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The study documents viewing habits, the significance given different genres and programs by audiences, what viewers gain from the programmes, and their perceptions of the actuality and truthfulness of such programs. The study has significant implications for program managers and society as a whole as they wrestle with the economic, cultural, and social effects of such programmes.

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ANNETTE HILL
WITH LENNART WEIBULL AND ÅSA NILSSON

Audiences and Factual and Reality Television in Sweden

Media Management and Transformation Centre
Jönköping International Business School

In conjunction with:
Communication and Media Research Institute, University of Westminster
JMG, SOM Institute, Göteborg University
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Foreword

How audiences consume and respond to content is a crucial factor in the business dynamics of media and also produces significant social and cultural effects. This book focuses on how audiences perceive and use the range of factual and reality programs, ranging from news and documentaries to lifestyle experiment and docusoaps. The book is based on an extensive survey and focus group interviews of Swedish television viewers in 2004-2005.

The research was designed and directed by Professor Annette Hill, a research fellow at the Media Management and Transformation Centre at Jönköping International Business School and a Professor at the Communication and Media Research Institute of the University of Westminster in London. The study was carried out with the help of Professor Lennart Weibull and Dr. Åsa Nilsson of Göteborgs University. Primary funding for the study was provided by the Media Management and Transformation Centre.

The study provides extensive evidence about how audiences view various channels and the ways in which they serve different wants and needs for factual and reality programs, the importance of different genres of such programs, their viewing habits for such programs, preferences for the genres and programs, and their perceptions of the actuality and truthfulness of such programs. The results provide insight into how audiences use and perceive factual and reality television programs and has significant implications for program managers and society as a whole.

The Media Management and Transformation Centre offers doctoral studies and research fellowships, provides research stipends to scholars studying relevant issues, and hosts conferences and workshops for researchers and media personnel that are designed to improve knowledge and understanding of media business issues.

Prof. Robert G. Picard, Director
Media Management and Transformation Centre
Introduction

This report presents the preliminary findings of a research project ‘Television Audiences and Factual and Reality Programming’, by Professor Annette Hill (University of Westminster, UK), with Lennart Weibull and Åsa Nilsson. The research was funded by the Media Management and Transformation Centre at Jönköping International Business School, with a small grant from the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Göteborg University, and partly carried out in co-operation with the SOM Institute, Göteborg University. This quantitative and qualitative project will provide evidence that contributes to existing debate on the ways in which viewers understand and critically engage with media content, specifically the content of factual and reality programming in Sweden.

The research presented in this report is in dialogue with a related research project conducted in Britain into the reception of news, documentary and reality television. Both reception studies will feature as a comparative analysis of adult television viewers and their responses to values and ethics within selected factual and reality genres (Hill forthcoming). The British project also addresses the findings of two reports presenting a literature review of adult media literacy in Britain (Livingstone and Thumin 2003, Livingstone et al 2005). A recommendation of both reports is that there is a lack of empirical evidence of adult media literacy. According to Livingstone et al ‘research on the audience’s understanding of television content is divided between evidence pointing to a creative, sophisticated, “media-savvy” audience and evidence pointing to an often forgetful, confused, biased or inattentive audience low in critical literacy skills’ (2005: 4). The results of the British survey in relation to adult media literacy will be published by the Office of Communications.

The case study of factual programming has been chosen as a useful means to frame audience responses to specific broadcast media content, and to address the twin issues of comprehension and critique within the framework of particular television genres. Factual programming includes a broad understanding of non-fictional programming on broadcast television, satellite, cable and digital television. The breakdown of factual programming into specific genres includes news and current affairs, documentary, and reality programmes, with further sub genres applied within each of these three categories. A case study of viewers’ understanding and critical engagement with a range of diverse factual programming allows space for a strategic analysis of an element of adult media literacy that has often been ignored within existing academic literature. Livingstone et al suggest that although ‘literature suggests that respondents understand, enjoy and trust many broadcast genres, it is less clear that audience trust is always associated with good understanding or critical
judgement’ (2005: 4). In addition, they suggest ‘barriers to media literacy include the changing forms of media representation (especially hybrid genres that blur reality and drama) and the demographics of the audience’ (2005: 4). This project therefore focuses on factual and reality programming in order to examine viewers’ understanding and critical judgement of changing forms of non-fictional representations on television.

The multi-method research conducted in this project is also a response to a growing range of quantitative and qualitative research into contemporary Swedish television audiences. For example research on media use (Rosengren 1994, Media Barometer), media and everyday life (see Reimer 1994, Jansson 2001 amongst others), the work of Höijer on TV audiences (eg 1998a, 1998b), research on children (see Felitzen 2004, 2005 amongst others), and the reception of popular culture (eg Bolin and Forsman 2002 amongst others). The aim of this multi-method audience research is to map attitudes towards factual and reality television, and also understand why viewers respond to these programmes in a variety of complex ways. It is the hope of this project that the results of this research will inform further television audience analysis based on quantitative and qualitative empirical data.

Research Questions

The research questions focus on four key issues within factual and reality programming – genre, actuality, learning, fairness.

Genre

How do adult viewers understand and evaluate the changing generic environment of Swedish factual and reality programming?

How do viewers define factual or non-fictional programming? To what extent do viewers categorize different factual and reality programmes as informative, entertaining, or both? How do viewers value different genres? How do channel expectations shape viewing attitudes and experiences?

Actuality

How do adult viewers evaluate the truth claims of different types of factual and reality programming?

What are viewers’ opinions of the truth claims of different programmes? What are viewers’ attitudes towards performance in factual and reality
programmes? Are adult viewers critically engaged with the diverse range of programmes on Swedish television?

Learning

What do adult viewers consider they learn from different types of factual and reality programming?

What type of learning might this be? Do viewers use factual programmes to help them form opinions about things?

Fairness

What attitudes do adult viewers have towards fair treatment of different social groups within news and current affairs, documentary, and popular factual programmes?

Do viewers perceive good and bad ways to treat people in factual and reality programmes? Is it important to viewers that particular social groups are treated fairly?

Research Methods

The research methods included an analysis of media content of a range of factual and reality programmes over a six month period, and a scheduling and ratings analysis of a range of programmes during the same timeframe. A series of interviews were also conducted with a range of media professionals working within Sveriges Television (SVT), TV4 and Kanal 5. This background analysis formed the basis for qualitative and quantitative audience research.

A series of semi-structured focus groups were conducted with six groups aged 16-34, and six groups aged 35-50, including a total of sixty participants altogether. The recruitment method used was quota sampling and snowball sampling. The focus groups were conducted from November 2004 to January 2005, and were held in both professional market research settings (four), and informal household settings (eight). The household settings were used to encourage more relaxed and spontaneous discussion. A series of open questions were asked regarding the four key questions of genre, actuality, learning and fairness (see Appendix Two). A game was used, whereby participants were asked to group a range of programme titles into categories and to discuss their reasons for the clusters of titles. Television clips from current affairs, documentary and reality programmes were used as visual prompts. The focus groups were audio recorded, and in addition notes were taken on general group behaviour and
body language. The audio recordings were fully translated and transcribed by the focus group monitor, and coded using NVivo.

A quantitative survey was conducted with a random sample of 2000 people. The sample included people aged 16-80 living in Sweden including foreign citizens (a more expansive discussion of methods are found in Åsa Nilsson’s chapter at the end of this report). The survey was conducted in co-operation with the SOM Institute, Göteborg University, and carried out by Kinnmark Information AB. The survey contained two open ended questions, and 37 closed questions, including various questions related to demographic variables. The quantitative research was conducted in association with Professor Lennart Weibull and Åsa Nilsson at the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication and the SOM Institute.

Mail questionnaires were collected from February 4th to April 25th 2005. The response rate was 51 per cent (with a natural sample loss of 146 respondents). In comparison, the response rate for the SOM 2004 survey was 65 per cent. Detailed analyses of comparable questions in both surveys show a very high similarity. Also controls on background variables like gender and age indicate that the relatively lower response rate does not seem to imply lower quality of data. The responses were scanned optically, and produced as an SPSS data file. The SPSS data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, multivariate analysis and factor analysis. See Appendix One for further details.

The research benefited from the assistance of Inger Skalse and Sofia Johannson during the qualitative research. The research also benefited from the advice of media professionals working within SVT, TV4, Kanal 5, and academics working within Jönköping International Business School, Stockholm University, Södertörn University College, and Lund University.
Factual and Reality Television

*General Television Context*

The Swedish broadcasting landscape for many decades was dominated by public service broadcasting (PBS) without advertising. In the mid 1980s it was permitted to receive satellite channels and in 1987 the first Swedish satellite channel, TV3, began commercial broadcasting (Hadenius and Weibull, 2003:183ff). In the following years also TV4 and Kanal 5 started as satellite channels. In 1991 it was decided on a Swedish terrestrial TV channel financed by advertising. After a tender the concession was given to TV4, owned by a Swedish consortium of publishers and organisations, which formally started its terrestrial transmission in 1992. However, both TV3, owned by the media conglomerate MTG, and Kanal 5, owned by the American broadcasting company SBS, developed their satellite channels by increasing the share of Swedish programmes (Gustafsson and Weibull, 1995).

Swedish viewers spend on average two hours per day watching television, primarily in the evening, from 19.30 and 21.30. According to Wadbring and Graham (2001) most people regard themselves as watching TV in a planned manner, especially viewers of PSB. The amount of time Swedish viewers spend watching television has altered little over the past thirty years, despite the increase in channels, from public service broadcasting dominated channels, to a range of PSB, commercial and satellite channels (Hadenius and Weibull 2003: 420-421). However, the amount of time Swedish viewers spend watching particular channels has changed significantly since the 1970s, and an average of 40 per cent of the viewing time in cable households is spent watching satellite channels, which has led to an overall reduction in the viewing for SVT. This figure increases to 50 per cent when considering younger viewers. (Hadenius and Weibull 2003: 423).¹

Bengt Nordstrom points out that Swedish Television, despite competition from the commercial channels, has a strong position when it comes to audience attitudes to traditional cultural and factual genres, but has a weaker position when it comes to younger viewers attitudes towards entertainment based genres (2000: 241-43). He argues 'for the Swedish TV market and viewer one could say that the altogether strongest side of public service television is to act as a guarantor and as a stimulator for a strong and qualitative TV programming range as a whole (2000: 254). It is the case that public service organizations have a higher trust rating than commercial channels, and this is both as

¹ Sofia Johannson assisted in the analysis and translation of the secondary texts referred to in this section, and the following section on press debate.
consequence of trust in the quality of PSB programmes, and also the association of factual genres such as news or documentary with PSB. However, Hadenius and Weibull suggest ‘one risk lies in that we in Sweden will get a sharper divide between “elite media” and “popular media” in the same way as in many other countries. The former turns to a knowledgeable few, while the latter turns to the broad audience with content where the emphasis is on entertainment’ (2003: 350).

In a report from the Broadcasting Commission ‘Swedish TV programming 2003’ (2004) the relationship between Swedish and foreign programming, and factual genres was highlighted. 75 per cent of the programming of SVT and almost half of TV4’s programmes are produced in Sweden. In comparison, about two thirds of TV3 and Kanal 5’s programming consists of American programmes. Factual programmes and entertainment programmes are to a large part Swedish… and reality TV game shows are the ‘most Swedish’ in Swedish TV (2004: 86). The Broadcasting Commission report details the number of hours allocated to particular genres. Selecting the factual and reality genres reveals a sharp divide between news and documentary on SVT, and reality programming on commercial channels.

**SVT1 2003**
- News 14.76 hrs pw
- Factual 22.33
- Reality entertainment 0.83

**SVT2 2003**
- News 8.88 hrs pw
- Factual 26.39
- Reality entertainment 2.42

**TV3 2003**
- News 1 hr per week
- Factual 3.2
- Reality entertainment 9.9

**TV4 2003**
- News 14.85 hrs per week
- Factual 8.3
- Reality entertainment 3.67

**Kanal 5 2003**
- News 0 hrs per week
- Factual 11.09
- Reality entertainment 19.9
Audiences and Factual and Reality Television

Hadenius and Weibull point out changes in channel identity and viewing preferences:

*SVT had in 1997 a daily reach of 40 per cent and an audience share of 31 per cent, while comparative figures for TV4 was 44 and 29 per cent. Five years later, the shares had fallen for both channels and they were completely even in the youth group. The winners were above all Kanal 5 but also TV3 which in year 2002 had over a third of the youth TV viewing. SVT on the other hand dominated completely among the older viewers with 55 per cent of viewing time in 2002, with TV4 only 25 per cent.*

They also note that in 2000 ‘the position of traditional soaps was weakened among audiences. In that situation the channels started to try so called reality close fiction or ‘reality TV’…Expedition Robinson (1997) was one of the first attempts in Sweden. The success of the series contributed to a literal explosion of the genre, which meant that every channel had to profile themselves with a docusoap’ (2003: 430). This comment is also echoed by the Broadcasting Commission: ‘in only one aspect there is a homogenous trend for the commercial channels: a heavily increased offering of Swedish reality entertainment. In their programme schedules the introduction of the docusoaps have meant the departure of the soaps’ (2004: 87). The rise of the docusoap has been cause for concern by programme regulators, media professionals and social commentators, as will be discussed in the next section on press debate. But, in terms of age and viewing preferences ‘much research shows that such programmes, for the youth, express something about society that the middle aged cannot see – and cannot handle… to be interested in entertainment is not the same as being a generation without insights’ (Weibull 1999: 22-23).

The television context to factual and reality programming impacts on viewers attitudes towards these genres, and will be referred to in later sections, in particular attitudes and values towards public service versus commercial programming.

