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## Reality TV in Bulgaria: Social and Cultural Models and National Peculiarities

MARIA POPOVA

**Abstract:** The Reality TV appearance results from the media content changes, the infotainment development, the media use enlargement, the creation of quality, mass, thematic universal media products, sold at for low costs and for big profits. The Reality TV significant contribution is the discrepancy between public and private, the viewers' possibility to see themselves and their problems into participants' behavior. Although the Reality TV shows present voyeurism, scandal and conflict, media audience may control the program narrative. These programs are entertainment form, but they engage the society with charity, define the media agenda setting, and present definitive socio-cultural models, national peculiarities, which answer to the media audience needs, which are general as cultural sense and social behavior. There are different Reality TV forms worldwide. Most of them represent local edition for the local media audience. In Bulgaria the Reality TV started in 2004 and it has had significant influence of the media content ever since. The Reality TV places substantial problems at the media sphere, connected with media reliability, media post-colonialism, media manipulation, and media pluralism.

**Keywords:** media – Reality TV – media content – media audience – Bulgarian television

# Reality TV in Bulgaria: Social and Cultural Models and National Peculiarities

Maria Popova

## *Media content – between media audience interest and social needs*

The changes in European media environment have been flowing in parallel directions in the last years. On one hand, the media fragmentarization increases in accordance with primarily declared and explored target media audience needs. As a result more media with different thematic have appeared, new media formats have been developed, media titles have been multiplied, media quality has been improved and the spectrum of media functions has been extended. This tendency may be actively observed in the last years, especially with the growing development and extending content of Internet. The appearance of quality media helps for social and ethnical groups' interests to be correctly shown. But as to print media, it leads to decrease in circulation, to reductions in advertising revenues, to bankrupt threat and above all to thwarting the very existence of pluralistic journalism in the relevant national media system.

On the other side, the second tendency is more widespread and, unfortunately, not very positively evaluated – from media researchers as much as from the media audience. It is related to the increasing commercialization of media content, as well as to the different media brands interlocking in some giant transnational media companies. Most of them offer identical as theme, narrative and messages media content for various media audience – regardless the different media forms (press, radio, television, Internet) or different national audience. This is made to the aim of reaching greater audience, and also putting down production costs, and putting up their ads profits. A similar position belongs to the British media theoretician Kevin Williams: "Commercialization is also seen as responsible for the "dumbing down", "tabloidization" or "boulevardisierung" of European television and media in general... Serious content, including politics, news and current affairs, is being either cut back or diluted to reflect the market demand for more entertainment. Specifically it means more human stories, less political coverage, fewer international and more local stories, hard news being replaced by sex, scandal and celebrities."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kevin Williams, *European Media Studies*, Hodder Arnold, 2005, p. 18-19.

Another British researcher shares the same worries. The mass communication theoretician Denis McQuail, wrote in a report in 1998: "The TV program itself has become more sensational, more negative, focusing more on scandals and rituals in politics. Entertainment has increasingly focused on sex and violence, on simplistic stereotypes, more rapid editing as part of a slowly developing "video-clip aesthetic", a new confusion of realities and television realities."<sup>2</sup>

Certainly, this is a leading tendency in the last years. Infotainment is imposed on the media space – a mix between information and entertainment, as a result, the hard news almost disappeared, but soft news, mass culture, lifestyle, video democracy etc. are popularized. The question we have to ask for is whether social stability and social development are dismissed. And also if it is a one-way direction or the process are convertible and the present domination results from the contemporary social and historical conditions.

### *Contemporary television – media content exchange or exchange of cultures*

Different researchers analyze media capacity to transform cultural conceptions and to form nationally differentiated cultural community. French scholars Olivier Mongin, Marc-Olivier Padis, Jean-Francois Barbier-Bouvet and Richard Robert divided the contemporary culture based on media interaction to two large areas – storage culture and culture de flux.<sup>3</sup> The first model belongs to the traditional art forms, which are publicly presented in their authentic type and they could not be creatively rewritten. The second model characterizes the traditional media (press, radio, television), which offer the completed artifacts and cultural models, and represented their cultural code to the media audience.

The new media (Internet, social networks, online journalism) are a combination between these two areas. They show the idea of culture as software, explicated by the German sociologist Ulrich Beck. It allows for supplementing, enrichment and exchange of existent cultural traditions and norms with new messages, notions and perceptions. Culture is realized as an open code, which the media audience can use through its own perception and personal social environment.<sup>4</sup>

This may explain some changes in the contemporary media, especially in television programs. Although audience with different national, cultural and social peculiarities watch TV shows, media formats influence over the way media viewers react to the media content. The television

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<sup>2</sup> In: Kevin Williams, *European Media Studies*, Hodder Arnold, 2005, p. 51.

