



Assessment of TV Program “Our Express”

2008, Tbilisi

Report

The goal of focus group meetings was to hear the comments by young people about the weekly TV show “Our Express”, gather information and specify the details. 29 teenagers aged 12-18 took part in the focus group meetings. Two groups were formed from 12-15 year olds and two groups were formed from 15-18 year olds. The following report is divided into two parts according to these age groups.

Results of focus group meetings held among 12-15 year old teenagers

When describing their ordinary day most teenagers said they usually woke up at 8 a.m. on weekdays. Some participants finish school at 2 p.m. some of them finish later at about 4-5 p.m. After that they prepare lessons, go to sports, music classes etc. Most participants have free time after 6-7 p.m. which most of them spend watching TV and playing/working on computer. Some of them prefer spending time with their friends, a smaller portion of teenagers like to spend their free time reading. Some teenagers prefer to spend their free time on their hobbies like paintball, painting, biking etc.

Mainly the group members watch TV stations “Imedi”, “Rustavi 2”, Georgian Public Broadcasting; relatively small number of the participants watch TV stations “Sakartvelo” and “Mze”. From foreign TV channels the teenagers prefer to watch Jetix, Premiere, Movie Hits, Discovery and Animal Planet.

The teenagers mainly prefer watching comedy programs like “Club Show”, “Shua Kalakshi”, “Our Office”. They also watch movies on TV, the significant part of the teenagers like educational programs, programs about animals and programs dedicated to military topics. Many teenagers expressed their interest in watching modern youth programs such as “Wall” and “Our Express”. News programs are less popular among them; however, some participants do watch them. Also a very small portion of the participants watch cartoons; the talk-shows such as “Taboo” are also not very popular among them, only two teenagers expressed any interest in that program.

The group participants say their friends really like comedy shows as well as TV series such as “Lost”, “Prison Break” etc. News programs are less popular; however, the participants noted that during the Georgian-Russian war their friends were watching news programs most of the time. Several participants said their friends like “Our Express” and after each program they discuss the contents among each other; they also mentioned quiz shows in that context.

The first time that most participants watched that program was by accident when surfing through the channels. Some of them found the program on the internet by accident, some were told about the program by their friends or parents.

As for the frequency that “Our Express” is watched by the participants, none of them watch it regularly. Most of them have watched the program 2 or 3 times, some of them watched it more times. Some of them don’t know when the program is aired. They watch it when they accidentally “stumble upon” it while surfing the channels. One participant watches the program more frequently than others; he says he watches at least one program out of three. Most of that teenager’s friends seldom watch the program.

Most participants say the program left positive impression on them. They say the program is fun and one doesn't get bored watching it.

As for the contents of the program, the participants do like it. Most teenagers enjoy the stories about extreme sports, rockers etc. They also mentioned the stories about graffiti made with the use of sprayers, the rally held in Armenia, the kid who lost and then found his dad. They also noted the camera work and said the cameramen got really good shots. All the participants like the fact that the stories are about their peers.

Some participants noted that the program needed advertisement; some promos should be made about the contents of the future episode of the program. They also made comments about the duration of the program; the participants believe the program is too short. Some participants believe that the stories don't contain full information about this or that topic. The participants also said the program could invite the guests to studio where they'd discuss the topics of each program. They also believe it would be beneficial if the viewers could send text messages to the program authors where they'd indicate what topics they'd like to be discussed in the next episode. The group members would like to have the opportunity of attending the studio meetings.

The title of the program "Our Express" is acceptable for about half of the participants; some of them believe the title doesn't correspond to the contents of the program.

As for the anchor the absolute majority of the participants like the fact that the anchor is their peer. Most of them had no problems with the anchor's clothing style; however, some teenagers said they'd like to see more modern clothes on the anchor. All the participants like the style with which the anchor leads the program.

Most participants believe that the main goal of the program is to provide the teenagers with information about the lives of their peers; some participants think the program is educational and it's directed at developing the judgment skills among teenagers. Some participants believe "Our Express" was created "in order to let us know how the teenagers have fun in other countries". Only two participants believe that the goal of the program is to make Georgian, Azerbaijani and Armenian teenagers closer to each other.

Most participants think the program manages to achieve its goals; however, some kids have a different opinion citing the low rating of the program.

Most participants from both groups note that before watching the program they had very little information about their Armenian and Azerbaijani peers. Some of them had some idea about the life of Tbilisi-based Armenians; some of them had some information from TV.