Press Context

From the beginning of television in the 1950s the quality of television has been debated. Some politicians during this period criticised television for being a commercial, low quality medium *per se* (Hadenius, 1998:137). The strong defence for PSB against commercial channels in the 1960s and 1970s had a similar background, often arguing for the value and quality of newspapers and stressing the interest to protect the daily press from competition from the advertising market.

In debates concerning docusoaps in the mid 1990s there is a similar type of criticism against low quality television. A brief overview of press discussion of news, documentary and reality TV indicates that ‘docusoaps’ are the most
commonly discussed non-fiction genre over the past few years. Debate regarding news tends to be focused on the reporting of changes to the news media, or the journalistic enquiry into a specific news event, in particular political events. Criticism of the journalistic coverage of the tsunami catastrophe in December 2004 is a good example of press debate regarding news.

Broadsheet writing about documentaries shows some concerns about the development of the genre, as well as the influence of reality TV and commercialization on documentaries. For example in *Dagens Nyheter* in an article on ‘Hard times for documentaries’ (15 Sept, 2004), Brita Landoff, a documentary maker, commented ‘sensationalism and emotionality are pushing away the conscious imaging of the world. It is time to stand up for the special characteristics of the documentary. Or Peå Holmkvist, a documentary maker, commented in another article in the same newspaper (12 April, 2003) ‘while the documentary is celebrating international success, in Sweden it has been pushed behind docusoaps and reality TV.’

There are both negative and mildly positive views about reality TV voiced in the press. But the main image seems to be of this format as a ‘low’ form of popular culture. The broadsheet coverage is mainly focused on the docusoap as a phenomenon rather than a detailed coverage of the shows and the participants. For example, Thord Ericsson writing in *SVD* (21 Nov, 2003) commented:

The docusoaps are accused of being dangerous, they have large audiences and the genre is spread over the whole of Western Europe and Northern America. Shouldn’t there, in the tension between these facts, be a story about our time that academics would throw themselves over? But so far Robinson-Kent, Big Brother-Linda and Nude-Janne have only been considered fleetingly. The only attempt to look at the whole genre was made two years ago by the media researcher Yvonne Andersson, for the Broadcasting Commission. She looked at episodes of ‘Expedition: Robinson’, ‘The Bar’, ‘Villa Medusa’, ‘The Mole’ and ‘Big Brother’ in relation to the general criticism and came to the conclusion that the ‘ethically questionable’ elements the programmes had been accused of were not particularly common.

The genre is covered extensively in the tabloid press. Docusoaps have been an important area of coverage for the tabloids, and part of a general increase in entertainment coverage in all kinds of Swedish newspapers since the late 1980s (Dommelöf, 1999). The papers eagerly follow the docusoaps and their participants, who become celebrities in their own right with accrued names such as ‘Robinson-Robban’, ‘The Farm-Helena’ and ‘Big Brother-Linda’. For example Marie Söderqvist in the *Expressen* (1 July, 2003) commented:
Audiences and Factual and Reality Television

The reason why everyone knows what is going on in the docusoaps is that sex, nudity and alcohol sell, even for the tabloids. There is no media development as clear during the past few years as the one of tabloids and docusoaps. It is the maniacal delight of the tabloids in things like Robinson-Robbins’ womanising, in existing and fabricated intrigues, and in the participants’ possible sexual affairs with each other that have lead to the enormous boom for the genre.

Criticisms of docusoap stars also tend to feature in the papers. For example Ebba von Sydow in the Expressen (16 Sept 2004) wrote:

Hundreds and thousands of TV-viewers are already hooked on ‘Robinson’, ‘Idol’ and ‘The Farm’. I understand them. It is perilously easy to fall – I’ve heard…What I can’t understand is who wants to be in the programmes. Who wants to be in a docu-soap 2004? Who thinks it sounds like a ‘fresh, fun, crazy thing’ today? Is it a free holiday and cheap dieting in Malaysia that attract? I’m sorry, but how can you be so dumb? How can you volunteer to be a pin-up, to make a fool of yourself and offer your private life to the whole of the Swedish population?

This type of negative criticism of docusoaps acts as a framing device for viewers, who echo these kinds of comments, and generally criticise docusoaps both for their lowest common denominator status and also for the ‘celebrity status’ of the participants. The focus on television and celebrities in the single copy sale tabloids is often said to be one important reason for their declining trust among the Swedes (Weibull, 2004).

Production Contexts

There are many different kinds of factual and reality television programmes on terrestrial and satellite channels. These programmes cut across several areas of production in factual and entertainment, including news and current affairs, documentary, popular factual or reality entertainment, lifestyle, and light entertainment. A variety of sub-genres within factual and reality television make up a high quota of contemporary output.

This project takes as a starting point the concept of factuality as defined as ‘Factual and reality experiences, imagination, values, that provide settings within which media institutions operate, shaping the character of factual and reality television processes and viewing practices, (adapted from Corner and Pels 2003: 3). This section briefly addresses the context to the reception of factual and reality programmes, considering the ways categorisation and scheduling impacts on viewer responses.

The categorization of factual and reality programming within the television industry highlights flexible commissioning systems, and crossovers in terms of subject matter and/or format. The hybrid nature of many factual formats
encourages cross categorization. Popular topics such as crime, health, or relationships appear in a variety of formats. The flexible categorization of factual and reality programming impacts on viewers as they make sense of the variety of traditional and contemporary formats.

For example, the press define series such as Big Brother, or FARMEN as docuseries. Within the industry these same programmes may be categorised as ‘reality series with a game element’. As one media professional explained: ‘reality gets divided. There is set up comedy, there is reality dating and then you do an exaggerated, warped, tricked reality dating where you have semi written elements in it.’ Another media professional categorised factual and reality as ‘news=actuality, documentaries=entertainment, docuseries=old expression, reality=good entertainment’. Lifestyle programming can also be subdivided into different subject areas, or approaches to lifestyle issues. For example lifestyle relationship formats can be categorised as ‘social-tainment’ and ‘consultancy TV’ within the industry.

John Ellis (2000) has discussed how scheduling is significant to our understanding of the ‘power of television’. News, current affairs, lifestyle and reality programming are building blocks for the evening schedule. The scheduling of factual and reality television informs our understanding of viewer responses, as viewers do not watch programmes in isolation, but within the context of a scheduled factual and fictional genres.

A special problem for Sweden is that most categories of documentary programming have been imported. Typical for Swedish television from the start has been its interest to find foreign formats easy to adapt (Nordmark, 1999:329). In the 1950s and 1960s it was mostly British programmes, later the American market was regarded as the most interesting. Some American talk shows and docuseries are transmitted directly, eg David Letterman Show, which means that there is not only a matter of category but also of acquired programming from abroad.

A brief scheduling analysis of factual and reality programmes during the autumn of 2004 indicates a narrow primetime schedule, where primarily news was stripped on SVT at the same time as docuseries were stripped on commercial channels. An example of the scheduling for two mid week evenings during September 2004 illustrates the choices for viewers, and the selected ratings for each type of programme shown.

One of the reasons for a narrow primetime schedule when it comes to factual and reality genres is that small budgets for Swedish made programmes mean resources and slots are condensed into a few flagship factual and reality series. The pressure for these programmes to perform means there is a risk channels over rely on more of the same. For comparison, in Britain there is a wide range of news and current affairs, documentary and popular factual programmes shown during primetime on PSB and commercial channels (see Hill 2005). Larger budgets, greater willingness to produce a variety of factual and reality programmes and schedule them during peaktime, means viewers
Audiences and Factual and Reality Television

have a wide choice of programmes on offer. As one media professional explained:

*The difference between the UK and Sweden is partly to do with tradition, and culture, and very much to do with money. Money plays such a major part in condensing the schedule, squeezing out part of the spectrum of programming. SVT is moving to create a middle ground. We tend to be top heavy, with high brow programming, and that is a problem because we are supposed to be there for everyone. We need an understanding of how popular culture works and how that is reflected in our programming.*

**Tuesday 14th September 2004**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>SVT 1</th>
<th>SVT 2</th>
<th>TV3</th>
<th>TV4</th>
<th>Kanal 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>7.30 pm</td>
<td>Rapport 1085&lt;br&gt;News 12.6 16.4 39.4</td>
<td>Expedition Robinson 330&lt;br&gt;Reality game 3.8 6.0 12.0</td>
<td>Farmen Skärgården 670&lt;br&gt;Reality game 7.8 11.5 24.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.00 pm</td>
<td>Uppdrag gransknings 780&lt;br&gt;Investigative journalism 9.0 17.2 24.3</td>
<td>Krokdil 100&lt;br&gt;Documentary series wildlife 1.1, 2.9, 10.1</td>
<td>Fab 5 270&lt;br&gt;Life style 3.1 6.2 8.5</td>
<td>Idol 1020&lt;br&gt;Talent show 11.8 18.4 31.7</td>
<td>Tjockholmen 235&lt;br&gt;Reality 2.7 5.2 7.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.55 pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>TV3 Nyheter&lt;br&gt;News</td>
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<td>9.00 pm</td>
<td>Aktuellt 740&lt;br&gt;News 8.6 9.8 48.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Extreme makeover 335&lt;br&gt;Life style 3.9 7.6 10.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.30 pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Toppform&lt;br&gt;Health</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.55 pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lokala nyheter&lt;br&gt;Local news</td>
<td>The Apprentice&lt;br&gt;Reality</td>
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*Figures show total rating, % rating, % share and % reach. Source for ratings: www.mms.se*
Wednesday 15th September 2004

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>SVT 1</th>
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<th>TV3</th>
<th>TV4</th>
<th>Kanal 5</th>
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<td>7.30</td>
<td>Rapport 1155</td>
<td></td>
<td>Expedition Robin 315</td>
<td>Farman Skärgården</td>
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<td>pm</td>
<td>News 13.3 17.8 40.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reality game 3.6 5.6 10.9</td>
<td>Docu-soap 9.1 12.3 27.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>Mitt i naturen 935</td>
<td></td>
<td>När Domus kom till stan 490</td>
<td>Idol 960 Talent show</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>pm</td>
<td>Wild life 10.8 15.0 29.4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Documentary 5.6 12.2 14.9</td>
<td>11.1 17.1 29.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.30</td>
<td>Gröna rum 805</td>
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<td>Izabella’s bröllop 185</td>
<td>Room service 400</td>
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<td>pm</td>
<td>Gardening 9.3 12.8 23.8</td>
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<td>Reality 2.2 5.5 5.7</td>
<td>Life style 4.6 7.7</td>
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<td>8.55</td>
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<td>pm</td>
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<td>Life style 3.7 7.4 10.3</td>
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<td>9.55</td>
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<td>pm</td>
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<td>Local news</td>
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* Figures show total rating, % rating, % share and % reach. Source for ratings: www.mms.se
Programme Categories

As a result of selective genre, scheduling and ratings analysis for news and current affairs, documentary, and reality programmes, twelve sub genres were chosen to represent the broadest range of programmes available to viewers during primetime, weekday television schedules for five main channels. The list of factual and reality categories and typical programme examples were not exhaustive. These categories were used in order to signal to respondents that when answering questions they should consider a representative range of programmes, categorised by sub genre and typical programmes within these sub genres.

News (‘Nyheter’), e.g. Rapport, Nyheterna, TV3 Nyheter

Current affairs/documentaries (‘Samhällsprogram/dokumentärer’), e.g. Dokument utifrån, enskilda dokumentärer

Investigative journalism (‘Undersökande journalistik’), e.g. Uppdrag gransknings, Kalla fakta, Insider

Political debate programmes (‘Politiska debattprogram’), e.g. Agenda, Debatt, Ekdal mot makten

Talk shows (‘Talkshows’), e.g. Sen kväll med Luuk, TV-huset, David Letterman show

Consumer programmes (‘Konsumentprogram’), e.g. Plus, Kontroll, Motorjournalen

Nature programmes (‘Naturprogram’), e.g. Mitt i naturen, Farligt möte

Documentary series (‘Dokumentära serier’), e.g. Djurpensionatet, Barnsjukhuset, Veterinärerna

Reconstructions (‘Rekonstruktioner’), e.g. Efterlyst, På liv och död

Lifestyle experiment programmes (‘Livsstilsexperiment’), e.g. Par på prov, Switched, Blind date

Lifestyle programmes (‘Livsstilsprogram’), e.g. Äntligen hemma, Solens mat, Roomservice, Fab 5, Gröna rum

Docusoaps (‘Dokusåpor’), e.g. Big Brother, Farmen, Riket
Viewing Modes

An overview of channel and programme preferences suggests viewing profiles divided into a number of axes: public service versus commercial channels; Swedish versus foreign programmes; public versus popular genres; information versus entertainment categories. These ways of categorizing and valuing factual and reality programmes highlights the importance of public discourse on television, and pre-existing attitudes towards Swedish television contexts and genres. The concepts of public service broadcasting, and public and popular culture frame attitudes towards Swedish television channels and programmes.

Public Service/Commercial

The most popular channels watched by viewers were the two public service channels SVT1/2 and TV4, followed by TV3 and Kanal 5. For example, Figure 1 Watching Channels (see Figures and Tables beginning on page 57) shows that over 80 per cent of the sample watched SVT and TV4 at least three days per week. TV3 and Kanal 5 attracted approximately 40 per cent of viewers watching at least three days a week, with little difference for more regular viewers. There was a similar great divide between the channels when considering daily viewing, which perhaps reflects the significance of news on SVT for the majority of viewers (see below). The other satellite channels had smaller niche viewers. In terms of background factors, there was an even distribution of age and life stage across 16-29, 30-49, 50-64, and 65-80 for TV4. Further, a significant difference between the 16-29 year olds, and 30+ can be observed for SVT. For TV3 and Kanal 5, there was a high percentage of younger viewers (16-29), less interest in these channels for viewers aged 30-49, and little interest from older viewers 50+ (see Figure 2 Watching Channels by Age and Table 1 Profile of Channel Audiences).

