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7 Channel Loyalty and Genre Preferences

As the previous chapters have shown, preferences for genres as well as channels are related to viewer's values. This leaves several possibilities in which the preferences themselves could be intertwined with values. Taking up my previous discussion, values could, for one thing, be linked to genre preferences which in turn could be linked to the preference for channels that present these genres more (or less) frequently. So, an additional, indirect effect of values on channel choice can be expected.

In fact, television channels function as brands that offer more or less reliable environments easily recognizable by viewers (e.g., Lin et al., 2002). Within these environments certain genres could play more important roles than others or be attributed to specific time slots within the programs. Therefore the typical afternoon program, for instance, could regularly present value-challenging talk- or court shows on a given channel, while a competitor may present lighter sitcoms or daily series at the same time.

But even within one genre, channels could offer different value patterns to their viewers. To give an example, the cartoon show "The Simpsons" was first aired in Germany on public-service *ZDF*, with only little success. After three seasons, commercial *ProSieben* acquired the broadcasting rights. Thilo Proff, managing director of *ProSieben* explained that with its anarchical humor and subversive criticism the series seemed to fit this channel's target group much better than that of *ZDF*.[15] How a program usually addresses values partly defines whether viewers will be appalled by it or whether it will appeal to them. But, as the "Simpsons" example shows, the setting in which such a value pattern is presented matters as well. This specific show may never have been intended to be a children's program and was misplaced in the afternoon program of *ZDF* that aimed at precisely this group of viewers.

[15] In an interview with medienhandbuch.de on November 6, 2008 (http://www.medienhandbuch.de/news/mit-den-problemen-der-simpsons-kann-man-sich-weltweit-identifizieren-das-macht-die-serie-so-einzigartig-exklusiv-interview--17860.html. Retrieved November 23, 2009).

Table 25: Genre preferences and frequency of TV channel use, 2007, partial correlations

Genres	ARD	ZDF	RTL	Sat.1
family series, medical dramas	.10***	.10***	.22***	.19***
quiz and game shows	.16***	.16***	.25***	.21***
news	.28***	.26***	.07***	.06***
newsmags., reportages, documentaries	.22***	.23***	.02*	.02*
action, adventure, thriller, war movies	n.s.	n.s.	.20***	.20***
crime series	.16***	.17***	.17***	.20***
arts, culture	.13***	.14***	-.08***	-.06***

n = 14,060; n.s. not significant; * p < .05; *** p < .001

Note: Controlled for age and education. For the measurement of variables, see chapters 3.3.2 and 6.1.

Based on the results from previous chapters, I posit that values are expressed in both people's use of channels and their genre preferences. But the question remains how values, channel and genre preferences are related to one another. In the previous chapters, we have seen that liking or disliking a genre is more closely affected by personal values than the frequency of selecting a channel is. Yet channel profiles, in turn, depend on what genres are broadcast; thus preference for genres should be related to channel preferences as well. Indeed, as Table 25 shows for the year 2007, most correlations between liking a genre and the channels examined before are considerable, even if controlled for two central demographics, age and education.[16]

Most correlations are positive, which is hardly surprising because genre preferences were gauged specifically for television. And favoring a (TV) genre is likely to increase rather than decrease TV consumption and use of individual channels. However, some channels are more closely related to specific genres than others and some are avoided by people with certain genre preferences. In this respect, the two groups of channels, commercial versus public-service stations, are clearly contrasted. Except for crime series, which are about equally related to all four stations, the public-service broadcasters and commercial stations show about the same correlations with genre preferences, respectively. But differences between the two types of channels are clear-cut: People who like

[16] Controlling for the other demographics included in previous chapters (gender, family status, East- versus West-German origin) only minimally changes the coefficients reported in Table 25. The more parsimonious analyses are presented here.

to watch news prefer PSB television over the two commercial stations studied here. For newsmagazines etc., this looks similar, but people favoring this genre seem more or less indifferent towards commercial TV. The contrast between the two types of channels is most extreme for preference for action and other arousing content as well as arts and culture. Action fans have a clear preference for commercial television, but no relationship with watching PSB is apparent. For sophisticated contents, the direction of the relationships with channel preference for either commercial TV or PSB is even reversed: People interested in art and culture watch *ARD* and *ZDF*, but avoid commercial *RTL* and *Sat.1*.

