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Television Reception and Technological Convergence in the 1950s: The Case of Mexico City

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Abstract

The aim of this chapter is to characterize and analyze the television audience in Mexico in the 1950s through the confluence of three audiovisual communications technologies: cinema, radio, and television. This research understands the convergence as a context and a social and cultural experience that changed roles, routines, perceptions, and stereotypes of the contemporary societies. How did the TV audiences of the Mexico City react to the technological convergence? How did cinema, radio, and television become interrelated? What elements mediated in television reception in the 1950s? To answer these questions, this research used the national press and specialized magazines of the time, oral history, and photographic archives as primary information sources. The chapter argues that the audience established a bond with TV from its past experience with cinema and radio. With the reference of the moving image, the immediately transmission and the domesticity, the viewers recognize themselves and react to screen contents. In 1950s, the audiences are active and interactive. This research concludes that technological convergence, from a historical point of view, constitutes a context of transformations and a set of assimilation, integration, and interaction practices. Likewise, it considers that in the middle of the XX century, the world experiments a “early convergence” of contents and technology, where the television is main characters.

Keywords: television, audiences, technological convergence, technological transformation, Mexico City, reception, history of mass media

1. Introduction

Television reception is a subject that has been relatively unexplored from a historical perspective. The same has happened with technological convergence. The past allows us to understand the key drivers of the emergence, change, and current character of television and its audiences, its association with other technologies, and its relationship with historical contexts. In Latin America, this subject was overlooked for various reasons: the difficulty to quantitatively measure the preferences and consumption habits of TV viewers before the 1970s; the reduced spaces where spectators could publicly express their views on media products; the difficult access to archives of TV companies—private and public—and their oldest audiovisual material; and finally, the absorbing trajectory of television, as a media that

captured the attention of scholars and neglected the other players in the broadcasting process.

The aim of this article is to characterize and analyze the television audience in Mexico in the 1950s through the confluence of three audiovisual communications technologies: cinema, radio, and television. This research understands the meeting of these media as a context where viewers, still “neophyte” and expectant, recognize themselves and react to screen contents. In Mexico, the technological convergence was key in the formation of the first generation of TV viewers. The audience established a bond with TV according to its past experience with cinema and radio. It is therefore not surprising to understand this convergence as a social and cultural experience that changed roles, timeframes, tastes, perceptions, and social habits, while reinforcing the interactivity of audiences, as well as their relationship with the media and their response capabilities.

Television changed the way to “see” and “listen to” information and entertainment. Three elements were key to shape the way in which the audience understood the arrival of TV within the framework of technological convergence: 1) the city was defined as the place of inception and development of television; 2) both the TV set and television as an industry were directly linked to the idea of progress and modernization in Mexico; and 3) the mass-consumption of technological innovation became a must for commercial advertising, political propaganda and advocacy, communication of education and culture, and even social prestige. These three elements are necessarily interrelated.

This research used as primary information sources the national press and specialized magazines of the time, oral history, and photographic archives (Casasola and Hermano Mayo). The historical narrative made it possible to identify behaviors of both television and recurrent viewers in the decades that followed, in terms of simultaneity, the establishment of routines and interaction, and regarding practices that will rarely reoccur in later years: the community sense, amazement, and recursiveness. How did the Mexico City audience react to the technological transformations and confluences? How did cinema, radio, and television become interrelated as the broadcasting means of the time? What elements mediated in television reception? To answer these questions, this chapter is divided into four sections: the first deals with the concept of television reception, from theoretical and historical perspectives; the second characterizes the TV audience of Mexico in the 1950s; the third focuses on technological convergence as a fact that left an indelible mark on the experience of the TV spectators of the time; and the fourth sets out conclusions on the ownership of a historical study to comprehend the future of television and technological convergence.

2. On TV reception

As reported by Orozco, reception is an interaction mediated by multiple sources, characterized by material, cognitive, and emotional contexts [1]. Audiences provide a unique meaning to the messages received according to their own cultural backgrounds and contexts [2]. They are far more than passive players or mere receptacles of everything displayed on screen [1]. Quite the opposite, as they react: nod, adapt, resist, condemn, or replicate. The practice to portray the viewer as a passive user has dominated both theory and historiography. As pointed out by Castells, the issue with such propensity lies in that the viewer continued being perceived as the object rather than as “the subject of communication” [3].

