

Infotainment in Television News: A Croatian Paradox of Presentation Styles and Their Reception by Young Viewers

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Abstract: This paper explores how infotainment elements in television news influence the viewing habits of younger audiences. It compares traditional news formats in Croatia (HRT's *Dnevnik 3*) with infotainment-based formats (RTL's *Direkt*) to assess their impact on young viewers' perception and media behavior. Using content analysis and a survey among youth, the study examines differences in news presentation styles and their influence on content perception, source preferences, and attitudes toward news formats. The findings suggest that infotainment elements may play an important role in shaping young audiences' preferences, with many respondents indicating a tendency to favor more engaging and visually dynamic content over traditional reporting styles. The results also point to a broader media paradox, where the way news is presented may, in some cases, influence audience engagement as much as the informational content itself. This research offers insights into how news presentation styles affect the information consumption habits of younger viewers, linking theoretical insights to empirical data.

Keywords: Infotainment; Television News; Young Audiences; Media Consumption; News Perception

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary media environment, the boundaries between information and entertainment have become increasingly fluid, particularly within television news formats. This convergence has produced the phenomenon of infotainment – a hybrid genre that blends journalistic reporting with entertainment features such as fast-paced editing, emotionally charged visuals, dramatic narratives,

and personalized storytelling. While originally driven by market competition and digital transformation, infotainment has become a dominant force in the production and consumption of news globally (Thussu, 2007; Savolainen, 2022). The academic discourse surrounding infotainment is complex and often polarized.

On one side, scholars such as Postman (1985) warned that the transformation of serious public discourse into entertainment risks reducing citizens' ability to engage meaningfully with societal issues. Others, like Holbert (2005), have emphasized the potential of infotainment to attract disengaged audiences and foster political awareness in more accessible ways. Emotional and visual elements, while often criticized, have been shown to enhance attention and memory retention (Brosius, 1993), particularly in fast-paced media contexts.

While these perspectives remain influential, it is important to consider their limitations in the contemporary digital media environment. The media landscape has significantly evolved since these works were published, particularly with the rise of social media and on-demand content, which may alter the role and impact of infotainment in ways not fully captured by earlier theoretical models. Recent data further highlight shifting audience expectations and consumption patterns. According to the Reuters Digital News Report 2025 (Newman et al., 2025), one of the key findings from 2024 is that a growing number of people are actively avoiding news content, often describing it as depressing, harsh, and boring. In contrast, short-form video news is accessed weekly by two-thirds (66%) of respondents, pointing to a growing preference for concise, dynamic, and visually engaging formats. This raises important questions about how infotainment influences audience perception, media trust, news consumption habits, and broader attitudes toward journalistic content.

Within this context, previous research has offered differing perspectives on the role of infotainment in informing the public. Indrati (2024) argues that infotainment can enhance news popularity and promote youth engagement with important societal issues without necessarily compromising journalistic standards. On the other hand, Dai and Wang (2023) caution that excessive simplification and entertainment-driven presentation may lead to superficial understanding and a decline in critical thinking among audiences. As a result, traditional news formats appear to be increasingly complemented by visually rich, emotionally engaging, and faster-paced alternatives.

Although previous research and recent data indicate that younger audiences increasingly rely on digital platforms rather than television for news consumption, television news remains an important reference point within the broader media ecosystem. It continues to shape journalistic standards, influence online news formats, and contribute to the overall framing of public discourse. Therefore, examining televised news provides valuable insight into the transformation of news presentation styles, even among audiences who do not consume it regularly.

Given these dynamics, this paper explores how infotainment affects the news consumption behavior of young audiences in the Republic of Croatia. By comparing the presentation styles of a traditional public news program (Dnevnik 3, HRT) and an infotainment-oriented commercial news program (RTL Direkt), this study seeks to understand how young viewers perceive, evaluate, and engage with different news formats. For the purpose of this study, “young audiences” are defined as individuals aged 15 to 30. This demographic group was selected for its distinctive media consumption habits, particularly its strong orientation toward digital and visually driven content, making it especially relevant for examining the influence of infotainment. Using a mixed-methods approach, content analysis, and a survey of younger viewers, this research provides empirical insights into how infotainment may influence how young audiences perceive and engage with televised news content.

Given the growing presence of infotainment in television news and the evolving media consumption habits of younger audiences, it is essential to explore how these formats shape how young people perceive and engage with news. Particular attention is given to content perception, source and format preferences, and tendencies toward different styles of news presentation. In this study, “presentation styles” are conceptualized as a set of formal and expressive features through which news content is structured and delivered to audiences. These include visual design, editing pace, narrative structure, tone, and the use of emotional or personalized storytelling. In line with previous research on infotainment and media formats (Thussu, 2007; Holbert, 2005), these elements are understood as key dimensions through which the blending of information and entertainment is operationalized in news production. For the purposes of this study, presentation styles are treated as analytical categories for comparing traditional and infotainment-oriented news formats. To systematically address this phenomenon, the study is guided by the following research questions: How does infotainment affect young viewers’ perception of news? What are young people’s preferences regarding news sources and formats? To what extent are young viewers more inclined to consume infotainment content compared to traditional news content.

