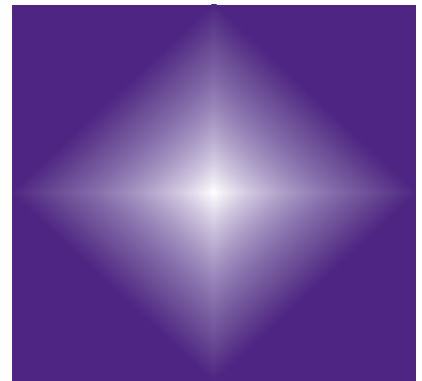




Children, Youth and Media Around the World:

An Overview of Trends & Issues



Report Compiled &
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.....

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United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted in 1989 and ratified by all but two countries, clearly spells out the rights to which all children everywhere are entitled. It contains four basic principles to guide political decision-making affecting the child: 1) the best interests of the child should be a primary consideration in such decisions; 2) opinions of children themselves should be heard; 3) child development, not only survival, should be ensured; 4) each child should be able to enjoy his/her rights, without discrimination.

Several of the CRC's key articles deal with the media and children. Article 17 spells out the important role of media to disseminate information that promotes the child's well-being in the broadest sense, giving states specific tasks:

States Parties recognize the important function performed by the mass media and shall ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health. To this end, States Parties shall:

(a) Encourage the mass media to disseminate information and material of social and cultural benefit to the child and in accordance with the spirit of Article 29;

(b) Encourage international cooperation in the production, exchange and dissemination of such information and material from a diversity of cultural, national and international sources;

(c) Encourage the production and dissemination of children's books;

(d) Encourage the mass media to have particular regard to the linguistic needs of the child who belongs to a minority group or who is indigenous;

(e) Encourage the development of appropriate guidelines for the protection of the child from information and material injurious to his or her well-being, bearing in mind the provisions of articles 13 and 18.

Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes the right of the children to express their own views in matters affecting them.

Article 13 enshrines the right to freedom of expression:

"(...) This right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice."

Article 17, together with Articles 12 and 13, should contribute not only to the development of well-informed citizens, but to young people's voices being heard more and more through the mass media. It sends a clear message that children should be both participants in and beneficiaries of the information revolution.

A look at the world media landscape for children and youth immediately presents two opposing themes: opportunities and risks. For example, globalization of media brings opportunities to broaden children's outlooks and provide more equal access to information, but it also threatens cultural identification and values. Technological advances bring the promise of new skills and greater youth participation in society, but also increase the risk of child exploitation and informational divides. There is an urgent need for societies to both protect youth and empower them to shape their own media environments, as spelled out by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and increasingly by media experts and educators around the globe.

This overview of trends and issues concerning young people and the media is based on a broad review of existing print and electronic sources, interviews with child media experts from different regions, and analysis of InterMedia's surveys in transitional and developing countries. The trends and issues highlighted here—from young people's media options and behavior, to the quality and influence of media aimed at them—all point to the need for more effective use of the vast positive potential of mass media and new technologies to advocate for, and enrich the lives of, children and young people worldwide.

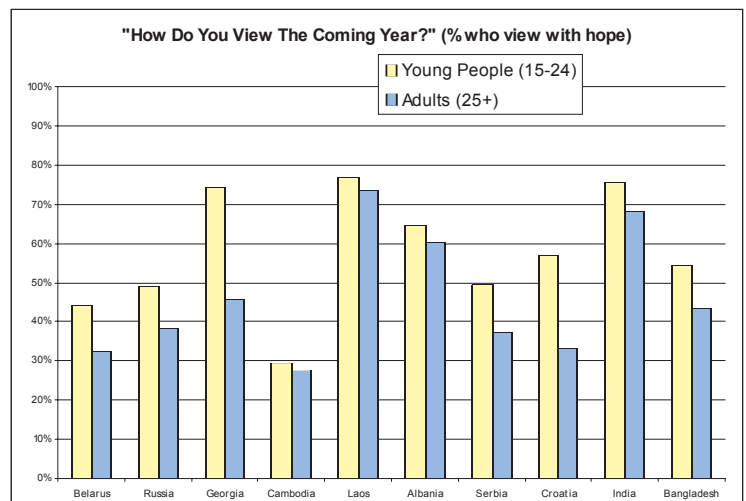
Children/Young People & Media in the World Today

Approximately one-third of the world's population is made up of 2 billion young people under 18. They make up half the population in the least developed nations; less than a quarter in the most industrialized ones. Their challenges range from basic survival to discrimination and exploitation. Moreover, there are myriad differences in cultures, traditions and values.

