

SYNOPSIS**Homo ludens televisiensis****Manifestation of interactivity in the history of millennium's Hungarian television**

„(...) panem et circenses. (...)”²⁷¹,
(Juvenal)

“Bread and Circuses!” – sounds the motto of the dissertation quoted from the Roman satirist and poet. As for the language usage of our age it means that people must have their basic needs and entertainment for their everyday life. In this context circus actually refers to the games²⁷² being inherent parts of the Roman social life of that time.

From the beginning of the human history games hold a central position both in the society and the life of individual people. *“Play is older than culture, for culture, however inadequately defined, always presupposes human society.”* (Huizinga, 1955:1²⁷³) Although the field for play has significantly narrowed in the everyday life of modern societies and the role of games have also diminished, games themselves were not vanishing but have been transformed – reflecting the principle of conservation of energy.

In the times of Juvenal's Rome – turn of the 1st and 2nd century BC – people gathered in amphitheatres to attend the fight of gladiators (~ game) and upon the question of the emperor, by only one movement of their thumbs – pollice premere or pollice verso²⁷⁴ – they could vote the life or death of the defeated warrior.

In the first decade of the 21st century's Hungary people were sitting home in front of their TV sets, watching different talent contest shows (~ games) and upon the call-to-action of the hosts, via a call or SMS by their mobile phones they could vote green or red light for the participants.

At first glance there is a high contrast between the two flashes, but – with some simplifications – it is merely some two thousand years elapsed between their happenings distinguishing them. The central elements of both are (1) games in various forms (fight, combat, rivalry); (2) games as entertainment and leisure activities; (3) collective decision

²⁷¹ As for the phrase pervading in the age of August, people's mind is to be taken off the political issues by providing them free corn, feasts and circus games. (Bakos, 1974:621)

²⁷² In the ancient Rome three types of games have been classified based on the kind of entertainment: (1) theatrical games (ludi scenici), (2) circus games (ludi circenses) and (3) swordsmen fight (ludi/munus gladiatorum). (Terényi, 1989)

²⁷³ Huizinga, Johan (1955) *Homo Ludens: A study of the play element in culture*. Boston, Beacon Press.

²⁷⁴ The fight of gladiators ended up when any of the warriors got wounded. The defeated, if he was strong enough, could ask the audience for mercy. Holding up with clenched hands and hunched-up thumbs (pollice premere) meant mercy, while outstretched hands with thumbs down (pollice verso) meant death on behalf of the people. (Pecz, 1902-1904)

making and (4) interaction²⁷⁵. While in the Roman times games were played in real places (amphitheatre) at real time, in the 21st century it is a virtual arena and mediated space (television) where real time game shows are taking place. **Mass media mediatised Johan Huizinga's homo ludens** created in 1938 and brought its 21st century descendant, **homo ludens televisiensis** into being.

In the first half of the 21st century²⁷⁶ **television** exploded into people's life and by the end of the century – just in about a fifty years time – it completely dominated it as well. The invention which became basically the most influential mass media of our age is one of those technical devices that **brought substantial change into people's lives many times within a century**. With its roll-up television fundamentally changed **the structure of viewers' free-time usage** and a few decades later – as a result of its incredibly fast evolution – it also **changed their consumption attitudes (i.e. television watching)**, the type and editorial principles of the content offered. This process is still on nowadays.

By marketing terminology, **classical broadcast television** as a product has reached its **last downward phase in the product lifecycle**²⁷⁷ (PLC) by the end of the millennium. On the other hand **television** as a human recreational activity seems to successfully **comply with the new opportunities and needs of viewers** induced by technological innovations. *“Television is breaking out from its tight constraints, traditional functions and finds new role (...) in entertainment through the integration of newly spread devices – especially mobile phone – being in the first phase of their product life cycle.”*²⁷⁸ (Kumin, 2004)

In the currently still dynamically developing info-communication technology environment **cross-media interactivity**²⁷⁹ (see chapter III. 2.1.3) – defined by the symbioses of the mass media (here **television**) and the **telecommunication** – is considered to be **the first real, large volume manifestation of the media convergence** forming in a **social dimension** while bringing **huge business success**. (Tóth, 2004) This phenomenon is set into the main **focus of the study**. The thesis is articulated along **dual purpose**.

