

## International

# Public Attitudes to Broadcasting in Scotland

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To assist the Scottish Broadcasting Commission in their investigations of the role for broadcasting in Scotland's cultural life and broadcast journalism in Scotland, TNS System Three was commissioned by the Scottish Government to conduct research amongst a representative sample of the adult Scottish population. The main objectives of the research were to a) investigate perceptions of and satisfaction with the way Scotland is currently covered by broadcasters, with particular emphasis on the way current broadcasting reflects life in Scotland and Scottish identity; b) investigate perceptions of and satisfaction with coverage of Scottish news and different aspects of Scottish news in network news programmes; and c) examine behaviours and expectations in relation to broadcasting.

## Main Findings

- The way in which Scotland is portrayed by television broadcasting was of relevance to the majority of respondents, and it mattered considerably to many of them.
- There was a significant gap between expectation and performance across all the dimensions researched, indicating that much improvement could be made to broadcasting in Scotland. In particular, there was an appetite for strengthening Scottish coverage in history/heritage and other factual programmes.
- In relation to Scottish news, the majority of respondents were content with the amount of Scottish coverage; however there was widespread interest in a new Scottish news programme on a new channel.
- Currently, reporting of Scotland in the UK news was considered weakest with regard to coverage of social and entertainment/the arts/music news, and best in terms of weather stories. Other improvements to the news that would be beneficial included increasing the regularity with which items are identified as relating to Scotland, and increasing local news coverage across most parts of Scotland.
- Whilst the majority expressed an interest in a new channel for people living in Scotland, the types of programme people would like to watch on it varied significantly according to age and social grade.
- There was strong support for live Scottish national football coverage to be shown free on terrestrial TV rather than on pay TV channels, even amongst those who were not interested in football.

## Methodology

This research utilised the Scottish Opinion Survey (SOS). Face-to-face fieldwork took place between the 27 February and 05 March 2008 and 1021 interviews were achieved. The sample was representative of the adult population in terms of sex, age, employment status and socio-economic group (SEG). The sample covered 43 constituencies throughout Scotland, with sampling points selected to be representative in terms of geographical location and party of Member of Scottish Parliament. The results were weighted to match Scottish population estimates using figures from the National Readership Survey 2006.

## Importance of, and satisfaction with, coverage of Scotland by broadcasters

The research examined views on seven different aspects of television programmes, namely whether they:

- Include everyone living in Scotland
- Reflect Scotland's character
- Inform and teach you about Scotland
- Do not stereotype Scotland
- Reflect Scotland's arts
- Represent the way people in Scotland live their lives today
- Represent your local area

The percentages claiming that the portrayal of Scotland in television broadcasting is important ranged from 81% to 71% across the seven different aspects rated. Moreover such views were shown to be strongly held, with a substantial percentage in each instance claiming that each aspect was 'very' important. The following three aspects emerged as particularly important in terms of Scottish broadcasting: *include everyone in Scotland, reflect Scotland's character and inform and teach you about Scotland.*

In comparison to levels of importance, satisfaction levels in relation to these same seven aspects were considerably lower. Overall, opinion was generally slightly more positive than negative but there was only one aspect, *reflect Scotland's character*, which achieved a satisfied rating from more than half the sample (52%). There were also sizeable levels of dissatisfaction recorded across all aspects, ranging from 25% for *reflect Scotland's character* to 33% and 36% for *inform and teach you about Scotland* and *represent your local area*, respectively. The size of the gap between

importance and satisfaction for the educational/informational role of broadcasting about Scotland suggests that this is the area most in need of improvement.

## Amount of Scottish coverage in TV programmes

Demand for more Scottish coverage in TV programmes was greatest for history/heritage programmes (56%) and other factual/documentary programmes (51%). Views toward comedy and programmes on music/arts/books were more evenly split between those who thought that current levels of coverage were about right and those wishing for more Scottish coverage. The view that there is too much Scottish coverage was only in evidence for drama (17%) and sports (28%), with the remainder in each instance slightly more likely to prefer the status quo rather than increased Scottish coverage. News programmes were the area where respondents were the most supportive of the current amount of Scottish coverage – 65% claimed to be happy with this; only 25% claimed there was too little coverage and 8% too much.

Overall, respondents were more likely to be satisfied than dissatisfied with the way in which Scotland is reported in UK news programmes, but a sizeable proportion fell into the latter category (48% satisfied versus 36% dissatisfied). In terms of specific aspects of the news, weather stories achieved the highest level of satisfaction. Scores for crime, political news and sports were also moderately good, whereas Scottish coverage of social issues and entertainment/arts/music evoked the highest levels of dissatisfaction (31% and 29% respectively).

