IS IT ALL ABOUT THE NEW MEDIA CONVERGENCE? UNVEILING THE AUDIENCE STRATEGIES OF POSTMODERN TELEVISION

Abstract

The post-television adopt media convergence opportunities in order to activate the so-called passive audiences by enabling efficiently the use of internet; by combining the television watching practice with the opportunities such as interaction and participation that internet incorporate. Even though this emphasis on interaction and participation has an emancipatory aspect concerning the practical positioning of TV audiences, it also has an ilusional character imposing a new kind of consumerism and interdependence which nourished by audiences’ multi-identities. This binary character of post-television constitutes the problematic of this study which aims to unveil the ideology beneath creating a new technology depended active viewership. Accordingly, departing from a critical perspective oriented by political economy and cultural studies, this paper aims to provide a better understanding of this tension by focusing descriptively on audience strategies of some Post-TV formats like Big Brother and Survivor.

Keywords: Media convergence, Interactivity, Postmodern television, Big Brother, Survivor
HERŞEY YENİ MEDYA YAKINSAMASIYLAYI İLGİLİ? POSTMODERN TELEVİZYONUN İZLEYİCİ STRATEJİLERİNİN ÖRTÜSÜNÜ KALDIRMAK

Öz

Günümüz Post-Televizyonu bir medya yakınsaması olarak internet ve Web’in sunduğu etkileşim olanaklarıyla televizyon izleme pratığını bir araya getirecek televizyon izleyicisi aktif hale getirme iddiasındadır. Her ne kadar bu vurgu TV izleyicisinin bu pratik konumlanışıyla ilgili özgürleştirici bir söylem içere de çokkümliki izleyicilikten beslenen tüketim ve karşılıklı bağımlılığa dayalı bir yanılsamayı da bize sunmaktadır. Post-televizyon bu ikili ve gerilimli karakteri yeni teknolojilere bağlı aktif izleyiciği yaratan ideolojinin örtüsünü kaldırmayı amaçlayan bu çalışmanın temel sorunsalını oluşturmaktadır. Aynı zamanda, ekonomi politik ve kültürel çalışmaların sunduğu eleştirel perspektiften yola çıkarak bu çalışma Big Brother ve Survivor gibi popüler Post-TV formatlarının izleyici stratejilerine odaklanarak söz konusu gerilimi anlamaya yönelikte çalıştır männi hedeflemektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Medya yakınsama, Etkileşim, Postmodern televizyon, Big Brother, Survivor

INTRODUCTION

When we decide to discuss the media convergence and the fact that the new media environment is characterized specifically by this term, we inevitably find ourselves on a slippery ground, on which classical debates on mass media have turned upside down. As Jenkins (2004: 34) states, we are entering an era where media will be everywhere and we will use all kinds of media in relation to each other. This envisages new tensions and new process of transition shaped by this new media environment. In the heart of this tensions and transitions, television occupies a crucial place in order to be part of this new media landscape by underlining the new economic dynamics, especially new corporate branding opportunities. According to the new media economy television has to be emancipated from national boundaries and to achieve new global markets. Following this, format producing and programming, use of Web as a new tool of interactivity and participation can be considered as dominant strategies of today’s television, which are enabled by both new media marketing and new active audience, and by their demand for collaborations with the producers (Moran and Malbon, 2006: 10; Jenkins, 2004: 36). The visible part of media convergence in new television landscape effectively benefits from these two aspects by emphasizing especially on the use of Internet.

In our case the post-television as being a centre for format producing adopt these strategies, by particularly underlining the importance of active audiences having different socio-cultural characteristics. Thus, the main method that the Post-TV prefer to use in this process is to enable efficiently the use of internet, by combining the television watching practice with the opportunities such as interaction and participation that internet incorporate. It’s obvious that this emphasis on interaction and participation has an emancipatory aspect concerning the practical positioning of TV audiences, but contrarily, it also has an ilusional character which imposes a new kind of consumerism and interdependence which nourished by audiences’ so-called multi-identities. This binary character of post-television constitutes the problematic of this study which aims to unveil the ideology beneath creating a new technology depended active
viewership. Accordingly, departing from a critical perspective oriented by political economy and cultural studies, this paper aims in general to provide a better understanding of this tension by focusing descriptively on audience strategies of some Post-TV formats like Big Brother and Survivor.

The two aspects of media convergence and convergence culture shaped by new corporate media logic and by the term of “collective intelligence (Levy, 1997)” constitute the main analysis framework of this paper. These two terms as categorized by Jenkins (2006), bring forward participatory culture framed by new economic dynamics. But also we are considering here the problematic of collective intelligence as a part of discourses of postmodernity which especially attribute greater importance to emancipatory characteristics of new viewership. The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. In the next section, we will try to clarify the term media convergence by emphasizing mostly on its economic and cultural aspect related to postmodernity. In section two we will explain the postmodern television phenomenon which benefits from media convergence, by focusing its strategies of production and programming, and interrogating them with the terms of participation, interactivity, format programming in order to conceptualize the ideology of active audiences of Post TV. The last section will discuss the specific TV formats like Survivor, Big Brother and The Voice in Turkey in the light of the analysis framework that we mentioned above.