THE RISE OF INFOTAINMENT: NARRATIVE STRATEGIES AND IMPLICATIONS

The term “infotainment”, a blend of the words information and entertainment, emerged in the late 1980s in the United States as broadcast content intended to both entertain and inform (Thussu, 2007, p. 8). Historically, the term was used to discredit journalists assigned to cover “soft” news. It was expected that such news would be consumed mainly by women, who were also the primary

producers of this content, but it eventually evolved into a distinct genre. Historically, female journalists have been directed toward soft news such as lifestyle, entertainment, and human-interest reporting, while men have dominated political and economic reporting (North, 2014, p. 356).

Hendrickx and Vázquez-Herrero (2024) further elaborate that infotainment is a journalistic form that blurs the boundaries between hard news and entertainment, adapting traditional news values to the logic and dynamics of social media platforms, where engaging, shareable content often takes precedence over in-depth reporting. This shift is especially evident in the habits of younger generations. As Esquen and Palomino-Flores (2024) note, Generation Z increasingly evaluates the credibility of news content not solely based on source authority but on emotional resonance, relatability, and visual storytelling. This generational shift forces news producers to adapt their formats and tones to maintain relevance in an evolving media ecosystem.

According to Thussu (2007), infotainment cannot be neatly categorized as either information or entertainment; rather, it exists in the middle ground, using both to reach the widest possible audience. Savolainen (2022) similarly highlights that infotainment is a hybrid of informative and entertaining content. Both authors thus provide straightforward explanations of what infotainment entails. Infotainment is generally recognizable by its entertaining nature. It often incorporates flashy graphics, rapid editing, music, sensationalism, and, at times, satire to capture viewers' attention (Postman, 1985).

The demand for fast-paced news is often associated with an increased emphasis on style and visual presentation, sometimes at the expense of more in-depth analytical content. Such news is designed to attract viewers with short attention spans who are accustomed to switching between channels and media formats, especially on online and mobile platforms, as well as to condensed visual stimuli on YouTube and other social media (Thussu, 2007, pp. 8–9).

Traditional journalism emphasizes objectivity, credibility, and in-depth analysis of events. Its primary goal is to provide citizens with information that enables them to make informed decisions in public and political life. However, with the rise of commercial television and digital platforms, news content has gradually shifted from “hard” news to a blend of information and entertainment (Thussu, 2007). The dynamics of modern news, driven by the need for speed and visual effects, have led to a shift in news form, placing style ahead of content. Unlike traditional news, which seeks to provide context and understanding of events (Thussu, 2007), infotainment is often designed to appeal to audiences accustomed to faster and more dynamic media formats. In this regard, visual elements and presentation styles have become as important, if not more important, than the informational value itself.

Dai and Wang (2023) found that while infotainment formats boost viewer attention, they often result in shallow processing and reduced comprehension, especially among younger audiences. Indrati (2024) observed that infotainment can attract broader audiences through visual appeal and emotion, but frequently sacrifices analytical depth and contextual richness, aligning with Postman's critique. While Holbert (2005) acknowledges that infotainment may increase political interest among disengaged viewers, he also warns of oversimplification and a tendency to prioritize style over substance, again mirroring Postman's fears about the dominance of entertainment logic in news media.

While foundational authors such as Thussu (2007) and Postman (1985) provide important theoretical insights into the relationship between information and entertainment, their perspectives must be reconsidered in light of the contemporary digital media environment. The rise of social media platforms, algorithmic content distribution, and participatory cultures has significantly transformed the ways in which news is produced, distributed, and consumed, particularly among younger audiences. Therefore, infotainment today should not be understood solely through the lens of traditional broadcast media, but rather as part of a broader, hybrid, platform-driven media ecosystem.

NEWS CONSUMPTION TRENDS IN CROATIA: AUDIENCE PREFERENCES AND THE ROLE OF INFOTAINMENT

In the Croatian media system, the coexistence of public service broadcasting and commercially driven television has been widely discussed in terms of its impact on journalistic standards and audience segmentation (Peruško, 2008; Car & Peruško, 2010). Research on media consumption in Croatia suggests a gradual decline in trust in traditional news institutions, particularly among younger audiences, alongside a growing reliance on digital and platform-based sources (Vilović & Car, 2017).

At the same time, studies indicate that commercial broadcasters have been more successful in adapting to changing audience preferences by integrating infotainment elements that increase accessibility and emotional engagement. In the Croatian media context, the transformation of news formats must be understood within the broader post-socialist media development and the coexistence of public service and commercial broadcasters. The public broadcaster Hrvatska radiotelevizija (HRT) has traditionally maintained a more formal, information-oriented approach, while commercial channels such as RTL Hrvatska have introduced more dynamic, audience-oriented formats. This dual structure creates a particularly relevant environment for examining differences in presentation styles

and the role of infotainment in shaping audience preferences. Television news viewership and audience preferences can be tracked through various methods.

