Popularization and personalization: a historical and cultural analysis of 50 years of Dutch political television journalism

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Chapter 3

TV programming in times of changing political communication

A longitudinal analysis of the political information environment

Manuscript under review.
Most discussions and appraisals of political information on television have a clear temporal angle to them, often focusing on dynamics in the post-WW II era. Although some authors qualify television as inherently at odds with the requirements of providing political information (e.g. Hart, 1994; Postman, 1985), the more common approach is to question whether the quality and quantity of political information have deteriorated since television became a widely used mass medium.¹ Focusing on the content and style of political television journalism, authors have studied whether the information that television provides has become more popular and more personalized, and have often - though not always - concluded that popularization and personalization have occurred to the detriment of other, more substantial dimensions of political information. These studies are often led by concerns about TV’s harmful influence on the workings of a healthy democracy (e.g. Brants & Neijens, 1998; Machin & Papatheoderou, 2002; Sparks & Tulloch, 2000; Street, 1997).

In this chapter, I will take issue with an important problem in the research about political information on television: the assumption of deterioration over time. Studies focusing on specific trends in media content, such as popularization or personalization, provide contrasting evidence (see for instance Norris, 2000; Rahat & Sheafer, 2007), with Anglo-American based scholars more often leaning towards the idea that entertainment has become all dominant (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999; Langer, 2007; Wattenberg, 1991). As systematic data on the supply and proportion of political information on television have hardly been collected, the evidence for strong-worded convictions about a changing ‘political information environment’ tends to be weak, and often based on selective or anecdotal data.

The research I present in this chapter is meant to counter these issues by presenting, first, a historically grounded inventory of potential broadcast time for political information. I examine specifically how the time spent on the broad categories of information, infotainment and entertainment on television in the Netherlands has evolved from 1956 to 2006. While only a small country on the global stage, its media landscape has been recognized as indicative for other national systems (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).
Second, I articulate the outcomes with the three phases of political communication that various authors have identified as, successively, ‘party-domination’, ‘public logic’, and ‘postmodern’ or ‘media logic’.

In the following sections of this chapter I will discuss, first, the only longitudinal empirical study about changes in political information on television that is available at present, and address the more general temporal models in political communication. Next, I specify the resulting research questions and describe the archive data and the coding categories used for the analysis. The results show that over time both public and commercial broadcasters in the Netherlands have dedicated more time to information programming, but these programs have moved out of prime time, especially on commercial channels. I also find that overall time spent on entertainment has gone down, contrary to the expectation, while time for infotainment programs has gone up, in concordance with existing beliefs. These diverging trends are relatively well explained by taking the three phases of political communication into account. In conclusion, I discuss the results in the context of debate about the quality of political television journalism for democracy, and provide suggestions for further research.

**THEORY**

There is, at present, little empirical evidence about changes in the available airtime for political information on television. Yet, it is evident that there is now more broadcasting time than ever. An increasing amount of television channels and the rise of other platforms to watch television (internet, mobile phones) have given television a non-stop presence, although many authors have argued that this has also made it harder to reach people and TV’s audiences have increasingly become fragmented (Koopmans, 2004; Prior, 2005, 2007). It is unclear, however, whether the current abundance simultaneously offers more space for political information, or whether it has been filled with entertainment offerings instead. Does more time also mean more time for political information? Aalberg et al. (2010) are in fact the only ones who have addressed this question by studying the flow of political information in six Western countries
over a period of 20 years. Based on an analysis of TV guides in 1987, 1997 and 2007, they found that the time spent on news and current affairs differs considerably across countries, with the lowest scores for those countries that are most commercialized. Their conclusion on over-time developments is less clear-cut: in most countries, the amount of news in general has increased as the consequence of the establishment of new (commercial) channels, but they do not find such a trend focusing on prime-time specifically. However, the relative limited time-span (20 years) and the fact that they sampled only three years in that period does not allow for a systematic and structural over-time comparison.

The study by Aalberg et al. demonstrates how important it is to identify the most basic level of what they call the ‘political information environment’, which concerns, among other things, the question as to how much time is actually (made) available for political information. This is the focus of the research at hand. While Aalberg et al. focus on the development of news and current affairs programs per se, in a somewhat limited time period, I analyze the ‘relative’ amount of time available for political information by comparing how the number and hours spent on information, infotainment and entertainment programs have changed from the beginning of television to the current period. This prolonged time period, and the inclusion of the two other main categories of TV-programming compared to the Aalberg et al. study, enables us to articulate the trends in the political information environment with the different phases of political communication that several scholars in this field have identified. They generally divide the post-war era into three overlapping periods to describe changing relations between politics, media and citizens.