DEFINING THE MEDIA CONVERGENCE AND POSTMODERN TELEVISION

We can easily say that the discussions about media convergence focus mainly on the technological aspects of the phenomenon. But this should be considered as only one side of the medallion. As Jenkins (2004: 34) pointed out, media convergence is more than simply a technological shift and it also alters the relationship between existing technologies, industries, markets, genres and audiences. The technological aspect of the phenomenon highlights mostly the use of new telecommunication technologies which makes possible for individuals to reach too many different media content at the same time and/or with the same device. The best example for this kind of use of new media is smart phones. They are certainly not simply telecommunications devices anymore; they also allow us to play games, record and edit videos, surf on the Internet, receive and send photographs or text messages, even watching IPTV’s or interacting with them. Departing from this example, the crucial role of technology in media convergence seems evident. But it is also evident or worth to discuss that despite its rhetoric of “democratizing media”, this shift is considered as being driven by economic calculations and not only by some broad mission to empower the public. In order to understand more clearly this contradictory character of media convergence, it will be useful to understand the term more holistically.

As Jenkins (2006: 2) defined, convergence can generally mean the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who will choose to go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want. He underlines clearly the fact that in the media convergence world the economical exchange value of the media product is important more than anything else. In this world, “every important story gets told, every brand gets sold, and every consumer gets courted across multiple media platforms (Jenkins, 2006: 3).” And this exchange seems to be guaranteed by the concentration of media ownership which tries to embody diverse media solutions from telecommunication to games or film to broadcast or
Is it all about the new media convergence? Unveiling the audience strategies of postmodern television

Publishing. This multidimensional economical facet of the convergence aims to dominate to media production environment. But in fact, beyond this clearly visible world, rests the main aspect of the media convergence: the participatory convergence culture...

Media convergence needs the perpetual circulation of media content across different media systems, competing economies, and national borders, as well as consumers’ active participation in order to continue its existence. This is not only about the simple use of different telecommunication devices as it is mostly comprehended, but rather being part of an active exchange system which produces new cultural codes. As Jenkins emphasized, the convergence, above all, represents a cultural shift as consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content (Jenkins, 2006: 3). This search makes the consumers’ active participation into the media content indispensable, and underlines the importance of a participatory culture.

For many, this participatory culture characterized with media convergence can also be conceptualized under the frameworks proposed by postmodernism and/or the condition of postmodernity (Lyotard, 1984; Harvey, 1989; Jameson, 1991). Identified with the decline of meta-narratives, fragmentation of the modern self and modern holistic culture, postmodernity highlights the crucial role of an active, multi-identified individual who is in continuous interrelationship with media driven culture. In the heart of this media culture television has a crucial place as a cultural form as Williams (1974) indicated before-by benefiting from all the opportunities of media convergence, mostly the interactive and participative characteristics of the Internet. With 1980’s, television has undergone a massive change which can be considered as “postmodernization process”. As Ian Ang (1996: 3) mentioned this postmodernization process comprehends “complex range of developments such as pluralization, diversification, commercialization, commodification, internationalization, decentralization—throwing established paradigms of understanding how it operates in culture and society into disarray.”

Departing from this perspective, we can discuss the relation between postmodernity and media convergence in at least two different aspects in regard to the short history of postmodernity.

The first aspect can be driven from a political economic perspective underlining the fact that economical characteristics of media convergence are related to some “mover” of the postmodern culture. As Ang (1996: 3) indicated these characteristics can be considered as “increasingly global, transnational, post-industrial, post- Fordist capitalism, with its voracious appetite to turn ‘culture’ into an endlessly multiplying occasion for capital accumulation.” From this critical point of view all the programming and producing strategies of postmodern television are designed to be in service of the new capitalism which tries to benefit from this “so-called” emancipatory culture. As a result, the participatory character of convergence becomes really problematic as it has a strong need for a kind of self-legitimization at a cultural level.

This problematic state can also be traced in the second aspect of the media convergence which is related to a new kind of individualistic culture shaped in everyday life formed within a postmodern condition. Starting from the end of 1960’s we bear witness to an age through which a strong rebellious individualistic culture has appeared. The children of the welfare state, without having any material restrictions or concerns for the future, focused more on ontological issues. As Pekman underline clearly, these children of the postwar welfare society has tried to express themselves more openly in order to create a more pluralistic, emancipated discourse on
individual (Pekman, 1997: 29). In this period, the individuals oriented towards a new identity strategy which refuse any kind of functional roles embedded to them by society norms and/or by modern traditions –like being a proletarian, fertility, soldiery and/or citizenship (Touraine, 2002: 232). These roles, conceptualized by the binary character of modernity have now been seen like strong restrictions on the primer existences of this new individual. The new individual who tries to become free of all these modern boundaries, set off on a quest for some ontological foundations which will legitimize her/his multiple identities.

These efforts seem to be in harmony with the epistemological affirmations of emerging postmodernism which underline the importance of the independent self. This is also related with the collapse of the dichotomy between authors and readers, producers and consumers (Dunn, 1998: 96) as the poststructuralist approaches has often argued. “The death of the author” (Foucault, 1977) represents this poststructuralist argument by underlining that everything is “representation” and that there is no such thing as a socially and culturally constructed subject (Wakefield, 1990; Dunn, 1998: 96). As Dunn (1998: 96) remarked, in this point of view “the positing of an ‘author’ of a ‘work’ is untenable since ‘the subject’ is only constituted in discourse, or more generally the ‘text’, and subjectivity in general is inseparable from the processes of signification constituting the culture.” The constitution of self in a postmodern discourse represents also the ontological positioning of Postmodern TV, which is based on this “producer-consumer” self. But, the ontological positioning of this “producer-consumer” self seems to be in demand of a convergence culture while a postmodern self would never choose to have a single and constant identity. In opposition to modern character of traditional television, postmodern TV transforms its strategy of target-audience by following in a way the post-structuralist discourses mentioned above. The new audience of postmodern television must and can be a consumer and producer at the same time as he/she participate the television narrative by means of different communication technologies and/or programming strategies.