For Huertas, history has considered and studied audiences from three perspectives: as a mass—a common vision between the eighteenth century and the first half

of the twentieth century—focused on the urgency to a fast and immediate communication to the crowds; as diverse groups, where the conformation of markets and differentiated consumers is privileged, as in the case of television; and finally, an individual-focused approach, which since the 1980s has made individualized or customized production a priority—not necessarily translating into better quality of contents—[3].

The 1950s and early 1960s witnessed the emergence and evolution of the viewer in Mexico. The spectator of the 1950s was an active agent, who by virtue of his/her cultural, religious, political, and social background, provided a variety of meanings to TV messages. This phenomenon comprises a whole communication process. Reception should not be understood as a mechanism that takes place in isolation from the media or the message. The agents of this system, even in the precariousness of the new technology, met and shared ideas ranging from curiosity to expectations. It was a tough issue. With TV, the act of communicating to the mass public became complex for three reasons: (1) the moving image, synchronized with sound, could be transmitted live, immediately, from the place of events; (2) the new media had a domestic character, as it no longer required attendance to a public hall to receive the message; and (3) the sense of rituality produced by TV, either at home or in a public space, was novel and favored congregations.

Nonetheless, the television viewer should not be idealized. “This is not to say that the subject of communication is not influenced, or even deceived, by the content and format of the message,” says Castells. The construction of meaning is complex and depends on “triggering mechanisms” that combine various levels of involvement in the reception of the message ([2], p. 179). All the links of the communicative process were connected when the screens were turned on. From then onward, each viewer can be understood as an interlocutor with other messages, audiences, and issuers. As a result, viewers are not uniform agents. The audiences of the 1950s, diverse as they were, mirrored the euphoria, curiosity, and admiration of novelty, but also skepticism, rejection, and disenchantment given some of the outcomes and the activism of others in demanding changes. While some received the contents from immobility, with no further questioning, others scrutinized them and expressed sharp criticism [4].

3. The TV viewer of the 1950s

In the midst of an industrializing and modernizing boost, TV officially was inaugurated in Mexico on September 1, 1950. This day, the IV Government Report of President Miguel Alemán Valdés (1946-1952) was read. The government opted for a private and commercial model, similar to the US. The first television concession was granted to the entrepreneur Rómulo O’Farril, to manage Channel 4 (XHTV). The two following years, another two channels were inaugurated: XEW-TV Channel 2, owned by Emilio Azcarraga Vidaurreta, and XHGC Channel 5, by Guillermo Gonzalez Camarena [5]. In 1955, Telesistema Mexicano S.A. acquired control of the three television networks, thus establishing a monopolistic scheme, in the hands of Azcarraga, who established the consortium Televisa S.A. in January 1973 [6]. Only until 1959 the first public project emerged, with an educational and cultural project named Channel 11.

In the 1950s, the TV set was a sumptuous appliance. “When TV sets become affordable for me, I may buy one,” said Gabino Granados, a photographer of Alameda Central, when interviewed by the magazine *TV-56*, almost 6 years after the media was inaugurated [7]. Data on the presence and expansion of televisions in Mexico City are scarce and sometimes contradictory. A few days before its

opening, O’Farrill, owner of the first channel, predicted that by mid-September 1950 there would be 2000 TV sets across the country, and 10,000 would be spread in households by the end of that year [8]. In 1954, the UNESCO report on information technologies, carried out for 52 state entities, estimated that some 50,000 TV sets were available in Mexico, that is, one for every 578 inhabitants. The statistics estimated a potential of 9 million viewers in the country, equivalent to 34% of its population. When figures were contrasted, it was found that the United States was the leading television power worldwide, with one TV set for every 7.5 inhabitants and 65% of the population considered as TV viewers [9].

By 1958, Mexico had 11 television stations in operation, distributed across several states of the country. An astonishing growth followed in 1959, the country had 16 stations [10]. The UNESCO report for 1963, which detailed the evolution of the TV phenomenon between 1950 and 1960, revealed that in 1958 there were about 184,000 TV sets in the country, equivalent to 6 sets by every 1000 inhabitants. In just 2 years, in 1960, the number had grown to 650,000, equivalent to 19 sets per thousand inhabitants, three times the number recorded in 1958. By then, Cuba was the country best positioned in Latin America, above Brazil and Argentina [11].