Nevertheless, children and youth everywhere share some universal traits. They are fundamentally more optimistic, more open and curious than their adult counterparts. Increasingly, children are enjoying unprecedented freedoms in many countries. Unfortunately, others confront growing health and social problems, ranging from deepening poverty and ethnic strife to substance abuse and sexually transmitted diseases, political turmoil and warfare.

Arguably, the proliferation and globalization of media are among the key factors that have shaped and defined the current generation of young people. In many countries, youth have access to a greater number of multi-media choices than ever before—conventional, satellite and cable TV channels; radio stations; newspapers and magazines; the internet and computer and video games. In addition, many are exposed to the same programs, the same characters and the same marketed spin-off products. Today there is greater availability of foreign programming and media, and less official censorship and control in many parts of the world. Information, email and images flow around the world faster and more freely than ever. Indeed, mass media are making the world smaller, and

culture and media are increasingly inextricable, especially for young people.



InterMedia Surveys 2002-3

Children's/Young People's Use of the Media

Television

Television is the dominant medium for young people—and adults—around the world. From the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, the number of television channels, household television sets and hours spent watching television more than doubled. There are now approximately 250 television sets per thousand inhabitants in the world—far more than the number of telephones. Satellite television reaches all continents, offering increasing numbers of channels targeting specific market segments, including young viewers. In the late 1990s, some 50 television channels directed specifically to children were launched, several of which have had enormous international success. However, this has

caused national television services in many areas to cut back their own production of children's programs.

As the graphs throughout this paper illustrate, weekly television viewing far surpasses radio listening in nearly every region, and dwarfs newspaper and internet use.

Average daily use of television among those school-age children around the world with access ranges from between 1.5 hours to more than four hours; many of these same children will rarely read a book. The prominence

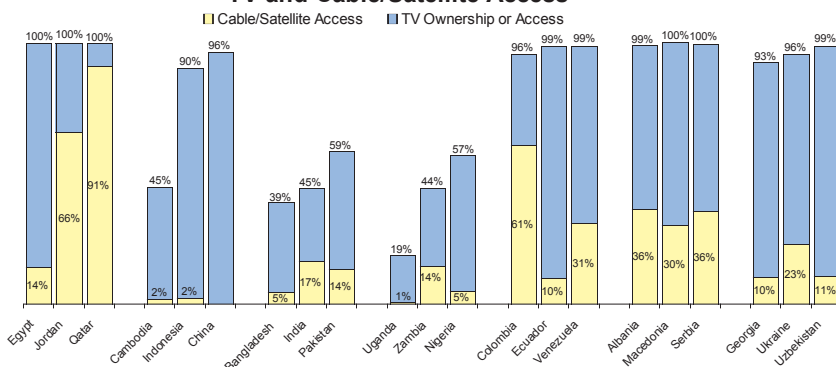
of television in young people's daily lives makes it one of their major information sources about the world around them.

The prevalence of television viewing among young people raises serious concerns about recent national and global trends in the television industry. The rampant consolidation of commercial media has meant the dominance of only a handful of large and powerful companies.

In industrialized countries, there have been recent outcries over rising levels of aggression, obesity, substance abuse, eating disorders and unsafe sexual behavior among youth, increasingly attributed to commercial media aimed at children and youth. In developing countries, where resources limit domestic productions, a majority of programs for children and youth are imported. Unfortunately, much of the content contains characters and messages that, at best, are simply not relevant to local cultures, and at worst convey violent images and mass marketing messages.

Plus, public broadcasters that have traditionally produced some of the best-quality children's media have had to reduce their youth programming in the face of funding cuts and growing competition from private channels. Clearly the case for media pluralism, i.e., access to media that effectively communicates and supplies relevant content, applies to children and young people as well.