²⁷⁵ Mutual relationship, mutual control over something. (Bakos, 1974:377)

²⁷⁶ In Great Britain it was the BBC who started pilot broadcasting in 1929, in Germany it was Telefunken in 1935 and in the United States of America NBC in 1939. Hungary started the pilot in 1954 and the regular broadcastings in 1957.

²⁷⁷ Product Life Cycle is the terminology used for indicating the changes occurring during presence of a product on the market. The classical product life cycle has four different stages: (1) market introduction, (2) growth, (3) maturity, (4) saturation and decline. (Jobber, 1999:227-228)

²⁷⁸ Original text: „A maga szűkre szabott korlátai közül más, újonnan tért hódított, termék-életciklusuk első felében járó eszközök – különösen a mobiltelefon – bevonásával, integrálásával tör ki hagyományos funkcióiból, és talál magának új szerepet (...) a szórakoztatásban.”

²⁷⁹ Interactivity realized on analogue distribution platform and by analogue signal transmission. Beside changing channel, setting volume or handling the VCR viewers are capable of further interactions with their TV sets as well. For example using teletext or actually participating in a TV program via mobile phone, etc.

1. Supplying a deficiency in media studies it intends to provide a **descriptive and analytical overview** on different kinds of interactive applications incorporating telecommunication services (IVR²⁸⁰ and SMS²⁸¹) in the transition period from the traditional (analogue²⁸²) broadcast television to the digital interactive television (referred in the dissertation as **cross-media interactivity**, see chapter III. 2.1.3). Through the complex, **multidisciplinary aspect** of the media studies it **classifies** the different **types of cross-media interactivity**, considers the specific characteristic features for each of them and descriptively **presents and analyses** the defined sub-genres. Manifestation forms of interactivity **in the Hungarian media practice in the millennium** serve the basis of the typology, while the analyses uses the disciplines of communication- and media studies, sociology, psychology, information technology, telecommunication, economics and also applies the experiences of about a decade of personal media practice.

2. With discovering the topic, analyzing and interpreting the research data, based on Huizinga's homo ludens the thesis is **defining** the **homo ludens televisiensis** who is to be found in the whole continuum of the television history, but getting its full shape in the era of cross-media interactivity. While enlarging the different aspects of the subject it also **verifies the existence** of the television type of "man the player" and finally presents a potential scenario of his **faith** in the future in the rapidly digitalizing world of smart media²⁸³ (**homo ludens digitalis**).

The thesis holds significant **relevance for the communication- and media studies** from several aspects.

- **Interactivity breaks the classical, one way (one-to-many) and hierarchical communication structure of television.**

Media economics – Serving merely information transmitting purposes was not a long period in the history of the slightly a century old medium. With the live connection of telephone calls into TV programs (1959, NBC Today Show), launching of teletext service (1974, ITV) and the massive spread of infrared remote control (in the 1980s) made the

²⁸⁰ Interactive Voice Response. IVR systems automate the response of calls and interact with the caller. The interactive voice responses the questions or reacts to the commands of the callers who can provide their requests to the center by using the buttons of the phone.

²⁸¹ Short Message Service. Using this service short (160 character) text messages can be sent and received via mobile phones.

²⁸² Television systems were running from the starts until the 1990's on analogue operation systems. At that time every single component of the television value chain (studio work, broadcasting, distribution and the internal technical mechanism of TV sets) were analogue.

²⁸³ The expression refers to the convergent media device market dominated more and more by smartphones and smart TVs.

feedback of the viewers technically possible, thus the **two-way communication** between the television and its viewers has started. From the very first moment of the birth of the medium a special kind of interactional relationship – determined by the state of technological development of the age – was always present between the consumer electronic device and its viewer. By the early ages of the 21st century interactivity became one of the most substantial expectation upon television programs, thus it is not a passing fashion, but a **natural evolutionary process induced by technical innovations**. After the millennium, in simultaneously **pluralizing and atomizing media space**, the different kinds of **interactive** info-communication technology **solutions** involving the **target audience** in a **participative way** came to the front. As a consequence the traditional one-to-many (broadcast media) model of mass media is replaced progressively by the many-to-many (social media²⁸⁴) and one-to-many (CRM²⁸⁵) solutions.

- **Cross-media interactivity** forms a transition between the classical broadcast- and digital/interactive television and as such it is a **media historical phenomenon**.