Ratings data from agencies such as AGB Nielsen (2024), along with internal statistics from broadcasters like HRT and RTL¹, provide basic insights into audience size and demographic composition. According to Thussu (2007), the style, format, and visual presentation of news content play a significant role in attracting viewers. This connection reinforces the argument that infotainment not only transforms the form of news but also reshapes the habits and preferences of younger generations. Postman (1985) argued that television transforms public discourse into entertainment, potentially reducing its analytical depth. While this perspective remains influential, contemporary studies suggest a more nuanced view, recognizing both the risks and the potential benefits of infotainment formats. According to the *Digital News Report* (Newman et al., 2025), Nova TV leads Croatian news viewership with a weekly reach of 49%. HRT follows closely, with 46% of viewers accessing it at least once a week and 36% watching it 3 or more times a week. RTL is just behind HRT, with 43% weekly reach and 30% tuning in at least three times a week. However, HRT performs poorly in the digital sphere, with only 17% of respondents using it online weekly. These trends are particularly significant in the Croatian context, where younger audiences increasingly combine traditional television viewing with digital and social media platforms. As a result, television news is no longer consumed in isolation, but as part of a hybrid media environment in which content is frequently reinterpreted, shared, and commented on across platforms. According to Peruško (2008), the media play an important role in shaping culture and strengthening Croatian civil society.

Humor and sarcasm in news programming have been shown to make information more appealing and easier to digest compared to traditional formats. Boukes et al. (2021) highlight that satire enhances audience engagement, especially on digital platforms where users frequently comment on and share content. However, Holbert (2005) warns that excessive humor can undermine the seriousness of news topics and shift focus from facts to presentation style. Music, similarly, plays a complex role. Brosius (1993) found that while music can be used to emphasize key points, overuse can desensitize viewers. Over time, audiences become “immune” to musical cues, reducing their effectiveness. Therefore, music in news broadcasts should be used strategically and sparingly to support, not overshadow, the content itself.

Overall, research suggests that audiences, particularly younger ones, appreciate entertainment elements in news. However, these elements must be used with caution and balance to preserve the integrity and informative value of journalism.

¹ HRT (Hrvatska radiotelevizija) is the Croatian national public broadcasting organization, responsible for delivering public service television and radio programming, whereas RTL is a private commercial television broadcaster operating within the Croatian media market.

In this context, the concept of presentation styles becomes particularly relevant, as it captures the specific ways in which informational and entertainment elements are combined within news formats. Understanding these stylistic differences is essential for analyzing how audiences perceive and evaluate different types of news content.

MEDIA THEORIES AND THEIR RELEVANCE TO INFOTAINMENT

The following theoretical approaches are particularly relevant to interpreting the relationship between infotainment and audience perception in this study. Media theories provide a valuable framework for understanding the impact of infotainment on audiences, especially younger generations. By exploring these theories, we can better grasp how constant exposure to news that blends information and entertainment shapes people's perceptions of reality.

Agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) explains how media influence what people think about, while concepts like media convergence and fragmentation reveal how modern media adapt content across platforms, amplifying infotainment's role in daily news consumption. Gerbner (1976) argues that long-term exposure to media content shapes individuals' perceptions of reality. Infotainment can strongly influence young audiences by emphasizing spectacular and sensational aspects of social and political events (Indrati, 2024). This focus on visually appealing, emotionally charged stories may distort the audience's understanding of societal priorities, as they tend to pay more attention to sensationalism than to facts (Dai & Wang, 2023). Over time, such exposure can lead to changes in viewers' attitudes and behaviors.

McCombs and Shaw (1972) suggest that media affect what people think about without telling them what to think. Infotainment often prioritizes visually appealing and entertaining topics over their social importance. This influences the priorities and attitudes of younger audiences, who are drawn to dynamic and engaging news formats. Consequently, public discourse priorities become linked to media presentation, potentially shaping political views and everyday decisions (Dai & Wang, 2023).

Media convergence and fragmentation highlight how infotainment is intertwined with the integration of television, online portals, social media, and mobile apps. These platforms offer flexible content tailored to users' preferences and schedules (Thussu, 2007). Fragmentation divides audiences into small, targeted groups based on interests, making it more likely for younger generations to consume fast-paced, visually appealing infotainment rather than traditional news (Thussu, 2007).

This evolving media landscape changes not only how information is consumed but also how it is structured and perceived, increasing infotainment's influence on communication and social life (North, 2014). As Lycarião (2024) notes, platformization contributes to public sphere fragmentation, allowing users to selectively choose content that confirms their preferences, thereby creating “filter bubbles” that hinder shared public discourse. Furthermore, media convergence fosters creativity in news delivery and has significant implications for journalism research and practice (Yang, 2024).

METHODS

Based on the defined research problem, three main research questions guide this study:

- RQ1: How does infotainment influence young people's perception of news? This question examines whether young audiences perceive infotainment as diminishing the seriousness of news or as a format that facilitates the understanding and interpretation of information.
- RQ2: What are young people's preferences regarding news sources and formats? This question focuses on identifying the media platforms young people prefer for news consumption (television, online news portals, and social media) and the formats they find most appealing (short news clips, visual content, and in-depth analysis).
- RQ3: Are younger viewers more inclined to consume infotainment content or traditional news content? This question examines the extent to which younger generations consume and prefer infotainment over traditional news programs, with a specific focus on RTL Direkt and HRT's Dnevnik 3.

