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To Know and to Win! Quiz Shows in Polish TV After 1989

Abstract

Television is a medium that mainly provides entertainment, and one of the types of popular programs of this type are game shows. These began to appear on Polish television in the 1960s and some of them were typical quiz shows. This article presents the theoretical foundations of the quiz show genre and shows how important licenses for this kind of entertainment programs were for Polish television after 1989. The aim is to fill a research gap in area of Polish media market regarding media franchises and formats. This is important issue in the current international media market. The research is based on content analysis. The context of the study includes analysis of Polish and foreign quiz show formats and their popularity in Polish media environment of three main TV channels. The findings indicate that most of the quiz shows broadcasted in Polish TV after 1989 were based on Western formats, which gave the program a greater chance of success compared to own brands.

Keywords: television in Poland, quiz shows, game shows, media franchise, media formats.

Wiedzieć i wygrać! Teleturnieje wiedzowe w polskiej telewizji po 1989 roku

Streszczenie

Telewizja to medium, które dostarcza głównie rozrywki, a jednym z popularnych typów programów tego rodzaju są teleturnieje. Zaczęły się one pojawiać w polskiej telewizji w latach 60. XX wieku, a część z nich stanowiły typowe quizy. W artykule przedstawiono teoretyczne podstawy gatunku teleturnieju typu quiz oraz ukazano, jak istotne dla polskiej telewizji po 1989 roku były licencje na tego typu programy rozrywkowe. Celem pracy jest wypełnienie luki badawczej na polskim rynku medialnym w obszarze franczyz i formatów medialnych. Jest to istotna kwestia na obecnym, międzynarodowym rynku mediów. Badanie opiera się na analizie zawartości i obejmuje analizę polskich oraz zagranicznych formatów teleturniejów typu quiz, a także ich popularności w polskim środowisku medialnym trzech głównych kanałów telewizyjnych. Wyniki wskazują, że większość teleturniejów emitowanych w polskiej telewizji po 1989 roku opierała się na formatach zachodnich, co dawało programowi większą szansę na sukces w porównaniu z markami własnymi.

Słowa kluczowe: telewizja w Polsce, teleturnieje wiedzowe, teleturnieje, franczyzy medialne, formaty medialne.

Introduction

The last two decades have been a time of dynamic changes on the traditional media market. They were forced by the rapid development of the Internet and the services available on it, which had a negative impact on the number of press readers, television viewers and radio listeners. Television is currently undergoing major changes, but it is still a very important medium in the lives of Poles.

Although the overall viewership of television is gradually declining, it still remains a significant source of entertainment for many audiences. Among the formats that have retained a strong presence on Polish television are game shows, which for decades have been attracting viewers with their engaging and competitive character. Game shows are an important branch of entertainment programs, and a huge number of this type of programs have been broadcast in Poland over the last 30 years. In this article, it was decided to focus only on those in which the game involved testing the knowledge of the participants. Lesser-known programs broadcast on local TVP branches were also omitted, focusing only on nationwide channels. The time period of this text results from the fact that after 1989, a rapid transformation of the media market took place in Poland. This resulted from political and economic changes and the country's transition from socialism to capitalism.

Television quiz shows often remain an under-researched area within media and cultural studies scholarship. The work of Su Holmes represents a significant scholarly intervention, specifically focusing on the theory and practice of this televised genre.

Her analysis is predominantly informed by a United Kingdom (UK) perspective, offering a localised and detailed critique of format mechanisms. Crucially, Holmes's research emphasises the structuring role of knowledge and the diverse typologies of knowledge that are validated and deployed within this form of popular television entertainment. Her contribution articulates how these shows operate as cultural arenas for defining and measuring intellectual competence²⁷. On the other hand John Fiske in his works consider quiz shows as a form of popular culture focusing on ideology, power and entertainment. He implies that game/quiz shows reflect dominant societal ideologies such as meritocracy, individualism and competition, promoting the belief that success is achieved through knowledge. The power in these shows is concentrated in the hands of the hosts and producers, who control both the game and the presentation of the contestants. These programs provide entertainment by building tension around competition, and they can also reflect social tensions related to class and economics, emphasising social hierarchies by favouring academic knowledge.