The first two decades after World War II have mostly been identified as the first phase, in which political parties dominated most Western European societies. These political parties were closely related to strong cleavages that structured societies in clearly distinguishable groups, based on social distinctions or –as in the Netherlands – on ideological preferences and religious denominations. Press and broadcasting media in this period were usually clearly tied to those societal divisions. As Brants and Van Praag argue “most press and broadcasting in countries of the Northern European model functioned as a platform on which specific factions of the socio-
political elite could inform the electorate about the ideas and plans they deemed relevant for the public to know” (Brants & Van Praag, 2006, p. 28). This so called period of ‘political parallelism’ meant a situation in which political parties set the agenda, which journalists followed. Blumler and Kavanagh (1999) call this period the ‘first age’ of political communication and describe it as a “party-dominated communication system” in which political messages were substantive and enjoyed ready access to the mass media. Citizens voted in accordance with their group-based loyalties; hence political campaigns were set up to mobilize rather than to persuade voters. Farrel and Webb (2000) call this period the ‘first stage’ of political campaigning, whereas Norris (2000) talks of ‘premodern campaigns’. In most European countries, there was only a limited amount of television per day, concentrated in the evening. As a medium of political communication, it offered little absolute time for political information and if it did it was clearly targeting the own constituency. Brants and Van Praag describe the situation in this period as a ‘partisan logic’, and characterize Dutch society as a system of pillarization with a “servile nature of the political communication system” (2006, p. 29).

Most authors agree that during the 1960s a new phase of political communication began (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999; Brants & Van Praag, 2006; Farrell & Webb, 2000; Norris, 2000). In this ‘second age’ (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999) the media system opened up and expanded, and the amount of television time increased drastically. Secularization, diminishing social cleavages and an increasingly volatile electorate ensured that parties were no longer secured of votes and election campaigns became more important. It also meant that journalism became more independent and critical of political parties. In this ‘second stage of campaigning’ (Farrell & Webb, 2000) marketing specialists and campaign consultants were increasingly used and parties placed “an emphasis on the party leader, and a focus on nationwide standardization and the broadcasting of a single campaign message” (Farrell & Webb, 2000, p. 105). The rise of this ‘modern campaign’ (Norris, 2000) was, in sum, related to the dealignment of parties from their constituencies, a more independent role perception of journalists, and a more professional approach of election campaigns. Brants and Van Praag call this the phase of
‘public logic’ and claim it can be seen as “the heyday of political communication” (2006, p. 29) because – as they claim - media identified themselves with the public good and journalists provided the news they deemed relevant for citizens. Politicians predominantly set the agenda, and journalists acted as watchdogs of democracy.

Not only did the amount of television time available to audiences increase drastically, there is also abundant evidence that the kind of television on offer changed as well. Television both expressed and contributed to cultural developments that have been identified, for instance, as ‘informalization’ and ‘democratization’. A new ‘youth’ generation developed a culture with music as an important form of expression, and protested against the older generation and the (political) establishment (Damen, 1992). The democratization movement propagated the participation of all citizens in all aspects of social and political life, including the process of opinion formation and public communication, and a growing desire by social and cultural movements rose towards more participation in the broadcasting system. In line with this, various TV broadcasters experimented with new ways of giving audiences a voice: the BBC for instance attempted with the show ‘Open Door’ to realize spectator-participation, which the WDR tried with ‘Anruf Erwünscht’ (Hollander, 1982).

Many of the second phase features are present in the current situation. However, authors additionally agree that we have ‘landed’ in a third phase of political communication, a ‘third age of political communication’ (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999), a ‘Digital Age’ or ‘third stage’ (Farrell & Webb, 2000), a period of ‘postmodern campaigns’ (Norris, 2000) or of ‘media logic’ (Brants & Van Praag, 2006). Typical for this third phase is the abundance of off- and online media, a diversity of communication styles, and bespoke instruments of campaign communication for specific target groups.