<sup>3</sup> See Оливие Монжен, Марк.-Оливие Пади, Ришар Робер, Интернет, четенето и изливащата се култура, *Култура*, бр.22, 31.05.2002.

<sup>4</sup> See Улрих Бек, *Що е глобализация? Заблудите на глобализма – отговори на глобализацията, Критика и хуманизъм*, 2002, p. 77.

producers set in the media formats definite socio-cultural models, which are general as cultural meaning and social behavior. In this way, the formats may be realized and replayed by the different participants as well as by the viewers, independently of current show specifics or national peculiarities. Or like Denis McQual wrote: "Audiences are both a product of social context (which leads to shared cultural interests, understandings, and information needs) and a response to a particular pattern of media provision. Often they are both at the same time, as when a medium sets out to appeal to the members of a social category or the residents of a certain place. Media use also reflects broader patterns of time use, availability, lifestyle, and everyday routines."<sup>5</sup>

Of course, presenting of one and the same programs to different audience may be interpreted with the globalization process and transnational information flows. Today the access to information is easier, especially in the Internet, and often the media content cannot be adapted to the media audience increasing in quality and personal interest. But there are some considerable problems. The first is concerned with the media reliability. The question is how media reality may reflect public space objectively and correctly. And also if the production of media information from the newsroom editorial staff is professional or it is a result of definite manipulative methods aiming to form the public opinion on given social themes.

Another important problem refers to the so called media post-colonialism. It presents definitive cultural domination (most of all US culture and lifestyle) through the worldwide media audience. That is why the media heroes' demonstrative social behavior is sometimes incomprehensible and can violate the traditional cultural, social and religious norms.

### *Reality TV – cross point between media information truth and media consumption increasing*

If we examine in more details the media content changes and especially the television ones, we will consider that the appearance of new media formats enriches the television space and enlarges media audience consumption. The television models are not always product of media producers' and media companies' willingness to increase their profits, but also an answer of media audience needs and an option for viewers to express their conceptions and notions. Reality TV is such worldwide popular format. Probably the shortest definition of Reality TV refers to "programmes where the unscripted behaviour of "ordinary people" is the focus of interest".<sup>6</sup>

Another characteristic of Reality TV can be read in texts of some other scholars. According to Jonathan Bignell "it might represent a new kind of access to, and interest in, ordinary people on

<sup>5</sup> Denis McQual, *Audience Analysis*, Sage Publications, Inc., 1997, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Bignell, *Big Brother. Reality TV In The Twenty-First Century*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p. 1.

television that can air important issues about identity and community in contemporary society.”<sup>7</sup> And Bill Nicholls argues that reality TV exhibits a strategy of deterrence that distances the television audience from reality, rather than seeking to represent and interpret it.<sup>8</sup>

Reality TV features most of all follow market – driven journalism model – profits increasing, media product creating, which can be sold in different media markets, production cost reduction and media content editing, which can answer to previously declared expectations of media audience, permanent holding of television viewers attention, attraction of advertisers etc.

The Reality TV development is a continuous process, and its nature results from the combination of different media forms– documentary television, tabloid journalism and popular entertainment. The documentary television form was popular in the 1970s and 1980s, especially in US and British television programs. It includes interesting human stories, personal dramas, fun stories, with high level of truthiness, and a plot separated into lots of series. The television communication defines this genre as docusoap – a mix between documentary and soap operas. Jonathan Bignell wrote that Reality TV is a docusoap form with its emphasis on personal stories and relaxed attitude to documentary’s claim of veracity, seems to be based around entertainment rather than the sobriety of documentary is not in itself a reason to devalue it as a television form. Its blending and blurring of genres and its dramatization of the real can be just as effective for the working through of the stakes of social life and its strictures as the sobriety of conventional documentary. What is different, and this is a significant rider to that point, is Reality TV’s lack of acknowledgement of itself as social commentary except in the most basic ways. According to him reality TV has gradually emerged as a designation that describes programmes characterized by a controlled environment, lacking documentary’s heritage of interest in social action. It is closer to entertainment and increasingly replaces entertainment in the schedules.<sup>9</sup>

It is a fact the Realty TV invasion in the documentary television changes all of the documentary programmers – including documentary journalism, documentary realism, and, observational documentary. Typical for Reality TV is the clearly indicated connection between documentary television and soap operas in respect of series parts. Some Reality TV programs are broadcast on air, but most of them are firstly fitting the information and after that it is edited. All of the Reality TV productions use characteristic participants. Usually the participants’ choice is set up previously from television producers and scriptwriters, and on the castings definitive characters, and not contributors’ spontaneity is what is looked for. Because of it on the screen

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<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Bignell, p.4 .

<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Bignell, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Bignell, p. 18, p. 25.

most of the participants demonstrate well-known behavior or familiar game strategy. They have been already watched different Reality TV programs and they knew the preferences of media audience.