But what role do values play in these relationships? A value such as high income/wealth is linked to both genre and channel preferences, as presented in chapters 4 and 6. I have found that people who share this value have a preference for commercial channels and tend to slightly dislike PSB. And they also like, for example, action, but avoid arts and culture. Taking into account the relationships between preference for these genres and use of the four TV channels, the actual relationships between these and the value item in question could resemble the model presented in Figure 6.

Here, a value would be an antecedent of both genre and channel preferences, and genre preferences would also influence channel use. In this logic, genre preferences would reinforce and thus moderate the relationships between a value and the selection of a TV channel. For instance, the positive relationship between favoring material wealth and watching *RTL* would be reinforced for people who, in addition, like action, adventure, thriller and war movies—because *RTL* is more likely to cater to this genre than *ARD* or *ZDF*. Thus the influence of values on channel preference would have been underestimated by the analyses presented in chapters 4 and 5: Genre preferences typical of certain values would add to these relationships and, indirectly, account for a larger influence of values on selecting or avoiding a channel.

I will therefore analyze how genre preferences moderate the relationship between personal values and television use. With values influencing genre preferences, there should be an indirect effect of values on channel use through genre preferences. In this chapter I test the relationships between select values, genre preferences and use of channels as depicted in Figure 6.

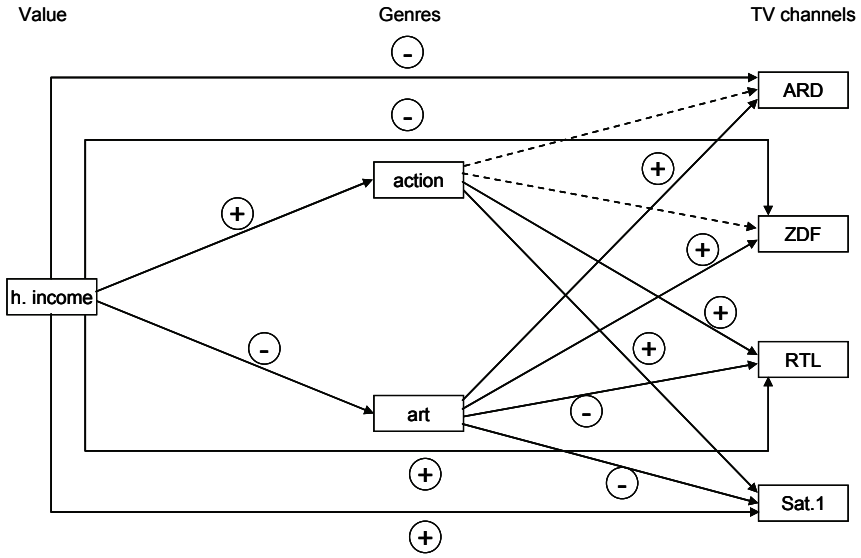

Figure 6: Theoretical path model of relationships between the value high income/wealth and preference for two genres and four TV channels

7.1 Method

My previous analyses have revealed no evidence for clear historical trends in the relationships with values, neither concerning channels nor the more fine-grained genres. With the data available to me, I do not think it fruitful to pursue this direction of research further, and I will concentrate on one exemplary point in time in this last part of my study, the most recent AWA wave, polled in 2007.

Likewise, I will focus on the two values and two genres that are most strongly related to each other as well as to channel preferences. The purpose of this analysis is to explore in more depth how personal values and preferences for media contents on the one and outlets on the other hand are connected. I will thus analyze relationships between two of the most polarizing value items, high income/wealth and religion/strong faith. On the other hand, I will focus on two genres that formed the most clear-cut differences in their relationships with channel preference: action movies, adventure, thriller and war movies as opposed to arts and culture.

