

TELEVISION BROADCASTS  
FOR CONSUMERS  
IN THE COMMUNITY COUNTRIES

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Special edition

Various numbers of "Industry and Society" have included brief descriptions of consumer programmes broadcast on the various television channels of the member countries of the Community: Germany (No 21/74), Belgium (Nos 17/74 and 18/74), Denmark (No 20/74), France (No 27/74), the United Kingdom (No 26/74), Ireland (No 23/74), Italy (No 31/74) and the Netherlands No (19/74).

These articles were written by and under the responsibility of the television producers concerned.

At the request of many readers these various articles are reprinted in this special edition.

Consumer information and protection programmes are produced in much the same way by the television services of the various Community countries, but the importance attached to them varies considerably. There is also a wide difference in the length of the programmes from one country to another and in the point in time when the television services first realized the need for consumer information and protection.

The first programmes for consumers were produced in Denmark in 1954 and were intended mainly for housewives rather than consumers in general. The other television services came into the field much later: French television, for example, did not produce its first consumer programme, "téléx-consommateurs", until 1961; in 1971 one of the German channels began broadcasting its programme "Ratgeber" which was intended solely for consumers (admittedly consumers had been informed on various aspects of the economy for a long time before then, but only in a very general manner); French-speaking Belgian television began its first consumer

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Further information is available from the Commission's press and information offices in the countries listed on the inside cover.

*The information published in this bulletin covers the European Communities' activities in the fields of industrial development, protection of the environment and consumer welfare. It is therefore not limited to recording Commission decisions or opinions.*

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programme, the "magazine des consommateurs" in 1966; and Dutch-speaking Belgian television did not start producing specifically consumer-orientated films until April 1973. Previously, consumer affairs had been partially dealt with in the course of different programmes (women's programmes, newscasts, etc.).

It is noticeable that in all the countries (excepting Italy, where specifically consumer-orientated programmes were suppressed in 1973 as a result of the controversy they aroused) growing importance is being attached to these matters as may be seen in longer programmes and specific content. Whereas the first broadcasts on consumer affairs were incorporated into the wider framework of programmes on economic matters or women's and news magazines, programmes dealing specifically with consumer problems have now been introduced. Danish television has gone furthest in its ideas of what a specifically consumer-orientated programme should deal with: for example, it considers the scope of these programmes to include examination of the decision-making process involved at management level in a firm before launching a new product and determining its price.

The broadcasting time given to these programmes and the level of participation by people whose interests are involved show clearly the varying degrees of importance attached to these questions in the various countries. Whereas countries such as France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy and Ireland devote less than one hour of broadcasting time per month specifically to consumer affairs, Denmark, Germany and the United Kingdom are well above this figure.

One of the German channels is particularly worthy of mention for its filmed reports giving financial, legal and technical advice to consumers.

Some countries attach a great deal of importance to consumer participation in the programmes. This is particularly true of Danish television and also applies to the Dutch-speaking Belgian service and the United Kingdom networks, where representatives from consumer organizations are invited from time to time to appear on the programmes and express their views. In some cases consumers participate directly in the programmes, for instance, putting questions to experts appearing therein.

## WHAT TELEVISION DOES TO HELP THE CONSUMER IN GERMANY

In order to encourage the flow of information within the Community, we have asked various television programme producers to tell us briefly what each television network broadcasting in the Community does to help consumers.

The text below was sent to us by the Bavarian network of the ARD (Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlichrechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland).

x<sup>x</sup>  
x x

Since their establishment the associated television networks forming the ARD have included programmes in their transmissions, at both national and regional level, devoted to consumer protection. A wide range of transmissions, from programmes on a large-scale to magazines, is devoted to consumer information. Programmes addressed specifically to the consumer have also recently been instituted. These take the form of film sequences, offering legal, financial and technical advice.

A financial adviser has the special task of aiding savers, tenants, pensioners and taxpayers, to economise. Stress is laid on the practical aspect of the information provided and the programmes invite consumers to be more selective when buying. In the "teletests" the adviser describes the results of tests carried out by the "Warentest" foundation.

A technical adviser informs the consumer as to the use and potential hazards of products, and their usefulness or irrelevance. The consumer's critical sense is developed and extended to include environmental protection.