The second Reality TV format is tabloid journalism. Its development started at beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and it is typical for the US newspapers firstly, and then – for the British press. The tabloid journalism perfectly mixes truth and fake stories, popular and ordinary people information, sensations, gossips, political scandals, crime stories, and an interesting investigating journalism. The broadcast media appearance only helped for the tabloid journalism in the public space. The tabloid TV is an excellent example for the huge influence, which scandal and sensational stories documentary has on the public opinion making.

The third Reality TV form – the popular entertainment refers to programs such as talkshows, gameshows, where the leading role is the entertainment function of media. The attention of media audience is chained to the insignificant, unimportant, relieve from busy work, to the entertainment in general. The Dutch television producer John de Mol, one of the Reality TV apologists and a creator of the most popular Reality TV show “Big Brother” argued that the only important thing for him is to entertain people, and this is a purpose he is following with every his new show.<sup>10</sup>

Such programs programming on the channel prime time or in the zones around it helps media audience to segment their watching time and correctly form their agenda setting, in accordance to the use of media content.

The prime Reality TV target is young viewers. That provokes the television producers to impose young participants mainly with similar appearance, behavior, and perception. Also they use different means for commercial products advertising, which are designed for young audience, through hidden ads or product positioning.

The Reality TV actively relies on the media audience feedback. During the time of reality shows inquiries with viewers are done or some cross media methods are used in order to keep the audience attention – offering different products, using different media channels, opportunities to vote in the program’ site. The viewers have the illusion of partnership with the media producer or of their significance due to the opportunity to vote for one or another participant. That model corresponds to the so called SMS-democracy, which not always has been understood positively – as a persuasive communication form.

The Reality TV bears some known media characteristics. But its popularity and media usability provoke other media formats, including media information and the news, to change their own traditional model.

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<sup>10</sup> In: Албена Борисова, Джон де Мол направи интимното публично, Сега, 22.09.2005.

### *Reality TV – social and cultural models bearer*

The Reality TV great contribution is the gap between public and private. In the television space public persons (like politicians, businessmen, celebrities, and stars) are replaced with ordinary people. For the media audience the intimate, the private life, the personal experiences are much more interesting than public images and PR practices. Or in other words the viewers may project their own personal lifestyles, dreams, hopes, fears, desires, problems on the television public reality and they can easily identify themselves with the media heroes.

The Reality TV is among the main programs, which impose new faces on the media reality, as well as they give a chance to ordinary people to enter aggressively the public space. The Reality TV shows participants have the feeling that they are stars. This is a result from the television producers' strategy, which accumulate media attention to the participants so that they may sell better their own program. And, of course, all of this is contemporary media practice to present publicly new images with new characters in order to overcome the boredom and quick change in interests of media audience. But the easy zapping negotiation brings a quantity of pseudo stars, and pseudo elite in the public space and it forms unreal beliefs and social norms. Also it alienates the most important social opinion leaders from the media field. The French researcher Divina Frau-Meigs explain that "reality TV is profoundly political in its implications as it brings into the public space a marketplace of self-promotion while annexing the private sphere of intimacy and secrecy."<sup>11</sup>

Most of Reality TV researchers pay close attention to the fact that this media format focuses on showing the fleshliness, sexuality, eroticism. And also that the viewer is placed in a situation of voyeur who is trying to build a degree of identification between his own body, beliefs, and lifestyle, and those whose participants in such formats provide to him. In turn, the media heroes play in the role of homo ludens. Most often on their media image have been superimposed their own identity, the notion which they have for themselves, the role, which they have to play in the program, and the expectations – their own and of the audience, how that role should be played.

The Reality TV most problematic area is the way different programs use national peculiarities. It either never happens or this kind of social behavior is not tolerated, and some type of participants has not been casting. Often the reason is that the Reality TV licenses are sold to television producers from different countries. It helps such programs to "perform well within the

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<sup>11</sup> Frau-Meigs, D. Big Brother and Reality TV in Europe: Towards a Theory of Situated Acculturation by the Media, *European Journal of Communication* (2006), p. 47.



international broadcasting market, with successful formats sold worldwide, and locally produced to nationally specific requirements”<sup>12</sup>, as Annette Hill wrote.