Researching television programs from the past is not easy due to the certain ephemerality of this medium. Fortunately, the Internet can be helpful in this case, providing references to these programs along with some information about their rules. Some episodes can be also found on YouTube and some VOD platforms.

²⁷ S. Holmes, *Quiz show*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2008, p. 2.

The aim of this article is to characterise quiz shows and present their development in Poland after the political transformation. An important research question is how many of them were foreign-licensed programs and how many were original Polish concepts.

What is a game show/quiz show?

Television is full of various entertainment programs, and this is largely what this medium boils down to for many people. Talk shows, series and finally game shows fill the schedules of many channels. The English names “game show” and “quiz show” quite clearly distinguish the type of program – the first one is more of a game with different rules, sometimes requiring intellectual skills and knowledge, but not based on questions and answers.

In other languages it is *spielshow* (German), *jeu télévisé* (French), *programa de juegos* or *concurso de television* (Spanish). The *Cambridge English Dictionary* states that a game show is: “a television program where people score points by answering questions or doing things”. In turn, the *Oxford Dictionary* gives the definition: “quiz show – a radio or TV show in which people answer a series of questions and compete to win prizes”.

A certain variation of this type of programs is the called a panel show in which famous people (actors, musicians, journalists) appear instead of ordinary people. Prizes are often donated to charity. In Poland, the name „game show” was introduced in the late 1950s by Stanisław Cześnin and Karol Lubelczyk. As the Polish name *teleturniej* suggests, a game show is a kind of tournament played on television. This term is semantically broad and covers various types of entertainment programs, not necessarily based on the knowledge of the participants, so can therefore be equated to the English „game show.” Examples include the “Idź na całość” show (1997–2001) and “Koło Fortuny” reactivated by TVP in 2017. These broadcasts undoubtedly fit into the general framework of a game show, and according to the English nomenclature we would call them game shows because they were not based on encyclopedic knowledge²⁸ (Kwiatkowska, 2020).

Nick Lacey presented a repertoire of several elements that allow the viewer to understand and be prepared for the reception a particular type of programs²⁹. For the quiz shows the list is as follows:

- a) setting – television studio;
- b) characters – studio audience, ‘ordinary’ people for contestants and an avuncular host;
- c) narrative – the questions or tasks must be overcome to win the prizes;
- d) iconography – a high-tech, glitzy set;
- e) style – basic ‘live’ television including focus on the host; audience and contestant reaction shots; segmented structure.

²⁸ A.H. Kwiatkowska, *Quizy – od teleturniejów do internetowej rozrywki*, „Studia Humanistyczne AGH” 2020, Vol. 20(4), p. 47–60, <https://doi.org/10.7494/human.2021.20.4.47>.

²⁹ N. Lacey, *Narrative and Genre: Key Concepts in Media Studies*, St. Martin Press, New York 2000, p. 206.

A game show can be characterised as a game that requires the involvement of participants, the performance of tasks by the participants in the studio in front of the cameras, and sometimes specialised knowledge and intelligence. In this type of program, we have the indispensable element of fun, i.e. games with specific rules. Roger Caillios³⁰ divided games broadly into four main categories. The type best suited to a game show is called “agon”, i.e. games based on competition and selecting the winner. The contestant can compete with other players or with the program “system” itself. However, not every program chooses a winner, in some of them no one can win in a single episode (“Milionerzy”, “Postaw na million”).

As mentioned, game shows are primarily games, although they have important rituals, especially at the beginning of the program. At the start, the players are usually introduced – their names, professions, education, and sometimes hobbies are revealed. There is a shift from diverse individuals to equal competitors. Then the game takes over and this equality is tested, revealing itself to be a matter of opportunity rather than skill. This gradually revealed inequality brings forth a winner who becomes the “Master of Questions”³¹.