This third phase has arguably started in the 1990s of the previous century with the arrival of cable and satellite technology, 24-hour news media, the multiplication of radio and television channels, the proliferation of communication equipment in people’s homes, and a growth of commercial media in Western European countries, all resulting in growing media competition. Consumer desires instead of public needs are said to influence what media offer, resulting in a
commercialized demand market (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999). A still increasing electoral volatility and the fragmenting media landscape also force political parties to be much more strategic in their communications, availing themselves of media management techniques, public opinion polls and focus groups, and politicians performing in a more personal and popular manner. This intensifying competition among politicians and journalists for a fragmented, individualized and easily distracted audience asks for saleable and attractive communication, giving power to the media, who set the agenda in this media logic phase (Brants & Van Praag, 2006).

In this consumer-oriented political communication phase, television networks are thought to spend less broadcasting time on ‘pure’ political coverage, and increasingly more on ‘infotainment’, since the increased competition stems from entertainment (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999). Also, because political parties intensified their professionalization, journalists try to increase their own prominence and ‘power’ of the political coverage that remains. This in turn leads politicians and their advisers to seek other outlets to get their message across, such as soft media formats and non-political shows (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999), again stimulating the rise of infotainment programs. The latter development also makes clear why it is imperative to include – as I do in this research - infotainment and entertainment categories in the analysis of the political information environment.

In table 3.1 I summarize the different terminologies for these three phases, and show how they capture similar processes. Describing developments in Western, mainly European but to some extent also Anglo-Saxon countries, there seems to be a clear consensus among authors about the overall typifications of the political information environment. It also shows that the three consecutive phases are better thought of as extensions of the previously existing environment, rather than as a replacement. In the current period, for instance, ‘docile’ partisan journalism is still available in the professional, almost glossy magazines that, for instance, political parties distribute among their members. Professional journalism evidently also still exists, among more consumer-oriented journalism.

What is unclear, however, is whether the political information environment as a whole has grown, declined or remained stable. It is
not self-evident that non-stop, multiplatform television contains as much time, as part of the total output, for political information as the limited TV-period did. In fact, Hallin and Mancini’s work (2004) suggests, implicitly, that this may not be the case, since the increase of television time has gone hand in hand with a change of television cultures.

They argue, specifically, that the polarized pluralist and the democratic corporatist models, typical for continental Europe, are evolving towards the liberal model (see table 3.1) resembling more and more the Anglo-Saxon situation. European media systems, they argue, have become increasingly separated from political institutions caused mainly by processes of secularization and commercialization. This evolution resembles the development of the three phases described above, as the first phase to some degree resembles the ideal-type democratic corporatist model, and the third phase of ‘media logic’ bears close similarity to the liberal model. Hallin and Mancini’s argument would imply that television time for political information has declined in relation to the overall television output.

Table 3.1 Terminology and characteristics three phases of political communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characterized by</th>
<th>1st phase</th>
<th>2nd phase</th>
<th>3rd phase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Blumler &amp; Kavanagh</td>
<td>Farrel &amp; Webb</td>
<td>Norris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age I</td>
<td>Stage I (premodern)</td>
<td>Stage II (modern, television age)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Farrel &amp; Webb</td>
<td>Norris</td>
<td>Brants &amp; Van Praag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Premodern</td>
<td>Modern</td>
<td>Public logic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partisan logic</td>
<td>Public logic</td>
<td>Liberal model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limited television time</td>
<td>Abundant television time</td>
<td>Non stop television time, available on other platforms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I test this assumption by collecting and analyzing data from the Netherlands, a country exemplifying the democratic corporatist model, but also a country moving towards a liberal model and entering the third phase of political communication, increasingly showing signs of a media logic (Brants & Van Praag, 2006).

Our purpose to combine trends in the availability of program categories with the phases of political communication, leads to trend-related and phase-related research questions. Trend-related questions focus on over-time changes in the presence of the various program categories. On the one hand, increasing broadcasting time offered, especially for public broadcasters, the opportunity to provide more serious information, which is one of their main (government enforced) tasks, without having to cut into their airtime for entertainment to attract audiences. This might have resulted in an increase in the relative presence of information on television – both in terms of broadcasting time and number of programs. On the other hand, secularization, commercialization and competition might have acted as counter forces. Therefore I ask:
RQ 1a. How does the relative number of programs for the various categories change over time?
RQ 1b. How does the relative broadcast time for the various categories change over time?

Next to providing a broad overview, a specific analysis of prime time seems warranted. During prime time, when most people actually watch TV, the stakes are high. Both for public and commercial broadcasters, from 6 till 10 PM competition is strongest, and audience rating most important. I thus ask:
RQ 2a. How does the relative number of programs during prime time for the various categories change over time?
RQ 2b. How does the relative broadcast time during prime time for the various categories change over time?