To address these research questions, two methods were employed: a survey and a content analysis. The survey was conducted among young adults aged 15 to 30 to capture their opinions, preferences, and media consumption habits. It provided insights into levels of trust in infotainment content, preferred news sources, and expectations of news media. In addition, a content analysis was conducted of RTL Direkt and Dnevnik 3 (HRT) to identify the presence of infotainment elements and highlight differences between the two formats.

The survey questionnaire consisted of four main sections. The first part covered demographic questions; the second, news viewing habits; the third, familiarity with and perceptions of RTL Direkt and Dnevnik 3 HRT; and the fourth, attitudes toward infotainment. A total of 164 responses were collected, including 128 women, 34 men, and 2 respondents who chose not to disclose their gender.

The questionnaire included both open-ended and closed-ended questions, was created using Google Forms, and was distributed online via social media from July 1 to July 30, 2025. The selected time period was chosen for its continuity and representativeness of regular broadcast programming without major external disruptions (e.g., elections or extraordinary events). Participants' anonymity was ensured throughout the process. The sample was obtained through convenience sampling, as the questionnaire was distributed via social media platforms.

This approach introduced a degree of self-selection bias, as participants who were more interested in media content may have been more likely to respond. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted with caution and cannot be generalized to the entire youth population in Croatia. Respondents were not required to watch specific episodes of the analyzed programs prior to completing the survey. Instead, their responses were based on prior familiarity and general perceptions of the programs, which may have influenced the accuracy of their evaluations. To facilitate understanding, key terms such as "informative," "entertaining," and "sensationalistic" were presented in simplified form; however, no formal definitions were provided within the questionnaire. As a result, responses reflect subjective interpretations of these categories. In this study, presentation styles are operationalized through eight observable content categories that reflect infotainment elements, including emotionalization, personalization, visual attractiveness, and entertainment features.

A content analysis of television news programs was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The analysis focused on RTL Direkt and HRT's Dnevnik 3. RTL Direkt was selected due to its blend of information and entertainment, while Dnevnik 3 was chosen as a representative of a traditional news format. The study analyzed 14 episodes in total (7 episodes of RTL Direkt and 7 episodes of Dnevnik 3 HRT) aired between August 1 and August 14, 2025. The selected time period was chosen for its continuity and representativeness of regular broadcast programming, without major external disruptions. A total of 135 news items were examined, with 60 from RTL Direkt and 75 from Dnevnik 3 HRT. Eight specific elements were analyzed within the content of both programs.

The analysis examined whether the news items were designed to evoke emotions, looking for the use of words such as "shocking," "disturbing," or "terrifying," as well as visuals that might provoke feelings like fear or sympathy. It also assessed the depth of the information provided, determining whether the news offered in-depth analysis and background context or simply reported events as they happened. The personalization aspect focused on whether the story centered on a single individual and included statements from ordinary people, witnesses, or passersby, using their stories to clarify the topic further.

Additionally, the analysis considered whether the news content was simplified to make it more accessible and understandable for a broader audience. Visual attractiveness was evaluated by assessing the presence of animations, graphics, and fast or dramatic transitions, as well as whether shots were dynamic or static, and the overall editing style. The presence of entertainment elements was also explored, including background music, informal tone, comparisons, metaphors, and humor. Furthermore, the study identified whether the news items belonged to “soft” news categories such as lifestyle or crime stories, and how much airtime was dedicated to these topics. Lastly, the relevance of each news item was examined in terms of its societal importance, and whether it was presented impartially and objectively, supported by factual evidence. A coding sheet was used to systematically analyze television content, recording data on the type of news, presentation style, duration, and infotainment elements (e.g., visual components, tone, and rhetorical style).

Table 1. Coding Scheme for Content Analysis of News Presentation Styles

Category	Operational definition	Indicators	Coding
Emotionalisation	Presence of emotionally charged language or visuals intended to evoke strong audience reactions	Words such as “shocking”, “disturbing”, “terrifying”, visuals evoking fear, sadness, empathy	0 = absent; 1 = present
Information	Degree to which the news item provides contextualized, in-depth information	Background explanation, expert statements, contextual data, analytical framing	0 = absent; 1 = present
Personalization	Focus on individual actors rather than broader structural issues	Interviews with citizens, eyewitness accounts, human-interest framing	0 = absent; 1 = present
Simplification of topics	Reduction of complexity to make content more accessible	Lack of detailed explanation, simplified narratives, generalizations	0 = absent; 1 = present
Visual attractiveness	Use of visually engaging production elements	Dynamic editing, animations, graphics, camera movement, visual effects	0 = absent; 1 = present
Entertainment elements	Inclusion of features primarily aimed at audience engagement and enjoyment	Humor, sarcasm, informal tone, background music, metaphors, comparisons	0 = absent; 1 = present
Soft news	Focus on less socially critical or lifestyle-oriented topics	Crime, lifestyle, entertainment, human-interest stories	0 = absent; 1 = present
Relevance	Degree of societal importance and informational value	Political, economic, or socially significant issues presented with factual grounding	0 = absent; 1 = present

Source: Own elaboration

The coding process was conducted by a single researcher. Given the exploratory nature of the study, intercoder reliability was not formally tested, which

represents a limitation of the research. However, coding categories were clearly defined prior to analysis to ensure consistency.