3.1 Public, semi-public, and private profile of the viewer

What were the most recurring daily practices of TV viewers in the 1950s? How was TV watched? Who congregated in front of screens? Watching television in the 1950s in Mexico was a public-private entertainment and socialization activity. TV was not a top-level source of information. The behavior of spectators, although diverse, was dominated by curiosity, the aspiration to own a TV set, and expectations regarding further advances to come. The following sections address viewers of the 1950s in public, private, and semi-public settings that allow to delineate their profile.

3.1.1 The public space

Commercial displays were one of the first contacts of Mexicans with *the TV set*, as a technological appliance, and with *television*, as an audiovisual communication system. Store displays were used as an information and advertising strategy. The public knew of the new technology and started to contemplate the idea of acquiring it. Department stores and manufacturers of TV sets organized exhibitions even before the system was introduced. Unintentionally, these exhibits were one of the first “public television watching practices.” In Mexico, the photographs by the Mayo brothers, in the *Archivo General de la Nación* (Mexico’s General Document Archives), recorded a group of people gathered in a projection hall in front of a *Magestic* TV set displayed in a small shelf [12]. Afterward, the TV set passed from exhibition halls to display cases. On August 13, 1950, *El Palacio de Hierro*, a famous department store, invited its customers to a “practical demonstration” in the basement of its annex building. “The day has come!” it announced in an advertisement published in the *Novedades* newspaper. The message was clear as to the target public and the type of experience it intended to advertise: “Your home can now be the stage of any show... as you and your family can enjoy the result of years and years of research” [13] (**Figure 1**).

Advertising campaigns were adapted to streets, becoming familiar for urban passers-by. “Watching TV” through a showcase from the street was also a way to become a viewer. “I had watched TV in the stores that sold them. There was always an exhibit for people to appreciate TV sets. I remember the *General de Gas* store, located at *Insurgentes*, where a TV set was always on display. That was my first

contact,” says a lady interviewed in Mexico, who owned a TV set since 1951 [14]. Only a few days before the television system was launched, the *El Nacional* newspaper raffled an *Admiral* TV set among its subscribers. The appliance was displayed in the windows of its corporate offices at the *Alameda Central*, in Mexico City downtown. Passers-by, both adults and children, gathered in the street to admire the new technology [15] (Figure 2).

The urban space was filled by curiosity, the experience of watching the small screen working, and the desire to purchase the appliance. The spectator was discovering himself at the very basics: “watching TV,” an elementary modality mediated by the technological expectation or by the mere chance of coming across “the wonder” of the time. The practice was arising as a public experience, as it was taking place in a collective, open, freely available space, as pointed out by McQuail ([16],



Figure 1.
Publicity of *El Palacio del Hierro*. *Novedades*, Mexico, August 13, 1950.



Figure 2.
El Nacional showcase in Mexico City. In: *El Nacional*, September 13, 1950, Mexico.

p. 26), but at the same time was tied to the control by a private stakeholder—a third party—who owned the appliance and decided when to turn it on and expose it to the public. In these dynamics, the casual passer-by suddenly discovered him/herself as active audience. To date, this practice still prevails in the streets and shopping centers. Between June 29 and July 1, 1962, when President John F. Kennedy and his wife paid an official visit to Mexico City, the local inhabitants made long queues on sidewalks to watch the motorcade. In addition, they were in showcases for a close-up view of the details as broadcasted on TV. This was recorded by Agustín Casasola in photographs from the interior of an appliance store, showing curious passers-by trying to watch the TV set placed in the middle of the showcase [17].

Display cabinets were not the only public spaces where TV sets were exhibited. Canteens, cafes, schools, hospitals, and even some parishes became recurring scenarios, attended by a faithful massive audience, offering far more amusement and comfort than streets. “We met on Saturdays. We gathered in a famous local cafe called *Kikos*, on *Michoacán* street, at *Colonia Condesa*. [...] We gathered to watch freestyle wrestling!” said one interviewee in Mexico City, who in his teens attended weekend meetings regularly [18]. Again, Mayo brothers and the Casasola archives allow tracking back in time these public TV-watching practices. Their photographs depict the daily life of canteens in the city, including the typical small screen turned on in the background [19]. Amidst a male audience, the TV set becomes an essential item that supplements the bar services. The TV set is incorporated into socialization practices, even becoming the spotlight when sports and political events took place. For many TV spectators, this was the only contact at hand with the communication media, and for others, the possibility of breaking with domestic everyday life.