The group participants are interested in stories produced in Armenia and Azerbaijan; however, many of them would like to have stories from other countries as well. They are interested how the teenagers live in Armenia and Azerbaijan, how they study or spend their free time. For example they'd like to see stories about the Armenian and Azerbaijani teenagers who like paintball, they wonder what kinds of sports are popular in those states, what kind of cuisine they have; they're also interested in rituals and religious holidays of those countries. Some teenagers would like to see stories about their peers who made some scientific inventions. Several participants said they'd like to see stories about the political and military situation in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

In case foreigners also watched “Our Express”, the focus group participants would like to see the following stories about Georgia in the program:

- Stories about Georgian history
- The situation Georgia is in after the conflict
- General information about the current state of affairs in Georgia

Teenagers say they’re interested in the following topics:

- Painting
- Art in general
- Patriotic topics
- How the kids spend free time in Georgia
- Georgian kings and battles
- Stories about the people who go against Georgian stereotypes

When asked where they would go with a video camera and what they would film, the group members voiced the following opinions:

- Historic sites in Georgia
- Abkhazian nature
- Georgian resorts
- African jungles
- Historic sites, pyramids, wonders of the world
- Bottom of the Caribbean Sea (with a waterproof camera)
- Stories about German and Dutch kids
- Ana Franck Museum
- London landmarks
- Roman, Italian historic sites
- Mariah Carey in her new New-York home
- Svaneti, Racha, Venice and Rio-de-Janeiro landmarks

Most participants note that their negative attitude towards Armenians and Azerbaijanis has changed and become neutral. Some of them say it’s because of the program, but some of them say it’s just because they have grown up. Initially about half of the participants had quite negative views about Azerbaijan and Armenia, the reasons cited were “Azerbaijan had appropriated Georgian territories”, “some Armenian journalist said Armenians were the ancestors of Georgians” etc. At the same time most of them note that the ethnic background isn’t important when evaluating various individuals. About half of the participants say they have friends who have negative views about those two nations and they believe if their friends watched “Our Express” they could change their views.

The participants believe that the following steps should be taken in order to improve the quality of the program:

- The program should be aired by a popular TV channel
- It should have more advertisement
- A studio should be added where guests would be invited
- The duration should be increased

- Scientific topics should be added
- Topics about animals and plants should be added
- More nations should be covered
- The topics should become more diverse
- The topics should be selected through text messages

When describing the program the participants used the following adjectives:

- Interesting
- Cool
- Fine
- Entertaining
- Educational
- Merry

All the participants said they'd advise others to watch the program. They'd advise the people who don't like Armenians and Azerbaijanis, people who are interested in other nations as well as bored and "uneducated" people to watch "Our Express".

When asked how they'd convince others to watch the program they said they'd tell them the contents of some story or show them the beginning of "Our Express". They'd also tell them the program was interesting and fun.

Most participants would like to have the program aired on Saturday night and repeated on Sunday morning. Some of them prefer the weekend midday hours. Some participants wished the program was aired on weekdays in the evening hours.

Results of focus group meetings held among 15-18 year old teenagers

For most members of the groups the morning starts at about 8 a.m. They spend the first half of the day in school till about 1-3 p.m. After school they start preparing lessons or go to sports. From after about 6 p.m. they have free time which they spend in front of TV or computer.

Most participants start to watch TV in the evening hours (from about 6-7 p.m.) during the school period. On weekends they watch TV in different hours of the day.

The teenagers mainly watch music and sports channels. From Georgian TV channels they prefer "Imedi", "Rustavi 2" and "Mze". They also noted that the name of TV channel isn't that important for them, the most important thing is to watch an interesting program.

As for TV programs most group members prefer watching the following shows: "Taboo" and "Profile". Their interest towards talk-shows, educational and sports programs needs to be noted.

When asked what their friends watched most of the time most participants said they didn't know; however, they assume their friends mainly watched music and sports programs.

It turned out that all the participants of the group watched “Our Express” for the first time by accident. When describing their impressions concerning the show the participants used the following definitions:

- It was interesting
- I liked it
- Not bad
- It needs some improvement

Most participants remain casual viewers of “Our Express” show.

Most of their friends don’t watch “Our Express” because they don’t know that such a show exists.

The group participants like “Our Express” because it’s a youth program about foreign teenagers. The absolute majority of the group members like the fact that the program is anchored by their peers.

Most of all they remembered and liked the following stories from the show:

- Story about graffiti
- Story about tree jumping
- Story about skateboarding
- Story about orphans aired on New Year’s Eve
- Story about punks
- Story about two guys making strange items with eggs and bread

The group members offered us to make the following changes in the program:

- The background should be more simple
- The anchor must become merrier and freer, he or she should be sitting on stairs, swings or strange chair etc. he or she should wear more original clothes.
- Background music should be used during the whole program
- Different stories should have different anchors
- Stories about well-known people and vocalists of music bands should be made
- Different music bands should be introduced: who they were, what kind of music they make etc.
- More national traits should be added to the program
- Studio should be bigger
- Debates should be introduced in the program
- A teenager should be invited to comment about various stories
- Two anchors should simultaneously anchor the program in a lively and free manner
- Stories about less known Georgian bands should be produced
- Stories about Georgian traditions should be produced
- Locals should produce stories about their regions and then send them to Tbilisi
- Program should review very old Georgian movies
- A story about Picasso paintings exhibition planned in Signaghi should be produced
- The program should receive text messages and air them.