FROM MODERN TO POSTMODERN: THE SHIFT IN AUDIENCE STRATEGIES

Before these transformations, which are more visible in 1990’s, traditional TV broadcasting had very clear modern characteristics. As Ian Ang emphasized, this television benefits from the special context of 1950s and 60s where modernity based economic wealth and ‘western values’ are promoted by modern societies. According to Ang (1996: 4), “these modern societies thought of themselves in self-contained, national terms, each capable of maintaining order and harmony through the consent of the vast majority of the population. This was a modernity ideally built out of a nationally coherent, if not culturally homogeneous citizenry, whose private lives were organized within nuclear families living in comfortable, suburban middle-class homes. Television, typically institutionalized in the centralized mode of broadcasting (Williams 1974; Ellis 1982), was thought to play a central role in the orchestration of the millions of these individual families into the national imaginary, the rhythms and rituals of the life of the nation.”

Among this perspective, the television audience is considered as a historically constructed self, who has to behave in less than perfect ways, “perfect that is in the modern sense of orderly, responsible, willing (Ang, 1996:4).” Modern television problematized its audience strategy upon their potential confirmation to, or disruption of, ‘normal’ social processes and ordered social structure where consumerism (e.g. USA) or citizenship (e.g. Europe) is the meta-common values. The basic strategy of this television is to act like a father
Is it all about the new media convergence? Unveiling the audience strategies of postmodern television

protecting his children, showing them what/how to do and/or say; to define strictly who will a part of the television narrative be by mostly utilizing a unidirectional flow of communication. The ‘Paleo TV’, as it is defined by Umberto Eco (1984) reflects the golden age of the television by buckling down to the values of modernity represented above, especially promoting the fact that the culture for everyone pass through the television (Missika, 2006:12). Missika defines this archaic period of television as a moment of “shortage” where the audiences have not much of choices. Especially in Europe the broadcasting was monopolized by the state and the audience have mostly only one TV channel to watch in which the program flow is linearly constituted. The only way that an audience has the opportunity to “take parole” in a TV program or ‘show’ is to be present at the studio as a spectator or having some important ‘merits’ like being a champion, great creator or notable etc. In addition to this no matter who we are, “we have to be there in our Sunday bests and we have to behave in a very correct way (Ramonet, 2001: 267).”

From the 1980s we bear witness a critical change in audience conception of television in parallel with the transformations of media environment. As a result of political economic transformation witnessed in Western modern world -e.g. neo-liberalism, post-fordism and global consumerism etc.-, the state monopolization of media has lost most of its legitimate basis and thus, TV institutions are quickly privatized. As Ang (1996:9) emphasized “scarcity has been replaced by abundance, state control by commercial initiative.” The developments in communication technologies such as network cables and/or satellites accelerated the privatization process by enabling the new profit opportunities. Thematic TV channels, transnational flow of TV products like series, films and/or shows are now in service of this media which is embedded to the mechanisms of this new global capitalism. Consequently, the monopolized television market has fragmentised with several national and/or thematic TV channels using cable and satellite technologies which aims to reach much more clearly defined target audiences.

It’s clear that the technological aspect of this transformation is crucial enough, but on the other side of medallion we bear witness to a critical change in audience conception of television. As this shift definitely has an economic impetus, it also has a cultural background which has its origins in the debates of postmodernism that we mentioned before. Ang (1996: 9) relates these changes with the signs of the irrevocable postmodernization of television, which has corroborated a radically altered landscape for television audiences. But it is obvious that the postmodernization of television comprehends a new audience culture shaped within the political economic struggles of 1980’s. As Ian Ang pointed out very briefly a transition from Fordist to post-Fordist consumption, where audience markets are increasingly thought of in terms of ‘niches’, made up of flexible tastes and preferences, rather than in terms of fixed demographics is at work now. As the level of competition increased, TV shows are no longer produced for an anonymous mass audience, but “customized” for specific, hard-to-get audiences. The ‘active audience’, then, is both an expression and a consequence of what Lash and Urry (1987; 1994) have called disorganized capitalism, where the instabilities of the free market economy are built into the production system itself, which has now embraced notions of flexibility, mobility and flow (Ang, 1996: 9).