When it comes to channel evaluation Figures 3 and 4 illustrate a similar pattern to channel preferences. SVT and TV4 received both a fairly positive evaluation (68 and 64 per cent). Respondents less positively evaluated TV3 and Kanal 5 with approximately 30 per cent claiming they were at least fairly positive towards these commercial channels. Familiarly with channels is, not very surprising, an influencing factor on channel evaluation. The more viewers watch channels on a regular basis, the more positive their evaluation of those channels (see Table 2). For example, 80 per cent of daily viewers of SVT were at least fairly positive towards the channels compared to 41 per cent of viewers who watched once or twice a week. For TV4 the figures are about the same. In contrast to the commercial satellite channels about one fifth of those not
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watching SVT or TV4 on a regular basis have a positive attitude to the channels.

The channel identity of SVT/TV4 and the commercial channels influences viewers’ attitudes. Table 3 clearly indicates that channel evaluation is connected to perceptions of Swedish television channels as public service or commercial. There is a strong connection between on the one hand the three commercial satellite broadcasters TV3, Kanal 5 and ZTV, and on the other hand SVT and TV4. The new digital channels, which still have a very small audience, fall in between. The background variables have a similar impact on attitudes as on viewing. In terms of age, there is a clear difference in attitudes, with younger viewers being slightly less positive of SVT, and older viewers being slightly less positive of TV4 (Figure 5). There is greater difference amongst younger and older viewers in positive evaluation of TV3 and Kanal 5 (cf. Table 4).

Content Categories

The significance of the concept of public service broadcasting to viewing attitudes can be seen most clearly when genre is taken into account. There is a strong connection between SVT and traditional factual genres, commonly perceived as public ‘duty’ genres. Similarly, there is a strong connection between TV4, TV3 and Kanal 5 and contemporary reality genres, commonly perceived as popular commercial genres. Responses to the survey have been framed in relation to these common perceptions of public versus popular genres. Respondents consistently valued traditional factual genres more than popular genres. These value judgements may also have influenced the reporting of viewing preferences, as there is a low reporting for watching popular genres which is not matched by the ratings profiles for these genres.

For example, in Figure 6 there is a summary of the value of factual and reality genres (i.e. how important respondents perceived it is that these genres are shown on Swedish television). The examples of two extreme responses for news and docuseries illustrates the high value accorded to a traditional public genre (99 per cent), and the low value accorded to a contemporary popular genre (10 per cent). If we use at least ‘fairly important’ as an indicator we can observe that the values collapse into two groups. The first consists of news, current affairs, investigative journalism, political debates, consumer programmes, nature and documentary series, which 67 and 99 per cent of respondents regard as important. The second group, which only one-third or less regard as important consists of reconstructions, life style programmes, talk shows, docuseries and life experiments. It is notable that other traditional factual genres such as current affairs, or political debate programmes have a relatively average value when the statistics for ‘very important’ are isolated. Documentary also has a low value rating when ‘very important’ is isolated. Given that these genres are most associated with public service channels it raises
issues regarding public value of these genres. News is the one genre which stands apart as publicly important to almost all viewers.

Table 5 shows that by using factor analysis it is possible to understand the value of news, documentary and reality genres as connected to communicative form. Those genres which use an investigative approach to social issues and real life are clustered together, as are those genres which take a more constructed approach to people and their everyday lives. Once again, news stands apart as a distinctive genre, although it shares an investigative approach often used in current affairs and consumer programmes. This clustering of genres was apparent in the focus groups, as one female participant explained: ‘docusoap is when you gather a bunch of people and let them live in a room or you know, and then you follow them or something, the other is that you look at a phenomenon and investigate it, or interview people on something specific.’

The value of public versus popular genres is also connected to channel identity. Thus, in Table 6 and Figure 8 the channels respondents considered the best for specific genres matched traditional binaries of public/popular channels and genres. SVT was considered the best platform for news, current affairs, investigative journalism, political debate programmes, consumer programmes, nature programmes, and documentary series. TV4 was considered the best platform for lifestyle, life experiment, and talk shows. TV3 was considered the best platform for reconstructions, and Kanal 5 the best for docusoaps. For some genres there seems to be a strong competition between the channels. For documentary series there is almost a tie between SVT and TV4; for docusoaps, lifestyle programmes, reconstructions and talk shows all channels have their fans. This valuation is clearly in line with earlier studies on programme preferences in Swedish television (Nordström, 2001). There are only small differences in terms of gender or age. Although small, the age differences show that young persons rate the news, current affairs, investigative journalism, political debates and consumer programmes a little lower and reconstructions, lifestyle programmes, talk shows and docusoaps a little higher (Figure 7).

Familiarity with particular programmes is a contributing factor to perceptions of channels and genres. Viewing habits for all the categories show a high percentage for people, on a weekly basis, watching the news (95 per cent, once a week), and other factual genres, and a low percentage for docusoaps (29 per cent) and other popular genres (Figure 9). These figures match the National SOM 2004 study (Figure 10) for similar genres and viewing habits; the table also shows the comparative levels of some fiction genres, eg light entertainment and film, which have rating similar to news and current affairs. The reporting of viewing habits for popular genres, in particular docusoaps, seems low compared to ratings of importance, although this may be explained by the percentage of older viewers who do not watch these programmes on the commercial channels. When considering those respondents who claimed to watch programmes at least once a month (Figure 11), compared to those who watched once a week,
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the numbers for news remained the same, but the numbers for other genres increased, suggesting these factual and reality genres attract occasional viewers. Given the intense scheduling of docuseries, it may be the case that respondents under reported their viewing habits due to the lack of value they attach to these populist reality series. This is reflected in Figure 12, where regular viewers of news remain high (88 per cent), but remain low for docuseries (14 per cent), although second highest when taking only daily viewers into account.

It is worth noting regular viewers of all other programme categories other than news remains fairly low in comparison with the perceived general importance of these programmes (Figure 13). The results show that current affairs, investigative journalism, political debates and consumer programmes are important genres that are associated with prestige, but this does not mean that they are regularly watched. The observation has been made earlier for the same type of genres in the daily press, for example editorials and political comments (Weibull, 1983). In television life style programmes and docuseries function the other way round: they are watched more than they are regarded as important. The pattern is even clearer when we analyse the data on an individual level (Table 7). Table 8 illustrates the high value of news and other factual genres, and the numbers of regular viewers. The tendency is not very surprising and even stronger in relation to how the channel is rated. For example, more than one third of the respondents disliking SVT regard docuseries as an important genre, to be compared with one tenth among those favouring SVT only (Table 9).

Information/Entertainment

Another way in which viewers understand factual and reality genres is according to axes of information and entertainment. This categorisation process is connected to values, as discussed in the section earlier. The categorisation of factual and reality genres maps onto the value accorded to these genres. Thus, news is categorised as important and informative, and docuseries are categorised as not important and entertaining. Some genres, such as nature series, or lifestyle are located somewhere in between both value and categorisation. Perceptions of channels makes little difference to the categorisation of programmes as informative or entertaining which suggests strong value judgements about these genres no matter what viewers think of the individual channels. For example, Figure 14 shows news was categorised by almost all respondents as informative, and docuseries as entertaining, representing two extreme ends of a fact/fiction scale. The results are very much in line with respondents’ rating of importance: information = important, entertainment = not important. There were a surprising number of respondents who categorised traditional public service genres such as current affairs or political debate programmes as both informative and entertaining, which may reflect the use of
different stylistic techniques in current affairs, and the performance of politicians in debate programmes.

Documentary and reconstruction programmes were primarily categorised as a mixture of information and entertainment which given the content of these programmes is not unsurprising. Lifestyle programmes were a genre respondents could not agree on, with the same numbers categorising it as informative and entertaining, and purely entertaining. This is perhaps related to the popular formats of many lifestyle programmes. These perceptions of programmes as informative or entertaining change very little when compared to evaluation of channels. Thus, as Table 10 indicates, there is a connection between particular genres and communicative forms, in particular investigative approaches to society, more observational approaches to everyday life, and constructed, or staged approaches to real people and their experiences. And, the connections between genre, communicative form, and categorisation are consistent across other value factors, such as channel evaluation.

The qualitative research explored categorisation of factual and reality genres. The findings also suggest viewers cluster programmes according to value judgements based on whether programmes are informative or entertaining. The majority of participants classified news as informative and docusoaps as entertaining - ‘everything we call docusoap is pure entertainment’. For example, this 23 year old female student described why she had grouped programmes in the following ways:

I group them according to how I feel they go together, so I have Debatt, Kalla Fakta, Uppdrag Gransknings, Dokument Utifrån and Rapport, those are programmes I would watch if I wanted to learn, they make me think again when I watch. Then I have selected Kvarteret, Gröna Rum, Äntligen Hemma, Veterinärerna, Vetenskapsens Värld, Mitt I Naturen, and these are more purely, well, yes, a bit entertainment, well you learn from them too. And then I have Diggiloo, Jeopardy and När & Fjärran together because I think they are good family entertainment. Then Plus, Efterlyst, Stina and Otroligt Antikm is more like um maybe for older people in the afternoons and in those hours when there’s usually docusoaps for us younger people. And then I’ve all this Insider, Expedition Robinson, well the docusoaps like, eh Par på Prov, Extreme Makeover, The Apprentice, eh Tjockholmen, Isabella’s Bröllop and Farmen in one and the same and these are really the kind of programmes I watch because I want to relax and not think and maybe even gossip with friends the next day about how horrible they are. Then TV3 news I think that’s the most horrible thing ever, it shouldn’t be called news because it’s Aftonbladet.

This viewer justifies her categorisation of various different programme titles by using an information/entertainment axis. There are informative programmes ‘I would watch if I wanted to learn’, there are informative and entertaining programmes ‘a bit entertainment, well you learn from them too’, and
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entertaining programmes 'the kind of programmes I watch because I want to relax and not think'. We also see the sociability of docusoaps, a different kind of value judgement not considered in the survey. There is also a connection between certain television programmes and age, for example docusoaps, and other media, in this instance what is perceived to be tabloid news. In the next section, genre classification is considered in more detail in relation to the qualitative research.
Genre

The flexible categorization of factual and reality programming in Sweden impacts on viewers as they attempt to make sense of changing genres and formats. Respondents were on the one hand clear in their categorization of news and docusoaps which represented extreme ends of a fact-fiction scale. However, they also expressed uncertainty about other factual genres, and some confusion about the categorization of recent docusoaps and commercial news. There is evidence to suggest categorisation of programmes is based on pre-existing concepts and values, and personal experience of programmes, which can lead to uncertainty about the classification of factual and reality genres.

There was an open question in the survey, asking respondents to list programmes they categorized as factual or non-fictional. This question produced a varied response across the sample. News (e.g. Rapport, Aktuellt), investigative documentaries (e.g. Kalla fakta, Uppdrag Granskning, Dokument inifran/utifran), consumer programmes (eg Plus), social debate programmes (eg Debatt) and nature programmes frequently appeared in the listings across all age groups, and dominated the listings among ages 35+. While such programmes appeared in the listings for younger age groups, it was also the case that these respondents were more often eclectic in their examples, covering many programmes within the reality TV genres (eg Nanny-akuten, Robinson, Top Model) and even some drama series (eg Melrose Place). The listings likewise appeared less hierarchical for many of the younger respondents, with programmes and genres often appearing in no discernable order, whereas for example news programmes appeared to be top of the hierarchy for older respondents and were often listed first. While reality TV to some extent featured in all age groups in the form of lifestyle programmes and reconstruction programmes (eg Efterlyst), docusoaps such as Robinson and Big Brother were only commonly listed among the two youngest age groups, and almost absent from the listings of other age groups. This suggests that there are patterns of viewing whereby older groups purposively do not watch popular factual programmes, whereas younger groups are more familiar with a range of genres, although commonly watch popular ones.

A range of examples across the sample illustrates the variety of responses to this question:

Big Brother, Kalla fakta, Insider, Efterlyst (male, aged 16-24, small town, worker’s home, non-university, unemployed)
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Riket, Expedition Robinson, Paradise Hotel (female, aged 16-24, Stockholm etc, higher civil servant/academic home, university, student)

All news programmes and programmes like Kalla fakta, Uppdrag granskning and Document utifran (male, 35-44 Stockholm, academic home, university, accountant)

Dr Phil, nature programmes, news, Par pa prov, Extreme Makeover, Antligen hemma, Fran koja till slott, Alla mot en (female, aged 35-44, small town, worker’s home, non-university, hair-dresser)

Rapport, Aktuellt, Sportnytt, Uppdrag granskning, Plus (male, aged 55-64, small town, worker’s home, non-university, electrician)

Rapport, Aktuellt, Kobra, Antligen hemma, Plus, Grona rum, Antikrundan, Vetenskapens varld, Sportspegeln (female, aged 55-64, city, civil servant home, university, IT-consultant)

In the focus groups, the diversity of responses was perhaps explained by some confusion about factual and reality genres. The majority of participants were clear what constituted news, although there was some discussion about TV3 – ‘God like TV3 news, that’s difficult, is it news or not?’ Participants also made connections between news and other investigative style programmes, as was evident in the previous section. For example, this 23 year old male student commented: ‘Firstly, here I’ve got a group with various news magazines and current affairs (society) programmes, and society debate programmes and news, with Rapport, Kalla fakta, Uppdrag granskning, Dokument utifrån, Debatt, Plus and Vetenskapens varld. There wasn’t a lot of news but it was put in that group anyway.’ Documentary appeared to split respondents, with some confident about their categorisation of documentary – eg ‘I’ve got these documentary stories, Dokument utifrån etc’, and others mixing documentary with more traditional and populist genres – eg ‘Mitt I naturen, well, Debatt, Efterlyst, Stina and Vetenskapens varld, and then Veterinärerna, I don’t know’.

