
Submitted by Gareth Andrew James to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English, January 2011.

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Abstract

The thesis offers a revised institutional history of US cable network Home Box Office that expands on its under-examined identity as a monthly subscriber service from 1972 to 1994. This is used to better explain extensive discussions of HBO’s rebranding from 1995 to 2007 around high-quality original content and experimentation with new media platforms. The first half of the thesis particularly expands on HBO’s origins and early identity as part of publisher Time Inc. from 1972 to 1988, before examining how this affected the network’s programming strategies as part of global conglomerate Time Warner from 1989 to 1994. Within this, evidence of ongoing processes for aggregating subscribers, or packaging multiple entertainment attractions around stable production cycles, are identified as defining HBO’s promotion of general monthly value over rivals.

Arguing that these specific exhibition and production strategies are glossed over in existing HBO scholarship as a result of an over-valuing of post-1995 examples of ‘quality’ television, their ongoing importance to the network’s contemporary management of its brand across media platforms is mapped over distinctions from rivals to 2007. Suggesting much longer institutional continuities and influences for understanding HBO’s success, the thesis outlines the development and influence of these strategies through a critical chronology of the network’s history. In doing so, the thesis aligns with trends for rigorous media histories that consider the origins, long-term precedent and cyclical institutional strategies that govern contemporary industry practices.
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Acknowledgements

Bringing the thesis to completion has been a long and difficult process, and there are many people to thank. The Arts and Humanities Research Council, for funding the project in its second and third year, provided invaluable support for allowing me to keep on schedule (and financially stable). Many thanks must also go to my supervisor Dr. James Lyons, for his guidance and patience across the three years, while advice from Professor Steve Neale on plans during the course of writing-up also proved invaluable for the final push.

Fellow PhD colleagues within the department, including Andrew Nelson, Lisa Stead, Jennifer Barnes, Nick Hall and Lee Durbin also provided sounding boards and sympathy during the process, mostly for putting up with my obsessing over details. Most of all I’d like to thank my family, brothers David and Ben, sisters Rhiannon and Nia, my grandparents and my parents Peter and Deborah for motivating me to keep on with the thesis, even when it seemed that it would never be finished.