Frau-Meigs has different opinion: “some values, connected to money and individualism, enter the Southern European countries’ spectrum; other values, connected to seduction and collective idleness, cross over to the northern countries of the EU. It is, properly, a percolation process. Each country is able to take the basic format and add or subtract pieces to create something which better fits their perception of national identities.”<sup>13</sup>

While Jonathan Bignell explained that traditional local cultures are said to be eroded by dependencies on media products, with their attendant ideologies derived from the United States, with the effect of globalizing consumer culture across regions and populations which become constrained to adapt to its logics and desires, despite the lack in some of these regions (in the developing world) of resources to participate in them... The use of television as a medium in which makeover TV is translated and exchanged across different local and regional spaces draws attention to the temptation to take television as a causal agent of local and regional social change based on the specific form it takes in the United States, he says.<sup>14</sup>

“Endemol” TV producer John de Mol claimed the same in his interview, explaining how he has been planning every project so that it may be welcome everywhere in the world. According to his opinion despite cultural differences and lifestyle distinctions people have the same taste. Even though he does not deny the right of local television producers to adapt the reality show conception to national peculiarities thus contributing to the successful program realization, when one show has success in the Netherlands, it means it can be welcome everywhere in the world.<sup>15</sup>

His words are confirmed by Brian Briggs, also a producer at “Endemol”, who says that “the reason why “Endemol” is so successful is that we take a format that works in one country, strip everything cultural off of it, export it to a new country, and then, over time, add cultural aspects of that country to it.”<sup>16</sup>

John de Mol, whose wealth has been evaluated to \$2.0 billion, is creator and owner of one of the biggest European television producing companies – “Endemol”, with which he started his first

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<sup>12</sup> Annette Hill, *Reality TV. Audiences and popular factual television*, Routledge, 2005, p. 21.

<sup>13</sup> Frau-Meigs, D. *Big Brother and Reality TV in Europe: Towards a Theory of Situated Acculturation by the Media*, *European Journal of Communication* (2006), p. 39.

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Bignell, *Big Brother. Reality TV In The Twenty-First Century*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p. 35, p. 48.

<sup>15</sup> In: Албена Борисова, Джон де Мол направи интимното публично, *Сега*, 22.09.2005.

<sup>16</sup> In: Magder, T. *The End of TV 101: Reality Television, Formats and the New Business of Television – Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*, 2004, p. 137.

Reality TV show "Big Brother" in the Netherlands in 1995. His business interests include several television channels and Internet sites now, and through his company "Talpa Media Group" he may sell licenses of his popular Reality TV programs all over the world. "Big Brother" has been shown in 70 countries, and for the most of them it has several editions. In some countries the program has different interpretation as "VIP Brother", which was very popular in Bulgaria, "Loft Story", which has been shown in France in 2001 and "Secret Story", which has been shown in France in 2007. All of the programs set on the participants competition, game strategy, viewers voyeurs possibilities. But some of them have cultural and national differences. For example the French "Soft Story" focus on love, romance and intimacy, the viewers vote participants to stay in the house, rather than negative voting to come out. "Endemol"'s hit shows "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire", "Fear Factor" and "Wife Swap" have very large distribution too.

Although the most of Reality TV programs have US licenses, the European producers create some popular programs, which have been bought by US TV channels. It is assumed that the first European Reality TV program is the British series "Seven Up!", shown by the Granada Television in 1964. It presented the life of a dozen persons, firstly when they are seven years old, then fourteen years old (in series "7 Plus Seven") and etc.

The modern European Reality TV form is continued by program "Nummer 28" by the Dutch television in 1991, and absolutely remarkable "The Real Life" by MTV in 1992. But as the most successful European Reality TV programs can be shown "Survivor" (originally named "Expedition Robinson") by the producer Charlie Parsons and British-Swedish company "Planet 24", which started in Sweden in 1997, "Big Brother", the British "Pop Idol" (by company "19 Entertainment") and "Dancing with the Stars" (originally "Strictly Come Dancing" by BBC).

The European Reality TV programs worldwide success inspirits the vice-president of European Commission Jacques Barrot to declare: "I welcome viewers' interest in European works. This demonstrates that European diversity... is a value shared by the vast majority of Europeans".<sup>17</sup>

### *Reality TV in Bulgaria – entertainment and social change*

The world tendency is that nearly 70% of the entertainment television programs include Reality TV features, and it is characteristic for Bulgaria too.<sup>18</sup> In Bulgaria Reality TV started in 2004, when the private Nova Television showed the "Big Brother" first season. The program had a really big success and its producers, which used the Dutch "Endemol" original license, prepared

<sup>17</sup> In: [http://ec.europa.eu/unitedkingdom/press/press\\_releases/2009/pr0942\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/unitedkingdom/press/press_releases/2009/pr0942_en.htm)

<sup>18</sup> In: Оля Желева, Весела Табакова: В риалити шоуто се проектират митове и мечти, Новинар, 23.10.2006.

several more editions, imposing local versions too. "Big Brother" is part of the so called Competition Reality TV program (Fig.1) – The Reality TV program version, in which participants, mostly ordinary people, compete for some cash prize. This is the most popular Reality TV show in Bulgaria. The "Big Brother" presenter – the Bulgarian journalist Niki Kunchev explained on the public discussion, dedicated to Reality TV in 2007 that all these programs have the only purpose – everything happening in the "Big Brother" house, to be publicly shown, to be commented from our commentators, and a social conclusion to be made of the behavior of the individual. We definitely do not look for some intellectuality, we have never set have such task, he concluded.<sup>19</sup>

The Reality TV programs attract great interest indeed – to the Bulgarian media audience, as well as to Bulgarian society. Although they present well-known Reality TV program version, the Bulgarian programs include some national and cultural features.