TV and Cable/Satellite Access



InterMedia Surveys 2002–4



Radio

After television viewing, listening to the radio is the next most popular activity among children and young people worldwide. Actual listening rates among the young vary greatly, however, depending on the quality of national broadcasting and the availability of private alternatives. In many countries, there has been a boom among young people in radio listening over the past decade, the result of the emergence of dozens of private radio stations. This is particularly the case in Africa and the former Soviet bloc countries.

Most young people tune in to the radio primarily for music and entertainment.

However, some local radio stations have been very successful in attracting and informing more socially active segments of the population, young and old alike. A good example is the ANEM network of independent radio stations in the former Yugoslavia. It has become a major source of diverse information and entertainment for youth interested in social life.

In some countries, listening to the largely political fare of public international radio broadcasters—the BBC, VOA, Deutsche Welle and Radio France Internationale, among them—remains surprisingly high among young people. According to 2003 surveys, 16 percent of young people 15 to 19 listened to international radio in Albania, 12 percent in Bangladesh, 21 percent in Nigeria and 26 percent in urban Haiti. These relatively high listening rates testify to young people's interest in political and social events, and reflect the need for high-quality information, still lacking in many countries.

The Internet

The internet has been gaining popularity among young people, though at a much slower pace than television and radio. In spite of significant differences among the developed and developing world, the use of computers and the internet is rising steadily, fastest among young men.

That there are so many more computer-literate young people than adults indicates the younger

While they like seeing themselves in the media, nearly 90 percent of children's programming broadcast in Latin America comes from abroad.

—Patricia Arriaga, Canal Once, Mexico

generation's greater interest in and aptitude for technological advances. Around the world, young users are increasingly turning to the internet as a source of information, communication, socializing and entertainment. At the same time, web access is the source of the greatest divide, both between countries (internet use in industrialized countries

far outpaces use in the developing world), and within countries (internet use concentrated among wealthier and better-educated urban youth).

Nevertheless, even in countries where internet and computer use is low, young people actively seek access whenever possible, most often in internet cafes. Young people are enthusiastic about the internet because, more than any other medium, it helps them establish contact with the outside world and freely seek information. Perhaps it is 'free' access to information that also accounts for the higher levels of trust young people (and adults as well) often place in information on the web than in information from traditional media.

Nearly \$8 billion was spent on TV marketing to kids [in the U.S.] last year, a walloping \$3 billion on food ads alone. . .Most pushed high-calorie, low-nutrition brands to tykes and teens, a demo with a big sweet tooth and little awareness of health risks.

—Broadcasting and Cable Magazine, March 2004

But, the openness of the web and young people's apparent inability to distinguish clearly between content and advertising worries parents and child advocates alike.

Young people use the internet primarily for communicating (email and chat rooms); downloading

(computer games, software and music); and obtaining information (about education, entertainment, sports, "taboo" topics not addressed by adults, and news that may be censored for political motives).

Print Media

In contrast to the steady rise of other media, in many countries print media have experienced a setback from the role they once played. Several recent developments have served to further decrease the numbers of young readers of print media. In part, this is a result of the improved quantity and quality of information available from television and radio. In industrialized countries, young people are distracted

by numerous media choices and technologies. In poorer countries, few youth-oriented publications exist and those that do often have limited circulation or are too expensive for most youth to afford.

In the former Soviet bloc countries, youth press once played a fairly vibrant role and received significant government backing. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, however, youth press has largely disappeared and has not been replaced by a regular alternative forum for young people. Starting in the early 1990s, newspaper readership levels declined sharply throughout the region, especially in those countries experiencing the greatest economic difficulties. Many publications folded without government subsidies and could not attract sufficient advertisers or subscribers. Those that did survive had to raise their prices, making them unaffordable for many. Lastly, the distribution system was so badly weakened in many countries that it is now common for newspapers and magazines to arrive in rural areas weeks and months late, if at all.

The publications in strongest demand among young people are those that appeal to their specialized interests—comic books and popular specialized magazines on computers, fashion, sports, science, business and music. Many are high quality, with slick and appealing content that cater to young people's interests, yet are often too costly for the average young person (or adult).