The legal adviser informs the consumer of his rights. He explains the wording and limits of text, which is favourable or unfavourable to the consumer, and warns him against unfair practices.

Two advisers on health and education also deal with these problems from the angle of consumer protection.

According to a poll carried out by a public opinion research institute, the advisers' programmes have been favourably received by consumers and attract an audience comparable to those of more than one successful variety show. In 1973 the producers were awarded the German television "Bambi" prize by the review "Bild und Funk". The gold medal of the International Festival of Films for Consumers as awarded, also, to the legal adviser.

Programmes are televised on the national network every Sunday between 10.45 and 11.30 a.m. and are repeated the following week on the third channel of the regional network.

"Reisemagazin" is designed for tourists and holidaymakers, and is intended to give viewers the ability to judge. Its sub-title "Information and Advice" clearly indicates that the programme provides practical advice and warnings, as well as the results of tests.

In addition to programmes in the "Ratgeber" series, which have been televised since January 1971, the economic review "Der Markt" has for a long time helped to inform the consumer of the many economic "facts of life" presented on each programme in the form

of films, animated cartoons, interviews and commentaries. Studios at Baden-Baden, Hamburg, Cologne, Munich and Saarbrücken take it in turns to televise this programme on Saturdays at 4.45 p.m.

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The ARD's 10 regional studios transmit their own programmes between 6 and 8 p.m. These consist of news magazines, consumer flashes and variety shows. The subjects dealt with are extremely varied: local politics, and economic, social, scientific, technical, cultural and sports affairs that concern the region. Consumer problems are dealt with in different ways, and as they relate to every day life in the region. The length of these consumer programmes varies, depending on topical requirements.

The Bavarian regional network, which has a potential viewing audience of 10 million, produces a monthly magazine for consumers lasting some 20 minutes. This programme is heard by 30% of the audience, even when it has to compete with a star film presented on another channel. Bavarian television also produces two other consumer information programmes "Ferien und Freizeit" and "Rückspiegel", each lasting approximately 20 minutes.

# WHAT TELEVISION DOES TO HELP THE CONSUMER IN BELGIUM

(French language channel, RTB)

In order to encourage the flow of mutual information within the Community, we have asked various television programme producers to tell us briefly what each television network broadcasting within the Community does to help the consumer.

The following article was sent to us by the Belgian French language television channel (RTB).

Programmes whose aim is to inform and protect the consumer have been broadcast by RTB since 1966. Since that date, and almost without a break, the following programmes, "Le magazine des consommateurs" (Consumers' Journal, 1966 to 1969), "Situation" (State of Affairs, 1969 to 1973), and "Si vous saviez!" (If Only You Knew, since 1973), have been put out.

All these programmes were produced by the Brussels studio and broadcast on the national chain. For some months now, programmes produced by the RTB's Liège studio and designed for consumers have been added to this range, particularly the "Conseils consommateurs" (Consumers' Councils).

## 1. "Si vous saviez!"

### Technical data

Production: RTB Brussels. Enquiries and Reports Service.  
20 minutes per fortnight, on Tuesdays at 20.15 hours (immediately after the television news).

Audience: 35 to 50% of the "potential" public (1% = 22 500 persons)  
Produced on black and white, Sepmag, 16 mm film.

Subjects covered 1973-74

- Consumer associations in Belgium (11 September)
- Dental care and false teeth (25 September)
- Telephones (9 October)
- Supply of heating fuels (23 October)
- Safety belts and safety seats for children (6 November)
- Poultry meat
- Is justice applied equally to all? (11 December)
- Automatic credit and cheque guarantee cards (18 December)
- Cable TV (8 January)
- Life assurance (22 January)
- Weighing scales (5 February)
- Safety windscreens for cars (19 February)
- Deceptive packaging (19 March)
- The poison antidote centre (2 April)
- Medicines (16 and 30 April).

2. "Situation 73-74"

Among the other productions of the Enquiries and Reports Service, mention should be made of some other broadcasts which are to be classed in this "Consumer Information" category. These are three numbers of the monthly social and economic information programme, "Situation":

- "Marché, oui ... commun, non" i.e. "It's a market, but not a common one", on 3 October 1973. (This was a comparison of prices in the six countries of the Common Market in 1972 and



was produced in collaboration with Vara Televisie (Hilversum) and ZWF (Baden-Baden);

- Distribution in Belgium: small businesses or supermarkets? on 6 February 1974;
- The oil crisis and supply difficulties for petroleum products, on 20 March 1974.