Despite their popularity among viewers, game shows have a relatively low cultural standing, especially compared to genres such as documentaries and news. In the UK, regulatory action has even been taken to control the size of prizes and limit the number of programs broadcast. These fears were especially widespread among the educated middle class, who viewed game shows as trivial or inferior programming. The BBC’s ethos also contributed to the genre’s early image. However, it was not until the advent of commercial television ITV in 1954 that game shows really found their place as light entertainment. Some scholars have criticised game shows, reflecting middle-class contempt for the genre. Fiske, identified the elements of “game” and “ritual” in game shows, arguing that they legitimise social hierarchies and inequality. The game reveals winners and losers with different predispositions, reinforcing existing social hierarchies, which are important especially in the UK³².

The origins of quiz shows

Hoerschelmann³³ and Holmes³⁴ wrote about the history of various types of game shows. Regarding Polish game shows, mentions can be found in works by Kwiatkowska³⁵,

³⁰ R. Caillios, *Gry i ludzie*, przeł. A. Tatarkiewicz, M. Żurowska, Oficyna Wydawnicza Volumen, Warszawa 1997.

³¹ J. Fiske, *Television Culture*, T&F, New York 1987.

³² B. Calvert, B. Casey, N. Casey, L. French, J. Lewis, *Television Studies. The Key Concepts*, Routledge, New York 2008, p. 126.

³³ O. Hoerschelmann, *Rules of the Game: Quiz Shows and American Culture*, State University of New York Press, New York 2006.

³⁴ S. Holmes, *Quiz Show...*

³⁵ A.H. Kwiatkowska, *Quizy – od teleturniejów do internetowej rozrywki...*

Kończak³⁶, and Barczyk³⁷. The roots of the genre lie in radio quiz programs. These appeared in the 1930s, mainly in the USA. In 1935, Roy Ward Dickson hosted a program called “Professor Dick and His Question Box” on one of the local Canadian radio stations. Within a few years, over 200 such programs appeared on radio stations across North America. However, quizzes were present on local British radio stations even before the founding of the BBC³⁸.

With the outbreak of World War II, radio game shows in the USA lost their popularity. After the war, however, they came back into favour. One of the most popular was “Stop the Music”, launched in 1948 and hosted by Bert Parks. However, a new genre of entertainment took off on television, and it was storming into American homes. Louis Cowan, who invented the radio program “Quiz Kids” in 1940, also tried his hand at television. The television version of this show was only a modest success, never keeping up with its radio broadcast (PBS). It was only with the program „The \$64,000 Question” that Cowan achieved significant success.

The popularity of this type of show even caused a scandal to break out in the USA in the second half of the 1950s. Game show directors began to manipulate the course of the competition to increase the viewership of their programs. They passed questions to selected players, who then won a series of brilliant victories³⁹. One of such scandals is shown in the movie “Quiz Show” from 1994.

Game shows in the Polish People's Republic era

The main role in popularising the genre on Polish television was played by Jan Zakrzewski and Ryszard Serafinowicz, creators of the OZETES team (from the first letters of the surnames of Juliusz Owidzki – the author of questions to most programs, Zakrzewski and Serafinowicz). At the beginning of the 1960s, when the initial structure of television was taking shape, the Gameshows Editorial Office was established, and its first manager was Ryszard Serafinowicz. Over time, the Editorial Office became part of the Chief Editorial Office of Entertainment Programs. After 1969 and the emigration of Ryszard Serafinowicz, the editorial office was managed by Stanisław Taczanowski and Janusz Budzyński. Soon, the editorial office lost its independence when Janusz Budzyński was dismissed from television. The first Polish television quizzes included: “Zgaduj-zgadula Tele-Warszawa”, “Kto, co?” and also “Krzyżówka z papugą” (“Crossword with a parrot”), in which the main prize was a live

³⁶ J. Kończak, *Od Tele-Echa do Polskie Zoo: Ewolucja programu TVP*, Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, Warszawa 2008.