This political economic will of television coincide with the postmodernist demands of TV audiences, especially the ones that await more room for their representations on the screen. As Missika (2006: 20) remarked the “public, impatient with a TV which is too ‘messenger’, aspires to a desecrated media.” This means that –with the help of the fragmentation of and
Is it all about the new media convergence? Unveiling the audience strategies of postmodern television

competition in the media industry- the audience will have much more choices that will represent themselves more intimately. The TV genres and/or formats like “talk-show” or “reality show” are clear examples of how the television of 80’s embeds the stories of the ordinary people in TV narratives. But as Missika underlined, this is not restricted with specific genres; from TV series to news programs we bear witness to a new conception of programming in which the ordinary life of ordinary people ascended the throne (Missika, 2006: 20). Before, the relationship between TV and its audience was a “teacher-student” relation which is arising from the fact that TV is a sacred medium telling always what’s good for the public. But starting from 1980’s, it is transformed to the one of “entertainer-entertained” (Missika, 2006: 21). The neo-television of 1980’s –as conceptualized by Umberto Eco- considered the audience as the ‘victims’ of the crises of the late modernity (e.g. unemployment stemming from the economic crisis, petrol shocks etc.) and as a result of this, it built its audience strategy on the relaxation of the individuals. At the other side, not only individuals are in need to forget the harsh everyday reality, they also need to exist, to feel alive, and to talk about their problems. Consequently, their demand for a television which will help them to come out of the depression seems coincided with the offers of neo-television.

During 1980’s and the first half of the 90’s, we experience a period of transformation from modern to postmodern while the corporate concerns of media industry has more and more realised the profiting potential of active audiencehood. This development can also be related to the contribution of new technologies which enable activeness of the audiences. As Ang (1996: 9) emphasized during that time, the cable, satellite and video cassette recorders have begun to destabilize and decentralize the institutional and technological arrangements of TV provision which had been in place for decades. But these were clearly not enough for both audiences and producers, while television is still quintessentially a unidirectional medium. By the end of the 90’s, this ‘nature’ of television started to change in so called “revolutionary” ways. Especially the very new communication technologies like mobile communication with its tools (mobile-smart phones, 3G to 5G transmissions), Internet-Web and IPTV have clearly affected the classical-modern unidirectional audience strategy of television. As we mentioned before, key term here still seems to be the media convergence especially in two senses:

1. The augmentation of viewers’ choices (as linear program flow of television has been broken down while the audiences can follow their favourites TV shows whenever and wherever they what... “Choice’ is now promoted as one of the main appeals of television to its audiences and is presented as the ultimate realization of audience freedom.”( Ang, 1996: 10))

2. Opportunities of interactivity and participation for audiences.

The media convergence claims that there might be a flow of content across multiple media platforms and the audiences might choose to go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want. The critical point here is that all these new audience practices seem to be enabled due to the convergence of new communication technologies with the traditional television.

The television of 2000s –both as a technological device and as an institution- is not a simple television anymore. As a technological device, it is also now “smart” –like mobile phones- which can be used as a computer, video recorder, communication device, game centre... The users of the smart TVs of nowadays may watch TV channels; listen to the diverse radio
stations; surf on the internet, do video chat and/or play games. As Missika (2006) underlined this is the “end of the television”; the television that we have been used to for almost half a decade. Instead of this television which has fallen into disuse, a Post-television takes place; as a multi-functioned device fully integrated to the converged media system. Quintessentially, the convergence of media, especially that of television seems to have a crucial role within this transformation process. This process also shows us the institutional aspect of the post-television.

The technological developments in media system are closely related to the demands of the audiences of media, even though these demands are often considered as manipulated. By both senses, new media corporations try to merge different media services with each other in order to satisfy the ‘postmodern desires’ of audiences in which interaction with and participation to occupy crucial place. As Moran and Malbon (2006: 10-11) pointed out, with the emergence of multi-channel environment, TV programmers have been obliged to take into consideration some different producing strategies in order to regain their audiences. At this point, the demands of audiences and the programming strategies compromise with each other, mostly around the very controversial notions of interaction and participation.

Before discussing these two notions, we have to underline the fact that the term ‘participation’ is mostly associated with interactivity to which in this paper we will attach more importance. Holmes (2004), in her article arguing the interactive audience in Reality TV, highlights the centrality of ‘interactivity’ in the contemporary media landscape and the ways in which it is increasingly structuring the interface between industry, text and audience, by referring the following quote: “Not long ago a [TV] commissioning editor’s first question would always be: ‘Yes, but how much does it cost?’ Nowadays, it’s just as likely to be: ‘Yes, but is it interactive?’” (Schreiber, 2002: 1). This question shows us perfectly the changing preferences of post-television which promote first of all the interactive audiencehood. Interactivity, especially in terms of TV producing, is a controversial issue. Many scholars emphasized the ambiguity surrounding theoretical discussions of the notion (Kim and Sawhney, 2002; Kiousis, 2002). Interactivity is mostly associated with new communication technologies, media convergence and the shift in unidirectional model of communication (Holmes, 2004: 217). But as Spiro Kiousis (2002: 356) points out, “concept of interactivity has variously been used to describe the context in which messages are exchanged, a property of the technology itself, or even a perception in users’ minds.” In the level of practical use, the interactivity used by television utilises the software and the hardware at the same time. Software here can be defined as the television narrative or text which demands the active participation of the audience. Hardware is mostly understood as interactive TV which is a media system or technology enabling the ways of interaction for television audiences; in terms of programme services, scheduling, information and advertising (Jensen and Toscan, 1999: 16). But we have to clarify the fact that technologies enabling the convergence of Internet with the classical television have critically evolved since the early 2000s. Especially the invention of ‘smart TV’ which operates as a personal computer, gaming centre, TV/Radio, shopping mall, advertising etc. at the same time and IPTV (Internet protocol television) as an hardware which makes possible the interactive uses of viewers has multiplied the opportunities of interactivity. Although the technology beneath this practice of interactivity is significant enough, the software, in other words the text/narrative dimension of interactivity can be considered as the main ideological motive behind the new audience strategy of post-television. As Holmes (2004: 2018) underlined, by putting too much forward the technological aspects of interactivity, one might
Is it all about the new media convergence? Unveiling the audience strategies of postmodern television