The January 1974 number of the quarterly "Tout va bien?!" dealt with the shortages of some major consumer products as a result of the energy crisis and the rise in prices.

### 3. "Conseils consommateurs"

#### Technical data

Production: RTB Liège

Started in January 1974, 1 to 2 minutes, three times a week, just before the television news.

Audience: considering the brevity of the programme, difficult to be precise but probably between 30 and 40% (between the "feuilleton" and the television news).

Produced on black and white, Sepmag, 16 mm film.

#### Subjects covered

- One-way packaging
- Door-to-door selling
- Deep-freeze products
- Cheque guarantee cards
- The save energy campaign
- Credit and door-to-door sales techniques

- Insurance
- Dietetic foods
- The quality of beer.

Finally, there is the TVF women's journal, also produced by the RTB Liège studio, which sometimes produces programmes focused on consumption:

- Children and publicity, 15 October 1973
- Stop giving poisonous presents! 12 November 1973
- Medicines 19 November 1973
- Sales methods in the supermarkets, 4 February 1974
- Apartments for renting at the Belgian coast, 4 March 1974
- A draft law on misleading publicity, 8 April 1974
- Colouring substances, 15 April 1974.

WHAT TELEVISION DOES TO HELP THE CONSUMER IN BELGIUM

(Dutch language channel, BRT)

In order to encourage the flow of mutual information within the Community, we have asked various television programme producers to tell us briefly what each television network broadcasting in the Community does to help consumers.

The following article was sent to us by the Belgian Dutch language television channel (BRT).

Since April 1973 BRT has been broadcasting programmes specifically devoted to consumers' problems. These programmes are broadcast every four weeks and last 40 to 45 minutes. They are devised by the "Artistic and educational broadcasts" service of the department of scientific programmes.

Well before the existence of this programme, "Wikken en wegen" (weighing the pros and cons), consumer problems were intermittently discussed on various BRT programmes, including the motorists' diary, womens' programmes, science programmes, current affairs programmes, etc.

BRT has set up a consultative committee to help it examine consumer problems. Specialists such as representatives of trade unions, consumer and other social organizations which are more or less directly interested in these problems are members of this committee. At the monthly meetings, which are attended by those in charge of the "consumer" programme, suggestions are put forward on matters

of current interest to the consumer. The experiment has shown that these meetings were particularly useful since they oblige the programme producers to compare their ideas with those of the specialists.

Up to the present the following subjects have been covered:

- Weight and quality of bread
- Price and quality of potatoes
- Inflation
- The "mini-consumer"
- The oil crisis
- Saving energy
- The safety of electrical installations
- Holidays in Majorca
- Fire extinguishers for cars.

Initially the magazine form of presentation was chosen, but it was abandoned in favour of broadcasts on major economic subjects (inflation or the oil crisis, for example). In the end, however, the producers decided to return the original formula which appears to meet with the approval of television viewers.

At present these programmes consist entirely of reportage sequences. From next September, these filmed enquiries will be accompanied by sequences recorded in the studio.

In spite of the unfavourable time of the slot (Saturday at 1900 hours) results of enquiries into audience percentages indicate that of a total of five million Belgians with Dutch mother tongue, about 500 000 viewers watch each broadcast in this programme series.

## WHAT TELEVISION DOES TO HELP THE CONSUMER IN DENMARK

To encourage the flow of mutual information within the Community, we have asked various television programme producers to tell us briefly what each television network broadcasting in the Community does to help consumers.

The following article sent to us by the Cultural Affairs Department of Danish Television is next in the series after Belgium (see IS Nos 17/74 and 18/74) and the Netherlands (see I&S No 19/74).

The first regular consumer information programmes on Danish Television started in 1954. At first they were addressed mainly to women in the home but were gradually changed, to appeal to consumers as a whole. In the past few years the subjects covered have moved from individual consumer problems to more general problems connected with public services.