Table 2. Quantitative Comparison of Content Features: RTL Direkt and Dnevnik 3 HRT

Elements	RTL	HRT
Emotional Expression	35	41
Information	18	21
Personalization	31	29
Simplification of Topics	42	46
Visual Attractiveness	42	14
Entertainment	34	6
“Soft” News	7	2
Relevance	30	45

Source: Own elaboration

Each category was operationalized using binary coding (presence/absence), based on predefined indicators. For instance, “emotionalization” was coded when emotionally charged language or imagery was present, while “visual attractiveness” was identified through the use of dynamic editing, graphics, or visual effects. The results suggest the presence of two distinct editorial approaches. Dnevnik 3 HRT affirms its status as a traditional, serious news program that focuses on in-depth analysis, objectivity, and social relevance, with a strong emphasis on politics, security, and social issues.

Visual elements and entertainment segments are used sparingly, primarily to support serious content. This aligns with agenda-setting theory, which suggests media influence public perception by prioritizing certain topics (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Visual and entertainment elements are sparingly used to support serious reporting. On the other hand, RTL Direkt strikes a balance between information and entertainment, emphasizing visual appeal, entertaining elements, and humor and sarcasm to maintain the attention of a younger audience. Simplification of topics and personalization are more prominent, which can help make the news more accessible to a broader audience but may affect perceptions of the content’s seriousness and objectivity. This reflects current media trends toward infotainment, balancing news delivery with audience retention (Esquen & Palomino-Flores, 2024). While this approach may increase accessibility, it also raises questions about the impact on perceived news seriousness and objectivity. This analysis indicates the potential role of infotainment in contemporary media as a tool for capturing audience attention, especially among younger viewers, while simultaneously highlighting the importance of traditional, deeper, and objective journalism that provides socially relevant information.

RESULTS

SURVEY

The research sample consisted of 164 respondents, with a strong representation of younger individuals. As shown in Table 2, the vast majority of participants (70.1%) were aged 19 to 24, while 12.8% were aged 25 to 30. Only 2.4% of respondents were aged 15 to 18, and 14.6% were aged 30 or older. This age distribution indicates a clear focus on young adults, particularly those in late adolescence and early adulthood.

Table 3. Distribution of participants by age group

Age group	N	%
15–18 years	4	2.4
19–24 years	115	70.1
25–30 years	21	12.8
Over 30	24	14.6
Total	164	100.0

Source: Own elaboration

Regarding gender distribution, the sample was predominantly female, with 78.0% of respondents identifying as female and 20.7% as male. A small portion identified as “Other” or chose not to disclose their gender. This gender imbalance should be taken into account when interpreting results related to gender-specific perceptions or behaviors. As for educational attainment, the majority of respondents had completed high school (68.3%), while 31.7% held a college or university degree. There were no participants with only primary education or no formal education. This indicates a sample that is generally well educated, which may influence their media consumption habits and their critical engagement with infotainment content.

Table 4. Distribution of participants by level of education

Education level	N	%
Primary school	0	0.0
High school	112	68.3
College / University degree	52	31.7
Total	164	100.0

Source: Own elaboration

The data on occupational status reveal that the majority of participants were university students (62.2%), followed by employed individuals (34.1%). Only a small number of respondents were unemployed (1.8%), high school pupils (1.2%), or retired (0.6%). This distribution is consistent with the age structure of the sample, suggesting a dominant representation of individuals in higher education or early-career stages. The occupational profile further supports the study’s focus on young adults as a key demographic in analyzing media consumption and infotainment preferences. The results indicate that TV news consumption among young people is generally low to moderate. Only 14% of respondents reported watching TV news on a daily basis, while 17.7% tuned in several times a week. The largest portion of participants (31.7%) watch occasionally, and another 29.3% said they watch rarely. Notably, 7.3% of respondents reported never watching TV news. These findings suggest that traditional television news may not be the primary source of information for a majority of young viewers, which is consistent with global trends indicating a shift toward digital and on-demand content consumption. The relatively low daily engagement highlights the importance of understanding which formats and presentation styles may better capture this demographic’s attention.

Table 5. Distribution of responses by news source

The News Sources	N	%
Newspaper	7	4,3
Online News Portals	83	50,6
Radio	31	18,9
Social media	141	86
Television	90	54,9

Source: Own elaboration. Note: The total exceeds 100% because multiple responses were allowed

Table 5 provides an overview of respondents’ preferred news sources. Although television is not the primary news source for most respondents, more than half still report consuming it to some extent. This suggests that television remains a relevant, though not dominant, component of the broader media environment among young audiences. Social media platforms are the most frequently cited, with 141 respondents (86%) indicating them as their primary source of information. In comparison, newspapers are the least utilized, mentioned by only 7 respondents (4.3%). Online news portals are used by 83 respondents (50.6%), while television remains a significant source, with 90 respondents (54.9%) reporting its use. Radio is cited by 31 respondents (18.9%) as a news source. These findings suggest a clear shift toward digital and interactive platforms among the surveyed population.