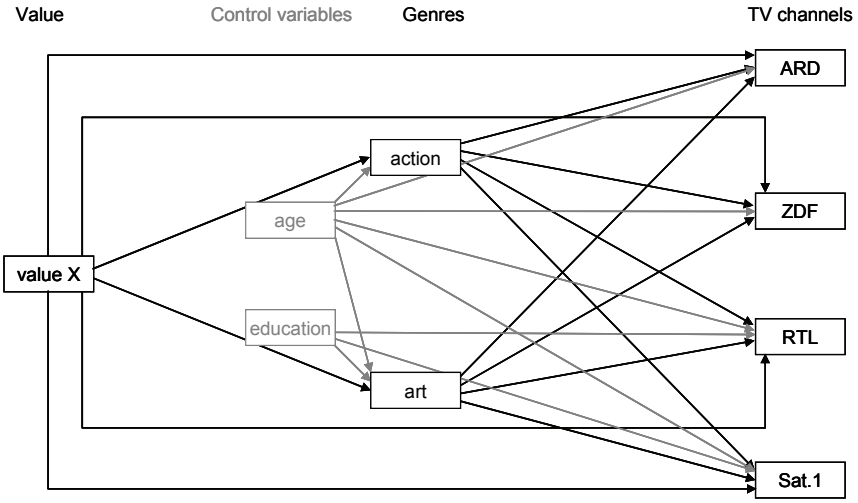

Figure 7: Model tested for relationships between a value, genre and channel preferences
Control variables in light gray.

I will control for two demographic variables that were of influence in previous analyses: age and education. Age is highly correlated with use of TV channels (positive relationships with PSB, negative ones with commercial channels) as well as preference for action. Older persons dislike this genre. Higher education leads to avoidance of commercial channels, but to a preference for arts and culture on television. These relationships are accounted for in my analyses. Figure 7 illustrates the structure of the models tested.

For the materialist goal of a high income and wealth, expected relationships have been depicted in Figure 6. For the social ideal of religion and strong faith, relationships of this item with the two genres and four channels should be the inverse of a high income. Finding religion important should lead to preferring arts and culture as well as public-service television, while the action-oriented genre should be avoided and commercial channels ignored. The direction of the other paths should stay the same.

7.2 Results

Figure 8 gives the estimates for the expected relationships between religion/ strong faith and media preferences.[17] As can be seen, all coefficients show the expected signs and almost all are significant, many substantial. Thus there are indeed indirect effects between values, genre and channel preferences. A religious orientation leads to preferring arts and culture on television and this in turn makes people choose both PSB channels more often while avoiding the two commercial ones. These indirect relationships reinforce the direct ones between this value and the frequency of watching said channels.

Most coefficients deviate a little from the partial correlations presented in Table 25 as well as from the regression coefficients in previous chapters. This is due to the introduction of values as additional controls in the first case and a different set of demographic control variables in the second. The signs of the coefficients are all consistent, however.