Media history, media sociology – Considering the usage patterns the level of viewers' involvement into the flow of media consumption was the most significant change in the television of the 21st century. As a result of the technical development (i.e. massive diffusion of mobile phones and SMS technology) the former one way communication was progressively replaced by interactivity, so the originally “lean back” (coach potato) viewer became a more active “lean forward” kind of television user. In the evolution of the television **interactivity utilizing telephone** as a **channel of feedback** represents a **transition** period in the process leading **towards total interactivity**. (Middleton, 2002)

- **Interactivity defined by the symbioses of television and mobile phone**, has created a **new television genre** by making Call TV/Participation TV²⁸⁶ come alive.

Media history – *“With some exaggeration we can say that since the appearance of television (and the basic television genres) no new, original genres have evolved.”* (Kolosi, 2006:39) In the process of blurring sharp boundaries of genres between the information and entertainment television programs,- the two major pillars of television -, new **transitive genres** (like infotainment²⁸⁷, docusoap²⁸⁸, gastroreality²⁸⁹) are emerging

²⁸⁴ Production, consumption and sharing of information (news, opinions or any other user generated content) via digital media platforms.

²⁸⁵ Customer Relationship Management. A process integrating and defining the interactions between customers and the company.

²⁸⁶ Call-in quiz show. Integrates television programs with mobile communications services (mostly the text based SMS, scarcely MMS) based on simply data transfer. See chapter V. 2.3

²⁸⁷ information & entertainment. The entertaining way of presenting information in television programs.

and getting shaped even these days. At the same time convergence with the television related co-industries (telecommunication, information technology) is constantly expanding the framework of genres and creates completely **new sub-genres** (Call TV/Participation TV) within the entertainment programs.

- **Interactivity forms based on telecommunication services make up a growing proportion of commercial television channels' revenues.**

Media economics – In the beginning of the 2000 years interactivity appearing on the national television market has not only changed the viewers' passive television watching habits, but fundamentally changed the way of thinking of television enterprises, too. (Jenei, 2008) The program related or program integrated, usually premium rate telephone based applications are very much suitable for intensively involving the audience, establishing and maintaining their loyalty and emotional relationship. On the top of all the previously listed features, interactive applications – ranking among the non-spot solutions (i.e. sponsorship, TV Shop, L&M²⁹⁰, internet, teletext) – represent **additional and alternative revenue sources** beside the steadily declining revenues from the classical spot sales activity.

- **The manifestation of interactivity in the millennium's Hungarian television practice cannot be explored as being an outsider.**

Media research – The thesis is revealing, studying, analyzing and documenting a phenomenon that cannot be described from an external perspective, without the co-existence (complex knowledge of the field, special background- and sensitive business information etc.) of the real time happenings. During the **field research** due to the insider nature of the author the phenomenon was observed directly and with the pretention of completeness, so it could reveal such kind of occurrences and implications which would have been hidden for an outsider. (Babbie, 2000:317) These include – among others – the study cases taken as examples illustrating the several types of interactivity. Although these cases contain some data (viewing figures, call and SMS statistics etc.) presented in the dissertation in an aggregated format – not infringing the scientific accuracy, but maximally considering business ethics –, the inputs were and are still available only for a very limited number of professional experts.

²⁸⁸ documentary film & soap. Television genre combining the features of documentary films and soap operas.

²⁸⁹ gastronomy + reality. Reality program where the contestants compete in cooking and baking.

²⁹⁰ Licensing and Merchandising.

As for the literature review in the pre-phase and the field research in the main phase of the work there is not any comprehensive scientific work either in the international, or in the national communication- and media studies similar to this thesis focusing on the cross-media television interactivity reflecting the **theoretical approach** along with empirical studies **with media practice of everyday's**. Covering a **niche in media history** the multidiscipline discussion of the dissertation is forming along the dimensions of two key concept-pairs: one being is “homo ludens (televisiensis) and the game”, the other being is “television and interactivity”.