The Netherlands started with a strong state-regulated public broadcasting system in the first two phases and developed into a dual broadcasting system in the third phase, resulting from more flexible regulations, causing competition not only between separate channels,
but also between public television on the hand, and commercial TV on the other. We wonder how this influenced their programming strategies and ask:
RQ3. Are the over-time developments in the number of programs and relative broadcast time for the various categories similar for public and commercial channels?

The phase-related questions concern developments in the three phases of political communication. The first phase is characterized by a dominance of political parties, with media as their direct mouthpieces, and in the second phase the media system opened up and journalists became more independent, critical and aware of the public good. Both might explain a strong dominance of broadcast time for ‘heavy information’, but at the same time the limited amount of television in the first phase, and cultural developments in the second phase making citizens more demanding, make us question:
RQ4. Are informative programs most present in the first and second phase?

Finally, I expect there to be some clear indications of the third, media logic phase in the structural supply on television. But because the Netherlands has also shown some resistance against described trends, I refrain from hypothesizing and ask:
RQ5. Are infotainment programs gaining ground on informative programs in the third, media logic phase, compared to previous phases?

**DATA AND METHOD**

I will answer these questions by presenting data from the Netherlands, a country – I claimed – that is typical of a more general movement from a democratic corporatist model to a liberal model.

**DATA COLLECTION**

To cover the complete post war period of political communication in The Netherlands, I collected data from 1957, when the first television programs were broadcast, to 2006. For 1957 till 1988 I used
archived print TV program guides. From 1989 onwards information about Dutch broadcasting is digitally available from Intomart (until 2002) and the Dutch Audience Research Foundation (SKO). I included all public and commercial TV channels, but made a limitation in the data by focusing on the three months preceding national elections and two midterm months between two elections. I made this selection since on the one hand, especially during election times, information is considered to be of crucial importance for citizens to fulfil their democratic role (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999). On the other hand, I want to ensure that the results are not biased due to a sole focus on this limited period of the electoral cycle.

Combining all data from the three sources into one dataset, I achieved a dataset of over 750,000 cases, meaning individual programs that were broadcasted in the total of 30 selected periods (see appendix B, table B1). I divided these periods into the three phases, following the study of Brants and Van Praag on the history of political communication in the Netherlands (2006). The first seven periods form the phase of partisan logic (1957-1969), the eighth till 20th time period form the phase of public logic (1970-1989), and the last 10 periods contain both public and commercial channels, forming the media logic phase (see appendix B, table B1).

OPERATIONALIZATION
In the coding of the data, I used individual programs as unit of analysis, and coded for title, date of broadcast, duration in minutes (start and end time), channel and broadcast organization of all television broadcasts (24 hour). In the analysis at hand, I report only on the number and the duration of programs.

I categorized the programs as belonging to ‘heavy information’, ‘infotainment’ or ‘entertainment’, on the basis of the classification schemes of Intomart and the Dutch Audience Research Foundation. This is a tripartition that has a long history, although it has also been subject to fundamental debate and practical issues concerning its application to concrete programs that defy easy categorization (cf. Adriaans & Van Hoof, 2006; Leurdijk, 1999). The allocation of programs to a specific category was based on the program information in the archives and online database, and on secondary information about the content and/or format of the programs.
available at the Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision, program
or broadcaster websites, or in some cases Wikipedia. See appendix B, 
table B2 for a list of these categories and some program examples.

The category ‘heavy information’ includes news, current affairs
and other programs that solely aim to provide information, although
that can apply to a wide range of issues. This is traditionally, in the
first and second phase of political communication, the category where
one would expect to find most political information. Infotainment, or
‘light information’ as it is called in the Dutch classification scheme, is
the category within which I grouped all genres and programs that
combine information and entertainment, for instance in talk shows
and show business programs. The entertainment category includes
self-evident types of soap opera-, comedy-, melodrama- and detective-
series. I placed life style, nature and sports here as well, thus
constructing a category that is unlikely to provide broadcast time for
political information.