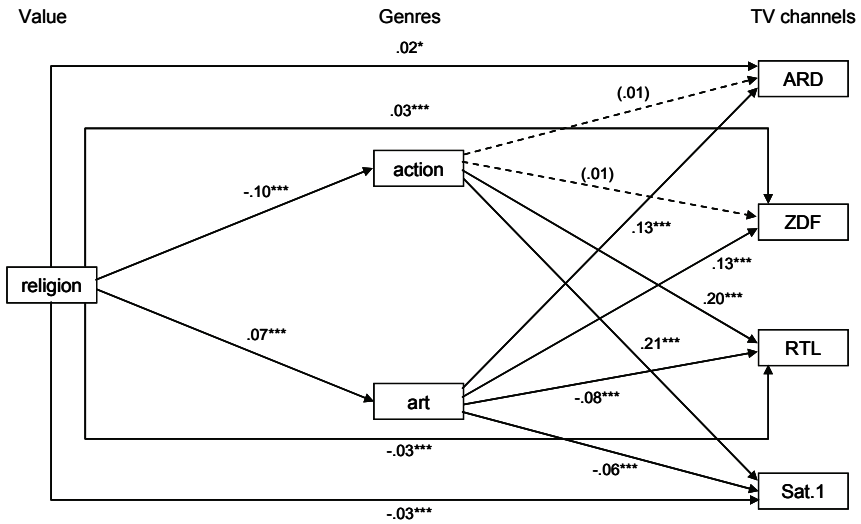

Figure 8: Religion/strong faith as a value, preference for action and arts/culture and watching TV channels: A path model

n = 14,060; χ^2 = 34,712.990; df = 33; p = .000; CFI = .993; TLI = .945;
RMSEA = .064; SRMR = .021; *Maximum Likelihood* estimation; * p ≤ .05; *** p ≤ .001

[17] See appendix B, Table B-1 for details on relationships of the core concepts with control variables.

Overall, the positive coefficients between genres and their "matching" channels are among the strongest relationships presented in this study. And the clear-cut links between a religious orientation and the two genres studied here partly extend to the paths between genres and channels.

This is replicated for high income and wealth as a value (Figure 9).[18] Yet here, the direct relationships between this materialist value and the two PSB channels are not significant. On the other hand, the paths leading to and from preference for arts/culture all follow the expected direction and reveal again indirect mechanisms that reinforce relationships between a value and channel preference through the liking or disliking of a genre.

Again, the positive relationships between being interested in arts and culture and watching public-service television as well as those between liking action and other arousing movies as well as commercial channels are considerable. And through these paths, additional effects of values are channeled toward the decisions about what station to turn on or off.

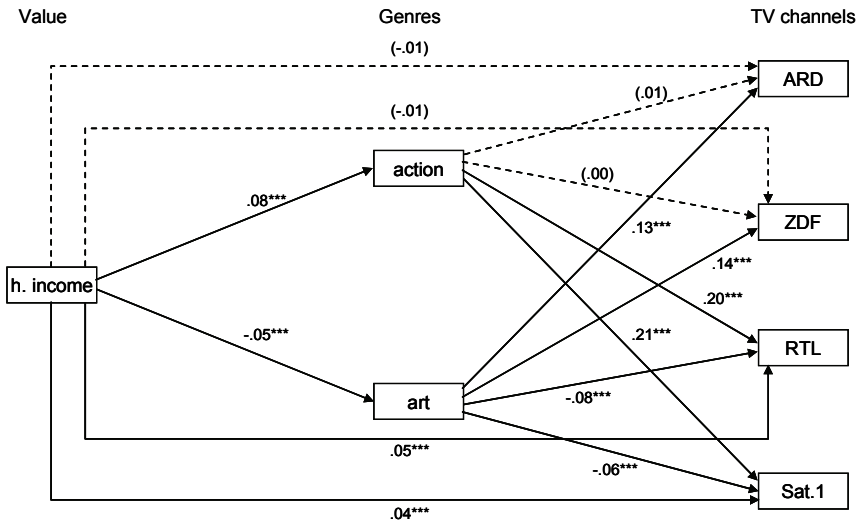

Figure 9: High income/wealth as a value, preference for action and arts/culture and watching TV channels: A path model

n = 14,060; χ^2 = 34,632.565; df = 33; p = .000; CFI = .993; TLI = .945;
RMSEA = .064; SRMR = .021; *Maximum Likelihood* estimation; *** p ≤ .001

[18] See appendix B, Table-B2 for details on relationships of the core concepts with control variables.

7.3 Summary and Discussion

The path analyses presented in this chapter are illuminating with respect to relationships discovered previously in this study. They deepen our understanding about how values and media preferences as well as preferences for contents and outlets are linked. Favoring a TV genre distinctly leads to increased use of a specific channel. Some stations are typically linked to specific genres, while for others indifference or even slight avoidance can be observed depending on what genres someone likes or dislikes.