In villages today there is practically no press, either for adults or for children and youth. The postal system does not work. Press that is three months old lies on the benches of provincial cities.

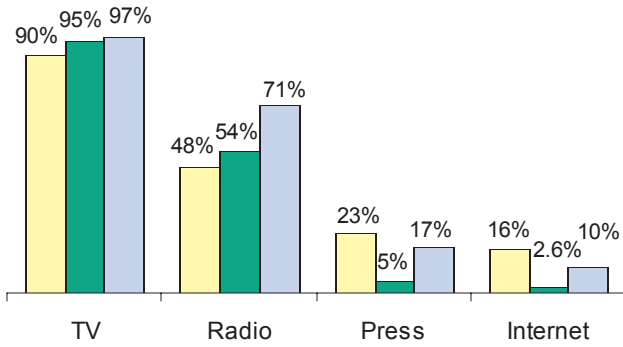
—Uzbek sociologist

The Informational Divide

In spite of improvements in quantity and quality of media for children and youth around the world over the last decade, there still exists an informational divide both between and within countries. The divide between better-educated, wealthier youth and less-educated, rural youth determines access to, use of and preferences for different types of media.

Balkans: Yesterday Reach, 15-19 Year-Olds

■ Macedonia ■ Albania ■ Serbia



InterMedia Surveys 2003; Macedonia n=172, Serbia n=115, Albania n=234 (Yesterday reach = percentage of population who listened/watched a certain medium yesterday.)



The informational divide takes many different forms. In developing countries, highest overall media use most often occurs among urban, affluent young people. But in some countries, television viewing rates are just as high in rural as in urban areas because of community viewing habits and because of the lack of alternative media.

In industrialized countries, in contrast, media use tends to be highest among lower socio-economic groups because television is inexpensive entertainment. While wealthier young people devote less time to television and video games, they spend more time using computers and print media.

Boys tend to access media more than girls, and use audio-visual and digital media more often as well. Yet, in some cultures, the opposite is true because restrictions on girls' activities often keep them at home. For the same reason, boys frequent outdoor places of entertainment more often, such as cinemas, internet cafes and video parlors.

If globalization is a process of accelerated flow of media content, to most African cultures and children, it is also a process of accelerated exclusion.

—Dr. Francis B. Nyamnjoh, University of Botswana

The vast majority of young people in the world do not have access to computers or the internet, mainly due to economic reasons.

Buying a computer and securing a web connection are still big investments in many countries.

In addition, poor infrastructure puts young people in smaller towns and villages at a disadvantage. Technical problems also discourage wide internet use in some countries and do not allow young people to fully appreciate all the possibilities the web offers. (Indeed, studies show sharply higher internet use when broadband access is available.)

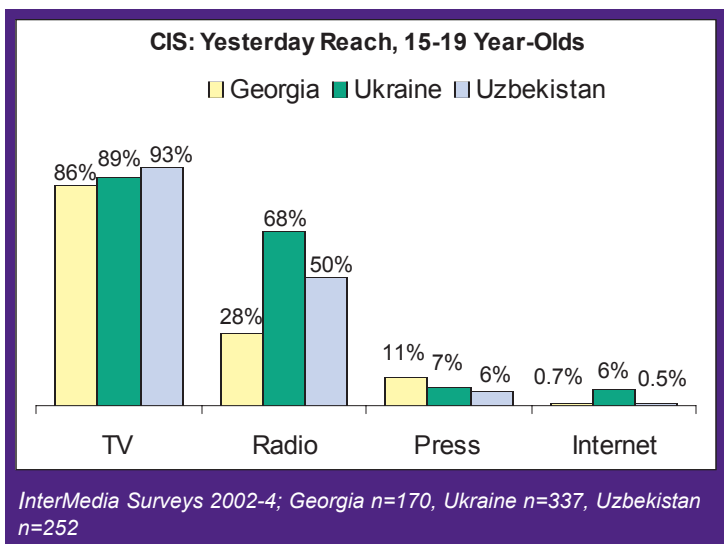
Apart from economic considerations, there are also young people who shy away from the internet because of the prevalence of English-language content, or the absence of content in their own language. Others are simply not particularly interested or do not fully understand its uses and possibilities.