In parallel with the routines of viewers on streets, bars, and restaurants, TV sets were also installed in some hospitals, nursing homes, orphanages, schools, parishes, hotels, offices, and trade unions. Except for the last three cases, TV sets usually came from donations. The appliance was intended to encourage the socialization of hospital patients, as an aid for pedagogical activities of infants, and for the “controlled” recreation of parishioners. The second group of establishments involved commercial interests or the promotion of spaces for rest and leisure of workers and users of certain public places. Occasionally, this practice was a news topic. In May 1956, *TV-56* reported that *Casa Philips* had given a TV set to the cancer ward at the general hospital, in Mexico City: “A group of more than 100 patients were ecstatic watching TV—some of them had never had this experience before” [20].

3.1.2 *The private space and the viewer*

From its pilot phase in the laboratory, “watching TV” was intended as a household activity, to be enjoyed in the company of family members. The TV set was advertised as a domestic appliance. “A New Era in the history of Mexican houses begins today ...,” said *RCA Victor* on September 1, 1950, in the *Excelsior* newspaper [21]. It was not only a matter of advertising, but also of conception. With time, as Silverston points out, television succeeded in being integrated within the “private household culture” [22]. It was a steady and complex process.

The most usual scenario consisted in adapting the living room or a small lounge to place the new appliance. The chairs or the main armchair in the room were arranged around the TV set, so as to facilitate the vision of all viewers ([23], p. 326). “The place was set to ensure satisfactory “TV-watching “sessions; beyond the TV shows displayed, spectators made efforts to accommodate their lifestyle and family gathering spaces” [4]. Spigel compares this “television room” at home with the bourgeois “living room” of Victorian times. The intention in the nineteenth century was to build “true theater halls” for family entertainment [24]. The theater

was coming to the household, which then became a theater itself. The sense of this practice is materialized with the arrival of television, says Silverstone. “The living room acquired a new function, or better yet, acquired diverse functions” [4]. In the consumer society of the mid-twentieth century, domestic spaces became [25] multifunctional.

The photographic records of the Mayo brothers and the Casasola archives, as well as printed advertising and cartoons, confirmed the domestic nature of television across virtually all socioeconomic sectors of society [4]. However, testimonies, interviews, and figures confirm that such reality has multiple edges. In Mexico, the idyllic image of a nuclear family sitting in front of a TV set did not materialize in 1950 (Figure 3). This image started making sense in the 1960s, with the massive sales of TV sets boosted by lower prices, high manufacturing volumes, greater competition, credit facilities, the consolidation of the television industry, and the strengthening of the middle classes. In the 1950s, the image disseminated by advertising agencies was more a vision derived from the Americanization of popular culture than a palpable common fact. The 1950 population census revealed that 60% of houses in Mexico City had a single room, and 25% had two rooms. Seventy percent of houses were of artisanal construction, made of adobe, wood, stakes,



Figure 3.
Publicity Zenith. In: *Novedades*, September 7, 1951, Mexico, p. 13.

sticks or stones, and 18% were built of brick and masonry. By the end of the 1940s, only 23% of the population had access to basic potable water services, while 79% of the house occupants were tenants. By the mid-twentieth century, “nearly half of the population lived in tenement houses” [26].

With television, the world, “the outside,” different, broad, and ever-changing, entered the house, “the inside,” the private and known [27]. It was now possible to explore the outside from the comfort of the living room, with no need to cross the street. The house was the essence of the new communication media. Both industry and viewers sought to make this fact true, although the physical and symbolic spaces of households—and families—would never be the same.

3.1.3 *The semi-public space*

In the 1950s, watching television was an activity associated to the encounter with others. This collective nature of the activity materialized in at least two scenarios: social gatherings with neighbors, friends, and family, and home businesses that offered TV-watching. Either case involved private spaces, offering no free access without the TV set owner’s authorization upon setting a few basic agreements. In any of these circumstances, the private house setting—previously a site of family privacy—suddenly acquired a semi-public character [4].

