

## **SUMMARY OF DOCTORAL THESIS**

Title: The spectrum of media engagement as an analytical category. Viewers' engagement with a chosen reality TV programme

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Discipline: social communication and media studies

The main objective of this dissertation is to describe and examine the spectrum of media engagement as an analytical category, propose tools for its study, and to test them on viewers of a chosen reality TV programme. The author has therefore decided to focus on the issue of media engagement, which is treated as an analytical category enabling in-depth research into the audience of media products.

The work is part of the cultural school's legacy and is based on issues that have not yet been widely addressed in Polish media studies. The theoretical basis of the dissertation is the Uses and Gratification Theory, according to which media scholars should seek answers to two inseparable questions: 'What do the media do to people?' and 'What do people do with the media?' The author also refers to two classic theories: encoding and decoding (by Stuart Hall) and cultivation (formulated by a team led by George Gerbner). Referring to these theories made it possible to lay the theoretical foundations for the latest considerations related to media engagement, parasocial contacts, which the author treats as a component of the spectrum of media engagement, and the study of texts belonging to popular culture in particular reality TV programmes, which most strongly encourage media engagement among viewers.

As a result of the literature review, the author developed her own theoretical proposals and tools, including a questionnaire containing a list of media engagement factors and a Parasocial Contacts Scale. To test them, the author decided to focus on examining the viewers of the Polish version of the programme 'Hotel Paradise', which is not only very popular among viewers, but is also a typical reality TV programme. Therefore, a four-stage extensive study was conducted, which included: (1) a quantitative and qualitative analysis of selected episodes of the programme 'Hotel Paradise' (the sample consisted of 88 episodes of the programme and additional materials – a total of over four thousand minutes of recordings); (2) a study on a representative sample for Poland (N=1000, age group 18+) on the motivation for media engagement among viewers; (3) a study of parasocial contacts between viewers of 'Hotel Paradise' and participants of the ninth season of the programme (conducted on a targeted sample); (4) an in-depth interview with the programme's director, Bartosz Łabędzki.

The work is divided into five chapters: three theoretical chapters and two empirical chapters. *Chapter 1* addresses the issue of parasocial interactions and relationships – the author conducted an extensive review of predominantly English-language literature, which made it possible to organise the theoretical and methodological considerations that have been developed since the 1950s. The chapter concludes with the author's proposal for the operationalisation of the most important concepts in this area, including the term ‘parasocial contacts’, which makes it possible to move away from the problematic term ‘parasocial interaction’ – understood both as a type of momentary interaction between a persona and a viewer and as the name of a metatheory. *Chapter 2* characterised the Uses and Gratification Theory and critically analysed research conducted in this area, including that on reality TV programmes. This was followed by a discussion of the problem of media engagement, which was characterised by referring to models developed by selected authors, in particular the concept of Annette Hill. The chapter concludes with the presentation of the author's typology of stages of media engagement, which is an extension of John Corner's (2017) proposal, expanded to include the problem of parasocial contacts raised in *Chapter 1*. The next chapter, the third, allowed the author to place the discussion in a broader theoretical and methodological context. She defined popular culture and its characteristics and characterised the theories of encoding and decoding and cultivation, including their latest applications. In connection with the subject of the study, the problem of media sexualisation was also discussed and the considerations of researchers analysing the representation of gender roles in the media were summarised. The last subchapter characterised reality television, establishing that it is a genre, and described its significance as one that has dominated and changed television programming.

The last two chapters of the thesis are devoted to the presentation and analysis of the results of the author's research. *Chapter 4* characterises the programme ‘Hotel Paradise’ and refers to previous analyses of this format (and the similar show ‘Love Island’), describes the methodology of the author's research and presents the results of the study – a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the content of the Polish version of ‘Hotel Paradise’. *Chapter 5* is devoted to the analysis of the results of research on the media engagement of the audience of the indicated format – among other things, a demographic and motivational profile of the show's audience was created and the strength of the parasocial engagement of viewers was examined. The original research allowed the author to verify the theoretical assumptions described in the thesis and to verify her conceptual and methodological proposals. The author's ambition was not only to examine a specific format and its viewers but also to introduce considerations that

are almost absent from Polish media studies and to create original tools for researching media engagement among viewers.

Due to its subject matter and the proposed research, the thesis aligns with the latest trends in global media studies. It also offers interesting theoretical and methodological proposals that will facilitate further research on the spectrum of media engagement, including a focus on formats beyond entertainment and on individuals beyond reality TV stars.