First feature is a possibility of self-understanding. In the multi-thousand castings, the participants are motivated in their behavior and game strategy by the chance to win big money prizes, as well as the chance for self-understanding. The Bulgarian TV presenter, ex-actor and ex-monk, participant in two different "Big Brother" shows, one of which is "VIP Brother", Dim Dukov declared on the public discussion, dedicated to the Reality TV in 2007: "Everybody has changed in the "Big Brother" house. You are out of reality after 10 days staying there. You start living in absolutely different, totally imaginative world. The main problem is that you give out information, but you cannot receive information. And it changes your thinking. It was very important for me to understand part of myself, anything, which I had not realized in the civil life. You may understand life by different ways, when you are closed there."<sup>20</sup>

These words can be supplemented by Reality TV formula, which was given by Georgi Lozanov – Bulgarian media expert and Head of the Bulgarian regulatory media organization "Electronic Media Council". During a public discussion in 2006, dedicated to Reality TV, he defines the Bulgarian Reality TV as "a hope, a piece of reality which we usually connect with private life of people. If you extract it from private life and reduce it to the public life, if you multiply it, you can change its meaning or even give it a new one. Probably the Reality TV is doing this transmission and working on this vehicle – it constructs situations, in which the real life is imitating the private

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<sup>19</sup> In: Мария Нейкова, Петранка Филева, Мария Попова (ред.), Медийното производство: бутик и конфекция в медиите. Дневник на Втория медиен панаир „Журналисти по теория, журналисти на практика“ 10-14 декември 2007, София, Авангард прима, 2008, р. 69.

<sup>20</sup> In: Мария Нейкова, Петранка Филева, Мария Попова (ред.), Медийното производство: бутик и конфекция в медиите. Дневник на Втория медиен панаир „Журналисти по теория, журналисти на практика“ 10-14 декември 2007, София, Авангард прима, 2008, р. 59-60.

life and its spaces, and stereotypes, and it can give publicity of this private life.”<sup>21</sup> According to him every Reality TV show starts with participants’ refusal of their privacy protection and permission of television to enter their private space, their private life. In the centre there stands the human body, human world is a world in the human body horizon, said Lozanov, and when Reality TV steps on the human territory, it cannot but start using the body and doing different things with it.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless the most popular Bulgarian Reality TV program “Big Brother” has been connected with entertainment and scandal behavior, most of the others programs, like Bulgarian edition of “Survivor” and “Fort Boyard”, which have been presented on the private Bulgarian television bTV, had a significant rating too. The program participants organized in few teams competed between themselves in extreme natural conditions or in a sea fort-prison near to the French coast. Some Bulgarian experts claim that these programs are preferred by Bulgarian viewers, because they emphasize on human competitive spirit, competition, creativity, strength, and courage.

As a second Bulgarian Reality TV feature may be point a possibility of ordinary people to receive public popularity. Although it is part of all Reality TV programs conception, in Bulgaria it is very strongly connected with the model of society structure and it influence on the way, by which the social groups are interacted. On the public discussion, dedicated to the Reality TV in 2008, the same was explicated by the popular Bulgarian journalist and documentaries author Sevda Shishmanova: “In professionals’ view to became a star, regardless in journalism, music or science, you have to do your best, you have to get over the different levels, you have to be qualified, you have to own some social approval and it has to happen many times in your professional life. While the Reality TV shows do all of this automatically and destroy the other convention – for the social requirements. Automatically they convert into new elite everybody who is necessary. Also important is the question where the Reality TV forms are referred and here lies the significant responsibility for those, who use this dramaturgical convention.”<sup>23</sup>

Third, all of Bulgarian Reality TV programs include different social problems – the homosexuality role in the Bulgarian society, the problems of participants from different ethnos and

<sup>21</sup> In: Мария Нейкова, Петранка Филева, Мария Попова (ред.), Журналисти по теория, журналисти на практика. Дневник на Медийния панаир „Журналисти по теория, журналисти на практика“ 11-15 декември 2006, София, Горекс прес, 2007, р. 25.

<sup>22</sup> In: Мария Нейкова, Петранка Филева, Мария Попова (ред.), Медийното производство: бутик и конфекция в медиите. Дневник на Втория медиен панаир „Журналисти по теория, журналисти на практика“ 10-14 декември 2007, София, Авангард прима, 2008, р. 57.