One of the reasons participants were unsure about documentary as a genre was its relationship with docusoaps. Some respondents were uncertain how to label both genres, and this reflects the confusion arising from the hybrid term docusoap:

Documentary portrays reality to the viewers then…Idol or Expedition Robinson, there you’re supposed to get a picture of what is real, but it’s an edited reality. Well it’s called docusoap, documentary soap, soap opera, they are contradictions in terms, soap opera, documentary, so it’s, well…like documentary shouldn’t be there, that word. (26 year old male student)
I find it a bit hard to understand what documentary is because that concept has widened, the meaning of the concept has gotten enormously wider, so I was a bit confused when you said ‘tell us some examples’ (laughing) so I don’t really know what it is, but I watch Idol 2004, does that belong with the documentaries? (41 year old female project manager)

These two examples illustrate the way participants worked through their understanding of documentary and docusoaps, showing critical engagement with the changing nature of these genres, and also uncertainty about their status.

Values

In the previous section, the results of the survey indicated a connection between value judgements about factual and reality genres and the categorisation of these genres as informative or entertaining. The focus groups were used to explore value judgements. There was much evidence to suggest participants categorised programmes according to pre-existing concepts and values. As this participant explained when attempting to group programme titles: ‘My God how many there are, I mix them up all the time…I just think that you can’t lump them together into one group, because some I like and some I think are crap. So it’s something else which decides whether they’re good or bad’ (25 year old female student).

The ‘something else’ used to frame categorisation of programmes is partly explained by value judgements. Some of these values have already been discussed in terms of concepts of public service, or popular culture. For younger viewers in the focus groups age was used as criteria for categorisation:

I have one with like a bit of old woman and old man kind of entertainment with Jeopardy, Diggiloo, När & fjärran, Veterinärerna, Gröna rum, Äntligen hemma, and Otroligt antikt. (24 year old male, unemployed)

Gröna rum, Äntligen hemma and När & fjärran it feels more like, I don’t know, boring couple programmes. (23 year old female student)

The most horrible programmes Go kväll, Debatt, they are for old people, it feels like I’m having dinner with my remote old relatives and I do that too often already as it is. (21 year old male student)

In the above illustrative examples, younger viewers criticised particular programmes for being ‘boring’ because they perceived them as aimed at older viewers. Here a value judgement is used that these programmes belong together because they are aimed at viewers with different life experiences.
Other values used by participants included quality values. Many participants made comments about programmes based on quality criteria as to whether they were good or bad. For example, ‘I’ve got a group of trash TV which not necessarily means you don’t watch it but still trash TV, Expedition Robinson, Kvarteret, Toppsform, Par på prov, Tjockholmen, Extreme make over, Izabella’s bröllop, Farmen, Idol’ (23 year old male student). In this example, the viewer is critical of the programmes, but acknowledges just because a programme is ‘trash’ doesn’t mean to say it isn’t watchable. Once again, this points to the value of programmes as watchable, even if they are not socially important.

Some participants categorised ‘bad programmes’, eg docuseries, as bad because they lacked moral values. This extract from a focus group discussion illustrates the use of morality as a framing device for genre classification:

*What makes a programme rubbish?* (moderator)

*What it’s about is bad, bad morals in some way* (23 year old female, day care worker)

*Just to make other people look foolish* (21 year old female student)

*They bring out characteristics in humans which I don’t think you should bring out* (23 year old female, day care worker)

These value judgements are based on ethical treatment of people in the programmes, something which will be addressed in a later section. These judgements are also based on the viewers’ position of moral superiority. This position may be contradictory for certain viewers who watch ‘bad’ docuseries, but at the same time criticise them for a lack of morality. As this participant reflects:

*But it’s very ambiguous…I see that as a bad side of me that I enjoy watching people getting exposed to difficult things on Robinson, but it’s part of an ambiguity and then the question is, those who produce this, those who get an enormous amount of money from licence fees among other things to produce TV, should they take advantage of this like? Somehow I don’t think they should take advantage of my bad sides, because it’s in all of us in some way, some little bit of malicious pleasure.* (31 year old male sub editor)

This viewer is critically aware of the attraction of certain docuseries and their construction of emotionally/physically challenging situations. At the same time he is critical of himself for enjoying the portrayal of conflict situations, and programme makers for appealing to his ‘malicious’ character traits. The illustrative quote used above is one of many discussions amongst participants.
about ‘humiliation TV’, in particular the humiliation inflicted on non-professional actors in docusoaps.

The value judgements used by participants highlight an emergent theme in the data related to viewing modes. Participants repeatedly attempted to explain different viewing strategies for different genres. These viewing strategies are characterised by the experience of watching the programmes. Sometimes these experiences connect to other conceptual value judgements made about programmes. Other times, they contradict these conceptual value judgements with the experience of watching television programmes on a more emotional rather than intellectual level.

Two examples will illustrate the connection and contradiction between viewing strategies and value judgements. This 34 year old mother explained her categorisation of programmes according to how she relates to them on a more conceptual level:

*I have three groups, and I have chosen them from how I relate to them mentally while watching. One group is my truth group of news and Vetenskapens värld and Otroligt antikt and Debatt. And then I’ve got one group which is only lazy watching where I don’t learn anything, Efterlyst, TV3 News, Tjockholmen, Dolce vita, Farmen, Izabellas bröllop, Extreme make over, Par på prov, Expedition Robinson, Veterinärerna, Mitt i naturen, Idol, Jeopardy, Diggilo, När & fjärran and Farligt möte. And then I’ve got my third group which are entertainment programmes I learn something from, and that’s the Apprentice, Kvarteret, Stina, Toppform, Äntligen hemma, Gröna rum and Insider.*

The above quotation highlights the ways this viewer makes sense of her viewing habits according to genre expectations. She has a ‘truth group’, a ‘lazy watching’ group, and an ‘entertainment programmes I learn something from’ group. The three groups are categorised according to both pre-existing value judgements of information/entertainment, and more personal judgements based on her own self-criticism - ‘lazy watching’.

This 28 year old male product manager explains his categorisation of programmes according to how he relates to them on an emotional level:

*I often think there’s a lot of delight over other peoples misfortune, I guess that to some extent is the definition of a docusoap, that you’re supposed to be able to sit at home in your TV sofa and then you’re allowed to let your malicious delight out, which you never get to show in every day life.*

Similarly, this viewer makes sense of his viewing habits by using personal and moral criteria to frame his definition of docusoaps. He refers to the ‘lazy’ TV viewer and docusoaps as humiliation TV, both common perceptions of docusoap viewers, and adds his own experience of taking ‘delight’ from observing other people in challenging situations within the safe environment of
the home. As with the previous example, he is critical of himself for watching such programmes, but also acknowledges that docusoaps give viewers an opportunity to criticise other people. As this participant explains: ‘If one should see it from a psychological perspective you might feel a bit better than the people you’re watching, because they’re so odd and mysterious’ (24 year old unemployed male).

Values therefore link to ethics, and many participants in the focus groups made connections between their value judgements about the categorisation of genres and ethical issues relating to good and bad programmes, people in programmes, and viewing behaviours. The connection between genre expectations and moral values is most apparent when participants discuss docusoaps. There was some discussion of this when considering news, which will be explored in the next section on actuality. But it is docusoaps which excite strong emotional feelings, and self criticism. One female viewer explained her feelings using the metaphor of heat: ‘Farmen, I get totally, well hot from that, then you have to get some fever reducing kind of medicine, it’s so annoying.’ This metaphor shows the relationship between watching docusoaps and what makes them good and bad in equal measure. The majority of participants voiced intense feelings for docusoap, which in turn shape categorisation of the genre. The majority of participants also criticised themselves for feeling ‘hot’, for their strong responses to characters and situations in docusoaps. Why participants were so self-critical is linked to value judgements about docusoaps as ‘trash TV’, and also as representing character traits and moral values at odds with common perceptions of Swedish television and people as ‘down to earth’ or ‘not exaggerated’. In the next section we shall see a link with values and ethics and imported programming.
Actuality

The results from the survey and focus groups indicate viewers are critically engaged with the truth claims made within particular factual and reality genres. This data provides evidence for the media literacy of adult viewers of all ages, gender and socio-economic status. Media literacy is understood to mean comprehension and critique. The quantitative and qualitative data indicates adult viewers are both critically engaged with factual and reality television, and concerned by the rapidly changing, often hybridised nature of these programmes. Therefore when considering comprehension and critique, it is important to recognise that television viewers can be media literate, and also experience uncertainty when responding to television content.

The survey and focus groups contained questions related to the issue of actuality in different types of factual and reality programmes. Actuality was understood as the truth claims made within programmes as perceived by viewers of factual content. Two types of questions were designed to understand actuality. The first related to the truth claims made by programmes, specifically attitudes towards the portrayal of events as they happened. The second related to the issue of the performance of non-professional actors in different types of programmes, in particular attitudes towards actuality, and the degree to which they personally value actuality, in news and current affairs, documentary and reality programming. For the questions in the focus groups, participants were asked to discuss their responses to the truth claims made within different types of programmes.

Perceptions and Values

Figure 15 details the degree to which respondents perceive particular genres as fairly or to a very high degree true-to-life. There is a hierarchical scale used for ‘at least a fairly high degree true-to-life’, with news at the top of the scale (91 per cent) and docusoaps at the bottom of the scale (5 per cent). If we use ‘to a very high degree true-to-life’ the range is from 38 (news) to 2 per cent (life style experiments, docusoaps and talk shows). There are some minor age differences, mostly that the youth is somewhat more critical of traditional informative genres, whereas older viewers are a little more critical of re-constructions, lifestyle programmes and docusoaps, and also political debates (Figure 16).
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As well as regarding categorization of genres, there is an association between informative or investigative approaches to real life, and more observational or constructed approaches. Therefore, perceptions of the truth claims made in programmes cluster according to news, current affairs/documentaries, with the exception of nature programmes, which are second to news in a hierarchical classification. See below for reference to perceptions of performance. There is a medium rating for political debate programmes, which is also linked with perceptions of politicians as performers, which will be shown below. The more constructed or staged programmes, such as docusoaps or talk shows are also clustered at the bottom of the true-to-life scale. If we focus on viewers claiming that programmes were very true-to-life, there is less diversity between genres, even if news still has the lead.

Critical engagement with the truth claims of factual and reality genres is most evident when a comparison is made between attitudes towards the truth claims of different programmes and the value attached to these truth claims. Figure 17 shows the perceived importance that a certain genre is true-to-life, resulting in high value for traditional informative content (85 per cent or more ‘fairly important’) and somewhat less importance attributed to lifestyle programmes, talk shows and docusoaps (23 to 51 percent), lifestyle experiments falling in between these two groups. In Figure 8 and Table 11 values are related to perceptions of truth claims. With the exception of news, nature programmes and current affairs, values and perceptions of truth claims differ. The most marked examples are political debate programmes (88 per cent, 42 per cent respectively), reconstructions (72 per cent, 43 per cent respectively), and lifestyle programmes (51 per cent, 22 per cent respectively). These figures suggest respondents would like to see these genres as more true-to-life. Although there is little value or perception of actuality in docusoaps or talk shows, there is still a small amount of criticism of these genres for not being true-to-life.

The second indicator of critical engagement is related to attitudes towards performance. Figure 19 shows the percentage of respondents perceiving that people are acting up for the camera, and in Figure 20 this is related to acceptability (‘not acceptable’ to act up). News (22 per cent, 80 per cent respectively) and nature programmes (14 per cent, 65 per cent respectively) were least associated with people acting up for the cameras, and they were also genres respondents claimed it was important people did not act up. Nature programmes were thought to be true-to-life partly because performance levels were perceived as low. Docusoaps (74 per cent, 23 per cent respectively) and talk shows (64 per cent, 31 per cent respectively) were thought to contain high levels of performance, and respondents attached little value to this. Political debate programmes (77 per cent, 46 per cent respectively), reconstruction programmes (62 per cent, 29 per cent respectively), and to a lesser extent lifestyle programmes (43 per cent respectively) were criticized by respondents
for high performance levels. These results indicate there is some connection between attitudes towards truth claims and performance levels.

**Swedish/Foreign**

There is also a connection between attitudes towards actuality and culturally specific genres. Figure 21 indicates that programmes from Sweden and other Nordic countries were perceived as fairly or very true-to-life (95 per cent Sweden, 94 per cent other Nordic countries). Britain, with its strong public service broadcaster, was also thought to produce mainly true-to-life programmes (91 per cent), but respondents were more critical of Britain when it came to very true-to-life, with only 31 percent agreeing with this statement compared to 53 per cent for Swedish programmes. Other European countries were also thought to produce programmes that were fairly or very true-to-life (88 per cent). American programmes were thought to be the least true-to-life, with 40 per cent of respondents claiming US programmes were hardly true-to-life, and 45 per cent/15 per cent claiming fairly/very true-to-life.

Age is a contributing factor in differences in perceptions of actuality and cultural specificity. Younger viewers were more likely to be critical of all programmes made in the selected countries than older viewers. Whereas in Figure 22 minor variations in age and perceptions of actuality were apparent, in Figure 21 age becomes more significant. For example 37 per cent of younger viewers (16-29) thought Swedish programmes were true-to-life, compared to 68 per cent of older viewers (65-80). In Figure 22 older viewers (65-80) were slightly more critical of the truth claims of all programmes than younger viewers (16-29). Criticism of the truth claims of programmes is connected with national cultural differences, and younger viewers are more cynical when comparing national programmes rather than programme categories.

