

Analysis of the SRG SSR's radio programme services: German-speaking Switzerland 2020

Summary

Dr. Sonja Glaab-Seuken (LINK) and Professor Dr. Andreas Vlašić (Medien Institut)

The Swiss Federal Act on Radio and Television (RTVA) and the license issued to the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation (SRG SSR) serve as a mandate for SRG SSR. The responsibilities assigned to SRG SSR include providing comprehensive, diverse and factual news coverage, fostering Swiss culture and promoting a dialogue among the different regions and language communities of Switzerland. The Federal Office of Communications (OFCOM) regularly commissions external specialists to review how SRG SSR is carrying out its performance mandate. This radio program analysis examines how SRG SSR implemented its mandate in its Swiss German radio programs in 2020.

Study methodology

The SRG SSR radio program analysis was conducted on the basis of the methodology of quantitative content analysis used in communication studies. The focal points of the analysis were drawn from the **performance indicators** defined by the broadcasting act and the license. They included the percentage of airtime devoted to information, thematic diversity, diversity of opinion, diversity of journalistic formats used as well as regional content.

An artificial week in which days were selected at random was used as a sample. The program broadcast by each of the six SRF stations between 5 a.m. and midnight on each selected day was then analyzed. Furthermore, the regional journals of SRF 1 were included in the analysis (table 1).

Table 1: Methodological key data of the SRG SSR radio program analysis 2020

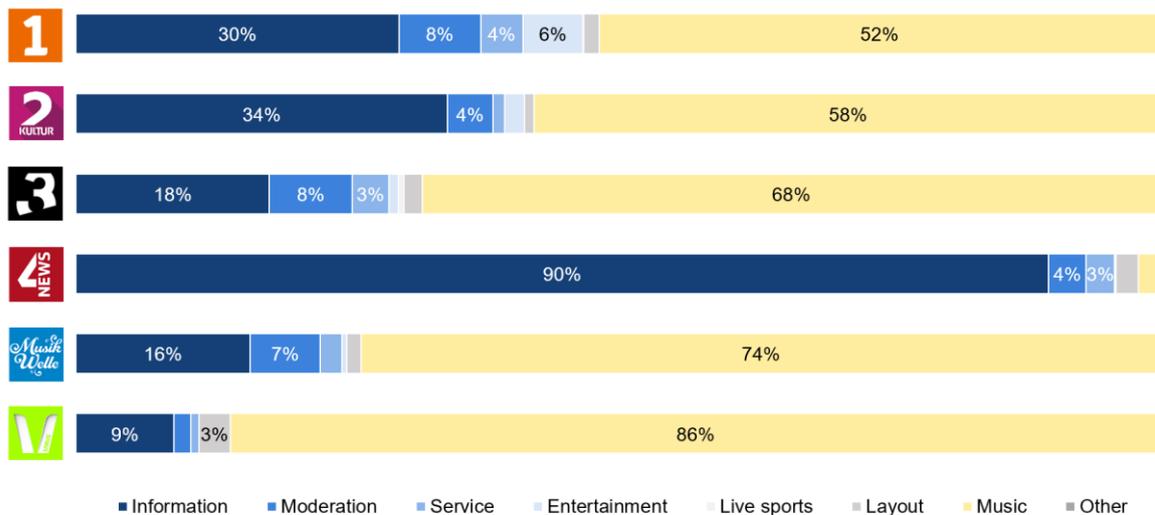
Methodology	Quantitative content analysis
Analyzed stations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- SRF 1 – National program & regional journals- SRF 2 Kultur- SRF 3- SRF 4 News- SRF Virus- SRF Musikhalle
Random samples	An artificial week (Mon.-Sun.), from 5 a.m. to midnight each day Analyzed hours per station: 133 Additional hours, regional journals: Total: 31.6 Total analyzed hours: 829.6

This analysis serves as the next chapter in a series of SRG SSR program analyses conducted in the past. Therefore, it applied the methodologies that had been previously used. They were modified only for the purpose of making necessary changes (including the new license requirements issued in 2019). This approach ensured that the findings of the latest study could be compared with the results of previous analyses. It also assured that the analysis could be used as a data basis for a long-term examination of the programs broadcast by SRG SSR radio stations.

Results

The results of the SRG SSR radio program analysis 2020 show a **largely stable situation, or even a slightly positive trend regarding the program performance of SRF radio stations** – in comparison with the findings from 2017. For instance, the percentage of airtime devoted to information rose slightly for all six SRF radio stations compared with 2017: On average, **information** made up one-third of all SRF radio programs that were analyzed in 2020. Yet the percentage of information offered in the program of each individual station varied significantly – in 2020 as in 2017: In line with its broadcasting profile, the program of SRF 4 News consists almost entirely of information and includes no music at all. By contrast, SRF Virus, a station aimed at young people, primarily broadcasts music, and only 10 percent of its program is devoted to information (figure 1).

Figure 1: Program structure
 Basis: Total airtime, random sample 2020, Mon.-Sun. 5 a.m. to midnight



All analyzed SRF radio stations covered a wide range of issues in their informative contents – in spite of their somewhat different broadcasting profiles and the focal points that arose from them. Coverage concentrated particularly on four areas that are especially relevant to the SRG SSR broadcasting license: politics, business, society and culture. The **thematic diversity** offered by the programs of the broadcasting family declined slightly since 2017. By contrast, the **diversity of journalistic formats** rose somewhat. In particular, SRF 2 Kultur and SRF 4 News packaged their content in a wide range of sophisticated journalistic formats, such as on-site reporting and feature stories.