³⁷ A. Barczyk, *Charakterystyka teleturniejów emitowanych w polskiej telewizji publicznej*, „Kultura-Media-Teologia” 2012, Vol. 10, pp. 90–102, <https://doi.org/10.21697/kmt.10.6>.

³⁸ S. Holmes, *Quiz shows...*, p. 38.

³⁹ K. Venanzi, *An Examination of Television Quiz Show Scandals of the 1950s*, <http://www.plosin.com/beatbegins/projects/venanzi.html> (accessed on: 1.10.2025).

parrot. Until 1969, the most popular game shows were “Kółko i Krzyżyk”, “Drzewko mądrości”, “Dwadzieścia pytań” among others⁴⁰.

One of the most recognizable and longest-broadcast Polish game shows testing the knowledge of the participants was “Wielka Gra” (“The Great Game”). It was broadcast by Polish Television in the years 1962–2006 and was modelled on the already mentioned “The \$64,000 Question”, which had a global reach and was also sold, among others, to Italy or Australia. And it was in Italy that Ryszard Serafinowicz watched it. However, the program was not officially licensed, as the Poles were simply inspired by the Western format⁴¹. In the times of the People’s Republic of Poland, there was not much concern about copyrights. The first presenter was Ryszard Serafinowicz (1962–69). He emigrated from Poland during the wave of anti-Semitic sentiments in 1968⁴². The hosts changed every few years, until finally Stanisława Ryster appeared, who hosted the program for over 30 years until its end (1975–2006). Thanks to this program, she became one of the icons of Polish television at that time.

The political transformation changed the face of Polish television primarily by opening up the free market, so the first private stations began to emerge. The first Polish tele-tournament based entirely on a license was the program “Koło Fortuny” (“Wheel of Fortune”), which began airing on TVP in 1992. It was the responsibility of Wojciech Pijanowski, who saw the programme while abroad and decided to try to bring it to Poland. It was broadcast from 1992 to 1998 and from 2007 to 2009. It returned to the airwaves in 2017 and the show is currently hosted by Agnieszka Dziekan and Błażej Stencel.

Quiz shows

The subject of this article is quiz shows, which are one type of game shows. They test the participants’ knowledge, which may relate to general or specific issues.

Three basic types of this type of program can be distinguished in terms of participants:

- 1-on-1 quiz shows: this type of program features only one contestant at a time, who interacts one-on-one with the host. At times it is somewhat reminiscent of a talk show. Examples include “Milionerzy” or “Życiowa Szansa”.
- Every man for himself: the players compete against each other and only one person can be the ultimate winner. Depending on the program, the other contestants win minor prizes or do not receive anything at all. Each contestant performs on their own and competes with their opponents to win. A good example is “1 z 10”.

⁴⁰ J. Kończak, *Od Tele-Echa do Polskie Zoo...*, p. 75.

⁴¹ R. Czejarek, *Kultowe polskie teleturnieje*, Wydawnictwo Słowne, Warszawa 2021, p. 84.

⁴² P. Kołakowski, *To on wprowadził teleturnieje do TVP. Przez antysemicką nagonkę wyjechał z Polski*, <https://plejada.pl/programy/ryszard-serafinowicz-dlaczego-prowadzacy-wielka-gre-wyemigrowal-do-kanady/cfkfd8r> (accessed on: 1.10.2025).

- Teams: this is a less common format of the game. Several teams appear competing for victory. An example of this is the program “Awantura o kasę” in which three teams of four people fought against each other.

In addition, two types of cyclicity can be distinguished – one-off, where each episode is separate and participants do not appear in subsequent episodes, and cyclical, where the best meet in the grand final or appear in subsequent episodes.