In January 1965 the "Radio Council" set up a committee responsible for assessing the significance of radio and television as consumer information media. In May 1968 this committee submitted its report on "Consumer information on Danish radio" which was approved by the Radio Council. The report indicates the measures that should be taken to improve consumer information.

At the end of last year, the production team for consumer programmes was enlarged, and was allocated a larger budget. Currently, two programmes, lasting at least 30 minutes, are transmitted every month. In practice programmes are often longer, and an average of 75 minutes is devoted every month to problems of interest to the consumer.

The shape of programmes has also been changed, making them more journalistic than educational in character. The new approach means that programmes can be made more lively and discussion encouraged. Generally programmes go out live, to keep them topical.

It is difficult sometimes to draw the line between issues which should be dealt with on consumer programmes, and other wider themes. So far there has been no difficulty in dealing with subjects concerning consumer protection, or differentiating between them and other television programmes. Nowadays it seems quite normal for any item of more or less direct interest to the consumer to become the subject of a consumer programme. But some circles still find it difficult, for example, to accept that the decision-making processes of a large company may be of interest to the consumer.

Previous programmes aimed to help consumers choose between quality products differing in price. Nowadays details of decisions made at management level, before a company launches a product and fixes its price, also come within the consumer programme framework.

Those responsible feel it to be most important that consumers should participate in programmes, and that these should focus on everyday practical questions. Daily they receive letters from consumers, asking that particular subjects be dealt with, and directors do take account of these requests. But they would also like the consumer to be able to play a direct part. When discussion of a new Danish law on foodstuffs was programmed, for instance 20 consumers were asked to obtain, over the period of

one week, details of the artificial substances contained in products they had bought. In a live programme, they were then able to put questions directly to the Secretary of State for the Environment, representatives of the economy, and the public health authorities.

The prices of 12 specific items were similarly studied. Television viewers were asked to purchase these items and to send in details of the prices paid. The large amount of mail received made a close evaluation of prices possible. This approach aroused a great deal of interest among viewers who had taken part in producing the programme.

Some subjects have been spread over two successive programmes: the first providing basic information, concerning which during the second programme, viewers were invited to put questions. The audience was thus offered a chance of taking part in the second programme, by questioning the experts concerned. This method was also employed to expand one television programme by introducing a radiotelephone extension. Television viewers and listeners were then able to phone in and obtain direct replies to their questions.

## WHAT TELEVISION DOES TO HELP THE CONSUMER IN FRANCE

In order to encourage the flow of mutual information within the Community we have asked the various television programme producers to tell us briefly what each television network broadcasting in the Community does to help consumers.

The following article was sent to us by INC (l'Institut national de la consommation - national consumer institute).

1. In 1961 French television set up the "Telex Consommateur" (consumer telex) programme. Its aim was twofold:

to inform housewives on what products were available on the market at relatively low prices so that they could buy to the best advantage;

to stabilize the market by letting housewives know when large supplies of seasonal products became available.

However, it very soon became necessary to include an indication of quality when giving a price, and to define for each product such items as standards, packaging criteria, preservation, and taste. Hence a new programme was devised including:

national "flashes" broadcast from Tuesday to Saturday inclusive and lasting 90 seconds, which give the price changes for a list of products;

"Jeanne achète", a weekly animated cartoon series lasting three minutes. In 1968 this became "Consommateur -Information" (consumer information) and was redesigned to match the housewives' level of development and knowledge.

The Consumers' information and protection office, (Directorate-General for Internal Trade and Prices) was responsible for conducting these



programmes in collaboration with a national network of correspondents. Since informing and protecting the consumer is an INC responsibility, however, it was asked to take charge of "Consonmateur-Information" on 5 January 1970.

By agreement with the French Broadcasting authority, ORTF, and in return for a fee, French television permits INC to put out programmes and makes a producer available. These programmes go out daily at 1910 hours, except for Sundays, on the first channel and last three minutes on Mondays, and 90 seconds on other days. They are now called "50 millions de Consommateurs" (50 million Consumers) like the monthly magazine. INC also has a contract with a film company, to produce films.

