

Chapter 9

Entertainment on French Television

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ABSTRACT

Since its appearance in the grid of programming, televisual entertainment has changed on several points: the presentation, the production, the mixture between entertainment and information. In this chapter, the authors study entertainment on French television by raising four principal points. A first part points out the important dates that marked the history of televisual entertainment. The second one presents the new chains that exploited the crenel of the entertainment and then allowed the multiplication of these programs. The third part counts the results and the analyses carried out on the evolution of the televisual entertainment by researchers in social sciences. The last one analyses the particular mixture between entertainment and politic. In conclusion, the authors say that entertainment has considerably changed in form but also in background. The objectives and reasons that characterize it are not comparable to those of its beginning.

INTRODUCTION

Since its appearance in the grid of programming, the televisual entertainment changed on several points: presentation, the production, the mixture between entertainment and information. Indeed, gradually, the emissions of entertainment opened with the participation of politicians or other personalities which do not result from the entertainment world or which are not artists (actors, singers, musicians, etc.). The viewers thus could attend the “slip”, with the fusion of emissions generally reserved for political personalities with emissions of entertainment.

In this paper, we propose to study entertainment on French television by raising four principal points. We present initially the important dates which marked the history of the televisual entertainment and which explain the important place that it occupies now in the programming. When they asked for the authorization of broadcasting, the free and paying channels of digital terrestrial television practically justified the creation of their chain by two arguments: programming of entertainments intended for a well identified public (young public, adults) and contents of the entertainment (artistic manga, plays, contests). The second part thus presents the new chains

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which exploited the crenel of the entertainment and which then allowed the multiplication of these programs. Indeed, from the Eighties to today, the entertainment underwent many modifications and was the object of research for many researchers, in several disciplines (sociology, communication sciences, history). The third part thus counts results and analyses carried out on the evolution of the televisual entertainment by researchers in social sciences. One of the important modifications of the entertainment is the place dedicated to the political personalities since the beginning of 2000. Previously, the politicians intervened only in the emissions of debate, during interviews or in the News... but not in the emissions of entertainment. However, they are now very numerous to request the emissions of entertainment, even during their electoral campaign. The last part develops this rather particular part of “entertainment and politic”.

BACKGROUND

Televisual Entertainment: Important Dates

We appoint two principal dates which mark one important moment in the programming of the emissions of entertainment on television French.

The first date goes back to the years 1950-1960 and marks an almost natural prolongation between the radio and television. In France, radio entertainments had sharp success as of the end of 1950. One of the first programming of entertainment was called *Le jeu des 1000 francs*. Programmed in April 1958 with the radio, *Le jeu des 1000 francs* regularly gathered the various family members around the radio. It consisted in questioning a candidate on topical questions or cultural questions. If the candidate did not make any mistake, he gained the sum of 1000 francs, from where its title. At the time, this emission

had sharp success and this success was never contradicted besides. Indeed, in April 2008, *Le jeu des 1000 francs* remained always the French radio broadcast most listened at 12:45. It simply underwent a light “relooking” in 2001, when the euro replaced the franc. It from now on was called the *Le jeu des 1000 euros* and seems the oldest play of the French radio landscape.

One year after the creation of this play, in 1959, the emission *Salut Les Copains* is launched on the radio station *Europe 1*. It was about a variety programme (pop music) which was addressed to the young people. At the beginning, the emission was programmed once a month for 30 minutes. But success was such as it profited from a daily diffusion. It became the emission most followed by “the generation of the baby-boom” which then listened to their preferred stars: Johnny Hallyday, Françoise Hardy, Sheila, Eddy Mitchell, Claude Francois, Sylvie Vartan, France Gall...

The success of the emissions of entertainment on radio explains logically the place that they then occupied on television. Indeed, the programming of the years 1950 is made up of emissions of entertainments and varieties, like *La Joie de vivre* (1952-1959), *Trente-six chandelles* (1953-1959), *Le cabaret de la télé*, etc. As the viewers appreciated also the fictions, the political officials granted a more consequent budget on television for the production of dramatic with an aim “of distracting” and “cultivating” the population. The game shows developed more around the intelligence, of the culture, and a little around the physical performance.

French television largely took as a starting point the concept of public service, such as it was declined on English television at its beginnings. In England, John Reith, first chief executive officer of the BBC was convinced that it was to tend to detached objectives of any financial interest and to serve the public (Aldridge, Mazdon, 2008). This rather particular design was essential in the European audiovisual landscape in construction, after

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