Based on the Huzinga's Homo ludens it can be set out that by the ages and cultures play elements were appearing through the history in different forms, developed and transformed in line with the actual social and technical background, because “*the true culture cannot exist without a certain play element (...)*”²⁹¹. By adding one word Huizinga's statement adapted for **the mass media age's** society sounds as follows: “The true **television culture cannot exist without a certain play element.**”

The paraphrased statement sounds as evidence, but with the taxative listing of the explicit functions of the television (1. informing, 2. entertaining and 3. educating) it can easily be verified too, whilst the **axiom constructs homo ludens televisiensis** in its own meaning. The “television man the player” has been shaped all along in parallel to the history of the medium and in a complete symbioses with it, so the history of the television represents the history of the homo ludens televisiensis as well. (Chapter VI)

From the content aspect offering a broad variety of entertaining television programs as its **immanent functional feature** television ever since strove to meet the constant demand of the viewers for different kind of games. (Chapter IV) As a result of the content development induced by **viewers of the reactive television** reality- and talent contest shows have appeared on-air, opening up the era of **cross-media interactivity** by the end of the 20th century. New media platforms (mobile phone and internet) integrated into television products made the former passive television viewers active, who then from this moment on were involved in several **different ways** in the process of television as conscious **content consumers**.

Voting components of television **formats** realizing **360 degree communication** are combining in their psychological effect mechanism para-social interaction (PSI) with elements of competitions (agôn). It has made the audience so active that – inverse to the reality shows – the technical solution itself has created a new television genre. Getting people

²⁹¹ Original text: „az igazi kultúra nem létezhet egyfajta játékos tartalom nélkül (...)” (Huizinga, 1990:222)

involved into the program flow has a special emphasis in the line-up of the telephone based interaction of Call TV programs. **Interactive television quiz shows** aired all around the world are the **virtual games** of the 21st century's adult society and hold dual play-element content. Making a call in the very proper moment refers to the fortune (alea), while finding the solution of the game is reflecting the mental aspect of the duel (agôn). As for the empirical researches exactly these two psychological drives make viewers to participate in the games. (Chapter V. 3.5)

Besides the interactivity integrated into the reality- and talent contest shows and Call TV programs three more **types of cross-media television interactivity applications** have been detected. (Chapter IV. 2) The altogether **five** different interactivity **forms** were presented and analyzed – applying multidimensional criteria – on the basis of seven dimensions taken from the practice of the Hungarian commercial television. The impact factors of the manifestation of the interactive element in the television productions are the incorporating television genre itself, the production, the target group and the real audience of the program, plus the related marketing communication activity. The **descriptive and analytical presentations** of the cross-media interactivity types along these aspects also demonstrate the **scientific uniqueness** of the thesis²⁹².

Considering its technological construction television is realizing one-way-communication, so the device in itself – without having an internal feedback channel – is **incapable of attaining** two-way-communication, the basis of **interactivity**. So interactivity with regards to television can only be defined in the relation of **evolution of converging co-industries**. **Cross-media interactivity** manifested in the transition between reactive- and digital/interactive television is to be considered a significant **media history milestone** from several aspects. Before no co-industry was able to show up a technical solution to involve viewers into television and realize additional revenues at the same time.

For making cross-media interactive applications **successful on the market** there was an essential need for a proper content to attract a wide mass of viewers (“content is the king”) and for interactive services to represent real **added value** (VAS) for the audience. The “**killer application**” kind of editorial content element innovations of the reality- and talent contest shows and the Call TV programs were able to progressively form and **change consumers’ habits**. (Urbán, 1999)

²⁹² See comprehensive summary table at the end of this Synopsys.

Cross-media interaction appearing in television programs in several different ways holds social action as a novelty from **sociological aspect**. Through this virtual kind of action people can **act as a community** even **without** their mutual **physical presence** (social media).

With the perfection of info-communication devices, transmitting- and distribution technologies **virtual presence** – the illusion of the mutual presence of other people – **has been created**. The massive diffusion of new media does not only mean the increase of the penetration indicators of the new communication technologies, but also opens up the way to new, yet unknown forms of social action. (Tóth 2004)

Cross-media interactive television application being present in the media practice of the European television markets called for the need of taking the converging co-industries' legal environment into a **uniform legal framework**, so the task of creating a **horizontal system of rules** overarching industries both from the content- and the technical aspect. Just like in the countries of the continent also in the domestic market interactive applications have been implemented for years in a macro-environment determined by legal anomaly.

It was the second half of 2000's when the **European Union** started the **uniform legislative process** with regards of this field. (Among others it was an EU decision adapted into the Hungarian law which resulted in getting out of Call TV programs in Hungary as of January 2011.) As for the national level media regulations effective as of January 2011 the new media law (Hungarian abbreviation: "Mttv.") versus the former one (Hungarian abbreviation: "Rttv.") has created a much more evident legal framework to the actors of the media market – through providing several new technical solutions, program content elements etc.