Public-service broadcasting in Germany is preferred by people who are interested in arts and culture, while commercial television is watched by fans of action, adventure, thriller and war movies, but not by those who like sophisticated contents. Preference for action does not seem to affect use of PSB.

That using outlets depends on what genres or content they typically present should hardly be surprising. As mentioned above, channels seem to have a distinct image as a brand that goes along with audience expectations about genre profiles ("informative" PSB versus "entertaining" commercial channels; Ridder & Engel, 2005). But how do values fit into the relationships between genre and channel preferences? People who hold more conservative, traditional values favor arts and culture on television, but not arousing movies. Likewise, they prefer public-service channels *ARD* and *ZDF* (which devote a larger proportion or their programming to the arts, but less to action and similar films) over commercial *RTL* and *Sat.1* (which show the opposite pattern for these two genres; Krüger & Zapf-Schramm, 2008). Holding a preference for one of these genres alone also is related to frequency of using the two groups of channels.

On the other hand, the *avoidance* of channels among people who prefer specific genres is not as strongly expressed in my models as *preference* for channels. As stated above, liking a television genre probably increases viewership. Disliking one genre, but not necessarily others, may reduce TV watching, but apparently not in a drastic manner. The positive, reinforcing effect of liking a genre on use of a "matching" channel clearly resists control variables. This can be interpreted as a learning outcome: TV viewers know what gratifications to expect from a given type of program (belonging to a genre) and they will also have experience with programming schemes of channels that emphasize certain genres but downplay others.

In sum, values are consistently related to both genres and channels, even if not all values to all channels. But they are factors that help explain media choices. A person's values influence his or her preferences for certain genres, just as

previous studies have shown for personality traits (see chapter 2.3.1). And values also go along with preferences for channels, which, in turn, interact with genre preferences. Relationships between values and genre preferences are stronger than those between values and channel use. Yet, genre preferences in turn influence channel preferences and thus lead to indirect and in sum larger effects on channel choice. Taking into account genre preferences thus helps to reveal the true importance of values for actual media use: Liking of a genre can reinforce (or further reduce) the relationships between values and channel use. For instance, the rejection of *RTL* among people who have a strong religious orientation is stronger for those who are interested in arts and culture. On the other hand, the preference for *RTL* among viewers who think a high income and wealth are important in life is stronger if they also like action.

But can the relationships discussed in this chapter have a different meaning as well? Could the role of *values* (instead of genres) be that of a mediator? Of course with cross-sectional data, it is unclear which of the variables I studied causally influence which others. Figures 8 and 9 depict genre preferences as moderators in the relationships between values and use of TV channels. The (cross-sectional) data in themselves could also be interpreted the other way around. For instance, the negative relationship between liking action and watching *ZDF* could be attenuated by certain value priorities. People who like action and comparable contents *and* who are religious could still watch *ZDF*. And they could have a different view of this genre than viewers of other stations because *ZDF* as one of their favorite channels displays only action movies that respect their religious (and other) values.

Yet my discussion of values in chapter 2.1 has defined them as close to the core of an individual's personality. They are changeable, yes, but should not be affected much by liking a certain genre. Thus, the relationships between, for instance, liking action and placing importance on religion should be rather weak. In my analyses, however, the coefficients between genre preferences and values are of considerable size. They indicate strong links that are more plausibly explained by genre preferences following personal values rather than the other way around.

In addition, my analyses have shown that values are more closely related to genre preferences than to channel use. In my understanding of the data, it is unlikely that the weak links between values and channel use could substantially moderate or even override the ties to genre preferences. Coming back to my example, being religious and liking action would hardly lead to watching *ZDF*. For one thing, *ZDF* does not feature this genre heavily, and liking action usually

does not go along with a religious orientation. It makes more sense to assume that preferences for genres typical of a channel reinforce relationships between values (a)typical of said genre and channel use. Supporting earlier findings on personality and genre preferences, values could influence genre preferences (fitting a person's values) in the same way that personality traits have been shown to do and could in the end contribute to people's actual media use behavior.