceptable. He argues that both abortion and homosexuality are against natural laws of reproduction and pose a threat to humankind.

stereotypes the broadcaster is usually associated with. In addition, the study points out complex reasons people listen to it. On the contrary to typical opinions that

[Radio Maryja – M.P.] is a broadcaster of...expansionist lobby group whose strategy bases on elements of bigotry and frustration as consequences of political and socio-economical transformations (Nitecki, J. 2002: 70),

author argues that the station attempts to find an alternative path for those worshippers who do not feel the need of close contact with the hierarchy. According to the study, the station is the medium bridging faith through the bonds between individuals. Moreover, it claims that station embraces the cultural and sociological changes that are happening in the country. Radio Maryja therefore is not only a medium for the wronged by life but also people educated and conscious in their choices, so the radio for them is a station that fulfils needs of national and Catholic views. Even if these conclusions are only backed by the content analysis of radio broadcasts, it is beneficial looking at, as it may undermine the modern stereotypes about nationalism or fundamentalism. Furthermore, findings could reveal patterns or facts about the movement of national Catholicism.

Foundation Lux Vertias⁹ over the years has published many books about Radio Maryja but considering foundation's ownership these materials serve propagandistic purposes. Only few give some useful information, *Yes-Yes, No-No* by Rydzyk (2002) is an account of the founder who remarks upon his struggles to run the radio station. It provides with the Rydzyk's principles on faith and conceptions of Church. Following the title Rydzyk says:

you have to be: yes,yes; no, no, because anything other than that, comes from evil (ibid: 46).

Rydzyk's black and white voice on the modern life could generate further questions whether the listeners share similar point of view as Father Director¹⁰.

⁹ Foundation run and owned by Tadeusz Rydzyk; a publishing outlet to Radio Maryja. See the appendix E for more information.

¹⁰ Father Director is Rydzyk's official address.

Another Lux Veritas publication (Kawecki, J. Jaskiewicz, K. Chorodzka, J. 2002) is a literary retrospective on Radio Maryja's ten-year existence. Chapter 'Radio Triptych' argues that the limiting the Church¹¹ to charity work and sacramental duties is wrong in its entirety for the Catholic Church feels responsible for the current shape of social life. Moreover, 'Radio Triptych' points out three parts that structure ideological message of the station. It is the Virgin Mary who is beloved by many Poles and now a radio's patron. It is the Church whom Radio Maryja protects and lastly, it is the Motherland that is worshiped on air. Basing on these findings, the research needs to look at the way listeners perceive the station, if they also recognise 'Three Mothers' (ibid: 94) as moral and ideological mothers of the airwave community.

CONCLUSION

In spite that theories of media effects have evolved over the past decades, the problem of media impact still continues to be central for scholarship. The focus has shifted on the audiences and recognised the complexity of media consumption. In fact, attention has been assigned to contexts in which media are received, how messages are understood and how interpretation is subject to cultural background. What is more, the interpretive communities model has here a potential to explore religious media audiences that are united both by the broadcaster and religion.

Referring to literature on media and religion, there seem to be three paradigms (Hoover. 2002) that look at religious broadcasting as distortion of real spirituality, means of propaganda and the institutional power. However, not much attention has been drawn to investigate the nature of audiences. There are only some papers that brought new perspective to the scholar tradition by uncovering people's motivations and the sense of community that religious broadcaster provided people with.

¹¹ In the above chapter, author uses Church and Radio Maryja like synonyms; therefore acknowledging Radio Maryja as a part of the Church hierarchy.

Radio Maryja may have the potential to unite and create a community of religious and opinion ties, just like any other programme or medium but the issue becomes more complex since it is as equally a community as it is religious broadcaster. When it comes to its audience, there are assumptions of particular demographic nature. ‘Mohair berets’ are more likely to be victims of transition that seek answers for their unsuccessful life on air of the station. The interpretive community model can help to create the real profile of the listeners.

Lastly, it is worth asking, not how audiences read religious media, but also how this is possible within their social context, and how does the engagement contribute to their lives. What is the role of religious broadcasting for the individual and for the broader society? The following chapters of the dissertation will focus on the study of what are the reasons for listening Radio Maryja and what values it represents for both the listeners and non-listeners.