underestimate the ideological dimensions –“idea of agency” as she call it- surrounding the practice. At the level of software, it is evident that the audiences are encouraged to use ‘spin off’ technologies in order to interact with the shows like Reality TVs. These fundamental interaction and/or cooperation-participation strategies of post-television derive clearly from the postmodern needs and demands of both viewers and the TV industry. In fact, as Holmes pointed out, what these post-television formats do is to take the basic concept of feedback and, first, make it more central to the discursive organization and structure of the programme; and, second, articulate its possibilities across a range of comparatively ‘new’ media sites. By doing this, a kind of so-called “win and win negotiation” takes place between audiences and television. In this process, we witness the empowerment of the viewers or new liberties of action (Kim and Sawhney, 2002: 221); within emerging discourses that are particularly important when it comes to the rhetoric (and political significance) of interactivity in post-television formats like Big Brother and Survivor. Many scholars argue that even though it seems that interactivity radically alters the power relations between audience and text, the actual range of opportunities available to the audience to influence “the story” was fairly limited (Roscoe, 2001; Tincknell and Raghuram, 2002).

Departing from this critical point of view, in the following chapter, we will try to analyse descriptively some popular Reality-TV shows as the examples of post-television in order to discuss the fundamental audience strategies around the concepts that we mentioned above.

UNVEILLING THE AUDIENCE STRATEGIES OF POST-TELEVISION: EXAMPLES OF BIG BROTHER AND SURVIVOR

In this paper, organized as an descriptive literature review based analyse, we will focus mostly on two very popular and effective examples of post-television which are often seemed as reality-TV formats: Big Brother and survivor. The common characteristics of these shows can be traced on their relationship with their audiences; as this relationship is mostly emerged at the level of interactivity. These two formats are considered as global success as both of them are broadcasted in more than sixty country covering all over the world. This mythical success of the shows derives from the ‘urgent desire’ –as Mark Andrejevic emphasises- to close the gap that has sustained both entertainment programming and the advertising which has been supported for more than half a century (Andrejevic, 2004: 9): “the gap between the unfulfilled passive viewer and the impossible fullness of the screen idol/advertising model.” As we underlined before, reality shows of postmodern television promise to collapse the distance that separates those on either side of the screen by cultivating the fantasy that “it really could be you up there on that screen-just send in your head shots and a homemade video, or call this number now (Andrejevic, 2004: 9).”

The point highlighted by Andrejevic is very critical in the sense of showing how these formats’ existence depends on audience’s interaction. As we mentioned before, this interaction practices depend largely on both software and hardware of interactivity. Both for Big Brother and Survivor –as they benefit from the very same formulate of reality television- the software and hardware are quite similar with some particular differences.

Big Brother is the phenomenal Reality TV show created by the format producer Endemol and first aired in Netherlands in 1999. The main format of the show was based on documenting the lives of several people (changes from ten to twenty) who had agreed to spend
hundred days living their lives in front of a national television audience and competing for an approximately $500,000 grand prize. While globalizing, from 1999 to 2016, this format has been updated, transformed but preserved its fundamental characteristics. In Turkey, the version adapted from the Australian version “Taxi Orange” aired firstly in 2001. From 2001 to 2007 six episodes has been aired and gained also remarkable success. After 8 years Big Brother Turkey returned on TV, by adding some new media convergence strategies into the format. This new version also reached significant TV ratings. The reasons beneath all this success can be discussed around several aspects but we would like to focus mostly and briefly on the audience strategies shaped around hardware and software related interactions.

The media convergence is surely one aspect of this, as it enables the hardware dimension of interaction. Big Brother has for the first time converged two different media – TV and Internet- in order to achieve more audiences. “The user-viewers” of this show may watch the highlights from the show and the elimination procedure live on TV; while they have the full access to what’s going on the Big Brother house on its website. But this is clearly not enough for the younger generations at the level of interaction as they are logged on to the Internet to chat about the television series while they either watch the show on television or online (Andrejevic 2004: 63). The young audiences of Big Brother might watch the live Internet feeds from the Big Brother house, and send intermittent messages to one of the online chat rooms devoted to the program. Even at work they can continue to this activity, because the video and audio portions of the show were available over the Internet and all three activities (watching, chatting and working) could take place on the same computer monitor (Andrejevic 2004: 63). But around the end of 2000’s, with the emergence of social media, especially Facebook, the efficiency of chat rooms diminishes while all of the chat room activities are transferred to those media. The official Facebook accounts of the shows becomes the real “arena” for those who would like to share comments.

The hardware dimension of interactivity isn’t limited to online chat rooms but still related to them. It’s obvious enough that 24 hours webcasting of Big Brother house via internet makes possible a sort of participation of television viewers which is enabled through continuous access. With this kind of access the viewers consider themselves as a part of the show while being totally informed of the whole “daily life” of the contestants give them the impression of controlling the Big Brother content.

Considering the currency and relatively long history of Big Brother, it’s quite clear that its different versions have enabled various strategies of hardware dimension of interaction which are mostly related to the show itself. As we underlined above, this characteristic which can also be named as “in the show aspect” of hardware dimension of interaction can be seen in the use of new communication technologies enabling audiences’ voting procedures.