Questions and host

Questions are one of the most important elements of knowledge game shows. They usually come in single-choice formats (“Milionerzy”) or are open-ended (“1 z 10”, “Awantura o kasę”, “Życiowa szansa”). The topics of the questions are usually very broad. Sometimes the player has a choice of thematic categories.

However, the knowledge required in such programs is a broad concept. Fiske, described one category of human knowledge as that lies in the social rather than the factual⁴³. In turn, Hoerschelmann suggests that the distinction between a quiz game and a game show is not so much about whether the knowledge is actually used, but about the content of this knowledge and its role in the broader context of the entire format⁴⁴.

As mentioned earlier, two types of knowledge can be distinguished in the context of such programs. The knowledge that is most closely related to the concept of power and cultural capital is factual/academic. In the “Milionerzy” or “Postaw na Million” programs, it will usually be the most desired. Shows like the American “The New Price Is Right” test rather everyday knowledge about the prices of home and consumer goods. For example, the Polish program “Kto wie?” created under an American license (“Let’s Ask America”) contains an element of intellectual fun but does not require encyclopaedic/academic knowledge. It is rather common sense, which involves guessing what answers the survey respondents gave. Therefore, it was not included in further tables and calculations. Similarly, “Koło Fortuny” requires general knowledge of words and popular sayings (it is based on the traditional “Hangman” party game). This type of knowledge is not acquired through school or reading, but rather through shared social experiences and interactions: it is therefore accessible to a wider range of people, and is democratic rather than elitist⁴⁵ 1987.

Hetsroni analysed questions from the “Who wants to be Millionaire” program in seven countries around the world⁴⁶. Among others, in Poland. He divided questions

⁴³ J. Fiske, *Television Culture...*, p. 268.

⁴⁴ O. Hoerschelmann, *Rules of the Game: Quiz Shows and American Culture*, State University of New York Press, Albany 2006.

⁴⁵ J. Fiske, *Television...*, p. 267.

⁴⁶ A. Hetsroni, *The Millionaire Project: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Quiz Shows From the United States, Russia, Poland, Norway, Finland, Israel, and Saudi Arabia*, „Mass Communication and Society” 2015, Vol. 7(2), pp. 133–156.

into three main categories: Academic knowledge, everyday knowledge and others. The first one included 6 categories, and the second one 5. Scope categories were Global and local. After analysing 222 questions from Poland, it turned out that they most often concerned history and science. Very few fell into the food, games&leisure and business and economy categories.

In every game show, regardless of what subcategory we classify it into, the host plays an extremely important role. This person often becomes the face of a given program, especially if it has been broadcast for many years. This is what happened, for example, with Tadeusz Szluk ("1 z 10") and Hubert Urbański ("Milionerzy"). In almost every case it is a man. The exception is "The Weakest Link", where in the original British version the host was a woman. It was similar in the Polish version. The top Polish host who has appeared in the largest number of game shows is Krzysztof Ibisz, who has hosted about 10 programs on several TV stations over the last 30 years.

The personality of the show host combines two roles – they are both a brilliant master of ceremonies and a strict but fair teacher-examiner. Both roles are controlled, but they come from very different cultural domains. The role of the master of ceremonies is directed more towards the studio and the home audience, and the role of the examiner is directed towards the participants. In this role, he is the gatekeeper of knowledge, who controls access to it and who uses knowledge as a means of controlling players and progress in the game. This gives the the authority of a high priest in a ritual⁴⁷.

Programs of this type are rarely run by women. The problem with using them as a host has to do with perceived credibility. The viewer wants to believe that the person asking the question also knows the answer. There is also a view that intelligence is not very feminine, and that a woman is defined as a "body" rather than a "brain." The role of the host is the discourses of power. Despite suggestions that perceptions of knowledge and intelligence play a role in adoption opportunities, gender imbalances are more often explained by vague references to "control" or "seriousness." Women are rarely portrayed in media as controlling, competent, and unflappable, again pointing to the tendency to define women in terms of their visual presence and sexuality⁴⁸. Paradoxically however, often women host television news programs.