A range of views regarding the issues or events being covered was included relatively frequently in journalistic formats in which such contextualization could potentially be provided (that is, not in news or brief reports): About one-fifth of these formats included different perspectives or opinions. Various different views also became visible (and audible) in the radio programs as the result of different actors/contributors being included in the informative content. Swiss actors in the widest range of areas – from politics and culture to sports – were included in the informative content of all six SRF radio stations. In a reflection of each station's broadcasting profile, SRF 4 News reported much more frequently on political actors, SRF 2 Kultur on cultural actors and SRF 1 on social actors than the remaining stations did. As a whole, SRF radio stations presented a comparable degree of **diversity of actors** as they did three years earlier.

The broadcasting license also requires SRG SSR radio stations to ensure that **genders are appropriately represented** in their programs. In 2020, the percentage of male voices heard on the air during the spoken segments of SRF radio programs was larger (and occasionally much larger) than female voices. This was particularly the case at SRF Virus: Male voices were heard on three-fourths of the airtime during the spoken segments on this station.

A positive conclusion can be drawn about the degree of **source transparency** – a key indicator of journalistic professionalism – offered by the stations. On average, four-fifths of their informative content identified the sources of information or even broadcast sound bites from the source. The SRF stations were equally transparent about their access to sources, that is, information about the specific way that they gained access to the transmitted information. The stations increased the level of their source transparency compared with 2017. This parameter rose back to the level last measured in 2014.

Significant changes were found to have occurred in the **geographic focus** of reporting by German-speaking SRG radio stations since 2017. In 2020, SRF radio stations continued to intensely report on events happening abroad as well as on issues of international relevance. But they devoted significantly less airtime to these topics compared with 2017. Instead, they allocated somewhat more airtime to events and issues related to French- and Italian-speaking Switzerland (Romandy and Ticino) than they did in 2017. Such a trend was also observed regarding information with a national or (language) regional impact. Thus, for 2020, a minor trend in which the stations shifted their focus from international issues to national

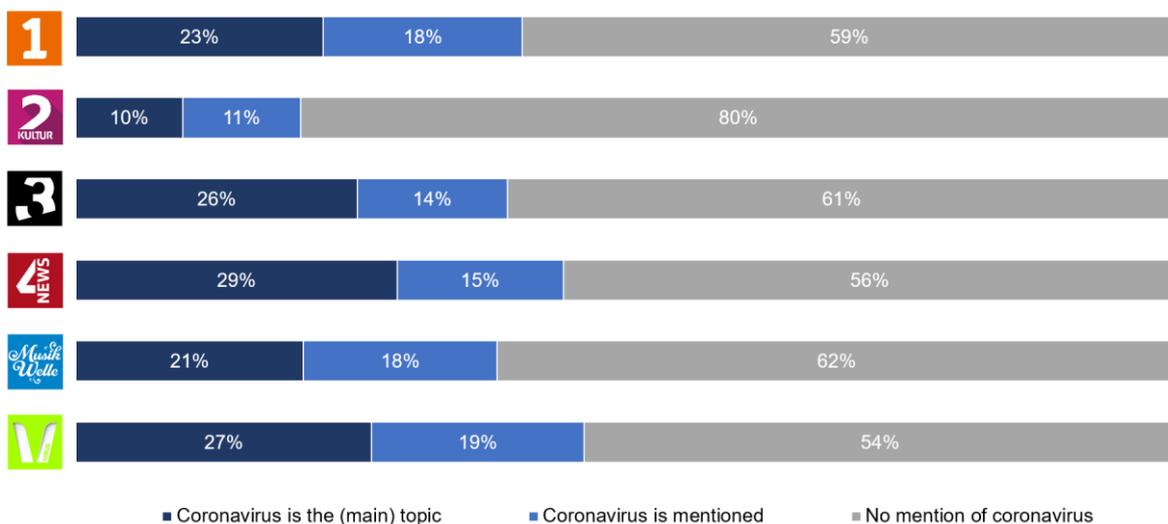
and (language) regional matters was observed. These changes could possibly be related to the special situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic: Listeners suddenly had a special interest in information about their own country and (language) region.

During 2020, the SRF radio stations intensively reported on and discussed about the mega-topic of the year: the **pandemic** and its impact on Switzerland and the international community. Only SRF 2 Kultur didn't follow that pattern: A total of 80% of its informative contents had nothing to do with the coronavirus crisis. SRF 4 News provided the most extensive coverage of the pandemic and its impact. The crisis was the main topic or sub-topic in nearly one-third of the station's reporting. The crisis was also frequently mentioned in SRF programs even if COVID-19 was not the topic of the reporting (figure 2).

Figure 2: Coronavirus crisis – focus of reporting

Basis: Duration of informative content, random sample 2020, Mon.-Sun. 5 a.m.-midnight

Filter: «Journalistic format» excluding headlines, ambience/effects/excerpts and music/video/archives sound bites



The stations devoted a significant amount of their programs to **Swiss musicians** both as part of their news coverage and their music program. Music performed by Swiss artists made up roughly one-third of the daily program of the SRF radio stations in 2020 – slightly higher than in 2017.