The age of anchors is acceptable for all members of the group.

The group members have a vague idea on the goals of the program. They think the show is produced in order to show the teenagers what's going on in modern life.

Some participants have no information about young Armenians or Azerbaijanis or they have information only about Armenians and Azerbaijanis living in Georgia. They have very scarce information about their Armenian and Azerbaijani peers living in their respective countries. Most participants are interested in the lives of their Armenian and Azerbaijani peers: they want to know how they spend their days, what kind of clothes they wear, what music they listen to, how they spend their free time, how they differ from their Georgian peers, what their hobbies, interests are etc.

The group members would be interested in the stories about historic sites, Georgian nature, its different regions, traditions and customs.

When asked where they would go with a video camera and what they would film, the group members voiced the following options (the answers are given in the first person):

- “I’d film a story about our religion. I’d deepen the teenagers’ knowledge in that sphere. I’d make a story about our traditions, customs, culture, ancestors etc.”
- “I’d make a story about modern kids and school. What kind of education there is, how the principals manage the schools”.
- “I’d film the nature of Georgia”
- “There is a village called Monasteri, it’s very beautiful and I’d make a story about it”
- “I’d make a story describing how Georgians differ from Azerbaijanis and Armenians”.
- “There’s a church built on a rock, which is visited by Georgians and Ossetians albeit on different days, I’d make a story about it”
- “I’d make a story about street pollution, I’d film kids throwing things in the street and with that story I’d tell the viewers that this is unacceptable”.
- “I’d make a story about animals, how they mistreat stray dogs”.
- “I’d make a story about extreme sports, skiing, bikers etc.”.
- “I’d make a story about the August events, I’d film the kids that are forced to be here, how they adapted to new schools, how they went through the war, I’d learn their adventures”.
- “Story about “old teenagers” would be interesting, I’d like to know what our parents and older generation did when they were our age”.
- “I’ve got a friend working in the patrol police, so I’d make a story about him”.
- “I’d film monasteries and show how people live there”.
- “I’d make a story about Georgian regions”
- “I’d make stories about people who have been mistreated by life and other people”.

Most group members watch sports and music channels, various comedy shows. TV show titled “Profile” is the most popular one among them; the participants are interested in that program because “it’s about the lives of ordinary people”. Besides, they like TV program “Taboo”, because topics that are taboo in society are openly discussed in that show.

The group members note that if a program is interesting, educational, entertaining then they’d

watch it by all means.

When describing “Our Express” to other people the group members would use the following phrases:

- It’s a good program
- That program is about kids of our age, it’s about our problems and lives
- It’s interesting
- It’s entertaining

As far as the title of the program is concerned the participants’ opinions were divided: some of them think the title is acceptable, but another part of the group members believe that the show should have a more “teenager-like” and interesting name.

As for interest towards Azerbaijan and Armenia and the teenagers living there, some participants note that their interest towards those countries increased and their attitudes have changed and become more positive. Some of them said their attitudes haven’t changed at all. It’s noteworthy that the attitudes were changed in the teenagers who used to have negative views about Armenians and Azerbaijanis; the rest of them had neutral or positive attitude towards Armenians and Azerbaijanis before.

Most group members don’t have friends that have negative attitudes towards Armenians and Azerbaijanis; however, the small percentage of participants who know such people say that to their minds even if those people watched “Our Express” their views wouldn’t change much.

The general tendency has been revealed – the youngsters are not well informed about “Our Express”, correspondingly almost all members of the group said that promos of “Our Express” should be aired much more frequently. The promos should include information about the contents of the future episode.

The group members voiced the following opinions about the anchor and the style of the show:

- The anchors’ clothing should be more modern
- Each story should be discussed after it’s aired
- The viewers should be able to express their opinions through text messages
- Fun stories should be produced
- The program should be more original
- The anchor should conduct the show in a more lively manner
- The program should be better advertised
- An action could be conducted in order to promote the show
- The program should be aired before a popular program so that people would watch “Our Express” as well
- The program should be moved to another TV channel
- The program should include more stories about Georgian regions, more national traits should be added to the show
- The studio should be bigger

The group members described the show with the following words:

- It's interesting
- It's cool
- It's necessary
- It's for kids of our age
- It's teenager oriented
- It's bleak
- It's boring
- It's for us

The group members think they'd recommend the program to interesting and curious people. They believe the program could be interesting for both young and older people.

For the majority of group members the best time for watching the show is weekend starting from about 6-7 p.m. Most participants would like to have the program aired on Saturday evening and then repeated on Sunday morning.

For a minority of the group members evening hours of Friday was also acceptable.