“I don’t have a TV set, as they are very expensive and the credit schemes offered by some shops are unaffordable for a family like ours. So, I watch some TV programs at my sister’s, who has TV,” replied Guadalupe de Lozano, an inhabitant of *Colonia Portales* in a survey conducted by TV-56 [28]. This testimony refers to a sporadic “TV-watching” modality. Those who attended these sessions did so under certain restrictions and mediated by third parties. The reception was variable. In theory, this viewer should be more selective and likely more demanding with the TV programs offered. The Mayo brothers archives include numerous photographic series of gatherings with family and friends around the TV set [29]. Children were the ones most benefited from these practices, as they had more flexible schedules and outdoor activities, surrounded by neighbors willing to share their TV set, as evidenced by several of our interviewees [14, 18].

Certainly, routines and tastes of children were changing. The Catholic magazine *Señal* indicated in 1958 [30]: “there is no way to tear children off the screen.” This reality had produced a distortion in the infants. Television images were in the minds of the little ones during their hours of study, sport, play, or learning. The new invention ended up keeping minors away from the company of their parents and their educational, religious, and domestic responsibilities. Spaces such as lunch or dinner had also been altered: “[...] The food is served on a special television table so that there is maximum visibility and in semi-darkness,” said Guy Robin’s article reproduced in *Señal*. From this point of view, the child could not distinguish between reality and screen fiction. The infants acted by imitation. The bad contents of the environment were a danger for the whole society and its future citizens. Additionally, certain programs could cause psychological damage and emotional instability, affect visual health, and lead to a tendency to not exercise [31].

On the other hand, places such as tenements—a multi-family group of houses that became popular in Mexico City—reinforced the collective nature of TV-watching. Specialized magazines such as *Tele-Guia* received letters from readers that were signed by up to 20 neighbors expressing an opinion on the schedule broadcasted [32, 33]. It is quite possible that many of these TV sets were communally owned. From these practices, two elements are confirmed: first, that TV sets favored the gathering of large groups of persons, fostering a collective get-together and entertainment event; and, second, that viewers responded actively to television

contents, expressing their own opinions and forwarding them—even collectively—to the press in order to be heard.

These spontaneous practices gave rise to a novel domestic business modality: selling television sessions. In an interview published in 1993, Manolo Fábregas, director and producer, commented that during the transmission of their “teleteatros” he received thank-you letters from persons who had earned extra income from public displays of his programs on their domestic TV set [34]. One of our interviewees recalls that charging “some 50 cents,” a neighbor allowed her and other children to watch the afternoon children’s TV programs. At times, each attendee carried his/her own chair. Furthermore, she points out that the charge could be higher for watching football and box broadcasts [35].

The Entertainment Office of the General Direction of Interior Affairs of the Federal District acknowledged the existence of “TV rooms” and established that the owners of this “kind of entertainment for profit” should meet the same requirements of movie theaters. In other words, these should have the approval of the General Direction of Public Works, the Police Office, the Fire Department, the Secretariat of National Economy, the Department of Electric Power Control, the Secretariat of Health and Welfare, and the Department of Sanitary Engineering, in addition to a certificate of no debit of fines [36]. This type of standard leads us to deduce that there were public TV projection rooms that were more sophisticated than domestic living rooms, equipped with more infrastructure to provide the service. For its part, the informality of neighbors responded more to the spontaneity and inventiveness than to the logic of a stable business that would allow them to meet all the requirements established by the Direction of Interior Affairs. On the other hand, the business modalities that emerged to meet the “TV-watching” demand were broadened further to include TV-set rental. This activity is traceable through classified ads. The *Compañía Panamericana*, in addition to renting typewriters, compressors, and cars, offered TV sets for rental for a limited time with home-delivery service [37]. Publicity advertised the activity as the seasons’ great novelty [37].

The street, coffee, or hospital viewer, the tenement spectator who attended improvised public rooms, watched TV at home or at occasional family gatherings, all lived an authentic TV-watching experience, mediated by the need to share a space, the willingness to make common a personal good, and the fascination with the new technology. A TV viewer in Mexico City was being recognized as a community member. Given the inherent material, socioeconomic, and cultural conditions associated to the context, this collective nature of watching television involved a thin boundary between the public and private. Some previously intimate spaces opened their doors. Sometimes, this was the result of genuine solidarity, whereas in others there was an economic interest involved. *Novelty* was the core that motivated the development of complex social relationships, negotiations, and interaction rules and practices, with both the other spectators and with the channel and messages broadcasted. The high cost of the first TV sets led to recursive practices and community practices to facilitate access to the appliance. Of course, all these experiences clashed with the *domesticity* image that TV-set manufacturers and their advertising campaigns sought to communicate to consumers. Public and semi-public “TV-watching” practices coexisted with that private, homely, and intimate ideal of being in front of the small screen [4].

