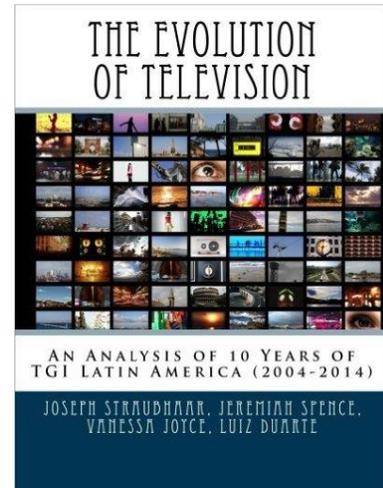


Joseph D. Straubhaar, Jeremiah Spence, Vanessa Higgins Joyce, Vinicio Sinta, Adolfo Mora, Víctor García, and Luiz G. Duarte, **The Evolution of Television: An Analysis of 10 years of TGI Latin America (2004-2014) (Volume 1)**, Austin, TX: University of Texas at Austin, 2015, 153 pp., \$250.00 (paperback).

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In *The Evolution of Television: An Analysis of 10 years of TGI Latin America (2004-2014) (Volume 1)*, Joseph D. Straubhaar's team—composed of Jeremiah Spence, Vanessa Higgins Joyce, Vinicio Sinta, Adolfo Mora, Victor García, and Luiz G. Duarte—provides a great TV description and interpretation of a survey by TGI Latina covering eight countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, México, Peru, and Venezuela. The book is divided into six chapters. TGI took into account certain criteria, almost the same that the authors applied, to raise a debate about the interpretation of the apparently senseless numbers displayed in the graphs. That criteria are unveiled in the chapters, driven by matters such as "Domestic TV Advantages," "A New Class of Viewers," "The Appeal of Foreign TV," and "Rise of Internet Television." In addition, they examine issues like TV technology adoption by different social classes and ages: who watches, what they watch, and by what means; time spent with TV versus other media; the impact of the Internet on TV spectatorship; and the Latin American TV market as a global player.



At the beginning of the book, the authors state some controversial and sharply comparative data, for example, that satellite and cable TV reached Latin American market 10 or 15 years later than in the United States, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. In some cases, the authors assign such a delay to the strengthening of national TV broadcasting, as in Brazil and Mexico. They consider, stating explicitly and always showing graphs, that TV is still one of the most important media—if not the most important—all over the world, maybe due its continuous and successful blending with other technologies, mainly the Internet. The clue to understanding this apparently odd information—even more when our everyday life experience goes toward an impressive perception of the massive use of mobile and other devices connected to the Internet, wherever we are—lies in the authors academic backgrounds. They have a strong U.S. academic point of view in their methods (so-called quantitative social research, with statistics-based arguments), and all are Latin American studies experts with empirical and field experience. This means that, given the numbers, they consider the historical and social circumstances under the aegis of analytical categories such as cultural capital and ideology, toward a better definition of the Latin American TV environment.

In the second and third chapters, the authors barely address notions such as cultural capital, and mention ideology, acknowledging that it is an easy Marxist analytical outlet—indeed, both categories are

too frequently applied to assess social events. Here we notice the increase of another and more important notion, namely, *cultural proximity*, a term coined or updated by Straubhaar. This notion is useful to point out that, among the TV audience, appealing to a handful of shared experiences (e.g., class, gender, education) is the key to explaining programming preferences. For example, following the book's data, Brazil and Mexico are the countries with less regional programming and more national producing, even when viewers have pay-TV and consumption of U.S. programming demonstrates ups and downs over the last 15 years.¹ In fact, the core of the first part of Chapter 2 has to do with national preferences. The authors discuss information such as how in Chile, the state and some universities made, through the 1990s, a *highbrow* TV programming profile. Another example is how in Argentina, between 2004 and 2014, and in Chile, audiences felt slight increases in national preference, but in Colombia and Venezuela, such numbers declined. The authors state:

Even though larger segments of most countries' audiences had increased viewing options in 2014 with rapid growth in multichannel households during the 2010-2014 period, the audiences in most Latin American countries surveyed showed a strong continuing preference for domestic TV programs, channels and films. (p. 30)