Table 6. Comparison of Respondents Who Watch RTL and HRT Programs

%	Yes	No
HRT	38.4	61.6
RTL	89.7	10.3

Source: Own elaboration

Table 6 presents the comparison of respondents' viewing habits for RTL and HRT programs. The results indicate that a significantly higher percentage of respondents watch RTL programs (89.7%) compared to HRT programs (38.4%). Conversely, 61.6% of respondents reported not watching HRT programs, while only 10.3% reported not watching RTL programs. These findings suggest that RTL programs have a considerably larger viewership among the surveyed population compared to HRT programs.

Table 7. Perception of the Program's Style

%	Entertaining	Dynamic	Superficial	Informative	Sensationalistic	Dry	Boring
RTL	45.1	51.2	14.6	56.7	20.1	3	12.2
HRT	0	1.8	5.5	59.1	1.8	22	42.7

Source: Own elaboration. Note: The total exceeds 100% because multiple responses were allowed

The results presented in Table 7 demonstrate notable differences in how respondents perceive the style of the two evening news programs RTL Direkt and Dnevnik 3 (HRT). RTL Direkt is predominantly perceived by respondents as Dynamic (51.2%) and Entertaining (45.1%). These findings suggest that RTL Direkt combines informative content with a lively, engaging presentation style, which may appeal more strongly to a younger audience. On the other hand, Dnevnik 3 (HRT) is most frequently perceived as Dry (22%) and Boring (42.7%). These perceptions indicate that while the program fulfills its informational function, its traditional and formal presentation style may be less appealing to younger viewers. The comparative analysis may indicate that RTL Direkt is perceived as both informative and engaging, which likely contributes to its appeal among younger audiences. In contrast, Dnevnik 3 (HRT), while also seen as informative, is characterized as less dynamic and more monotonous. These distinctions in perceived style could significantly impact viewing preferences and habits among the younger demographic.

The study's findings indicate that RTL Direkt's program incorporates a higher degree of emotionalization and entertainment elements than HRT's Dnevnik 3. Specifically, 36% of respondents associated RTL with emotional storytelling, and 51.2% noted the presence of entertainment components. This aligns with Brosius's (1993)

assertion that emotional content in television news significantly affects audience engagement and perception.

Table 8. The content elements associated with RTL Direkt and Dnevnik 3 (HRT)

Content elements	RTL (%)	HRT (%)
Emotionalisation	36	11
Information	32.3	53.7
Personalisation	32.3	6.7
Simplification of Topics	45.1	7.9
Visual Attractiveness	30.5	7.3
Entertainment elements	51.2	1.2
Soft News	16.5	8.5
Relevance	17.7	45.7

Source: Own elaboration. Note: The total exceeds 100% because multiple responses were allowed

Moreover, the inclusion of humor, satire, and informal presentation styles in RTL's format supports Holbert's (2005) typology, which emphasizes the blending of entertainment and political information in infotainment. The data also show that RTL programming is characterized by topic simplification (45.1%) and personalization (32.3%), which aligns with Savolainen's (2022) conceptualization of infotainment as a hybrid format that prioritizes accessible, relatable content to attract viewers. Boukes et al. (2021) further argue that such personalized, simplified news content fosters greater audience interactivity, as reflected in higher viewing rates for RTL (89.7%) than for HRT (38.4%).

On the other hand, HRT's Dnevnik 3 was perceived as more informative (53.7%) and relevant (45.7%), with a lower presence of entertainment elements (1.2%) and emotionalization (11%). This supports Lycarião's (2024) findings on the fragmentation of the public sphere, where traditional news formats maintain a focus on factual reporting and contextual depth, appealing to audiences seeking more in-depth information. The lower percentages of visual attractiveness and simplification also align with North's (2014) analysis of "hard news" as less sensational and more focused on objective reporting, often associated with traditional news outlets.

Finally, the higher reliance on social media and portals as news sources (86% and 50.6% respectively) noted in the survey suggests an audience shift towards formats that combine entertainment with information delivery, which Dai and Wang (2023) found to enhance viewer attention and engagement in online video infotainment content.

When comparing the content analysis results (Table 1) with the survey findings (Table 7), several key observations emerge. While the content analysis shows that HRT features more news stories that evoke emotions, survey respondents associate RTL with a higher degree of emotionalization (36%) than HRT (11%). This suggests that although HRT includes more emotionally charged stories, RTL’s emotional presentation has a stronger, more memorable impact on the audience. Both the content analysis and the survey agree that HRT provides more in-depth and socially relevant information. Survey data further highlight that the audience perceives HRT as significantly more informative, whereas RTL is seen as offering less in-depth content. Regarding personalization, the content analysis finds that both programs use it to a similar extent, but survey respondents perceive RTL as much more personalized.

This discrepancy may be explained by RTL’s use of humor and a casual tone, which likely enhances the impression of personalization. The content analysis reveals a similar level of topic simplification in both programs, yet the survey indicates that the audience perceives RTL’s news as much more simplified. This may be due to RTL’s stronger incorporation of humor and entertainment, which contribute to this perception. Both datasets clearly show that RTL employs significantly more visual elements than HRT, which is strongly reflected in audience perceptions.