Nevertheless, for Big Brother, the hardware dimension of interaction can be followed not only “in the show” but also “outside the show” aspect which comprises especially spin off’s of Big Brother, the use of social media and/or home video/webcast. We have mentioned that the use of social media, especially Facebook takes over the chat room activities where user-audiences gain the opportunity of commenting on the show and of interaction with the other fans. Here we can highlight the crucial role of media convergence “converging” an “outside the TV” practice with a TV show itself. The fans on Facebook might get informed from the news about the show; participate on debates mostly on the activities of contestants that they support.
and interact with other fans. This whole interaction process usually continues in an endless flow, by sometimes reaching an enormous amount of comments and likes and other kinds of Facebook activities. For example, on the official Facebook site of the latest USA version of Big Brother, more than three million fans get together and more than a thousand comments on an average are made by the fans in 24 hours. The contexts of the debates are mostly around the show’s content, especially the contestants’ daily actions – their conflicts with each other, the relationships as friends and/or potential lovers etc. It is obvious that on Facebook there is a kind of strong interaction with Big Brother content, and also that this interaction is enabled by the media convergence itself. But as this content is only limited consciously with the context of the show, the fans’ interactions stay in frontiers of consumerism veiled by the format. In order to corroborate this, the format reaches a tone of emancipation which is highly illusive, emphasising on the relationship with interaction and control: “The more you interact, the more you’re in control...” The “control” mentioned here by the format underlines two things: Control on the TV show content (even its “destiny”), control of one’s own destiny. Interacting with others, telling-showing them what’s reel and true empowers the user-audience in terms of self-existence. But this empowerment seems to stay in the ilusional world of Big Brother, as the reel politics of the reel world demand real actions.

This critic can be exercised for the other aspects of the “outside of the show” element but which is rather related to software dimension of interactivity. For Big Brother, spin off TV Shows in which debates and comments on the latest events are performed in a TV studio, usually with participation of the spectators are considered as the opportunities of regathering the TV audience in front of the screen. These shows give the audiences the chance of getting informed of the resume of the show content, the latest agenda of the show and the fans’ discussions. On the other hand, these shows are also used by the producers in order to manipulate the audiences’ interests and the “story” of the show by underlining certain subjects. The spin off show named as “The Ones that you didn’t hear nor see” (Görmedikleriniz Duymadıklarınız –GD) of the previous version of Big Brother aired in Turkey was a good example for this. From an open text/active audience perspective highlighted mostly by cultural studies, it can be considered as a public arena where audiences have merged their knowledge on their daily life and the facts represented on the show (Binark ve Kılıçbay, 2004: 86) by their presence lively in the studio or -using a kind of media convergence- participating to show by telephone or by means of other telecommunication devices. However, the show by limiting this discussion content with only the show itself creates an illusion of participation for audience, where audience tend to think they control everything about the show or even themselves.

In postmodern television, media convergence and its “trademark”, interactivity, is often veiled in the shows’ design/format. Especially as a software dimension of interactivity, we often witness the use of production process as a content element by which the audiences are convinced to be totally in control of the show. In this case, the show produces not only certain program contents but also the discourse of perpetual interaction of the audiences to the show via SMS, mobile phone apps, official web site and/or social media. In our case, Big Brother –at the early versions- didn’t have too much discourse on interactivity; while the spin of show “GD” was emphasizing strongly on interactivity as a continuous discourse. But as we witnessed in the last season (November 2015-March 2016) some up to date versions of interactivity added directly to Big Brother format as picturing “selfies” with the special selfie cameras located in the house. The production team shares these photos on social media platforms in order to enable
Is it all about the new media convergence? Unveiling the audience strategies of postmodern television

the interaction of the audience. Merging this hardware and software type of interactivity, it’s obvious that the format tends to put forward new methods and discourses of a participatory show.

Considering our analyse matrix comprehending hardware and software dimension of interactivity by one side, “in the show” and “outside of the show” by the other side, one of the most popular postmodern television format Survivor deserves to be interrogated more profoundly. Survivor is a reality game show comprehending different show features including game, drama, contest etc. As Andrejevic (2004: 195) underlined, the show’s phenomenal success depends mostly on its ability to manipulate the inherent tension in reality programming between making an appeal to the “reality” of the spectacle and staging this spectacle so that it fulfills the expectations that audiences have for prime-time drama: “fast-paced action and complicated plot lines that provide both suspense and resolution during a certain time slot.”

Like Big Brother, Survivor, through its seasons and various international versions, has maintained the very basic premise of the game in which sixteen to twenty contestants are split into tribes and assigned separate camps at the filming’s location, which is usually a typical tropical setting. As a tribe, the contestants must survive on the basic level by constructing shelter, building fire, looking for water, and struggling for food and other necessities for the entire length of the game, which ranges from 20 days (as in the French special seasons) to 134 days (as in some seasons of the Turkish edition). In the first half of the game (before the “merge”), the tribes overcome the challenges in order to get rewards of food, shelter, or luxury items, while others are for immunity, which will prevent the winning tribe from having to leave the island in the next Tribal Council. At Tribal Council, the tribes discuss the events of the last few days with the host asking questions, and then vote out one of their own players, eliminating them from the game. Even though the format has usually the same guidelines, the Turkish version—especially the last two seasons that we will examine briefly—has very different features regarding the effectiveness of media convergence and the interactivity strategies developed upon this. In the next paragraphs, we will try to scrutinize the interactivity strategies that the Turkish format applies by benefitting from the means of media convergence.