An open ended question in the survey asked respondents to reflect on their attitudes towards Swedish and foreign factual and reality programmes. Responses to this question were consistent across all age groups and social categories. The majority of responses touched on issues of national identity, and can perhaps be seen as framing a reaction to internationalisation on a wider scale.

The vast majority commented on American programming, often in very negative terms. American programming was described as sensationalist, overly commercial, ‘smutty’ and as depicting an unidentifiable image of reality. A few respondents also mentioned British programming, which then mostly (but not always) appeared to be regarded as of high quality. Only a couple of respondents referred to ‘European’, or ‘Scandinavian’ programming. ‘Programmes from other countries’, then, were mainly defined as American programmes, perceived in a negative/critical way.

Swedish programming was by contrast described as more true-to-life, and as better reflecting a ‘Swedish’ mentality of ‘down-to-earth-ness’ and honesty. A
reoccurring theme across the age groups was that Swedish programming, on a language level as well as on a cultural level, was easier to identify with. Older respondents also commented positively on Swedish programming as more transparent, accountable and controllable, and at times referred to a Scandinavian as well as a Swedish mentality. Although most of the comments on Swedish programming were positive, some respondents perceived Swedish programming as too ‘politically correct’.

An illustration from the qualitative study of a range of responses across gender, age, life stage, region and socio-economic status highlights the similarity of opinions regarding Swedish and foreign programmes:

You feel more at home with the Swedish language, which means you trust what they are saying more. (male, aged 16-24, small city, worker’s home, non-university, plumber)

Programmes from USA are so exaggerated. It’s just about being the greatest, the best and the most beautiful. In Sweden we are more down-to-earth and want to keep to reality, is my opinion. (female, aged 16-24 Stockholm etc, civil servant home, non-university, student)

They usually exaggerate quite a lot in USA and Great Britain. (male, aged 25-34, country, worker’s home, non-university, nursery assistant)

Programmes from USA tend to give very peculiar images of reality – perhaps because we are so different, but more likely because it is more sensationalism and ratings figures that are the controlling factors there – at least more so than in Europe and especially Sweden. (female, aged 35-44, Stockholm etc, business home, university, project manager)

Too many programmes originate from or have been inspired by USA, an overstressed country [sic]. It gives a strange picture of reality and a peculiar understanding of the world. More compassionate programmes, please! (male, aged 55-64, small town, civil servant home, non-university, postman)

I can more easily identify with the Nordic culture. (female, aged 65+, city, worker’s home, non-university, carer)

The language used by respondents to define differences between Swedish and foreign programmes indicates their value judgements regarding public service versus commercial dominated cultures (‘ratings’, ‘sensational’), national culture and identity (‘identify’, ‘Nordic culture’), or personal characteristics (‘exaggerate’, ‘down to earth’). There is a sense that respondents perceive foreign programmes as not only importing foreign content, but also importing
foreign social, cultural and moral values. The value judgements made by respondents as discussed in previous sections are framed not only according to the moral values of respondents themselves, but also perceived imported values from abroad. The strength of criticism of American programming, especially reality TV, suggests a desire on behalf of Swedish viewers to watch popular factual programmes based on Swedish cultural and social values. However, criticising popular factual programmes is also part of the attraction in watching them in the first place, and such comments are connected to criticism of popular culture in general.

Critical Engagement

The results from the focus groups support the finding that viewers are critically engaged with different types of factual and reality programmes, and question the truth claims made within different genres. In the previous section, categorization of genres was linked to values regarding public service broadcasting. These values were also used as a framing device for judging truth claims. One example illustrates a common discussion about actuality, genre and channel identity:

"You can categorise according to how trustworthy things are, how there's a commercial interest behind the channels. First you can categorise public service a bit, mostly when it comes to represent documentary things, news, TV4, well, also…ehhh…then it's just downhill. (20 year old male, unemployed)."

There was little debate about judging the truth claims of news programmes on SVT or TV4. When discussion did occur, criticisms were directed at a lack of trust in the editorial decisions made by programme makers. For example, comments focused on editorial framing, or particular perspectives, ‘they all angle it differently so you have to be careful with what you accept.’ Or as this 32 year old male sub editor explained: ‘you build an image from many sources, but mainly through the news, then if you don’t accept the image they want to present, you build your image from the outside.’ However, overall there was a great deal of trust in news on these channels, which corresponds with the survey data.

Participants understood that news was mainly true-to-life, but were also aware that news could only ever present mediated versions of reality. An example of a typical group discussion illustrates this point:

"It’s a picture of reality, you don’t see, well if you trust the person, or the people making the program, then you can perhaps relate to it and think you get some kind of overall picture of some major event in society, but I think you are fairly

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Thanks to Markus Sterky for his useful comments on this issue in an earlier draft of this report.
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aware of that it is a picture, I don’t think you think you’d get some genuine knowledge of reality. (29 year old student)

Well often you don’t know anything else, but that is what you get to see, so then it becomes that which, you believe that is what it’s like, if there’s been like well ‘the president has died in Lebanon’ then you believe that eh, you wouldn’t think that’s not the case, but if you watch other news, American news then you can see, discover that it’s angled differently from the Swedish news. (29 year old female desk officer)

Is that the case with all Swedish news then or? (moderator)

Every channel has their own… (29 year old student)

Yes I think you have to watch each channel on its own terms, SVT public service has got one idea of how you present news, TV4 has another, TV3 has another (30 year old student)

The discussion centres on how trust in the truth claims of news does not necessarily mean the news is treated uncritically. The phrase ‘a picture of reality’ encapsulates these participants understanding of actuality in news. The use of other words such as ‘angle’ or ‘terms’ indicates an awareness of editorial issues. In addition, these participants are aware that Swedish news is different, and more trustworthy than foreign news, as supported by the results in the survey. However, different channels have different ‘ideas’ of how to present news.

One area of news which was criticised was commercial news, in particular TV3. The criticism from participants was related to the way TV3 focused on entertainment news. The entertainment frame ensured many participants did not trust the news stories. For example, this 28 year old female carer commented: ‘Well their ‘thinking’ is not to present serious news but to present some kind of news entertainment, which they in some way think people want and I think I don’t even trust their weather, it just feels like ‘no’ there’s nothing I want to watch.’ This criticism of commercial news was also reflected in the definitions of news in the previous section.

There was some debate about judging the truth claims of current affairs or documentary in the focus groups. Discussion centred on whether the use of different opinions made viewers more rather than less critical of the objectivity of the programmes. The presentation of extreme opinions was viewed with some suspicion. Those participants who were critical of current affairs, or investigative programmes related their criticism to an overall cynicism of news media. Two examples illustrate this perspective:

I don’t watch much of Debatt and Dokument utifrån because I think they are someone’s opinions which get shown, and it’s definitely not like for real, Debatt
is always put together so that there are no debate it’s more like, ‘if you tell us your opinions about this’ and then there’s some who hold an opposite opinion, I don’t think it’s real, I, I have, and then I have become so terribly cynical (laughing) I don’t know, but I don’t believe in anything anymore. I have lost faith in people after watching Efterlyst (laughing). (44 year old female computer technician)

I can think while watching ‘aha they’ve done it like that’ and that you get more and more critical and try to find loopholes, like how they have or why they put it in a specific way, at the same time I don’t think I see the whole picture. (23 year old student)

There was also some criticism of documentaries on TV4 being too sensational, and therefore unbelievable – ‘TV4 documentaries which are as unbelievable as, you still don’t believe in them, there are Siamese twins and strange diseases…’ These kinds of comments connect with value judgements about public versus popular programmes, quality issues, and genre categorisation.

Critical Viewers of Docusoaps

The majority of discussions regarding actuality were focused on docusoaps. There were heated discussions about these programmes, with the majority of participants agreeing they presented a constructed view of reality, a staged reality. For example:

I mean it’s called docusoap, it’s very dramatised and very staged, so you expect, even if many ordinary documentaries also are staged to a large extent, you expect to get a picture of someone’s everyday life or about what something is, whereas in the docusoap you know everything is orchestrated from above and every like, well there are really scenes taking place, even if their lines are not decided beforehand the scenes are ready, if you understand. (29 year old male student)

You think about it all along ‘can this be real’? (23 year old male student)

And that’s maybe part of what’s fascinating, that it could be real. (26 year old male student)

Yes. (23 year old male student)

Even though it’s probably not. (26 year old male student)

The first example highlights how viewers expect that docusoaps are ‘orchestrated’, so that real events and experiences are staged within the format in order to make them entertaining. The second example highlights the
common type of debate associated with watching docusoaps, where the very staged nature of docusoaps becomes part of the attraction for viewers.

Docusoaps invite a critical viewing mode. The programmes invite the viewer to engage in debate, to question what is authentic and what is staged, to judge the actions of non-professional actors faced with challenging situations. Participants were aware that this was the most extreme example of the construction of real events for television cameras. In many ways, docusoaps were easy for participants to discuss in terms of actuality precisely because the programmes invited viewers to judge the truth claims. As this participant explained:

Well, if you’re after what truth is, reality then…really there is nowhere in any of these programmes you can be sure of getting to see the truth or reality and then in a way it’s better with the docusoaps, with them you know, you don’t expect the truth, you expect, well maybe you get to see 10% of the truth, you know there’s another 90%. (30 year old male civil servant)

As the results of the survey made clear, actuality within factual and reality genres is bound up with the issue of performance. Nowhere is this more apparent than in discussion of docusoaps. The majority of participants felt that people who took part in docusoaps were ‘media hot’. The intentions of docusoap participants to work in the media, or to become personalities who were discussed in the media on a regular basis, meant that most participants judged docusoaps as unreal partly because of the participants. They also felt that the very act of being in front of a camera meant people would act up. For example, these two participants explain the power of the camera to transform ordinary people into performers:

But like when you see a bunch of 15 year olds who get in front of the camera at some football match they also act up to the camera a lot (29 year old male student)

Everybody does, you take on a role in front of a camera (29 year old female desk officer)

The majority of participants agreed that levels of performance were most extreme in docusoaps where ordinary people are invited to become contestants in a reality gameshow. On the one hand, as the results of the survey suggest, this is not a problem for viewers because they expect docusoap participants to perform in a staged environment. On the other hand, the majority of participants were very critical of people in docusoaps for being extraverts, for being ‘exaggerated’ or ‘sensational’, in the same way American reality programmes were thought to be exaggerated and sensational. The criticism of non-professional actors in docusoaps is therefore also connected to negative
identification, which as we saw in the previous section, can be part of the attraction in watching docusoaps and criticizing the behaviour of people in the programmes.

Critical Viewing Strategies

A final theme to emerge from the focus groups relates to the idea of viewing strategies or modes. As stated in the previous section viewing strategies are characterised by the experience of watching programmes. Sometimes these experiences connect to other conceptual value judgements made about programmes. Other times, they contradict these conceptual value judgements with the experience of watching television programmes on a more emotional rather than intellectual level. This contradictory experience emerges in discussion regarding truth claims made in different genres, in particular genres related to investigative reporting, and those related to constructed real events and experiences. On one level, participants’ debate about actuality reflected the findings of the survey regarding perceptions and value of actuality. News was the most trustworthy, docusoaps the least trustworthy. One assumption would therefore be that when watching news, viewers are media literate, in the sense that they comprehend and critique news stories, judging news to be true-to-life, apart from some examples of commercial entertainment based news. On another level, participants’ debate about actuality revealed a contradictory response, as they discussed watching news both with a critical eye and ‘with a lazy eye’. In the same way, participants discussed watching docusoaps with ‘easier eyes’, and with a critical eye.

Some examples will illustrate this point. Two participants describe different ways of watching news and docusoaps:

One knows it is not an investigative programme so you don’t watch it with those eyes…with easier eyes just to relax, more, something which is just, sometimes I can think someone is stupid, or have a laugh or think it’s fun. (20 year old female student)

It’s rare that you sit and think with a critical eye when watching the news, anyway, I very much believe everything they say. (21 year old female, unemployed)

Their comments touch on the way particular genres or formats invite particular responses from viewers. On the one hand investigative programmes are informative, and therefore invite the viewer to engage with facts and issues presented within the programme. On the other hand, unless a viewer knows specific details about these facts and issues, read about the topic from other sources, or have first hand experience, the programme does not invite easy criticism. Similarly, docusoaps are entertaining and invite the viewer to engage
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with the events and experiences presented within the programme as entertainment, or what participants often described as ‘mindless entertainment’. On the other hand, a viewer will often have first hand experience of the issues in the programme related to social and personal behaviour, relationships and emotions, and this invites easy criticism. Therefore it is possible to find evidence of a media literate viewer for news and docusoaps where the viewer may be active and passive depending on the experience at the time. An illustrative quote from this participant helps to explain this contradictory position:

"I think I get more passive, more of a passive receiver when I watch Rapport and Aktuellt or news…while I watch more actively when I watch docusoaps, that is I try and think more about what the relationships between the participants are like, think more…while the news is like taken in, worked on. You're probably thinking more critically when you're watching docusoaps because you know that 'what can be true and what is scripted' than compared to those who are on a square in Moscow [reporting] about the Russian Presidential election. (20 year old male, unemployed)"

This participant uses terms like active/passive to explain his viewing strategies. He can be more instantly critical of docusoaps by judging what is true or ‘scripted’ according to his knowledge of ‘relationships’. He is less instantly critical of the news because he needs to ‘take in’ what is being reported by experts and journalists in the field. He may become more critically engaged with the news, but only once he has ‘worked’ on a particular story, and judged it according to other news sources, or personal experiences. These viewing strategies for news and docusoaps will also be discussed in the next section in relation to learning and factual and reality programmes.
Learning

The findings from the survey and focus groups indicate that viewers understand learning to mean both formal learning from traditional factual genres, and informal learning from popular factual genres. Formal learning is understood as relating to learning about world or national events, or social issues. Viewers usually apply this understanding of learning when initially responding to the issue. Informal learning is understood as relating to personal or emotional issues, and in particular what viewers can ‘get out’ of programmes. There is also evidence to suggest viewers learn about the media from factual and reality genres. In relation to the focus groups, evidence suggests viewers are media literate in their comprehension and critique of genres, and emotionally literate in their responses and actions based on viewing experiences.