The logic of national preference, according to cultural proximity, takes into account great trends in terms of genre: soap operas and some series. The question we have—indeed, the answer is tenuously veiled by numbers—concerns some social phenomena that could be expressed by key words such as *globalization*, *cosmopolitanism*, and *second screen*. As a matter of fact, it is worth noting that the notion of "evolution," mentioned in the title, does not appear anywhere the book, but underlines—coherently—every single argument, from the massive use of graphs to the discursive outcomes. Consequently, some questions naturally arise and are partially answered: Is taste really globalized? Do preferences have to do more with class or TV show profile? Do *telenovelas* (soap operas) have the same impact as news broadcasting? And in other genres, what is involved with the worldwide success of *Game of Thrones*, *House of Cards*, *Big Bang Theory*, *CSI* and other shows? Is the taste for U.S. fiction/drama a universal pattern? But what happened with *Betty la Fea*, *Chaves*, *El Chavo del Ocho*, *A Escrava Isaura?*, and *Mujeres Asesinas*? Does the Brazilian working class have the same preferences as the Ecuadorian working class? What about the upper classes in Argentina and Venezuela? And the middle classes in Colombia and Chile? If the authors apparently do not respond to such questions, they suggest answers by others means. Because the authors use Bourdieu key words—which means they interpret the outcomes of the survey under the auspices of categories such as economic capital, social capital, and cultural capital, as mentioned—the results lead us to the dependency between improving Latin American capitalism and the shifting of TV viewers' programming diversity and taste, always related to multichannel penetration. Economic capital, social capital, and cultural capital create a web that includes education, income, and national audiovisual policy—the latter may be a lack among the criteria in the book's description and analytical methodology.

¹ A small complaint to the authors, who say Brazil is a country with "almost 300 million people" (p. 93), but according to the *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística* (IBGE, or Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics), as of February 7, 2017, Brazil has 207,063,905 inhabitants (<http://www.ibge.gov.br>).

In the fourth chapter, "The Appeal of Foreign TV," some important information helps the academic audience better understand the current circumstances and forecast the changing landscape: "In 2014, 60% of Latin Americans demonstrated interest in domestic programming, compared to 48% showing interest in programming from the USA" (p. 72). These numbers may clear up doubts about the traditional popular opinion that being a viewer is the same as being a citizen. There is animosity about some past U.S. actions south of the U.S. border, and many people from all walks of life carry some prejudice throughout their lives, and their preferences used to be for national TV shows. But as audience, as viewers—meaning *viewers* as a social figure—all that political and historical background vanished with the rise of the dominant statements that have headed the world since the late 1980s, right after Ronald Reagan's second term as president and the rise of the "politically correct" and soft power as the great arguments that legitimate the emergence of the "neocons." Today, as Straubhaar's team states, Latin American "cultural capital is a predictor for both U.S. and European programming interest, it is increasingly stronger for U.S. programs and films, while potentially weakening in strength for European programs and films" (p. 78). That new logic turns Latin American regional values upside down: 25 or 30 years ago, the explicit desire of the regional audience was be up to date with what France, Italy, Germany, and Great Britain were producing, as well as the U.S. TV content was already hegemonic. Another important issue mentioned by the authors is the "linguistic capital," a sort of advantage for pay-TV, given the large number of English-speaking TV programs.

The fifth and sixth chapters update information about the use of TV on the Internet—namely, the second screen as an important tool for sharing opinions about the TV programs viewers are watching in separate places, but with the mobile and tablet platforms come to fruition. As we have seen, the authors only considered the evolution of television in Latin America in terms of media access; multichannel penetration; uses of the TV apparatus according to social class, age, and education; and TV on the Internet. A Latin American reader would think that the kind of approach chosen by the authors does not mention power relations and social matters, which are always included when any regional or even European intellectual or organization thinks about Latin America and media. But if we read this book sharply, we may find those solutions for our requests, and we even may reach some conclusions, even without their causes being mentioned.