We use two different operationalizations for the prominence of the
various categories: per period, I calculated the ‘total number of
programs’, and the ‘amount of broadcast time’ (in minutes) spent in
each category. I used these two variables to assess the relative
presence of program categories through time, meaning the percentage
of the total number of programs and broadcasting time respectively
that is being taken up by the specific category. I calculated the
means of numbers and duration of the total of programs in each
category to draw comparisons between the three phases. For
instance, in the third period 1655 minutes were spent on heavy
information, 391 minutes on infotainment and 5959 on enter-
tainment. In total, 8005 minutes were broadcasted during this
period, with 21% spent on information, 5% on infotainment and 74%
on entertainment. Subsequently, the percentages per meta-category
of all periods within a phase were summed up and divided by the
total amount of periods, resulting in a mean score of the relative
presence per meta-category per phase. For the media logic phase I
also compared the means for public and commercial broadcasting.
RESULTS

TRENDS
Our first research questions concerned the change in the relative number of programs (RQ 1a and RQ 2a) and in relative broadcast time (RQ 1b and RQ 2b) for the various categories from 1957 to 2006. Starting with the first research question, figure 3.1 shows the overall trends in the relative number of programs for each meta-category. Whereas these percentages stay relatively stable on public channels, there is a steep increase of informative programs at commercial channels. While these trends may counter common wisdom about developments in the relative presence of information, infotainment and entertainment programs, a more detailed focus on developments in prime time offers an additional understanding. To answer the research question about the trends in number of programs during prime time (RQ 2a) I present figure 3.2 which shows the opposite trend: an increase of entertainment programs and a decrease of informative programs, which is similar for both type of channels.

Since general broadcast time has increased immensely over the years, I am also interested in the relative broadcast time for the categories (RQ1b and RQ 2b). Figure 3.3 shows the overall trends in the amount of broadcast time spent on the three program categories, which shows that for both type of channels the amount of broadcast time for information increased, and for entertainment decreased. However, during prime time (RQ 2b) I see in figure 3.4 that there is a decreasing amount of broadcast time spent on information on all channels.

The third research question asked whether the over-time developments in the number of programs and relative broadcast time for the various categories are similar for public and commercial channels. Looking again at figures 3.1 to 3.4 you will see that the developments for public and commercial channels are comparable in that they both broadcast increasing amounts of information during the entire day. At prime time both public and commercial channels have continuously less numbers of informative programs and both broadcast decreasing amounts of information between 6 and 10 PM, although this trend is much stronger for commercial channels. Public
CHAPTER 3

Figure 3.1 Relative number of programs per period of time

Figure 3.2 Relative number of programs in prime time per period of time
Figure 3.3 Relative broadcast time per period of time

Figure 3.4 Relative broadcast time in prime time per period of time
CHAPTER 3

channels increasingly broadcast infotainment instead of entertain-
ment and information, and commercial channels increasingly
broadcast vast amounts of entertainment at the cost of information.

Our conclusion thus is that overall there is increasingly more
‘heavy information’ available on TV, in a wide variety of programs, on
both at public and commercial channels. However, at prime time,
entertainment and, to a lesser extent, infotainment gain ground,
especially at commercial channels. I conducted additional tests to see
whether linear trends (independent variable) in the amount of
broadcast time (dependent variable) for the various categories at
prime time were statistically significant. Therefore, I conducted a
regression analysis on aggregated data, with average scores per
period as the main interest. I included as the independent variable a
trend score that has the value of 0 for the first period. For each
subsequent period the value increases with 1. The dependent variable
is the percentage of the total amount of broadcasting time that is
being taken up by the various categories. This analysis showed that
the decrease of information at prime time on commercial channels is
significant (B = -1.370, SE .331, p<.01). This indicates that in each
subsequent period, the percentage of information on prime time
decreases with 1.37% compared to the previous period. The decrease
of information at prime time on public channels is not significant (B =
-.087, SE .100 p=.39). Across all channels the decrease of information
during prime time is also not significant (B = -.133, SE .099 at
p=.187) but the increase of infotainment at prime time is (B = .361,
SE .060, p<.001). Overall, each subsequent period the amount of
broadcast time for infotainment increases with 0.36% compared to
the previous period.