Although the legal, technical and economic background of the transition from analogue to digital television can be considered today as hundred percent ready for the change, television content providers – as an ideal financial scenario for them– would rather extend the era of cross-media interactivity. Reason for that is that some of their revenues are deriving from monetizing their content and related cross media interactive applications, however, business models of the new television area have here some blind spots. **Analogue switch-off**²⁹³, thus the digital change started all across Europe **in the first decade of the 21st century** is expected to be finished by the early 2020's. Following a 4-6 years long simulcast²⁹⁴ period the traditional broadcast (analogue) television of the past century will be irrevocably replaced by

²⁹³ Finishing of the analogue terrestrial program transmission.

²⁹⁴ The transition period during which the digital broadcasting is working parallel with the analogue broadcasting until the latter finally ends up. In the European countries this period lasts for about 4-6 years and during this time both the television content providers and the consumers prepare themselves for the complete quitting of the analogue system.

digital television and along with it the **digital/interactive television era** also **opens up** with several new forms of **viewers' interactions**. The end of cross-media interactivity means at the same time the start of a new television era with the **homo ludens digitalis** representing a new type of “man the player”. This moment, however, opens up a new chapter in the media history, so along with the cross-media television era this dissertation is also closing at this point.

The author of this media history documentation prepared with scientific pretence and for scientific purposes is not supposed to predict the future of the studied phenomenon within the framework of the current dissertation. Her well-established reason for that is that this writing is dealing with a phenomenon of a transition period (cross-media interactivity) induced by the evolution of technological innovations and as such has not only ex ante milestones (reactive television – chapter III. 2.1.3), but also the upcoming ex post stages are already known (digital television²⁹⁵/interactive services²⁹⁶ – see chapter III. 2.1.3). Already many years ago extensive scientific writings have been created on the digital television era being in its market introduction and growth stage of its product life cycle in the domestic media market, so both the international and the Hungarian literature are abounding in information regarding the topic²⁹⁷.

Regarding the **content structure of the thesis** it is constructed by seven major chapters. The Introduction (Chapter I) provides a general overview on the studied phenomenon, designates its location in the scientific framework, highlights the importance and actuality of it and along the explanation it also lists the main statements of the thesis. The study of the thesis statements starts with the review of the methodology applied for the elaboration of the topic. (Chapter II, Methodological considerations) It is followed by the Disciplinary context (Chapter III) presenting the relevant literature overview belonging to the two key components of the conceptual framework providing the theoretical grounding and embedding of the dissertation: homo ludens (Chapter III. 1) and interactivity (Chapter III. 2). The

²⁹⁵ Television signals are being transferred in digital form. (Orava & Perttula, 2004) Feedback channels for the viewers are mostly those of the cross-media interactivity era

²⁹⁶ Interactivity based on digital broadcasting. Via the built-in or external set-top-box connected to the TV set, viewers can use a wide variety of services. (Orava & Perttula, 2004) Such services are EPG (Electronic Program Guide), DVR (Digital Video Recorder), TSV (Time Shifted Viewing), a VOD (Video on Demand) etc.

²⁹⁷ International publications on digital (interactive) television are for example: Jensen, Jens. F. (2005) *Interactive Television: New Genres, New Format, New Content*; Pisan, Yusuf (ed.) (2005) *The Second Australian Conference on Interactive Entertainment*. Hungarian scientific publications are for example: Ágnes Urbán (2004) *Az új médiaszolgáltatások piaca*; Ágnes Jenei (2007) *Egy új televíziós modell kialakulása. A digitális interaktív televízió vizsgálata az olasz televíziózás fejlődéstörténetében*; Jenei Ágnes (2008) *Táguló televízió, Interaktív műsorok és szolgáltatások*. More detailed references are to be found in the Literature of the dissertation.

manifestations of the two concepts in the media practice are discussed through the presentation of Play-elements in television (Chapter IV) and Interactivity in television (Chapter V). The latter contains the overview of the history of television interactivity (Chapter V. 1) and the detailed analytical description of the different types of cross-media interactivity (Chapter V. 2 – see also the table at the end of this synopsis). Following the main discussion of the thesis it results in the conceptualization of Homo ludens televisiensis. (Chapter VI) The Summary closing the dissertation is synthesizing the main findings revealed through the discussion and also reflects on the list of main statements published in the Introduction. (Chapter VII) The Terms and definitions part contains a complete list of the abbreviations and terms to be found in the thesis with the belonging explanations and page numbers.