When it took over responsibility for these information programmes the management of the Institute felt that the programme should change its style, but keep its flair. The programme was therefore slightly altered: a topic for the week is introduced on Mondays and discussed for three minutes. It is then taken up again, in 90 second spots, on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and sometimes Thursdays (depending on how important the subject is), to give a fuller picture. On Saturdays there is an animated cartoon which is a competition as well (viewers are asked an easy question and have until the end of the programme to find the answer), and the subject for the following week is announced. The remaining 90 second spots (Thursdays and Fridays) are either devoted to promoting the magazine, "50 millions de Consommateurs", or deal with a current topic.

A wide range of subjects is dealt with, selected in collaboration with consumer organizations belonging to the INC administrative Council. For instance, during the first quarter of 1974 the following topics were brought up: milk, holiday bookings, comparative tests by INC, soundproofing, labelling of food products, biological farming, evictions, oils.

2. Unlike television networks in most Community countries, French television has not yet devised any programmes, other than those by INC, that are specifically designed to inform the consumer. However, several programmes such as "vivre au présent", "les dossiers de l'écran", "aujourd'hui madame", and "actuel 2", do from time to time include such subjects and on these occasions INC representatives sometimes take part.

Finally a series of 90-second regional programmes called "Consommateur-Information" should be mentioned. These are financed by the Directorate-General for Internal Trade and Prices and produced by regional consumer associations, e.g. UROC (Unions Régionales d'Organisations de Consommateurs - union of regional consumer associations) and broadcast information on problems specific to a given region.

## WHAT TELEVISION DOES TO HELP CONSUMERS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

In order to encourage the flow of mutual information within the Community, we have asked the various television programme producers to tell us briefly what each television network broadcasting in the Community does to help consumers. It should be understood that these articles are the sole responsibility of their authors.

The following article was sent to us by "Response Consumer Communications", a British journalistic venture concerned with making consumer information more widely available in all the media. It is independent of any consumer, business or broadcasting organization.

Television broadcasting in the UK is carried on by the BBC which has two national networks financed by viewers' licence money (one of these has a small amount of opt-out regional programming) and also by the Independent Broadcasting Authority. The IBA grants licences to 15 companies to broadcast in 14 areas of the country and these companies finance themselves by selling about six minutes of each hour of their broadcasting time for advertisements. There must be no connection between advertising and programme content.

The BBC produces approximately 140 hours of programmes per week on its two channels and the 15 commercial companies average 156 hours. Of this time the BBC produces about 20 minutes of regular consumer programming weekly and three of the IBA companies originate an average weekly total of an hour. Depending on the area of the country in which you live you would be able to see either (on both BBC and IBA stations) three different regular programmes or only one report of about 15 minutes on BBC-1. In addition there are some hours of broadcasting on all three channels given over each week to documentaries

and magazine programme reports which investigate from a consumer viewpoint or which put forward that viewpoint. No UK consumer organization or group has a programme under its own control but most are invited (or actively seek) at some time to express their opinions or give the results of any research in the many news and current affairs programmes. These contributions are therefore under the control of the individual programme producers.

1. Regular programmes originated by the BBC

The BBC produces no regular programme solely devoted to consumer viewpoint. All television broadcasting of this type is presented within the context of other programmes or series (an eccentric exception to this will be noted later). The main BBC programmes to which a consumer might look for regular information are:

- (a) "Nationwide". This is a news magazine programme broadcast each weekday from 1800 hours for about 50 minutes. It is intended for family viewing. Each Thursday approximately 15 minutes of the show is devoted to a wide range of consumer matters. This is watched by roughly  $10\frac{1}{2}$  million viewers throughout the country. The producer of this consumer section of Nationwide regards its aim as 'informing consumers of their rights' and its successes are causing some shady firms to go out of business as a result of television publicity being able to express public concern to the politicians in such a way as to help cause an Act of Parliament to include a clause to ban re-pricing of goods on shop shelves and also getting the rights of caravan owners raised in a parliamentary debate. This production uses both studio material and specially shot film.

(b) "This is Your Right". (Produced in Manchester by Granada TV). Seen only in Lancashire this weekly programme aims to give advice on a wide range of social problems. It is seen on Mondays at 1825 hours, runs 15 minutes and reaches 800 000 homes. Each week it receives about 300 letters and 50 phone calls from viewers and the advice of its panel of experts is made available both on and off the screen. It is popular, its reputation is one of sympathy and it is especially geared to its community. Consumer queries and problems form more than half its content and concern. This is a studio based production.