Especially the seasons after 2011, it’s evident that the Turkish Survivor format benefits very efficiently from the means of media convergence in order to augment its ratings. Before we start to analyse these specific aspects, it would be necessary to explain briefly the format of Turkish Survivor—especially the characteristics differentiating from the other international versions. In Turkish version, the contestants are also split into two tribe named as celebrities and volunteers. The celebrities are selected from publicly well-known people like singer, kick boxer, Olympic athlete, and models while the volunteers are selected from the “so-called” ordinary people some of whom are also models, athletes, and personalities appeared on other reality shows. All the contestants or “cast-members” participate in games as teams, get or loose rewards as teams but at the end, they face off the tension of elimination individually.

If we continue to the same analyse framework that we followed above, we might start with interrogation of the hardware and software dimension of the interaction. Unlike Big Brother, the interaction discourse embedded to show and the physical use of new communication technologies—which are designed to improve the interaction opportunities—have

1 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Survivor_(franchise)
2 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Survivor_(franchise)
to be jointly evaluated. The format highlights almost in every moment show the importance of the voting process which is clearly related to the interactivity of audiences. The use of SMS and mobile apps are continuously encouraged throughout the show, especially by the host himself. Unlike the other international versions, the audience of Turkish Survivor have the last final decision by which they designate the winner of the show via SMS and/or mobile apps. As a result the voting is considered as vital both by contestants and audiences. This kind of partnership between audiences and contestants works as a promise of reality which is integrated to the hardware and software dimension of interactivity. As Andrejevic (2004: 89) underlined the interaction –and the audience participation by proxy- procedure starts with the selection of contestants from reel people and it continues with the use of SMS and mobile apps discursively and practically.

On Survivor, that’s quite evident that various interaction discourses are maintained through the show. Especially the continuous emphasis on the “empowerment” of the audiences is remarkable. Like Big Brother, the show format depends on the fact that the whole things happening in front of the eyes of audiences are real but (unlike Big Brother) it’s much more aesthetically designed. Because of that, it’s almost impossible to see the production process as a content element by which audiences may apply a sort of control mechanism on the show. But instead of this, both contestants and the main host often emphasize on the fact that even though the game processes are very vital as they get the reward for immunity, the final decision is always up to audiences. As the Turkish Survivor is the longest version –considering the length of the game (contestants stay nearly 140 days on the island) - the eliminating procedures are designed upon this length by putting forward the voting procedures taking place in every week. Every week, the tribe which loses the immunity game writes down a member’s name as a candidate of elimination. Unlike the other versions, one of the tribe members who has won the personal immunity game says another members’ name for SMS (and mobile apps) confrontation. At this point the voting procedure starts and at the end night the most voted contestant stays in the game while the other is eliminated. This process repeats every week until the final week of the show where the final winner is only designated by the votes of audiences. This very long duration through which the audiences participate to the show by voting is a very effective interaction process. Because of the length of the show the producers need to emphasize continuously the voting procedure and this contributes clearly both software and hardware dimension of interactivity.

Another aspect related to interaction strategies of Survivor surely nourishes from the use of new media platforms and technologies. But at this point, we have to say that the utilization of the interactive web sites (such as webcast, blogs, chat rooms etc.) is rather rare comparing with the social media dedicated to Survivor. The use of social media, especially like Facebook and Instagram is at a phenomenal level in two ways: For the user-audiences, it’s a new form of public sphere where debates on Survivor content are conducted. On the other side, for producers it’s a great opportunity to get the audiences involved much more closely in the show, by informing them with the latest issues, creating new and manipulating the existing agendas. But the main issue to analyse here is surely the fact that the by means of social media the fans feel content of being informed about the existence of the ordinary people who think or feel the way they do. As Andrejevic (2004: 9) underlined, the fans may talk with each other on social media with the ease of they could identify with other fans and cast members as they are considered as ordinary, reel people not totally superstars and/or super human beings.
The debates conducted on Facebook focus usually on the actual agendas derived from the Show content. But most of these discussions comprehend the discourses of the fans concerning their identification with the contestant they have chosen to support. For example through the last season of Survivor (2016) the audiences are split into several fan groups at the beginning, but later on, certain contestants like “Avatar Atakan (the winner)”, “Serkay (the finalist)” and “Semih (4th place)” occupied the main part of the discussions. The fans of the each contestant have their own discourse reflected clearly on Facebook which is also nourished by the conflicts between the contestants. In this sense, the example of a popular contestant “Semih Öztürk” deserves to be scrutinized more profoundly.