Over time, increasingly more ‘heavy information’ has become
available on television on both at public and commercial channels.
Yet at prime time, entertainment gains ground at the expense of
information, although the increase is relatively small and statistically
not significant. To enhance our understanding of these somewhat
complex and contradictory trends I now turn to the phase-related
research questions to see whether these developments can be
elucidated by focusing on time specific circumstances.
PHASES
Our first phase-related research question (RQ4) asked whether informative programs are most present in the first and second phase. As we have seen in the figures so far, the entertainment category has always been the most present on TV. Both in general, and at prime time, television is mainly an entertaining medium, both on public as on commercial channels. Table 3.2 shows that especially in the first, partisan logic phase the relative presence of entertainment (79%) is strongest compared with information and infotainment. Table 3.3 shows that the means of the absolute amount of broadcasting time increase strongly over time, indicating more broadcasted hours. It also shows that the broadcast time spent on informative programs increased more than the broadcast time for the other categories. This is more clearly visible when we look again at the relative means in table 3.2, and see an increase of information from 17% in the partisan logic phase, 19% in the public logic phase to 20% in the media logic phase. On public channels only the percentage of information even increased to 25% in the third phase. Although informative programs are thus not most present in first two phases (nor in the third), they are becoming more important over time.

Table 3.2 Relative means of broadcast time in percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Std. D.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Partisan logic</td>
<td>Information</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>16.89</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Infotainment</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>79.11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public logic</td>
<td>Information</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>19.10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Infotainment</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>76.56</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media logic</td>
<td>Information</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>14.96</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>25.36</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>20.16</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Infotainment</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>10.24</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>8.46</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.11</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>9.35</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.22</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>74.80</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6.42</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>66.18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9.52</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>70.49</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Finally, I asked if infotainment programs gain ground on informative programs in the third, media logic phase compared to the previous phases (RQ5). Looking at table 3.4, we see that the number of infotainment programs increased from around 3% in the first two phases to almost 8% in the media logic phase. We also see an increasing amount of broadcasting time spent on infotainment, especially on public channels, where it doubled its relative presence from 4% to 8% (see table 3.2). This is however not at the cost of airtime for information, since we have seen that the amount of airtime for these programs also increased. In general, the entertainment programs lose broadcast time, both at public and commercial channels.

Table 3.3 Relative means of broadcast time in hours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Std. D.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Partisan logic</td>
<td>Information</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Entertainment</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>54:00:58</td>
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<td>736:11:52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>470:28:37</td>
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<td>601:57:02</td>
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<td>559:01:44</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2898:58:45</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1350:51:51</td>
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</table>
Table 3.4 Number of broadcasted programs per phase per meta-category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Information</th>
<th>Infotainment</th>
<th>Entertainment</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
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<td>3828</td>
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<td>% within phase</td>
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<td>18719</td>
<td>30576</td>
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<tr>
<td>% within phase</td>
<td>35,9%</td>
<td>2,9%</td>
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<td>22193</td>
<td>192894</td>
<td>287317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within phase</td>
<td>25,1%</td>
<td>7,7%</td>
<td>67,1%</td>
<td>100,0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>85291</td>
<td>23258</td>
<td>215441</td>
<td>323990</td>
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<tr>
<td>% within phase</td>
<td>26,3%</td>
<td>7,2%</td>
<td>66,5%</td>
<td>100,0%</td>
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</table>

DISCUSSION

This study of the political information environment gives no conclusive evidence for a decreasing quantity of potential broadcast time for political information on television. Increasing amounts of time are spend on information at the cost of entertainment (public TV) and infotainment (commercial TV) programs. These results concur with the study of Aalberg et al. (2010). However, there is also increasingly less information broadcast at prime time, especially on commercial channels. In concordance with existing beliefs, I find that more diverse infotainment programs are aired in the media logic phase, which get more broadcast time especially at prime time. Whereas Aalberg et al. argue that countries with strong public television offer more prime time ‘heavy information’, I actually find that although at the start of the third phase commercial channels aired as much information as public channels at prime time, both type of channels over time have fewer numbers of informative programs and also spent less and less broadcasting time on them at prime time. This trend is stronger for commercial than for public channels.

More specifically we have seen that in general most broadcast time is spend on entertainment. Especially in the first phase of partisan logic the share of entertainment programs is the largest. This phase can be regarded as the starting phase for television, a period in which
both broadcasting organizations and governments were still figuring out how to deal with this ‘new’ medium. The very limited airtime and political parallelism of this phase are apparent in strict rules that concerned mainly the distribution of airtime for the various, social-political broadcasting organizations, and the order ‘to broadcast programs acceptable for everyone’. In the Netherlands, stipulations for the types of content that broadcasting organizations had to air were very vague and mainly focused on the cultural and religious needs that existed in Dutch society. (Partisan) press was indeed the most important mass medium, and television was mainly regarded as amusing (Wijffjes, 2005). Children’s programs and art broadcasts such as movies, plays and opera’s, etc. were aired most frequently. These programs were classified as entertainment in this study.