(c) "Citizens' Rights". (Produced in Birmingham by ATV Network Ltd.). This weekly 30 minute programme aims to give clear information on citizens rights concerning a wide range of social matters. It is seen in the Midland region only on Monday at 2230 hours and repeated on Sunday at 0930 hours. We have not been supplied with audience figures. The usual format for this show is for a studio audience (aided by specially briefed reporters) to confront a panel of experts with their problems, but once a month a specially consumer oriented programme is mounted. This "Miscellany", as it is called, presents specific problems to a series of experts, each particularly skilled in relation to the query and not to the entire topic as in other programmes. Their advice and appraisals are usually summarized in the form of possible action based on the citizens rights. Once again this is a studio based production using no film.

- (b) "Pebble Mill at One". This general magazine programme is seen every weekday throughout the country at 1300 hours. It runs 45 minutes. During each week it will carry some items of specific consumer interest and its interviews and reports can be informative. Basically a studio programme, it does use film reports from time to time.
- (c) Once each week the 1 hour 15 minute long Afternoon Programme (starting at 1445 hours) includes a five minute report on food prices called "Shopping Basket".
- (d) "That's Life". This is the 'eccentric exception' referred to earlier and which is publicized by the BBC as 'a late-night collection of real-life jokes, dramas and problems'. This programme is usually broadcast on Saturday at 2305 hours and runs 40 minutes. Consumer problems are used as the basis for displays of humour and a particular sort of wit on the part of the performers. Arguably it has had a negative effect on the consumer cause.

## 2. Programmes originated by the IBA companies

- (a) "Good Afternoon". (Produced in London by Thames Television Ltd.). This is a general magazine programme broadcast every weekday at 1430 hours for about 25 minutes. Once every two weeks on a Friday the transmission is given over entirely to consumer matters. This is networked through half the IBA regions. In London alone it is seen by 1.7 million people. The two presenters cover a wide range of topics on film and pre-recorded videotape from 'best buys' in consumer durables to food additives, the effects of advertising, consumer education or loopholes in the Welfare State. It may deal with three topics per programme or only one. Its emphasis is on investigation and information. It does not trivialize its material.

## Conclusions

Broadcasting for consumers in the UK follows no overall policy or pattern. Little regular broadcasting is undertaken specifically from this viewpoint because it is only now being delineated and understood. There is however a range of casual programmes produced from this view, almost accidentally. It would seem that where specific consumer broadcasting is undertaken it attracts good audiences (especially considering the times of transmission) and often brings goodwill or prestige to the producing organization. No organization of consumer interests has access to regular air time other than through broadcasting organizations and their professional producers.

## WHAT TELEVISION DOES TO HELP THE CONSUMER IN IRELAND

In order to encourage the flow of mutual information within the Community, we have asked the various television programme producers to tell us briefly what each television network broadcasting in the Community does to help consumers. The following article was sent to us by Irish television.

Growing affluence is building up increasing public interest in consumer programmes on television. The consumer is pressurized into buying so much that he wants value for money. Who can blame him? Money is hard-earned and taxes are high and the increasing standard of living difficult to maintain.

At RTE, there has always been an awareness of the importance of the public interest. The national station caters for this interest, but it is not as simple as it sounds. Programmers have to be careful because the law of slander and of libel protects the bad as well as the good and the indifferent.

One of the handicaps in dealing with subjects of consumer interest on television is that too often programmes can deteriorate into mere public service announcements. Viewers give such programmes short shrift. A turn of the wrist and they are chasing other fare on different channels.

A regular consumer programme slot in a television schedule is not always the happiest way of dealing with such items. For one thing, it can be very difficult to keep up the standard of interest. At RTE, the programmers get around this particular



difficulty by avoiding the fixed slot. Thus major programmes, from time to time, as the necessity arises, deal with subjects of great public interest. The result is that a serious subject can be treated in a way that is entertainingly instructive at the best and attracts maximum reaction. Presented in a public services sort of way, such programmes would hardly have been noticed.

One of RTE's most popular offerings is "Tangents", a magazine type programme which goes out five times a week. At least once a fortnight it deals with goods people buy in shops and stores. It has covered all sorts of items of consumer interest from cosmetics to the quality of soup.