Quality of Media for Children & Youth

Growing Concerns over Lack of Quality & Control

As media options for most children have grown in recent decades, so too have concerns about the quality of media aimed at children. Growing numbers of parents, educators, researchers and policy-makers around the world are alarmed about the lack of quality media for children and young people and the growing availability of low-quality entertainment featuring violence, sexual content, undesirable role models and lack of diversity. There are also serious questions about the short- and long-term effects of this material.

Numerous studies have been done on the effects of media—violence in media in particular—on children. Young people often speak of the power the media has on their lives, and any parent can attest



to the impressionable, unquestioning and imitative nature of children. How much the mass media influence children and young people is somewhat debatable, but sociologists and researchers in different regions have observed some of the following adverse effects:

- growing influence of entertainment media on youth style and identity
- decreasing role of traditional sources of influence: family, school, community, religion, etc.
- appeal of individualism and personal, as opposed to collective or societal, achievement
- some confusion in values (misguided sense of right and wrong, of human relations)
- an increasingly blurred line between advertisements and program content
- distortion of reality and rising expectation gaps
- newfound culture of “glamour” and “celebrity”
- creation of harmful or unrealistic stereotypes; a promotion of intolerance or apathy
- emphasis on the banal and trivial; de-emphasis on education, creativity and culture
- tendency for young people to think less for themselves and to follow media-set agendas.

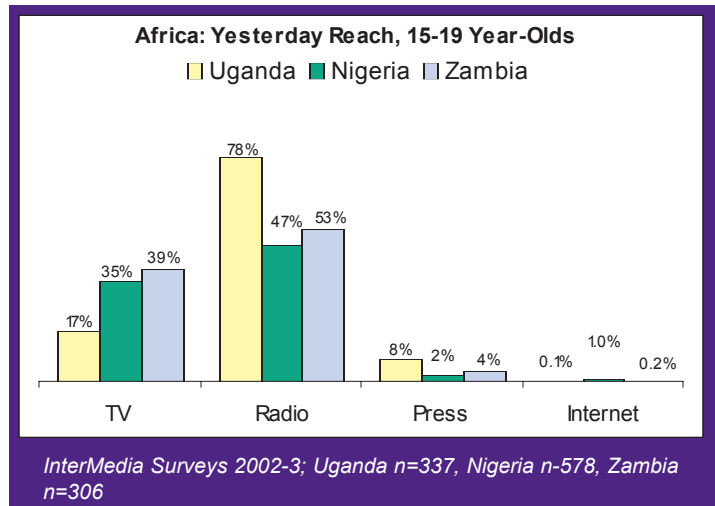
Children and youth advocates lament these negative effects because they recognize the enormous, potentially positive influences media can have on young audiences—namely broadening their world outlook and destroying stereotypes, increasing communication and access to diverse ideas, and promoting critical thinking and participation in social and political life.

Fueling concerns is the decline of parental supervision over young people’s media habits. In part, many parents are simply too busy to be closely involved in what their children are consuming. Also, youth programming is sometimes

not scheduled when most youth are actually watching, so they end up watching adult material. In addition, it is increasingly difficult for adults to know what young people are consuming. They can’t keep up with the changing television fare, electronic games and websites, and they also cannot track *where* their children are consuming media—in their rooms, at school, at friends’ houses, in internet cafes or even just hanging out. In Japan, for example, the majority of young people possess mobile phones and more than three-quarters of them access the internet via their phone.

What Constitutes Quality Media for Young People?

There is no clear consensus on what comprises quality media for children/young people. Producers, children’s specialists, parents and children all have somewhat different notions, although criteria such as being credible, comprehensible and uplifting, and empowering youth to think for themselves are recognized as key ingredients. Indeed, it seems easier to agree on what quality media for young people is *not*: dull, boring, patronizing, overly commercial or violent, vulgar, disrespectful, biased, manipulative or corruptive.