Prizes

The majority of game shows broadcast in Poland, as discussed in the article, offered cash prizes. Only a few of them opted for non-monetary prizes. The value of these prizes has been and continues to be highly varied. There are also different so-called guaranteed thresholds, if any. Sometimes the amount of potential cash prize also depends on luck. In the programs "The Wall" and "Gra w ciemno," even the correct answer does not guarantee success. It all depends on random factors (the fall

⁴⁷ J. Fiske, *Television Culture...*

⁴⁸ S. Holmes, *Quiz show...*, p. 89.

of the ball in the first one and the contents of the envelopes which are unknown to the competitor in the second one).

An interesting concept, different from most programs, is presented by the “Postaw na milion” (“The Million Dollar Money Drop”) program, where participants start with a million zlotys and their goal is to keep as much money as possible until the end of the game by correctly answering single-choice questions. However, most of them do not reach the last eighth question and end up empty-handed.

The highest win so far in the history of Polish game shows is PLN 1,000,000, which was won five times in the game show “Milionerzy”. The first time was in 2010 – 11 years after the premiere of the Polish edition. Then in 2018, 2019, 2021 and 2022.

In addition, several other game shows were broadcast in Poland, where the main prize was at least one million zlotys: “Życiowa Szansa”, “Chciwość czyli żądza pieniądza”, “Grasz czy nie grasz?”, “Strzał w 10”, “Postaw na milion”, “Million w minutę” and “Ryzyko”. Show “The Wall. Wygraj marzenia” theoretically allows for the highest possible win, which is PLN 1,237,494 but such a prize has never been awarded. In October 2023, a special series of “Milionerzy” took place, where the prize was PLN 2,000,000⁴⁹.

Game shows and quiz programs serve as notable reflections of their contemporary societal and economic environment due to their characteristics as cultural artifacts and commercial products. The base simplicity of their production model often requiring minimal elaborate sets or extensive narrative development. That makes them remarkably agile within the media landscape. This characteristic allows production companies to adapt and innovate quickly, potentially making game shows the fastest responsive genre to evolving economic constraints and prevailing cultural trends. Consequently, their format, prizes, and even the subject matter immediately reflect the current socioeconomic climate. Also, the game shows inherently possess a broad appeal and mass accessibility, establishing them as a pervasive form of entertainment. This extensive reach means that their content and structure must resonate with the collective cultural consciousness, offering valuable insights into the current cultural values, beliefs, and attitudes of the society at large⁵⁰.

Licenses, formats

Media formats have been present on the market for decades, but only at the end of the 20th century did they become very important. Albert Moran defined the television format as *“a set of variable elements in a program out of which the variable elements of an individual episode are produced”*⁵¹.

⁴⁹ *Milionerzy: Dwa miliony do wygrania*, <https://tvn24.pl/ciekawostki/milionerzy-dwa-miliony-do-wygrania-czy-pytania-beda-trudniejsze-kiedy-wielki-final-st7382486> (accessed on: 1.10.2025).

⁵⁰ L. O'Neill, *How Game Shows Perfectly Reflect the Era We're Living In*, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/7xg5a9> (accessed on: 1.10.2025).

⁵¹ A. Moran, *Global Television Formats: Genesis and Growth*, „Critical Studies in Television” 2013, Vol. 8(2), pp. 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.7227/CST.8.2.2>.

Unfortunately, there is no consensus on what exactly is a TV format and how it should be understood. In his monograph *The Format Age. Television's Entertainment Revolution*, Jean Chalaby helpfully assembles four definitions to highlight different aspects: TV Format as licensed remake, recipe, method of production and proof of concept⁵². But some scholars argued that economic based definitions are too narrow. Also need to be considered some aspects as generic adaptations in the form of textual characteristics, production practices and audience addresses – this phenomenon has a more nuanced historical and theoretical understanding⁵³.