<sup>23</sup> In: Мария Нейкова, Петранка Филева, Мария Попова (ред.), Преход в медиите и медии в преход. Дневник на Четвъртия медиен панаир „Журналисти по теория, журналисти на практика“ 30 ноември – 4 декември 2009 г., София, Авангард прима, 2010, р. 53.

with some physical and mental limitations, the place of woman in the family, the children attitudes, and the overcoming of some sexual and religious prejudices.

It may be seen in several Personal Improvement and Makeover Reality programs (Fig.2). Although they have been defined as one of the most expensive and very popular forms of Reality programming, the Bulgarian viewers' interest is significantly inefficient. The programs are strongly criticized, but they pose important ethic and esthetic problems to Bulgarian society, connected with problematic family relationships.

The social problems are shown in some Aspiration Reality formats (Fig.3), which have been presented on the private television channel bTV and on the First channel of the Bulgarian public service broadcaster BNT – BNT 1, are very interesting also. The production had significant popularity, because the themes, which have been shown – the orphans' destiny, and building houses for orphans to live in; selection of the most popular book for the Bulgarian society; vote for the greatest Bulgarian (real or historical) person, are very important for Bulgarian society, and they having been developed in other quality journalism programs such as news and talk shows.

The Reality TV programs, part of the Social experiment format (Fig.4), which have been presented on BNT 1, and on the private television bTV Action, give a chance for social exchange – between the celebrities, which have been living with ordinary people for a while, and between family couples, who had changed pairs and viewers may watch their adaptation into a new family environment.

That presents the fourth Reality TV feature, but which is not typical only for Bulgaria – the participant's interest and devotion. On a public discussion, dedicated to Reality TV in 2008, the popular Bulgarian journalist and Reality TV show "Music Idol" scriptwriter Georgi Toshev told: "I am fan of what people offer, and it should be spontaneity, an acceptable emotionality in good psychic borders, and an ability to say something really interesting to many people. I do not care how they look like. Of course, I have some ideas on my mind – sexy lady, sexy dude, nervous woman, who blows up at every three minutes. But the most important thing is to fall in love with 12-13 people."<sup>24</sup> Georgi Toshev explained that if we are talking about Reality TV, we can see that it reflects on everything – policy, lifestyle, fashion, sport. Everything is reality – the way we are writing, the way we are communicating, the way we are expressing ourselves, he explained because fashion is escalating – if you are not reality, you are old fashion".<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> In: Мария Нейкова, П. Филева, Мария Попова (ред.) Медиен плурализъм и медийно разнообразие. Дневник на третия Медиен панаир „Журналисти по теория, журналисти на практика“, 1-5 декември 2008 г., София, Авангард прима, 2009, р. 45.

<sup>25</sup> In: Мария Нейкова, Петранка Филева, Мария Попова (ред.) Медиен плурализъм и медийно разнообразие. Дневник на третия Медиен панаир „Журналисти по теория, журналисти на практика“,

As a fifth feature may be shown the very professional creation of the programs. A large audience interest in Bulgaria has the music (Fig. 5) and dance (Fig. 6) Reality TV programs. All programs are involved music and dance show business celebrities as judges; the participants' spontaneity, talent, positive emotion creation is relied on. An example is "Dancing Stars", which participants are art, sport, policy, and show business celebrities, who learn to dance, and, with the help of professional dancers, compete between themselves. This Reality TV show compensates the Celebrity Reality format missing in Bulgaria, where the hosting star lifestyle and their communication with family members or other participants is shown.

The "Dancing Stars" popularity among Bulgarian viewers was due to the professional atmosphere, positive emanation, dance fairy, and celebrities' attraction. The journalist Elena Yoncheva, who is one of the "Dancing Stars" participants, explained on the public discussion, dedicated to the Reality TV in 2008: "Probably, one of the reasons for my decision to compete in this show was to see inside what really it is. I had no idea the extent, on one hand, that this is Reality show, and, on the other hand, that some of the situations are not real, but directed by the television, with an idea to be more dramatic, or, because it is the easiest way, with little effort, to have maximum effect on the viewers. I am trying to "play" on the show. And, I can say, all depends on the participant – how far he/she allows to be directed. I must say, I would never label Documentary TV a Reality TV, and, I think, it is an abusive parallel between them. I make Documentary TV, but I feel discomfort to force someone, whom I am shooting, to walk around, because I want to capture their movement. I do not think it is necessary to manipulate people even in the most insignificant details. My "Dancing Stars" contribution helps me to love the Documentary TV even more. I began evaluating it much more."<sup>26</sup>

Very professionally are made the Reality TV shows in other formats as Fear-Based Reality format (Fig.7). Nevertheless the participants are demonstrating sensational and phenomenal abilities; the Bulgarian audience interest was not high.