In the second, public logic phase, of expanding media and professionalizing journalism, much more broadcasting time became available, also due to the presence of a second public television channel, and broadcasting organizations and journalists became more adapted to the medium. In the Netherlands the cooperation of broadcasting organizations in one news program (‘Het Journaal’) continued, and the current affairs programs of the separate broadcasting organizations became really established as a critical, analytical journalistic genre. This is visible in the increasing amount of time spend on informative programs in this phase. Although increasing competition between broadcasting organizations led to concerns about the growing amount of mass entertainment, we actually see that the category of ‘heavy information’ programs increases relatively most in this “heyday of political communication” (Brants & Van Praag, 2006:29).

In the media logic phase, as expected based on existing literature, most noticeably the airtime for infotainment increased. The intensifying competition among politicians and journalists, it seems, has stimulated the rise of infotainment programs, which are also increasingly aired at prime time. We see in this phase a general decrease of broadcast time for pure entertainment. In fact, we see again an increase of information, which is probably because (commercial) broadcasters, in a dual broadcasting system such as in the Netherlands, in order to be taken serious, need at least their own news program. These informative programs are, however, scheduled
outside of prime time. On the one hand, this finding seems to support claims about increasing consumer-orientation and convergence towards a liberal model of political communication. On the other hand, the third phase is characterized by an abundance of off- and online media and a proliferation of communication equipment. Digital recording machines such as TiVo, and the increasing availability of TV shows on the Internet lead to more personal viewing. At any time of the day people can watch both ‘heavy information’ or info- and entertainment programs, both at home on television or at the computer, but nowadays also increasingly away from the house, on laptops, notebooks, tablets and mobile phones. One could argue that television programming becomes less important and therefore the idea of prime-time less meaningful.

Debate about the quality of journalism, the viability of public debate and the role of political information on television in times of changing political communication have led to many discussions and studies about a popularization of political communication and a personalization of politics. The question however, whether the space for these forms of politics and political communication was and is available, and has expanded over time, has hardly been studied previously and only in a somewhat limited way. For popularization and personalization to occur, media need to offer a suitable ‘stage’. With regard to television this means that genres that are open or vulnerable to these styles need to be increasingly available for both popularization and personalization to increase. This study shows that this is only partly the case. The overall relative presence and proportion of information on television has remained relatively steady over the years. Infotainment has increased, but its presence is still relatively small. Yet this study gives no information about the content of specific programs. Traditionally the category of ‘heavy information’ is where one would expect to find most political information, but more research is needed into whether and how the content of ‘heavy information’ programs might have become more entertaining. We are also in need of additional understandings of the infotainment genre, to see what kind and how much political information might reach a wide(r) audience through these programs.

With regard to processes in politics and the media, I conclude that, although there might have been a shift in the Netherlands from
a democratic-corporatist model towards a more market and consumer
demand-oriented model, secularization and commercialization have
not led to an overall decreasing availability of broadcast time for
politically relevant information. The rise of infotainment at prime time
at both public and commercial channels, and the rise of
entertainment during prime time at commercial channels do call for
wariness regarding future developments and more in-depth content
analysis of these various programs. But I also argue that the
relevance of prime-time is diminishing with the increase of personal
viewing and the growth of digitally available television content. I
conclude that the process of change from a partisan to a media logic,
in a country that shifted from a public service to a dual broadcasting
model, does not yet support the idea of eroding opportunities for
public debate. The results do reinforce the notion that countries with
a strong public broadcasting tradition offer a hearty diet of political
information to their audiences, especially at the public broadcasting
channels themselves.
NOTES

1 See for instance ‘Fifty years of Media: Changes in journalism’ http://athome.harvard.edu/programs/fym/
2 In 1956 Dutch television started with the first broadcast of a daily news program, but since there was too little data for this year to include in the analysis, the research period starts in 1957. Looking at a post-war period of (thus almost) 50 years, the research period ends with the parliamentary elections in 2006.
3 I used the same guide for the entire period, the Televizier, an independent radio and television program guide, except for a few years for which the guide was unavailable. I then used the AVRO-bode.
4 Additional regression analyses, that included as the independent variable a trend score that has the value of 0 for the first period and increases with 1 for each subsequent period, showed that the difference between election and non-election time is never significant for any of the discussed results.