Questions in the survey and focus groups related to levels and types of learning in different factual and reality programmes. Learning was understood to mean both formal and informal learning opportunities perceived by viewers of particular programmes. Therefore two types of questions were designed. The first related to opinion formation, where the aim of the question was to ask respondents to think about how watching specific content may help to form opinions on any subject. The second related to types of learning, specifically learning about social, personal and emotional issues, which was explored in the focus groups. Together, these questions formed a basis for understanding respondents’ attitudes towards learning from news and current affairs, documentary and reality programming.

Opinion formation

In terms of opinion formation, the results of the survey indicates news scores at the high end of an opinion formation scale (66 per cent), and docusoaps/talkshows at the low end of the scale (6 per cent/3 per cent). Figure 23 details the hierarchical manner in which respondents classified programme categories according to opinion formation. The low ratings for political debate programmes (26 per cent) and documentary series (26 per cent) is surprising given the communicative form of the programmes. Similarly the medium rating for current affairs (46 per cent) is of interest given the nature of the topical content of these programmes. It is perhaps the case that respondents considered the question difficult to answer, as it would require them to consider examples of programme content which has helped them to form opinions.

Although the pattern is generally similar for all age groups, there are some systematic age differences in how learning is regarded (Figure 24). Among young people reconstruction, lifestyle programmes, docusoaps and talk shows
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are perceived as containing more learning opportunities than amongst the elderly.

The focus groups highlighted a difficulty in researching learning from television. There is a social stigma to learning from television, a popular form of leisure activity and not one usually associated with learning. This comment by a male participant highlights this perception of learning: 'When it comes to general knowledge it’s never ending, but there’s not much you can’t learn somewhere else, it’s not like they’ve got a monopoly on knowledge, it’s at other places as well'.

When participants in the focus groups talked about learning from different programmes, they usually isolated examples of formal learning. For example, this 29 year old female desk officer explained:

You can learn languages, you learn about different cultures, about animals, about space and all sorts of things you wouldn’t otherwise get to see, När & fjärran, you get to see from different countries, which you wouldn’t otherwise, you may not ever go there, so you can get an idea of, some perception of what the world looks like which you wouldn’t have otherwise.

In general, participants felt they could learn about the world mainly from news and documentary, for example:

*How the seas work or about the Second World War, there are many examples.* (34 year old female teacher)

*There are also fantastic documentaries about music, going through all of music’s history.* (22 year old male student)

*There are good, really good documentaries and like that, like when there are stories on history, then you definitely learn something.* (30 year old male systems administrator)

*I just think documentaries, or news are what you can really learn from, so you keep up to date on what’s happening in general.* (27 year old female student)

When it came to more informal learning opportunities, participants debated whether it was possible to learn from more popular genres, and what kind of learning this might be. An extract from a focus group highlights the way participants talked about informal learning:

You can’t learn from a docusoap really, except that you learn that you’d never want to take part in a soap, that’s the only thing you learn...But well of course I think that autumn when we were watching Farmen practically every evening, it’s been rolling here, and you’ve followed this psychologist or therapist or
whichever he was, who was the most difficult person you can imagine, and then he wins the whole lot. Then somewhere, of course when you see his actions and behaviour, and you get to see reflections afterwards where they might regret what they said and did and so on. Of course when you watch it you put those things in your little reserve in there and then you remember that this was a bad way of doing it, you should not have done it that way, and it's much easier to sit here and say 'shit how can you say that, how can you do that and that'...I think, well of course you learn something whether you think you've learnt something or not, when this whole series has passed, you get impressions whether you want it or not.

(33 year old production designer)

First this participant makes a throwaway remark about learning, joking that the only thing to learn from watching docusoaps is not to take part in them. On reflection, he begins to explore his own viewing experiences whilst watching a docusoap with his partner. It is the observation of social behaviour, and in particular the negative criticism of a character in this docusoap which he relates to the idea of learning. His description of a 'reserve' is key, as it shows how he can 'get impressions', and learn along the way, without explicitly acknowledging learning from this programme. In the reserve learning are ideas and impressions about social behaviour, right and wrong ways of living and relating to people. As a viewer, he may draw on these ideas and impressions from his reserve, as and when he needs them.

Gossip about participants in factual and reality genres, in particular docusoaps, is another example of learning. When viewers gossip and debate about these programmes, they are connecting to a social event. Some participants described how they watched docusoaps in order to be able to discuss them socially:

Above all through watching TV in today’s society you learn to keep up to date on what’s happening, I mean coffee break talk is to a fairly large part caused by what's happening on TV, if you watch all these docusoaps you always have something to discuss with someone…it's like when Robinson started if you didn’t know what Robinson was you might as well have said 'what do you mean, Riksdagen, what's that?' you'd get totally alienated, you can’t communicate with people, they like 'what, haven't you watched Robinson'? (29 year old male student)

By watching docusoaps, this participant ‘always has something to discuss with someone’, indicating the all purpose usefulness of docusoaps, or other media events, for general social interaction. Peer pressure is a contributing factor, as without a certain familiarity with these programmes he feels isolated from his peers (‘totally alienated’).

Another example illustrates the idea of learning and different viewing strategies for docusoaps:
My mother’s husband is watching Robinson and Farmen and really does hope that he’ll learn something, and does get really sincerely pissed off that there isn’t enough of farming in Farmen and not enough of survival in Robinson., whereas if I watch that program I can get a sadistic pleasure in watching people act like idiots and you can sit here at home feeling ‘how good it is that I’m not as stupid as all the rest’. (30 year old male student)

Here, one viewing strategy is to criticize docusoaps for lack of formal learning, or accurate information. Another viewing strategy is to have no expectations of learning from docusoaps. The ways in which this participant criticizes the people in the programmes is both an example of lack of learning, and also self-criticism, which could be viewed as evidence of learning. This strategy of self-criticism when watching docusoaps was discussed in the previous sections in relation to value judgements. Some participants reflected on the process of watching these programmes as an opportunity to learn about themselves as viewers, to be self-critical:

You learn about yourself - ‘why do I sit here and watch?’ You think ‘I’m really not someone who watches that kind of crap’...and then you sit there for fifteen minutes and you sit and note that ‘now I sit here and watch that kind of crap’...and then you start to think ‘but why do I still sit here?’ (30 year old male civil servant)

In the examples provided, there is evidence to suggest participants can learn about emotional issues whilst watching docusoaps. Emotional learning is understood to mean learning about sympathy and empathy for other human beings and animals. Docusoaps borrow from melodrama, and often present stories of ordinary people in emotionally charged situations. As many docusoaps invite negative identification, it could be said that viewers do not sympathise with participants. However, debate relating to negative identification, and self-criticism by viewers, can lead to opportunities for emotional learning. Further research is necessary to explore this issue in greater detail.
Fairness

Attitudes towards fair treatment of different social groups in factual and reality programmes indicates viewers frame their responses to representations of non-professional actors, public figures and celebrities in relation to genre expectations and perceptions of social groups. Overall, viewers think that programme makers treat different social groups well, but there is some awareness that there could be improved ethical treatment of people. They value the fair treatment of all social groups in all genres, but they value fair treatment more in relation to children rather than celebrities, and in news rather than docusoaps. This difference in attitudes is partly explained by context. Viewers perceived a difference between the types of people who were asked to offer their opinion or share their experiences in news and documentary, and the people who applied to take part in docusoaps. However, despite these differences, there was some awareness that people deserve to be treated with integrity, no matter who they are or why they chose to take part in a television programme.

The topic of fair treatment of different social groups was the basis for a series of questions in the survey related to attitudes towards ethical treatment of non-professional actors, public figures, and celebrities. Fair treatment was understood to mean just and fair treatment of people by programme makers in factual and reality programmes. The different groups of people included:

- Young children
- Teenagers
- The elderly
- Women
- Men
- Ethnic minorities
- People with mental health problems
- People with disabilities
- Politicians
- Experts
- Celebrities

Respondents were asked if they thought programme makers treated these different groups of people fairly in three factual categories - news, documentary and reality programmes. They were also asked how important it was to them that these different groups of people were treated fairly. In the focus groups, participants were asked if they thought there were good and bad ways to treat people in programmes.
The results of the survey show a generally positive perception of fair treatment in news for all social groups. Figure 25 indicates that respondents perceived men (64 per cent), experts (62 per cent) and children (61 per cent) as very/fairly well treated in news, followed by women (56 per cent), the elderly (51 per cent) and teenagers (50 per cent). Less than half the sample thought politicians (48 per cent), celebrities (46 per cent), ethnic minorities (44 per cent), and disabled people (40 per cent) were treated very/fairly well, whilst a third thought people with mental health problems were treated very/fairly well. Figures 26 and 27 indicate that if we compare perceptions of fair treatment in news with docusoaps, then attitudes change, as respondents think people of all groups are treated much less fairly in docusoaps (for example men 24 per cent, people with mental health problems 13 per cent). Genre clearly influences attitudes to ethical treatment of social groups. Despite significant differences in perceptions of fair treatment across genre, attitudes towards fair treatment of social groups was consistent for news and docusoaps. Certain social groups were perceived as receiving better treatment than others, for example men were perceived as being treated the most fairly in news and docusoaps (64 per cent, 24 per cent respectively).

Figure 28 shows that respondents valued fair treatment for all social groups in news. For example, 83 per cent valued very fair treatment of children in news, 81 per cent the elderly, and 78 per cent people with mental health problems. Experts (60 per cent), politicians (58 per cent) and, especially, celebrities (50 per cent) scored lower due to their public personas in the media. If we compare these figures with those for docusoaps (Figure 29), respondents placed less value on the fair treatment of all groups (approx. 20 - 30 percentage units lower) but the ranking is about the same (Figure 30).

The difference between perceptions and value of fair treatment shows a critical take on this issue. For example, respondents highly valued the fair treatment of children in news (83 per cent) but perceived fair treatment to be less than they would wish (61 per cent). Similarly, respondents valued the fair treatment of women in docusoaps (46 per cent) but perceived fair treatment as lower (21 per cent).

Discussion in the focus groups centred on the context within which people chose to take part in programmes. There was a fundamental difference between the types of people who were asked to offer their opinion or share their experiences in news and documentary, to the types of people who applied to take part in docusoaps. There was a common understanding that people who were asked to take part in news and documentary were mainly treated fairly. The one exception was in relation to victims of tragedy, where it was thought news journalists sometimes invaded privacy – ‘even the news get more and more indiscrete when it comes to relatives of victims.’ One example illustrates general comments on context to fair treatment.
Well, but they usually have knowledge on something, and then maybe TV finds them, and they tell them about their hobby, their knowledge etcetera, a docusoap celebrity has applied to the TV channel, probably for several years before being cast, and eventually you are that crazy person we need to create imbalance in this group, ‘you’re perfect here’. (33 year old male production designer)

This participant’s comment highlights the perception of non-professional actors in docusoaps as ‘media hot’ (a ‘docusoap celebrity’), and selected for their larger than life personalities. The context within which people are filmed in news, documentary and docusoaps in part explains why genre frames attitudes towards the value and perception of fair treatment discussed above.

Although participants were mainly critical of ‘media hot’ docusoap contestants, some viewers still felt these people deserved fair treatment no matter what the circumstances. As this 34 year old mother explained: ‘I think for soaps, even if there is a contract, there has to be some kind of integrity. Even if they’ve got themselves to blame, it doesn’t mean it’s right.’ Another participant argued:

When you apply for a docusoap and get chosen and agree to go on, then you have to take the DVD with ridiculous moments where you make a fool of yourself…but then, of course there’s always people who don’t realise what it means…they understand what it means, but they don’t realise what it means to them in the future, what the effects are. There I think you have a responsibility to make sure that these people who maybe haven’t understood what effects this is going to have on their lives, that you help them. (30 year old male civil servant)

His comments on ethical treatment of docusoap contestants, and the responsibility of programme makers, indicates an overall concern for fair treatment, and integrity, no matter who the people are or why they chose to take part in a television programme. Concern for fair treatment of non-professional actors connects with participants’ awareness that these people are often put into challenging situations in order to make entertaining television.

In relation to critical awareness of fair treatment in factual and reality programmes, the findings suggest that viewers lack understanding of the ways programme makers treat people and the rights of non-professional actors. The use of genre as a framing device for ranking of social groups is troubling as it highlights a common perception of docusoap participants as less deserving of fair treatment by programme makers. In fact, the highly constructed nature of many of these programmes would indicate docusoap participants are potentially vulnerable to manipulation or exploitation, and may not understand their rights regarding ethical treatment. If viewers value fair treatment of all social groups, then it is important to increase awareness of such treatment in all genres, rather than valuing certain genres over others according to a public/popular framework. Fair treatment therefore is one area in which viewers need to
increase media literacy, and programme makers can play a role in increasing understanding of this ethical issue.
Conclusion

This report on television audiences and factual and reality programming has addressed four research questions. How do adult viewers understand and evaluate the changing generic environment of Swedish factual and reality programming? How do viewers evaluate the truth claims of different types of factual and reality programming? What do viewers consider they learn from different types of programmes? What attitudes do viewers have towards fair treatment of different social groups within news and current affairs, documentary, and reality programmes? The findings for these research questions are outlined below with reference to the quantitative and qualitative data.