The content analysis and survey both confirm that RTL contains substantially more entertainment elements than HRT, with the audience recognizing this difference even more strongly. While the content analysis shows a smaller difference in the amount of “soft” news between the two, the survey suggests that RTL is perceived as a substantially larger source of “soft” news. Finally, both the content analysis and survey data indicate that HRT broadcasts significantly more relevant and socially important news than RTL. In summary, comparing content analysis results with survey responses reveals interesting contrasts between editorial practices and audience perceptions, highlighting how different presentation styles influence viewer experience and interpretation.

Table 9. Elements that increases the desire to watch the program

The desire to watch the program increases:	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	SD
Infotainment	3%	4.3%	25%	36%	31.7%	3.89	1.00
A professional tone of the host	9.1%	19.5%	28 %	25 %	18.3 %	3.24	1.22
Inclusion of humorous comments	1.8%	3.7%	18.9%	38.4%	37.2%	4.05	0.93
Dynamic and dramatic music	7.3%	9.1%	36.6%	32.3%	14.6%	3.38	1.07

Source: Own elaboration

The results shown in Table 9 indicate different levels of influence of individual content and presentation elements of television shows on the respondents' desire to watch them. Humorous comments were most positively rated by respondents, with an average rating of 4.05 and the lowest standard deviation ($SD = 0.93$), indicating a high degree of agreement and relative homogeneity of responses. Almost 76% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that humor increases their desire to watch the show. This suggests that humor and an informal approach are important motivational factors for younger audiences.

Infotainment also shows a positive influence with an average rating of 3.89. More than 67% of respondents agree (36%) or strongly agree (31.7%) that this format increases their motivation to watch. This confirms that the combination of information and entertainment stimulates young people's interest in informative content, consistent with theoretical assumptions about the popularity of infotainment among younger demographic groups. Although dynamic music received a slightly lower average rating (3.38), nearly half of the respondents still showed a positive tendency towards it. The relatively high standard deviation ($SD = 1.07$) indicates diversity of opinion within the sample, suggesting that music has a subjective effect: for some, it enhances the experience and interest, while others may perceive it as overbearing or inappropriate in the context of informative programs.

The professional and serious tone of the presenter records the lowest average score (3.24) and the highest standard deviation ($SD = 1.22$), indicating the highest disagreement among respondents. Only 43.3% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that a serious tone increases their desire to watch. In contrast, almost 29% of respondents disagreed with this statement. These results suggest that traditional, formal presentation styles resonate less with younger audiences, who clearly prefer a more relaxed, personalized approach. Several limitations of the study should be acknowledged. The sample is not representative, with a strong overrepresentation of female respondents and students.

Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data and subjective perceptions may affect the reliability of the findings. The content analysis was conducted on a limited number of episodes within a specific timeframe, which may not fully capture the overall editorial strategies of the analyzed programs.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study examined how infotainment elements shape the perception and consumption of television news among younger audiences by comparing two Croatian programs: *RTL Direkt*, an infotainment-oriented format, and *Dnevnik 3 HRT*, a traditional, formal news program. These findings demonstrate how

presentation styles, operationalized through infotainment-related elements, systematically shape audience perception across both programs.

Using a mixed-methods approach combining content analysis and survey data, the findings reveal several important patterns that contribute to the understanding of contemporary news consumption and align with established theoretical frameworks. The content analysis indicated that *Dnevnik 3 HRT* contained a slightly higher number of emotionally charged news items (41) than RTL (35). However, survey respondents predominantly associated *RTL Direkt* with emotionalization (36%), while only 11% associated HRT with the same characteristic. This discrepancy suggests a distinction between the presence of emotional content and its perceived impact. As Brosius (1993) argues, audience perception is shaped not merely by the presence of emotional elements but by how they are framed and presented. RTL's use of dynamic visuals, sensational language, and dramatic music likely intensifies emotional resonance, making such content more salient to viewers, even when it is not more frequent. This supports the notion that form is as influential as content in shaping audience perception, consistent with Holbert's (2005) argument that infotainment enhances engagement through emotional storytelling. Accordingly, even when traditional news includes emotional reporting, infotainment formats amplify its visibility through stylistic framing, thereby boosting audience recall.

Both the content analysis and survey findings indicate that *Dnevnik 3 HRT* is perceived as delivering more in-depth and socially relevant information. In the content analysis, HRT scored higher on information depth (21 vs. RTL's 18) and relevance (45 vs. 30). Survey respondents confirmed this pattern, rating HRT significantly higher on informativeness (53.7%) and societal relevance (45.7%). These findings are consistent with previous research (North, 2014; Lycarião, 2024), which emphasizes the continued importance of traditional news outlets in sustaining democratic discourse through factual, contextualized, and analytically rich reporting.