Licensed formats have become an important element of the television market in many countries around the world, and European companies (Great Britain, the Netherlands) have proven to be extremely important. They have launched many global formats, mainly game shows and reality shows. In today's globalised world, television stations often buy the rights to create and broadcast their own version of a popular entertainment program. In 2000, the Format Recognition and Protection Association (FRAPA) was created, and its goal was to protect the interests of format creators and facilitate trade in formats.

Translating the format of a game show entertainment program requires a lot of attention and commitment. There is an analogy here to translating a text into another language. A literal translation of the text is not enough. What counts are such components as the colours of the set, the personality of the host, the general pace of the program and many others⁵⁴. Keinonen used the example of Finnish television to present a diagram in which he listed the actors involved in cultural negotiations⁵⁵. These are the production section (Flying producers, producers and program executives) and the Reception section (spectators and journalists). Between these layers there is the "text" of the program that needs to be translated.

Global giants sell formats from their catalogs and also produce their own local adaptations. However, whether formats come from a parent company or a third party, local production companies negotiate between global influences and relevant national television cultures when selecting formats for their domestic market. Although the content of these adaptations is local, the systemic conventions of the format apparatus are both deterritorialised and naturalised. As formats cross national and cultural boundaries, they also transfer knowledge and know-how, including proven practices in format

⁵² J. Chalaby, *The Format Age. Television's Entertainment Revolution*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2015, p. 12.

⁵³ J. Ellis, A. Esser, L.J. Gutiérrez, *TV formats and formats research – theory, methodology, history and new developments*, „VIEW: Journal of European Television History and Culture” 2016, Vol. 5(9), pp. 1–5, <https://doi.org/10.18146/2213-0969.2016.jethc098>.

⁵⁴ A. Moran, *When TV Formats are Translated* [in:] *TV Formats Worldwide: Localizing Global Formats*, Ed. A. Moran, Intellect, Bristol 2009, pp. 45–47.

⁵⁵ H. Keinonen, *Television Format as Cultural Negotiation: Studying Format Appropriation through a Synthesizing Approach*, „VIEW: Journal of European Television History and Culture” 2016, Vol. 5(9), pp. 60–71, <https://doi.org/10.18146/2213-0969.2016.jethc103>.

acquisition and appropriation. Thus, local and national television industries around the world engage in the reproduction of global structures.

Poland is a place culturally close to Anglo-Saxon countries and Western Europe, so the formats do not require significant changes. The setting and structure of the show remains essentially the same. It is difficult to see any major modifications in the programs examined. It is worth noting that two originally Polish knowledge game shows (broadcast by Polsat) had their versions abroad. “Awantura o kasę” appeared in New Zealand, and “Gra w Ciemno” had its versions, among others in the Czech Republic, Spain and Italy.

The tables below present a list of game shows for individual major Polish television stations, divided into original productions and those based on imported formats. The original name of the program and the years of its broadcast in Poland were also provided. In case of original production titles are self-translated to English.

Table 1. Quiz shows in TVP since 1989

Licensed shows	Original shows
Va Banque (Jeopardy!) 1996–2003, 2020 – present	Teleadwokat (Tele-advocate) 1999
1 z 10 (Fifteen to One) 1994 – present	300 procent normy (300% of Norm) 2008–2009
Postaw na milion (The Million Dollar Money Drop) 2011– present	Miliard w rozumie (Billion in the Mind) 1993–2005
The Wall. Wygraj marzenia (The Wall) 2017–2019	Jeśli nie Oxford, to co? (If not Oxford, than what?) 2nd half of 1990s
Wielki Poker (Poker Face) 2007	Salomon 1998–1999
Giganci historii (Connoisseurs of History) 2020 -present	Ryzyko (Risk) ca. 2002–2003
Gilotyna (The Guillotine) 2009–2011	Podróż życia (Journey of a lifetime) 2015
21 (21.) 2000–2002	

Source: own research.