The majority (75%) considered it to be important for the news to be clear when reporting whether an item relates to Scotland or not. Moreover a third (34%) believed this strongly. The frequency with which this clarity was evident varied, primarily, between those claiming that they 'usually' find it clear (asserted by 35%) and those saying 'sometimes' (asserted by 36%). Just under a fifth though (18%) claimed that it occurred only 'rarely' or 'never', whereas less than one in ten (7%) said they 'always' find the reporting of Scottish news items clearly marked as such. The overall pattern of response therefore demonstrates that frequency of clarity could be much improved.

The vast majority were interested in watching local Scottish news and over a third (37%) expressed a strong interest. There were significant variations according to region on this measure, with those in the South much more interested than those in other regions, but most noticeably compared to those in the North East and Lothians.

Respondents were asked at which level they would like to receive their local news out of three possible levels: city, region and area. The most popular response was 'region', but only by a slight majority of 54%. Amongst the substantial remainder views were equally split between those who preferred the emphasis on 'city/town/village' and those preferring the broader coverage of 'area'. However, views were strongly affected by area of residence of respondents, with, for example, those in Lothians and Glasgow most in favour of 'your city/town/village' whereas in the Highlands & Islands support was more widely recorded than elsewhere for 'area' (39%), and weaker than elsewhere for 'city/town/village'.

## Choice of channels for watching news on television

Having a choice of channel for watching news about Scotland was considered to be important by a large majority (76%); moreover for over half of this majority it was considered to be 'very' important. However, not all respondents actively use different channels to watch the news: 36% claimed to regularly watch the news on the same channel compared to 57% who indicated that they use a number of channels.

## A new Scottish news programme

Amongst the vast majority who watch the TV news there was widespread interest (74%) in a new Scottish news programme (to be broadcast on a different channel from ones that might currently be watched), even amongst those who currently regularly watch the news on the same channel.

When presented with a choice between two options for the early evening news programme, Option 1 being a one hour programme presented and broadcast from Scotland and Option 2 being two half hour programmes, one based on the UK news presented from London and the other a programme presented from Scotland, Option 1 achieved the widest support. However there was also a substantial level of support for Option 2 - the status quo: 53% favoured Option 1 and 36% favoured Option 2, with the remaining 10% having no clear preference.

Reflecting interest in increased Scottish coverage in various types of programme and in a new Scottish news programme, most of the sample (83%) agreed that it was important for broadcasters to provide debate and discussion programmes on topical Scottish issues outside of the 'news' style programme format.

## A new Scottish television channel

Additionally, the vast majority (82%) expressed an interest in a new Scottish channel for people living in Scotland, with almost half this group claiming to be 'very' interested in this. In terms of the types of programmes to be broadcast on this new channel, interest was most widespread for news programmes (58%) and to a slightly lesser extent, for other documentary/factual programmes (52%) and history/heritage programmes (50%). Support for comedy and drama was more moderate by comparison (43% and 38% respectively), whereas there was limited support for feature films (29%). However, it is important note to that the pattern of preference differed significantly amongst different age groups and according to social grade.

## Communication platforms used to obtain news

TV is the dominant source of information for news at the International, UK and Scottish national news levels (over 80% claimed to use TV for each of these). For local news, newspapers play the most prominent role (77% claimed to use newspapers for this purpose) and, newspapers also emerged as the main secondary source for all other levels of news. Radio usage was significant but comparatively much lower for each type of news with only around a quarter endorsing this platform on each level of news, and likewise, the internet (on the computer) achieved a lower but still reasonable level of claimed usage, ranging from just under a fifth (18%) for international news, to 9% for local news. Conversely, internet on the mobile phone was mentioned by only 1% for each level of news. Patterns of usage for all platforms, but especially the internet, were strongly affected by age and social grade.

## Live football coverage on free terrestrial television

Not surprisingly perhaps there was widespread support for the showing of international live Scottish football matches on free terrestrial TV rather than only on subscription. Of more importance, perhaps, is the finding that there was widespread (71%), and strong (61%) agreement with this proposition amongst the substantial proportion (39% of the total sample) who claimed that they were generally not interested in watching live Scottish national football.

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The report, "Public Attitudes to Broadcasting in Scotland" which is summarised in this research findings is a web only document and is available on the publications pages of the Scottish Government website at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/Recent>

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