4. Technological convergence in television reception

The 1950s are unprecedented for the media landscape of Mexico. For the first time, three audiovisual media converge within the same time and space: the trajectory and dynamism of the film industry, the expansion and consolidation of the

radio, and the expectation and innovation of television. We refer to two media already well established and one in full materialization. The period represents the capacity to multiply audiences, and with them the meanings of program contents and their penetration at a large scale. Television inaugurated a context of technological convergence. Its incursion into the communications platform represented a novel alternative of information and entertainment, which combined operating mechanisms and offer of services already popularized by other media. Castells points out that network of devices led to the materialization of a mass society and culture ([38], p. 363). The new media, its messages and viewers had to respond to this context of convergence and sociocultural changes. It is worth remembering that in the early 1950s, Mexico had 25,791,097 inhabitants [39]; 10 years later, the General Population Census recorded a total of 34,923,129 persons, almost 18 million of whom lived in cities, equivalent to a little more than 50% of the country's population [40]. Urbanization was asymmetrical. Forty percent of the urban population was concentrated in the capital of the country ([41], p. 700). At the same time, the buoyant middle class experienced a significant rise in Mexico.

The 1950s are a sort of turning point between the predominantly rural Mexico and the Mexico dominated by urban majorities. The period witnesses the coexistence of modernization as an imperative and distrust of the new as a sign of uncertainty. Technological convergence experienced both the suspicion and skepticism of some and the euphoria of others. Not all social stakeholders were prepared. The "great public" reacted from their previous experience and understood the peculiarities of television in function of what their impressions already acquired with other communication media. Its referent was the moving image provided by cinema and the immediacy of information and domesticity brought by the radio.

4.1 The known

The cinema arrived in Mexico in a moment of "faith in progress" and urban renewal, in 1896 [42]. The expansion of the show led to the construction of special theaters and projector tours to various parts of the country. Quickly, Mexico went from being a recipient country to a country where film productions were made. The first experiments of Mexican entrepreneurs and directors, with "The Mexican Charros," a short film of 1903, evolved into the legendary "Santa" in 1931, credited for being the first sound production in the country. The growth of the media consolidated a profitable industry. Between 1930 and the 1950s, the national cinema experienced a "golden age" [43, 44]. As an alternative to the films arriving from Hollywood, this period was characterized by a nationalist cinema that repeatedly alluded to revolution times [4]. By the mid-1940s, around 50% of the films exhibited in Mexican theaters were domestic productions. In spite of this, and "except for the work of Buñuel," the success of the nationalist scheme and its thriving industry went into decline by the mid-1950s ([45], pp. 521-523).

On the other hand, the first public radio broadcasts in Mexico took place in 1921 [46]. Radio stations were founded in 1923, mandated by the federal government, licensed to CYL, owned by Raúl Azcarraga, and to CYB, owned by the cigarette company *El Buen Tono*. Until then, the country's broadcasting system had been managed by the state, so that licensing to private enterprises gave way to a mixed model regulated by the Law of Electrical Communications in 1926 [30]. The idea of turning the radio on "mass entertaining and business enterprise" boosted its popularization, and the radio set entered households to stay [46]. With the expansion and modernization of radio stations, Azcárraga founded XEW in 1930. By 1934, Mexico had 57 radio chains, which further increased to 100 by 1940 ([47], p. 639).

The FM frequency arrived at the end of that decade, but the regulations were not amended until 1961, with the Federal Radio and Television.

4.2 The novelty

The birth of television in Mexico is linked to the fascination with technological innovation. Such interest was linked to the findings of Guillermo Gonzalez Camarena, who in 1946 founded the first experimental television laboratory in the country. Consequently, on September 7 of this year, a small television station under the name XEIGC was installed in 74 Havre street, in Mexico City. This experimental channel broadcasted its own programs every Saturday. Gonzalez had been conducting research since 1935, allowing him to develop a chromatic image system that was tested and presented to the public, from his home, in 1939 [48]. The invention was patented as a tri-chromatic system, based on the use of primary colors for image capture and reproduction [48].