However, this informational strength appears to come at the expense of reduced engagement among younger audiences, who increasingly prefer shorter, visually dynamic, and emotionally engaging formats, as reflected in RTL's substantially higher viewing rates (89.7% compared to HRT's 38.4%). *RTL Direkt* was also perceived more strongly in terms of personalization (32.3%) and content simplification (45.1%), despite the content analysis showing relatively similar levels of personalization in both programs. This suggests that RTL's stylistic choices, particularly its informal tone, anecdotal storytelling, and use of humor, amplify the perception of personalization. This aligns with Savolainen's (2022) argument that infotainment prioritizes accessibility and relatability over analytical depth.

Similarly, although both programs demonstrated comparable levels of topic simplification in the content analysis, survey respondents perceived RTL

as significantly more simplified. This perception is likely reinforced by humor, informal language, and narrative compression, which make complex issues appear more accessible. These findings are consistent with Boukes et al. (2021), who argue that personalized and simplified formats increase audience engagement, particularly in fragmented digital media environments.

Both datasets also confirm that RTL Direkt relies substantially more on visual and entertainment elements (visual attractiveness: 42 vs. 14; entertainment: 34 vs. 6). This difference is even more pronounced in audience perception, with 51.2% of respondents associating RTL with entertainment, compared to only 1.2% for HRT. The structured segments in RTL, which often incorporate satire and humor, reflect findings by Dai and Wang (2023) regarding infotainment's effectiveness in sustaining attention in digital video environments. In this context, humor, music, and sarcasm function not merely as stylistic additions but as strategic tools for maintaining engagement and managing emotional response in an increasingly saturated media environment.

Although both programs include "soft news," their editorial priorities differ significantly. HRT remains primarily focused on "hard news" topics such as politics, security, and economics, while RTL incorporates a higher proportion of lifestyle and entertainment content (7 vs. 2 soft news items). Survey findings reinforce this distinction: 16.5% of respondents associate RTL with soft news, compared to 8.5% for HRT. This aligns with Holbert (2005) and Boukes et al. (2021), who conceptualize infotainment as a hybrid genre that blends informational and entertainment logics to broaden audience appeal.

However, it also raises concerns regarding the potential displacement of public-interest journalism if audiences increasingly prioritize entertainment value over informational depth. The survey further indicates a strong preference for digital news sources among young people: 86% report using social media, and 50.6% rely on online news portals. This reflects a broader structural shift in news consumption and supports Dai and Wang's (2023) argument that infotainment is particularly effective in digital environments characterized by brevity, interactivity, and emotional appeal. RTL's format, which closely mirrors social media aesthetics, appears especially well-adapted to these evolving consumption habits.

These findings should be interpreted in light of several methodological limitations. The sample is not fully representative of the broader population, with a strong overrepresentation of female respondents and students. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported perceptions rather than controlled exposure limits the ability to directly link program content to audience interpretation. Respondents were not required to watch specific episodes prior to participation, meaning that responses reflect general impressions rather than experimentally standardized viewing conditions. Finally, the content analysis was conducted on a limited number of episodes within a short time frame, which may not fully capture

longer-term editorial patterns. Based on the combined findings, the study offers indicative answers to the three research questions, revealing consistent patterns in how younger audiences engage with different news formats. Specifically, (1) The findings suggest that infotainment significantly shapes audience perceptions, particularly by enhancing emotional engagement, perceived clarity, and overall appeal; (2) The results indicate a clear preference for commercial, infotainment-oriented formats, with 89.7% of respondents reporting viewership of *RTL Direkt*, compared to 38.4% for *Dnevnik 3 HRT*; (3) The findings suggest a stronger inclination toward infotainment-based content. Both datasets indicate that *RTL Direkt*'s use of visuals, humor, dramatization, and personalized storytelling resonates more strongly with younger audiences than the formal and fact-driven approach of HRT.

This study contributes to the growing body of research on infotainment by providing empirical evidence from the Croatian media context. The findings demonstrate that infotainment strategies, such as emotional storytelling, personalization, visual enhancement, and humor, function not merely as stylistic devices but as meaningful mechanisms that shape audience perception and engagement, particularly among younger viewers. At the same time, the study highlights the continued relevance of traditional journalism, as represented by HRT, in delivering factual, contextualized, and socially significant information. These findings suggest that a balanced media environment may be more effective than a strictly polarized one, combining informational depth with engaging presentation to sustain both attention and democratic value.

The study also identifies several underexplored dynamics within the Croatian media landscape. One key insight is that perceived emotionalization and infotainment style exert a stronger influence on audience interpretation than the actual frequency of such elements in the content. In other words, how news is presented appears to matter more than how often specific stylistic features occur. Within the Croatian context, this is particularly relevant given the coexistence of public service and commercial broadcasters, which operate under distinct editorial logics. Comparing these two models provides a clearer understanding of how global infotainment trends are locally adapted within a small media system.

Finally, the research points to a broader generational shift toward infotainment-oriented consumption patterns, even when audiences recognize traditional journalism as more informative and socially relevant. The strong preference for *RTL Direkt* (89.7%), despite acknowledged informational advantages of *Dnevnik 3 HRT*, illustrates a clear paradox in contemporary media consumption: perceived quality and actual preference do not always align. This suggests that the experiential dimension of news – how it feels, sounds, and appears – may, in some cases, outweigh its informational depth in shaping audience behavior.

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