Summary of Findings

Genre

The scheduling of factual and reality television informs viewer responses, as viewers do not watch programmes in isolation, but within the context of a narrow primetime schedule, where viewers have come to expect traditional factual genres on public service channels, and contemporary popular factual genres on commercial channels.

Viewers profile programmes according to a number of axes: public service versus commercial channels; Swedish versus foreign programmes; public versus popular genres; information versus entertainment categories. These ways of categorising and valuing factual and reality programmes highlights the importance of public discourse on television, and pre-existing attitudes towards Swedish television contexts and genres. The concepts of public service broadcasting, and public and popular culture frame generally strong attitudes towards television channels and programmes.

There is a strong connection between SVT and traditional factual genres, commonly perceived as public ‘duty’ genres. Similarly, there is a connection between TV4, TV3 and Kanal 5 and contemporary reality genres, commonly perceived as popular commercial genres. Viewers frame their responses in relation to these common perceptions of public versus popular genres.

Viewers cluster those genres which use an investigative approach to social issues and real life. News stands apart as a distinctive genre, although it shares an investigative approach often used in current affairs and consumer programmes. Viewers cluster those genres which take a more constructed approach to people and their everyday lives. Docusoaps stand apart as a
Audiences and Factual and Reality Television

distinctive genre, although it shares an observational approach often used in lifestyle or some documentary.

Viewers value traditional factual genres associated with investigations of reality more than popular genres associated with constructions of reality. These value judgements influence the reporting of viewing preferences, as there is a low reporting for watching popular genres which is not matched by the ratings profiles for these genres. These value judgements also frame discussion of these genres. The sociability or watchability of programmes is discussed by viewers in negative rather than positive terms, or quality criteria.

Attitudes towards Swedish and foreign factual and reality programmes highlight a perceived distinction between American programming as sensationalist and overly commercial and Swedish programming as better reflecting a ‘Swedish’ mentality of ‘down-to-earth-ness’ and honesty. This issue touched on wider issues of national identity, and can perhaps be seen as framing a reaction to internationalization on a wider scale. There is a sense that respondents perceive foreign programmes as not only importing foreign content, but also importing foreign social, cultural and moral values. The uniform criticism of American reality TV suggests a desire on behalf of Swedish viewers to watch popular factual programmes based on Swedish cultural and social values. However, criticising popular factual programmes is also part of the attraction in watching them in the first place, and such comments are connected to criticism of popular culture in general.

Value judgements about the categorisation of genres often leads to discussion about ethical issues relating to good and bad programmes, people in programmes, and viewing behaviours. The connection between genre expectations and moral values is most apparent when viewers discuss docusoaps, which excite strong emotional feelings, and self criticism. One female viewer explained her feelings using the metaphor of heat: ‘Farmen, I get totally, well hot from that, then you have to get some fever reducing kind of medicine, it’s so annoying.’ This metaphor shows the relationship between watching docusoaps and what makes them good and bad in equal measure. The majority of participants criticised themselves for their strong emotional responses to characters and situations in docusoaps. Why viewers are so self-critical is perhaps related to value judgements about docusoaps as ‘trash TV’, and also as representing character traits and moral values at odds with common perceptions of Swedish television and people, as ‘down to earth’ or ‘not exaggerated’.

Actuality

Viewers are critically engaged with the truth claims made within factual and reality genres. Judgements of actuality are based on values, genre expectations, channel identity, performance and other contextual factors. There is a hierarchical scale used for actuality with news at the top of the scale and docusoaps at the bottom of the scale.
Swedish viewers place great trust in the truth claims made by news. Swedish news is perceived as more trustworthy than foreign news, public service more trustworthy than commercial news. However, trust in the truth claims of news does not necessarily mean the news is treated uncritically. The phrase ‘a picture of reality’ encapsulates audience understanding of actuality and an awareness of editorial issues in news.

Viewers are aware of the staged reality of docusoaps. Docusoaps invite a critical viewing mode, where viewers question what is authentic and what is staged.

There is a connection between attitudes towards actuality and culturally specific genres. Programmes from Sweden and other Nordic countries were perceived as more true-to-life, than those from Britain, or other European countries National differences in attitudes towards programmes were relatively minor, with the exception of American programmes which were highly criticised.

Swedish television viewers are media literate. Media literacy is understood to mean comprehension and critique. The quantitative and qualitative data indicates adult viewers are both critically engaged with factual and reality television, and concerned by the rapidly changing, often hybridized nature of these programmes. Therefore when considering comprehension and critique, it is important to recognize that television viewers can be media literate, and also experience uncertainty when responding to television content.

Learning

Viewers understand learning to mean both formal learning from traditional factual genres, and informal learning from popular factual genres. Formal learning is understood as relating to learning about world or national events, or social issues. Informal learning is understood as relating to personal or emotional issues, and in particular what viewers can ‘get out’ of programmes. Viewers also learn about the media and their own viewing practices from watching factual and reality genres.

There is evidence to suggest viewers can learn about emotional issues whilst watching docusoaps. Emotional learning is understood to mean learning about sympathy and empathy for other human beings and animals. As many docusoaps invite negative identification, whereby viewers are mainly critical of the people taking part, it could be said that viewers do not sympathise with participants. However, debate relating to negative identification, and self criticism by viewers, can lead to opportunities for emotional learning. Further research is necessary to explore this issue in greater detail.

Fairness

Attitudes towards fair treatment of different social groups in factual and reality programmes indicates viewers frame their responses to representations of non-
professional actors, public figures and celebrities in relation to genre expectations and perceptions of social groups. Overall, viewers think that programme makers treat different social groups well, but there is some awareness that there could be improved ethical treatment of people. They value the fair treatment of all social groups in all genres, but they value fair treatment more in relation to children rather than celebrities, and in news rather than docusoaps. This difference in attitudes is partly explained by context. Viewers perceived a difference between the types of people who were asked to offer their opinion or share their experiences in news and documentary, and the types of people who applied to take part in docusoaps.

In relation to critical awareness of fair treatment in factual and reality programmes, viewers lack understanding of the ways programme makers treat people, and the rights of non-professional actors. The use of genre as a framing device for ranking of social groups highlights a common perception of docusoap participants as less deserving of fair treatment by programme makers. In fact, the highly constructed nature of many of these programmes would indicate docusoap participants are potentially vulnerable to manipulation or exploitation, and may not understand their rights regarding ethical treatment. It is important to increase awareness that people deserve to be treated with integrity, no matter whom the people are or why they chose to take part in a television programme. Fair treatment therefore is one area in which viewers need to increase media literacy, and programme makers can play a role in increasing understanding of this ethical issue.

Reflections

In the final section of this report, some brief reflections are offered on the findings within the context of Swedish television, policy and academic research.3

Public and Popular

The wide range of programmes considered in this research show a factual and reality map that is being redrawn by programme makers and viewers. Factuality was defined as ‘Factual and reality experiences, imagination, values, that provide settings within which media institutions operate, shaping the character of factual and reality television processes and viewing practices’ (adapted from Corner and Pels 2003: 3). It can be said that factuality in Sweden is one that is mapped across public and popular axes. The public/popular divide is closely associated with other value judgements, such as public service/commercial, and is the framing device for understanding factual and reality television. Whole

3 We would like to thank those people who took part in a public discussion on the early findings of this research for their helpful comments, many of which are reflected here.
genres are associated with public service television, eg current affairs, and commercial television, eg lifestyle. News and docusoaps stand apart from all other genres, at extreme ends of a public/popular axis. News is publicly important, docusoaps are not. News is informative, docusoaps are not. News is trustworthy, fair, quality television, docusoaps are none of these. Viewers apply these value judgements to almost every aspect of factual and reality television. The narrow scheduling of news and docusoaps on public and commercial channels explicitly re-enforces these value judgements.

And yet many factual and reality programmes cross public/popular divides. Time and again we see viewers struggling to define hybrid genres such as reality game shows, or emergent genres such as life experiment programmes. Traditional public service genres such as documentary have been opened up to popular audiences with the use of different communicative techniques. Many news stories concentrate on human interest, many docusoaps are the topic of news stories. This is not to say that popularisation is always good, or that the public no longer value hard news. But the strong divide between public and popular acts as a barrier to viewers’ experiences of a range of factual and reality television. The public/popular framing of television is matched by age profiles for public service and commercial channels. Such a division in viewing experiences is cause for concern as this means that younger viewers may value public service channels but they are not watching. In order to attract popular audiences, a balance is needed between public and popular programmes.

Guilty Viewers

A common experience for Swedish viewers is to feel guilty about watching television. When it comes to popular factual television these guilty feelings increase exponentially. Docusoaps appear to be the lowest form of television, and therefore viewers appear to feel the most guilty when watching them. Not only are docusoaps perceived as trashy entertainment, but they are also mainly shown on commercial channels, and are often foreign. Guilt therefore is associated with choice of leisure activity, quality standards, production contexts, popular culture, and national culture and identity. Feeling guilty about watching television is a common feeling for many viewers around the world. But, what makes the guilty viewers in this research distinctive is the different and extended levels of guilt in being entertained. The common perception of Swedish programming as better reflecting a ‘Swedish’ mentality of ‘down-to-earth-ness’ and honesty is a quality much valued by viewers. The kinds of programmes most associated with Swedish values are those shown on public service television. These are also the kinds of programmes often described by younger viewers as boring.

Therefore, television viewers are in a paradoxical position whereby they want more Swedish programming that reflects Swedish cultural, social and moral values, and yet many do not wish to watch them. Certainly for younger viewers
Swedish factual television is a bitter pill to swallow. This leads then to guilty viewing of foreign and homegrown docusoaps, where viewers are heavily critical of the format, the participants, and themselves, almost to the point of self-loathing. A play on the Swedish term 'lagom' perhaps helps to explain this issue. There is an understanding amongst viewers that there is nothing ‘average’ about docusoap participants, there are no ‘average Joes’, nor are participants perceived as balanced, self aware, or self-effacing. Rather, docusoaps symbolize the opposite of ‘lagom’, where people are put in extreme situations, behave in extreme ways, and make viewers feel extreme emotions. The over the top docusoap participants and viewers’ guilty responses to them can perhaps also be connected to the idea of the Law of Jante (Janteloven), an idea that in the context of docusoaps refers to the critical judgement of docusoap participants and good and bad ways of living. It is easy to criticize docusoaps, and indeed docusoaps can be entertaining precisely because they invite critical viewing. But, there is something about these guilty viewing practices which highlights a need for factual and reality television based on Swedish cultural and moral values, which can be enjoyed by popular audiences.

Media Literacy

Swedish viewers are media literate, and the value of this should not be overlooked in current policy and academic research objectives. Viewers across all age ranges, gender, socio-economic status, regions, and educational levels show evidence of understanding and critical judgement of changing forms of non-fictional representations on television. Livingstone et al suggest that ‘barriers to media literacy include the changing forms of media representation (especially hybrid genres that blur reality and drama)’ (2005: 4). When it comes to the aspects of media literacy associated with comprehension and critique, Swedish viewers display high levels of literacy, especially in relation to hybrid genres such as docusoaps. It is possible to say that viewers are more media literate when it comes to docusoaps than the news, because they have learned to play the reality game. Docusoap viewers are like computer games players in that they quickly become as knowledgeable as the producers. These viewers are knowledgeable, cynical viewers who have learnt about the media from the media.

It is also the case that viewers need to become more media literate. For example, in discussion of the news, viewers want to be able to compare different ‘pictures of reality’, but lack the time, resources or knowledge to investigate news stories on a regular basis. Whilst viewers value news for its trustworthy portrayal of events, they need to be able to critique it in the same ways they critique other popular genres. In terms of fair treatment, there is evidence that viewers lack understanding of the rights of non-professional actors in docusoaps, and indeed treat them as second class citizens. Programme makers have a role to play in actively promoting media literacy, as an informed public
leads to an engaged viewer, and that can only be a good thing for Swedish television.
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Figure 1: Watching Channels (per cent)

Figure 2: Watching Channels by Age (per cent)
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Table 1: Profile of Channel Audiences (watching at least 3 days per week)

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<th></th>
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<td>22</td>
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Figure 3: Channel Evaluation (per cent)
Figure 4: Channel Evaluation; Opinions Only (per cent)

Table 2: Evaluation of SVT (SVT1/SVT2) by Watching Habits, Including Comparison with Positive Evaluation of Other Channels (per cent)
Table 3: Dimensions in Channel Evaluation (factor scores)

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Note: Created by factor analysis (varimax rotation; 3 components extracted)

Explained variance (%) 35 23 22

Figure 5: Channel Evaluation by Age (per cent amongst those with opinion)
Table 4: Profile of Channel Evaluation Groups

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<th>SVT-</th>
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<th>All respondents</th>
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<td>27</td>
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<td>23</td>
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</table>

Figure 6: Importance of Showing on Swedish Channels (per cent)
Audiences and Factual and Reality Television

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<th>People/life</th>
<th>&quot;Reality&quot;</th>
<th>News</th>
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<td>Lifestyle programmes</td>
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Note: Created by factor analysis (varimax rotation; 4 components extracted)

Table 5: Importance of Showing on Swedish Channels (factor scores)

Figure 7 Importance of Showing on Swedish Channels, by Age (per cent)
Jönköping International Business School

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<td>News</td>
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<td>Current Affairs/Documentaries</td>
<td>SVT1/SVT2</td>
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<td>Talk Shows</td>
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<td>Lifestyle Experiment Programmes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Docusoaps</td>
<td>Kanal 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 6: Best Channel**