The *Radiolandia* magazine captured the expectation produced by the test emission of González in 1949: “We were able to admire the work by Camarena until recently, when he installed a small TV set in some cinemas in the capital; this was a real surprise for many, who started going to the cinema not to watch the movie, but to be able to observe something they believed was impossible: television in Mexico” [49]. With González Camarena, a first collective seduction by technological advancement emerged. “Mexico is probably the first country having TV with natural colors that, as Gonzalez stresses, is the true television [49].” His inventiveness was a source of pride for Mexicans. The “nationalist consensus” referred to by Loaeza was evidenced in the frequent exaltation to the Mexican as being unique and authentic: quite an example to follow ([50], p. 133). Technological leadership became a patriotic reference, which celebrated with honors that Mexico was the first Latin American country where television was launched.

4.3 Confluences

In technological convergence, television and TV spectators fulfilled two functions in the 1950s: first, *being the novelty*, an object of wonder and curiosity. “And how are we going to be able to watch people in a box?” recalled one of our interviewees as an example of her stupor as a child when experiencing the new technology [51]. And second, *being the synthesis*. Television was presented as a “hybrid” between movies and radio. The best of both worlds was now contained in one single option. Television resembled sound films, offering the appealing benefit of not requiring a public setting for projection. And as the heiress to the radio, it based its operation on a domestic receiver set able to deliver distance and real-time broadcasting.

What was television like? A few months before the inauguration of the television system in Mexico, specialized magazines, such as *Club 16 mm* and *Radiolandia*, conducted pedagogy work on the media and its technique. These magazines published graphic displays showing the mechanisms of cathode ray tubes and made readers become acquainted with the creation of antennas. Referring to the Decree issued on February 11, 1950, *Club 16 mm* specified the technical and administrative standards regarding the installation of television stations. Only one cinema magazine and one radio magazine could provide updated illustrations on the new media. How to make television? At the operational level, interaction was organic. The earliest technicians, cameramen, illuminators, and scenographers—not to mention artists, scriptwriters, announcers, directors, and producers—came from the radio and cinema. Their mission was to readapt the technical expertise acquired

in other media. Scenographies and studios started being shared. At the end of 1950, Channel 2 employees received the first training course on television in Mexico, led by the engineer Roberto Kenny and endorsed by the Columbia College of Chicago [52]. “The industry was breathing activity, dynamism and youth,” stated Miko Viya, one of the TV pioneer directors [48].

In the 1950s, “making television” and “watching TV” involved a variety of adaptations. While the new medium structured and defined itself, it also modeled the viewers. The processes were two-way. The audiences did not take long to get an impression of “the newcomer” and identify themselves as users. Technological convergence assumed a leading role in this process. The experience gained with other audiovisual devices was key to function, as well as to establish differences and similarities.

5. Conclusions

Technological convergence is neither a recent experience nor a subject restrained to the digital world. In broad terms and without forcing anachronisms, it is reasonable to assert that television represented, in the communications field, the first example of interconnection of services, innovation, and technical process in a single device. In the mid-twentieth century, the world is in an “early convergence” of content and technology.

In this analytical framework, the viewers of the 1950s were key stakeholders of their time. Technological transformation, which for the first time brought together cinema, radio, and television in the same space, was the first reality that viewers had to face. In countries like Mexico, the viewers’ practices responded to their impossibility to buying TV sets on a massive scale, to the sense of collectiveness, to social mobility aspirations, to cultural references, and to a context involving growing urbanization, literacy, mass culture, and modernization.

From the moment when TV screens were turned on, the television audience became a plural and changing agent. The material, social, and cultural conditions of the time determined what, how, when, and where to watch TV. This research confirmed that, despite of its recent arrival, audiences in Mexico were active for the most part, and although a certain conservative tone prevailed, they were in constant dialog with the contents projected. Previous experience with cinema and radio, as well as the trajectory of the press, served as a training ground to this end.

Technological convergence, from a historical point of view, constitutes a context, a succession of transformations, and a set of assimilation, integration, and interaction practices. In the mid-twentieth century, television succeeded in linking the known with the novelty, offering speed, connectivity, domesticity, and massification of messages. In an unprecedented way, the TV set took remote motion images and sound to households. It connected the “indoors” with the “outdoors.” The effects were multifold. According to McLuhan, the rise and confluence of media were key for remodeling and restructuring the patterns of social interdependence and private life in this era ([53], p. 8). That is why the future of technological convergence and television lies also in the historical reflection, the recognition of the past, and the signs of change that these represent.

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