As we underlined above the format depends on the contradiction between the two tribes, but in order to augment the level of conflicts both in two tribes also takes place potentially contradictory personalities. Semih Öztürk, as a contestant, is such a good example for that, as he is an earlier contestant of another reality-show named as “Utopia” broadcasted in the same channel with Survivor. As a contestant even though he’s not great successor in the games, he has put himself forward with the help of the extraordinary conflicts he created consciously. His discourse throughout the show is always othering, which is often nourished by the discussions that he made with his team mates. As this specific character of him has been foreknown by the others –he was using the same strategy on Utopia- the tension between them was inevitable. On social media platforms, this discourse finds its perfect echo, as Semih’s fans show the same othering attitudes on the others contestants’ fans. This continuous contradiction taking place both on the show and on Facebook created a great setting where user-audiences interact with each other with great eagerness. This great eagerness can easily be traced on the comments of Survivor Turkey official Facebook page which is followed by 2.3 million fans. It’s not very easy to derive statistics on comments concerning especially the tensions created by Semih’s fans but yet still, when we examine the 24 hours comment traffic we can reach some results supporting our determinations mentioned above. For example, at the final day of the show (1st of June 2016) nearly three thousand comments are made. Most of the comments are made to the areas where Facebook page posted the latest information about the show, but most of the comments are not related with this information as they are above all related about who is going to win the contest. The interesting point here is that even though Semih is eliminated in the quarter final, his fans get still in to discussion with other fans preserving the same othering discourse.

Even this descriptive determination shows us the fact that the social media is a very effective media convergence tool in terms of audience interaction. But the hardware dimension of interaction is not limited to use of social media as we witness also another interaction tool as an example of media convergence: The use of home-video as an interactivity element... Unlike Big Brother, home videos loaded by audiences to the official website and/or to social media platforms are used by producers for different purposes like creating a new reward for contestants, selecting next contestant candidates and above all creating an interaction setting where audiences will feel in control of everything about the show. The use of home-videos for selecting the contestants (the members of the volunteers tribe/team are selected via the home-videos self-pictured and loaded to show’s web site) is a fundamental element because of the fact that audiences’ hopes of being a part of the show will always be kept alive. The contestants selected from the “ordinary people” like audiences will eventually create new “ordinary protagonists” with whom the audiences will identify themselves.
The last point which should be scrutinized about Survivor is a software dimension of interaction element: Spin off TV Shows... As Big Brother Spin off (GD), Survivor spin off “Survivor Panorama” is a daily platform where debates and comments on the latest events are performed in a TV studio, with two hosts (a male, former Survivor contestant and a woman) and with also participation of the spectators. Like Big Brother, this show is clearly considered as an opportunity of regathering the TV audience in front of the screen; by giving the audiences the chance of getting informed of the resume of the show content, the latest agenda of the show and the fans’ discussions. On the other hand, these shows are also used by the producers in order to manipulate the audiences’ interests and the “story” of the show by underlining certain subjects. Every five days of week, the show entertains two guests, the eliminated contestants, the contestants of previous seasons and some celebrities in order to set the agenda of the day. The discussions on the Panorama are often being related to social media content, so that a holistic interactivity process can be enabled.

CONCLUSION

Postmodern television is surely characterized by media convergence, As Jenkins (2004) emphasized, which comprehends the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who will choose to go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want. The most important and effective technology enabled by media convergence is surely internet and Web, as it is promoted as an element of emancipation for audiences. In this sense, Karl Marx’s dream seems to have been realized: “the tools and the means of production are in the hands of the workers (Andrejevic, 2004: 13).”

On the other hand the postmodern television which benefits from the consequences of digital revolution cannot be seen as the final remedy for the he power imbalances of late-industrial society but as an attempt to resolve the contradictions that impaired its efficiency. In this sense, “the genius of the “selling of the Internet” is that the latter is equated with the former: the participation of consumers in the rationalization of their own consumption is sold as empowerment (Andrejevic, 2004: 15).”

In this paper which aims to unveil the audience strategies of postmodern television related to the media convergence phenomenon, we tried to scrutinize two international Post-TV formats: Big Brother and Survivor. As a result of the descriptive analyses of the two shows, both on Big Brother and Survivor, we witness clearly the use of media convergence tools and elements. The most effective tool used in this process is evidently interactivity strategies enabled by these shows. On producers’ side even though the whole interaction elements are considered to be provided for audiences sake – like a better watching practice, control on the story of the show etc. - the concrete consequences are controversial, especially if we take into consideration the final aim of “selling internet” that is mentioned above.

To conclude, we can adapt the statements of Andrejevic (2004: 18) underlined in his book “Reality TV” by which he tries to unveil the ideology behind the strategies of Reality TV, to our problematic concerning postmodern television’s audience strategy. According to this, postmodern television can be seen as a form of popular culture example of the extension of the monitoring gaze associated with this digital enclosure. It also envisages the existence of surveillance and interaction –which is interrelated- as a form of self-empowerment by the promoters of the online economy. Finally, it helps reposition surveillance and interaction “as the
Is it all about the new media convergence? Unveiling the audience strategies of postmodern television

guarantor of individualism and self-expression and thereby as a means of overcoming the homogeneity of mass society”.

The contemporary role of mediated interactivity—a fundamental element of media convergence—as a form of getting real is surely the main discourse of this post-television. For those who claim that this is the end of the television, there are some clear reasons especially the ones underlining the fact that the classical forms of television will not exist anymore. But on the other hand, post-television brings along with genuine characteristics like interactivity, empowerment of audiences and all the other opportunities that media convergence enable. The final question here is how this television will continue to use this... by rationalising multi-identified consumerism of audience which is veiled under emancipation or by giving them the real opportunity of empowerment.

REFERENCES


Jameson, Frederic. (1991), Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, Verso, London.


Is it all about the new media convergence? Unveiling the audience strategies of postmodern television


Survivor (Franchise); https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Survivor_(franchise), 05.07.2016.


Touraine, Alain (2002), Modernliğin Eleştirisi, YKY Cogito, İstanbul.