Table 2. Quiz shows in Polsat since 1992

Licensed shows	Original shows
Życiowa Szansa (It's Your Chance of a Lifetime!) 2000–2002	Awantura o kasę (The Fuss over Cash) 2002–2005
Grasz czy nie grasz? (Deal or no Deal?) 2005–2007	Gra w Ciemno (Blind Game) 2005–2007
Joker (Joker) 2017–18	
Rosyjska Ruletka (Russian Roulette) 2002–2004	
Piramida (Pyramide) 1997–2000	
Chciwość, czyli żądza pieniądza (Greed) 2001–2002	
Łowcy nagród (Raid The Cage) 2020	
Strzał w 10 (Power of 10) 2008	
Eureka, ja to wiem! (Achmea Kennisquiz) 2005–2009	
Rozbij bank (unknown/ Break the bank) 2001–2002	

Source: own research.

Tabela 3. Quiz shows in TVN since 1997

Licensed shows	Original shows
1. Milion w Minutę (Minute To Win It) 2011–2012 2. Milionerzy (Who wants to be a Millionaire) 1999–2003, 2008–2010, 2017 – present 3. Najslabsze ogniwo (The Weakest Link) 2004–2005 4. Dzieciaki z klasą (Britain's Brainest Kid) 2004–2005 5. Czy jesteś mądrzejszy od 5-klasisty (Are You Smarter Than a 5th Grader) 2007–2009	Galaktyka (The Galaxy) 2002

Source: own research.

Table 4. shows the proportion of licensed and original programmes. As it turns out, the vast majority of knowledge-based game shows produced in Poland after 1989 were based on licenses. They mainly came from Anglo-Saxon countries, but also from other regions of the world (e.g. the Netherlands). Telewizja Polska (TVP) is distinguished by a large percentage of its own formats compared to private channels. This is probably due to the fact that, as a public broadcaster, it does not have to worry about the commercial success of its programs as private televisions. TVP stations are maintained largely from subscription fees paid by citizens and government subsidy.

Table 4. Proportion of quiz show origins

	TVP	Polsat	TVN
Licensed	53.4%	83.3%	83.3%
Original	46.6%	16.7%	16.7%

Source: own research.

Summary

Quiz shows constitute an important segment of game show entertainment in Poland. The majority of these programs are produced by major television networks, a phenomenon likely driven by high production costs, including license acquisition, specialised studio infrastructure, and the large number of personnel involved. Additionally, the value of prizes for participants is a significant factor. In Poland, game shows are frequently produced by external studios, with ATM Grupa, established in 1993, being a notable leader. This company has produced numerous game shows for various competing television stations. The cost of production can fluctuate significantly, contingent on a multitude of factors. Many of these programs have been broadcast over the last 35 years, with diverse rules and broadcast schedules. A considerable number of them are currently aired on the main TVP channels.

The longest-running game show in Poland was a TVP production, “Wielka Gra”, which was broadcast for approximately 44 years (1962–2006). The longest-running quiz show currently on air is “1 z 10”, which has been broadcast since 1994. This program

is characterised by its simple stage design and relatively modest prizes, with episode winners receiving around 5,000 PLN.

According to the conducted research, the vast majority of Polish quiz shows were based on foreign licenses – most often from the USA or Great Britain, although other countries also appear (Turkey, France). This is probably due to reasons similar to those behind licensing of other formats, especially those in the talent show genre.

Game shows in some way reflect the era we are living in because they are a product of our society and economy. Game shows and quiz shows are quite simple for companies to make, making them potentially the quickest to adapt to the changing times among all genres. Additionally, game shows are a form of entertainment that is accessible to a wide audience, which means that they can provide insight into the cultural values, beliefs, and attitudes of a society⁵⁶. Therefore, game shows can be seen as a reflection of our times, as they are influenced by and reflect the social, economic, and cultural context.

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⁵⁶ L. O'Neill, *How Game Shows Perfectly Reflect the Era We're Living In*, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/7xg5a9> (accessed on: 1.10.2025).

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