The same has happen with the Bulgarian edition of "Lord of the Chefs", which is shown on bTV and "Cherry on the cake", which is shown on Nova television (Fig. 8). Both programs are very serious, engaging in drama, talent and competitive skills of participants. The Bulgarian audience was attracted, especially these viewers, who are regularly watching TV shows devoted to cooking and culinary.

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1-5 декември 2008 г., София, Авангард прима, 2009, р. 40.

<sup>26</sup> In: Мария Нейкова, Петранка. Филева, Мария Попова (ред.) Медиен плурализъм и медийно разнообразие. Дневник на третия Медиен панаир „Журналисти по теория, журналисти на практика“, 1-5 декември 2008 г., София, Авангард прима, 2009, р. 45-46.

The permanent popularity among Bulgarian media audience have the Reality TV shows, which may be defined as Quiz show Reality (Fig.9). This Reality TV format is traditional for the Bulgarian viewers and is typical for the one of the Bulgarian longest shown TV programs – “A minute is long” and also for the 1990s emblematic Bulgarian TV game “Nevada”. The programs are very professional and rely to the participants’ good knowledge, general information, rapid reaction, and combinative thinking.

A remarkable Bulgarian TV phenomenon is the appearance of Reality TV elements in the traditional talk show programs. It is characteristic for the Talk Show Reality format (Fig.10), and on Bulgarian TVs some similar productions may be seen.

The focus is on the political themes and on the ability politicians and public figures to reach their own audience easier, and the important political and social themes to find their non-traditional development.

Sixth feature of Bulgarian Reality TV programs is the possibility of media manipulation, criticized by some Bulgarian experts and some of Reality TV programs participants. On the public discussion, dedicated to the Reality TV in 2008, Denitza Mincheva, dentist and participant in the Reality show “The Lives of Others” of the public broadcaster BNT, defined her contribution as a social manipulation and she thinks that media in general, including the Reality TV, give a chance for mass manipulation by every possible way, because the personal messages may be changed, and the people may be used.<sup>27</sup>

The same idea is supported by Elena Yoncheva, popular Bulgarian journalist and author of different documentaries. On a public discussion dedicated to Reality TV in 2008, she explained that Reality TV show idea is to make a show and sacrifice the reality. This is our idea about reality, she said. But in a documentary television movie we came to a situation, which could be different if the camera was not there. So I had an ethical problem as a journalist, though it was a documentary and nothing was invented. But at the end it is not a 100 percent reality, because our presence changed it already, told Yoncheva.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> In: Мария Нейкова, Петранка Филева, Мария Попова (ред.) Медиен плурализъм и медийно разнообразие. Дневник на третия Медиен панаир „Журналисти по теория, журналисти на практика“, 1-5 декември 2008 г., София, Авангард прима, 2009, р. 43.

<sup>28</sup> In: Мария Нейкова, Петранка Филева, Мария Попова (ред.) Медиен плурализъм и медийно разнообразие. Дневник на третия Медиен панаир „Журналисти по теория, журналисти на практика“, 1-5 декември 2008 г., София, Авангард прима, 2009, р. 46.

## *Conclusion*

The Reality TV exceptional success is connected with the way these programs win media audience interest. Viewers may see themselves and their own problems in the persons of show participants; it is staked on his primary reaction, on his voyeur wish, on the banal, scandal and provocative behavior. At the same time these programs give to the media audience the feeling that their vote may control the show. And though these programs focus on the entertainment, activity and over-communication, they have a socialized impact too.

It is important to mark the extent to which the Reality TV is situated between media manipulation and media pluralism. Indeed many of Reality TV participants declare that their participation have been manipulated. In those programs television producers and media companies rely on the previously researched expectations of the media audience. Many of them present the dominant social group viewpoint, typical for the majority of the media audience. The definitive press on the public opinion may be done through preliminary editing of the Documental Reality content, especially when programs are not presented live.

But the Reality TV has important social influence, connected with new meaning it gives to the media pluralism. All these productions present different social types; they try to overcome some ethnical, religious and sexual prejudices. The Reality TV shows give a chance for a public comment on significant social problems and they overrule the existing social conflicts. In the future this TV format will be successfully developed and many of its elements will be used by the other television programs. And this will transform the media and media audience, as well as the society in general.