![Best Channel Graph](image)

**Figure 8 Best Channel (per cent)**
Figure 9 Viewing Habits, Watching at Least Once a Week (per cent)
Figure 10: Viewing Habits: Factual Programming and National SOM 2004 (Watching at Least Once A Week; per cent)
Audiences and Factual and Reality Television

Figure 11: Viewing Habits, Watching at Least Once a Month (per cent)

Figure 12: Most Regular Viewing Habits (per cent)
Figure 13: Important Contents vs. Regular Viewing Habits (per cent)

Table 7: Individual Relation between Regular Viewing Habits and Notions of Importance (per cent)
## Audiences and Factual and Reality Television

### Channels watched (at least 3 days/week):

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<th>SVT only</th>
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<td>97</td>
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<td>59</td>
<td>88</td>
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**Table 8: Content Preferences by Channel Habit (per cent Watching at Least 3 Days Per Week)**

### Channel evaluation:

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<th>All +</th>
<th>SVT/TV4 +</th>
<th>SVT +</th>
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<th>All -</th>
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<td>29</td>
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<td>32</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
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<td>Nature programmes</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<td>15</td>
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<td>Docusoaps</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>Consumer programmes</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>Reconstructions</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Talk shows</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>1</td>
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**Table 9: Content Preferences by Channel Evaluation (per cent Watching at Least 3 Days Per Week)**
Figure 14: Perception of Information vs. Entertainment (per cent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Society</th>
<th>Lifestyle</th>
<th>&quot;Reality&quot;</th>
<th>Relations</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Current affairs/documentaries</td>
<td>0.71</td>
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<td>News</td>
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<td>0.01</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
<td>-0.27</td>
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<td>Consumer programmes</td>
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<td>Lifestyle experiment programmes</td>
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<td>0.83</td>
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<td>Documentary series</td>
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<td>-0.01</td>
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<td>-0.11</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.77</td>
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Note: Created by factor analysis (varimax rotation; Kaiser’s Criterion)

Table 10: Dimensions in Perceptions of Information/Entertainment (factor scores)
Audiences and Factual and Reality Television

Figure 15: True-to-Life (per cent)

Figure 16: Fairly True-to-Life, by Young and Old (per cent)
Figure 17: Important that True-to-Life (per cent)

Figure 18: True-to-Life, Importance vs. Perception (per cent)
Audiences and Factual and Reality Television

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Very important:</th>
<th>True-to-life:</th>
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<th>Yes</th>
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<td>60</td>
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Table 11: Individual Relation between Perception of True-to-Life and Notion of Importance (per cent)

![Figure 19: Ordinary People Act Up for the Camera (per cent)](image-url)

To a fairly high degree
To a very high degree
Figure 20: People Acting Up in Television, Non-Acceptance vs. Perception (per cent)

Figure 21: True-to-Life, Programmes from Different Countries (per cent)
Figure 22: True-to-Life, Programmes from Different Countries, by Age (per cent)

Figure 23: Opinion Forming (per cent ‘always’ or ‘most of the time’)
Figure 24: Opinion Forming, by Young and Old (per cent)

Figure 25: Perceptions of Fair Treatment in News Programmes (per cent)
Figure 26: Perceptions of Fair Treatment in Docusoaps (per cent)

Figure 27: Perceptions of Fair Treatment in News vs. Docusoaps (per cent)
Figure 28: Importance of Fair Treatment in News Programmes (per cent)

Figure 29: Importance of Fair Treatment in Docusoaps (per cent)
Audiences and Factual and Reality Television

Figure 30: Importance of Fair Treatment in News vs. Docusoaps (per cent)
TV Opinions in Sweden: Survey Method and Sample

Åsa Nilsson

Survey design

The survey study TV Opinion in Sweden is aimed at the Swedish population aged 16–80 years, including foreign citizens. The questionnaire was sent out to a random sample of 2,000 people living all over Sweden.

The questionnaire contained 12 pages of questions on TV habits and TV attitudes (see Appendix). Most questions contained fixed response alternatives, requiring a single mark, but the questionnaire also included two open-ended questions. In all, the questionnaire contained 39 questions, most of them multi-item questions.

Field work

The main part of the questionnaires was collected in February and March 2005. The field period began January 31 when the questionnaires were mailed out together with a letter, reaching (most) respondents on February 3. During the month to come, the initial send-out was followed up by a thanks/reminder postcard; a new questionnaire; and by a set of telephone reminders. Due to the relatively low response rate (cf. e.g. Nilsson 2005), an extra set of telephone reminders were added in order to encourage the respondents to fill in the questionnaire. Table 1 shows the field work in detail.

As an initial response to the survey, on February 7, 115 questionnaires had been completed and returned, meaning a first gross response rate of 6 per cent (Table 2). This corresponds to 12 per cent of the questionnaires that would be completed by the end of the field period. Monday one week later, the gross result was 17 per cent, two weeks later 24 per cent. Beginning on the sixth week, the response rate was still not higher than 36 per cent; however, by a new set of telephone reminders, the response rate accelerated somewhat (cf. Figure 1). In the end of April, i.e. after 12 weeks of fieldwork, a gross result of 47 per cent was reached.

From Figure 2 it is evident how the filling-in of questionnaires was encouraged by the reminders. (Observe the fact that Saturdays and Sundays—with no mail delivered—are included along the time axis, which somewhat exaggerates the pattern by bringing the response curve all the way down to “0” each weekend.)
Response Rate and Sample Loss

From the gross sample, common procedure is to exclude persons that have diseased, are invalids, non Swedish-speaking, have changed address, have moved abroad or for other similar reasons are not considered part of the population (cf. note to table 3), i.e. the so-called sample loss. Excluding the sample loss, the net sample is the established base when presenting a survey’s response rate.

From the original sample of 2 000 people, 146 were excluded as known sample loss (Table 3). The net sample is thus 1 854 people; with 944 respondents that means a net response rate of 51 per cent.

The telephone reminders are helpful also when it comes to gain knowledge of why people are not able or willing to participate in the survey. Together with the information from the “refuse questionnaire” and from contacts initiated by the respondents, we learnt that the most common reason for not being able to participate is being ill/disabled/unable, which covered one third of the people (Table 4). But almost as big a share of the sample loss was due to people living abroad or away travelling. People having moved or living by unknown address make up one fifth, non Swedish-speaking one tenth. A small share was due to mortality.

The most often stated reason for not wanting to participate is lack of time (table 5). This result is not unique for this study but is an experience also from other survey studies (Nilsson 2005). Not wanting to participate as a matter of principle is also quite common, as is the reason that the questions are not found interesting enough. A relatively common reason mentioned is that one is not watching TV, at least not very often.

Representativeness and Response Rate by Population Groups

For a representative survey, the degree of variation in response rate in different population groups is crucial. If a certain group is underrepresented and the responses from this group tend to differ from the average, the survey’s general results are less valid for the population as a whole.

As is evident from the data in Table 6, women participate to a somewhat higher degree than men, an experience often made in other studies (e.g. Nilsson 2005). When it comes to age, there is a dividing line at 50 years – those under, especially the 20–29-year-olds, being somewhat less willing to participate. In terms of geography, people living in the Stockholm area, in Western and in Southern Sweden are somewhat less inclined to participate than those living in other parts of the country; the somewhat weaker response willingness in the big city areas is also a common experience (ibid.).

The demographic composition of the respondents constitutes a kind of miniature Sweden. By Table 7, the distribution amongst responses with regard to gender, age, and geographic region is compared with the Swedish population, as well as with the gross and net sample respectively.
In the table, the variations in response rate between women and men is reflected in women being somewhat overrepresented amongst the respondents; it has nothing to do with a skewness in the drawn sample. Also we see that the age group 20–29 is somewhat underrepresented compared with in the Swedish population, and people in their fifties and sixties on the contrary somewhat overrepresented. There is also a slight underrepresentation of people living in the Stockholm area. On the whole the responses very well match the demographic pattern of the Swedish population.

Apart from demographic profile, it is possible to validate the representativeness of the response sample by comparing its feature with that of another survey on a, to the study, very crucial area: general tv-habits. The results from the question on how often one watch certain TV channels are possible to compare with the results from the National SOM study 2004 ("Riks-SOM 2"; age span adapted to that of this study, i. e. 16–80), based on a response sample of 1 772 people. The SOM survey has a somewhat higher response rate: 66 per cent. From Figure 3 it is clear how very similar those two surveys measure TV channel habits; the biggest difference in the results, focusing on the share watching at least 3 days a week, is four percentage points (referring to the ZTV channel).

References

Figures and Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Action Description</th>
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<td>Jan. 31</td>
<td>Questionnaire with letter sent out (reaching respondents by Feb. 3).</td>
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<td>Feb. 7</td>
<td>Thanks/reminder postcard sent out (reaching respondents Feb. 10).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb. 15</td>
<td>Postal reminder: questionnaire with new letter sent out (reaching respondents Feb. 18).</td>
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<td>Feb. 24-Mar. 7</td>
<td>Telephone reminders.</td>
</tr>
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<td>Mar. 8</td>
<td>Postal reminder: questionnaire with new missive to those not reached by phone (reaching respondents Mar. 11).</td>
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<td>Mar. 17-Mar. 22</td>
<td>Telephone reminders.</td>
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<td>Apr. 18</td>
<td>“Refuse questionnaire” (without ordinary questionnaire) sent to remaining respondents.</td>
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Table 12: Field Work

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<th>Number</th>
<th>Gross per cent</th>
<th>Cumulative per cent</th>
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<td>Mar. 7</td>
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<td>Mar. 14</td>
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Table 13: Received Response Week by Week (number, per cent)
Figure 31: Gross Response Rate (gross cumulative per cent)

Figure 32: Received Responses Day by Day (numbers)
Audiences and Factual and Reality Television

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<tr>
<th>Gross sample</th>
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<td>Sample loss</td>
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<td>Net sample</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unwilling/not reached</td>
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<td>Gross response rate</td>
<td>47%</td>
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<td>Net response rate</td>
<td>51%</td>
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Table 14: Responses and Sample Loss

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<td>Ill/disabled/unable</td>
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<td>Non Swedish-speaking</td>
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Table 15: Reasons Behind Sample Loss

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<td>Have not got time</td>
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<td>A matter of principle</td>
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<tr>
<td>Questions not interesting</td>
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<td>Never/rarely watch TV, have no TV set</td>
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<td>Not without compensation</td>
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<td>Not trusting the anonymity</td>
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<td>Combination of reasons</td>
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Table 16: Reasons for Not Wanting to Participate (per cent)
Fokusgrupper

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<th>Blandade grupper klasstillhörighet</th>
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<td>Blandade grupper marksänd/satellit kanaler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Blandade grupper av barnfamiljer och utan barn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• Halvstrukturerad, moderators medverkan är på mellannivå. Huvudfrågor är samma för alla fokusgrupper, medan 'fiskande'frågor och programklipp kan variera mellan åldersgrupperna.
• Frågeformulär fylls i av alla grupper.

Introduktion

Välkommen; presentera förfarkningsprojektets ämne; tryck på att få höra olika åsikter; på deras erfarenheter och perspektiv; att försöka att inte prata i munnen på varandra; be dem presentera sig med att säga sitt namn och program de ser regelbundet inom området program med någon form av dokumentära inslag, (factual).
Huvudfrågor

1 Erfarenhet av TV-tittande

ANVÄND LISTAN: Vilka av dessa program gillar ni bäst? Vilka av dessa program gillar ni inte?

- Fiska efter de tre undergrupperna av Nyheter och samhällsprogram, Dokumentärer, och Dokusåpor (reality)
- Fiska efter när i tablåerna deras program ligger, vid vilken tid de tittar som mest
- Fiska efter debatt och skvaller för särskilda nyheter eller dokusåpahändelser

2 Definiera genre

Hur skulle ni definiera program med någon form av dokumentära inslag eller sådant som inte är drama?

- Fiska efter vad de tycker är karaktärsslagen i de tre undergrupperna, till exempel hur skulle du definiera nyheter?
- Fiska efter vad de värderar i de tre undergrupperna, baserat på definitionerna

ANVÄND LEKEN, BE DEM ATT KATEGORISERA OLIKA PROGRAM, OCH ATT FÖRKLARA SINA SKÅL FÖR DE KATEGORIER DE VALT

3 Sanning

Tycker du att det du ser i dessa program är verklighetstroget?

- Fiska efter de olika undergrupperna
- Fiska efter om kända människor agerar annorlunda framför kameran
- Fiska efter iscensatt verklighet, och autentisk verklighet, hur ser skillnaden ut?

VISA KLIPP FRÅN DOKUSÅPA PROGRAM
Klipp från Izabellas bröllop
4 Att lära sig

Vad lär ni er av dessa program?

Fiska efter praktiska, sociala, känslomässiga saker, fråga efter exempel
Fiska efter de olika undergrupperna
Fiska efter sociala attityder till att lära sig av TV
Fiska efter att lära sig om medier

VISA KLIPP FRÅN DOKUMENTÄR
Alla grupper ser klipp från dokumentär Jobba för de rika

5 Deltagande

Finns det rätt och fel sätt att behandla människor som är med i TV?

Fiska efter olika sociala grupper, som män, kvinnor, barn, kändisar osv
Fiska efter hur de uppfattar människor som är med i dokusåpor (reality) jämfört med människor som är med i dokumentärer eller nyheter

VISA KLIPP FRÅN SAMHÄLLSPROGRAM
Alla ser klipp från Flickor på Ekbacken

Runda av och frågor

Finns det något ni vill diskutera?
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