From time to time, the major current affairs programme, "7-Days", tackles subjects which are of great interest to the consumer field. So far it has examined, not only consumer durables such as cars, but also services, such as those provided by garages. One of its more celebrated programmes was a highly controversial inquiry into money-lending. Other programmes have examined the quality of housing and the service provided by the State for the people.

In common with the other television authorities in the Community, RTE keeps its activities in this field under extensive and careful review, always with an eye to improvement and expansion.

One cannot help thinking, however, that television can do more for the consumer on a Community-wide scale. There should be greater exchange of programmes of interest to consumers and one

dreams of a major programme, going out regularly, and linking all nine members of the European Economic Community, which will show how consumers in all the countries can learn from each other.

A programme such as this could go out quarterly. It would demonstrate the confidence of the Commission in the value of television as a means of uniting the disparate elements of the Common Market.

## WHAT TELEVISION DOES TO HELP THE CONSUMER IN ITALY

In order to encourage the flow of mutual information within the Community, we have asked the various television programme producers to tell us briefly what each television network broadcasting in the Community does to help consumers. The text below was sent to us by an Italian journalist specializing in consumer problems.

The first and only regular programme which the RAI (Italian radio and television) designed for the information of the Italian consumer was launched in the autumn of 1969 under the title "io compro, tu compri" (I buy, you buy). It went out every Thursday at 1300 hours and was very well received, being shown at a time which was particularly suitable for housewives.

The programme was broadcast over three periods: 1969/70, 1970/71 and 1971/72. During the latter period, the programme was shown during the evening. Subsequently, it was dropped for reasons not given officially, but, unofficially, this was said to be as a result of internal dissensions and the serious controversies which it aroused.

The programme almost always contained a live investigation on a problem of great topical interest with street interviews, followed by a discussion between specialists and members of the public, and supplemented by commentaries on the various topics. The style of the programme as a whole was more "sensational" than purely informational.

Intense controversies were set off by the investigations into calves bloated with water and fed on harmful feeding stuffs, into mineral waters and dietary products. These controversies were caused by the fact that the programme courageously denounced certain situations, but without offering any alternatives. For example, the broadcast on mineral waters had only one brand in mind in its denunciation. But since Italian television is not

allowed to mention the names of products the criticism appeared general - hence the serious difficulties encountered by the producers and the dropping of the programme.

Since 1973, Italian television no longer produces programmes devoted specifically to consumer problems, but the programme "A ... come agricoltura" (A ... for agriculture) which has been running for a number of years, being broadcast every Sunday at 12.30 hours, devotes a few minutes to publicising the criticisms voiced by consumers on anything "that just isn't good enough". However, these criticisms are limited to the one subject of the broadcast - agriculture.

WHAT TELEVISION DOES TO HELP CONSUMERS IN THE NETHERLANDS

(VARA Television Institute)

In order to encourage the flow of mutual information within the Community we have asked various television programme producers to tell us briefly what each television network broadcasting within the Community does to help the consumer.

The following article was sent to us by the Dutch Television Institute VARA.

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The programme "Koning Klant" (the customer is always right), produced by the Dutch Television Institute VARA, is broadcast every fourth Friday at about 2100 hours. It lasts about 50 minutes.

This series will be continued until the end of May. It will then be replaced by four bi-monthly programmes during June, July and August. The programme will be called "Watermerk" (pastimes in and on the water) and will keep the public informed of the state of cleanliness of the water, beaches and rivers, etc. Bacteriological tests will be carried out on samples taken at 40 different sites throughout the country in regions where water is an element in leisure activities. These tests will enable the public to decide whether it is safe to swim at a given spot or whether the water is sufficiently clean for fishing (e.g. where ammonia concentration in water is too high, fish disappear).

The "Koning Klant" series will resume in October and continue throughout the 1974/75 winter season. The programmes include comparative enquiries on goods, commentaries and reportages on misleading trading practices, and a

spot where television viewers take over and can put their complaints to a group of specialists on the rights of the customer. The creation of the programme is not subject to any limitations of freedom, as long as it stays within legal bounds. Any companies or products discussed are always explicitly named.