## APPENDIX

*Fig.1 Competition Reality TV programs in Bulgaria*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Television</i>	<i>Market Share</i>	<i>License</i>
Big Brother	2004	Nova TV	35%	Endemol
Big Brother 2	2005	Nova TV	36.4%	Endemol
Big Brother 3	2006	Nova TV	53.5%	Endemol
VIP Brother	2006	Nova TV	42.6%	Local version
Survivor	2006	bTV	53%	CBS
VIP Brother 2	2007	Nova TV	41.5%	Local version
Survivor 2	2007	bTV	33%	CBS
Big Brother 4	2008	Nova TV	43.7%	Endomol
VIP Brother 3	2008	Nova TV	48.6%	Local version
Survivor 3	2008	bTV	50.4%	CBS
Fort Boyard	2008	bTV	56.1%	Channel 4
Survivor 4	2009	bTV	45.5%	CBS
Fort Boyard 2	2009	bTV	49.9%	Channel 4
Big Brother Family	2010	Nova TV	38.6%	Local version
Fort Boyard 3	2010	bTV	36.7%	Channel 4

*Fig.2 Personal Improvement and Makeover Reality TV programs in Bulgaria*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Television</i>	<i>Market Share</i>	<i>License</i>
Extreme Makeover	2007	Nova Television	30.7%	ABC
Temptation Island	2007	Nova Television	20%	Fox
Cheaters	2008	Diema	6.4%	Bobby Goldstein
The moment of truth	2009	Nova Television	20%	Lighthearted Entertainment
The truth about us	2010	Nova Television	17.6%	Lighthearted Entertainment
Farmer Wants a Wife	2011	Nova Television	15.4%	FremantleMedia

*Fig. 3 Aspiration Reality TV programs in Bulgaria*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Television</i>	<i>Market Share</i>	<i>License</i>
The Magnificent Six	2008	bTV	51.1%	Local version
The Magnificent Six 2	2010	bTV	48%	Local version
The Great Bulgarians	2006	BNT 1	-	BBC-The Great Britons
The Big Read	2008	BNT 1	-	BBC-The Big Read
The Little Big Read	2011	BNT 1	-	Local version
Life as We Know It	2006-2012	bTV	-	Local version
Lost in Bulgaria	2011	Nova television	13.8%	Local version

*Fig. 4 Social experiment Reality TV programs in Bulgaria*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Television</i>	<i>Market Share</i>	<i>License</i>
The Lives of Others	2008	BNT 1	21%	Local version
Wife Swap	2009	bTV Action	-	Endemol
Wife Swap 2	2010	bTV Action	-	Endemol
Wife Swap 3	2010	bTV Action	-	Endemol

*Fig. 5 Musical Competition Reality TV programs in Bulgaria*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Television</i>	<i>Marker Share</i>	<i>License</i>
Star Academy	2005	Nova Television	18.9%	Endomol
5 Stars	2005	bTV	23.8%	Local version
Music Idol	2007	bTV	49.9%	ITV-Pop Idol
Music Idol 2	2008	bTV	48.5%	ITV-Pop Idol
Music Idol 3	2009	bTV	44%	ITV-Pop Idol
Bulgaria's Got Talent	2010	bTV	52%	BBC-Britain's Got Talent
X Factor	2011	Nova Television	63.2%	FremantleMedia
The Voice of Bulgaria	2012	bTV	70 %	Talpa Media

*Fig. 6 Dancing Competition Reality TV programs in Bulgaria*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Television</i>	<i>Market Share</i>	<i>License</i>
Dancing Stars	2008	bTV	29.2%	BBC-Strictly Come Dancing
Dancing Stars 2	2009	bTV	41.4%	BBC-Strictly Come Dancing
VIP Dance	2009	Nova Television	25%	Endemol-Strictly dancing
Bailando	2010	Nova Television	12.4%	Endemol-Bailando

*Fig. 7 Fear-Based Reality TV programs in Bulgaria*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Television</i>	<i>Market Share</i>	<i>License</i>
Mediums	2008	bTV	51.5%	Local version
Mediums 2	2009	bTV	30.6%	Local version
Fear Factor	2009	Nova Television	28%	Endemol

*Fig. 8 Professional Reality TV programs in Bulgaria*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Television</i>	<i>Market Share</i>	<i>License</i>
Lord of the Chefs	2011	bTV	19.23%	Local version
Cherry on the cake	2011-2012	Nova Television	34%	Local version
Star Machine	2012	TV7	25%	
Casting	2012	BNT 1	-	Local version

*Fig. 9 Quiz show Reality programs in Bulgaria*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Television</i>	<i>Market Share</i>	<i>License</i>
Who Wants to Be a Millionaire	2001 - now	Nova Television	37%	Endomol
Deal or No Deal	2005 - now	Nova Television	20%	Endomol

*Fig. 10 Talk Show Reality programs in Bulgaria*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Television</i>	<i>Market Share</i>	<i>License</i>
The Promise	2011	BNT 1	-	Local version
Referendum	now	BNT 1	27.5%	Local version
Pyramid	2006	bTV	-	Local version
Pyramid	2011	bTV Action	-	Local version
Direct democracy	2011	TV7	-	Local version