While it is important to remember children and young people are as diverse in their tastes as adults, they tend to favor entertainment-oriented content, with lively and interesting characters, informal style and language, and dynamic and engaging presentation. They are also naturally drawn to subjects that interest them—music, sports, style, culture, celebrities, science and technology, etc.—and those that convey messages about how to have fun, be successful and look good.

The image the media have of young people has two extremes: 1) a perfect teenager, great at school, has a beautiful boyfriend or girlfriend, loves his parents, has the greatest clothes..., 2) the black side of the moon: hates school, hates the world, hates everything, has a punk attitude, doesn't care about anything at all.
 —15-year-old from Brazil

Yet young people are not interested solely in light entertainment fare. They are also eager to learn, and drawn to information that shapes their identities, builds their sense of social belonging and makes sense of the world. They are attracted to content that entertains them, and to that which presents children and young people similar to themselves, in situations that relate to their own lives.

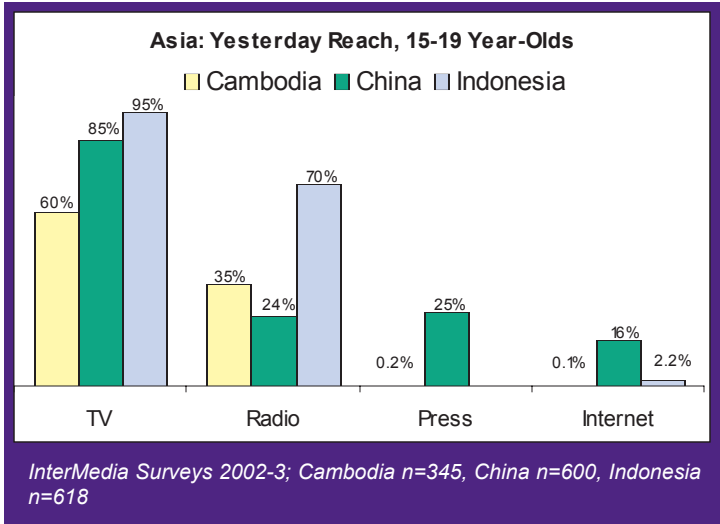
Some young people contributing to UNICEF’s Voices of Youth website have lamented the frequent stereotypical portrayals of young people as trendsetters or high-achievers on the one hand, or victims or wrong-doers on the other. They note the general absence from the media of the ordinary young person who lives a typical life with routine ups and downs.

Many young people also appreciate media content that deals credibly with topics they may find difficult to discuss with parents or adults, such as personal relationships, sexuality, AIDS, drugs, self-esteem, etc. They value factual information and advice provided by experts, as well as material prepared and presented by young people themselves. In focus groups InterMedia has conducted in different countries, youth say they believe only young journalists can really understand their problems. Similarly, young people feel adults either miss the point or present issues in ways that are too serious, pedantic or patronizing. In addition, youth in countries with widespread poverty, corruption, political turmoil and/or disease also seek realistic, relevant and meaningful content to help them understand and cope with hardships they face in their daily lives.

Lack of Real Choice

In reality, in spite of all the media options seemingly available to many young people, young audiences aren’t really given a fair choice. There is a dearth of quality programming for youth and children across the board.

There is even less choice in the majority of countries heavily dependent on foreign imports. A great deal of exported media for children and young people are produced with formats and content that can appeal to and be understood by as many cultures as possible. Thus, the prevalence of animated programming and media violence is generally driven not so much because it is what young audiences want, but largely because of competition and global marketing.



Young People Aren't Tuned Out

Young people in the industrialized world are not all as apathetic and tuned out as they are sometimes perceived to be, and are interested in content meaningful to their lives. Studies in Western Europe and the United States make a distinction between apathy and cynicism, i.e., young people's

expression of disinterest in social and political life is often superficial and "part of the condition" of being young. For many adolescents, "cynical chic" is a way of dealing with their own sense of powerlessness and what they see as "inconsistency, complacency or hypocrisy on the part of adults." Thus, many young people will say discussion of serious issues is "boring," but they will often have interesting and informed opinions on these issues.

Need for More Realistic Portrayal

One of the largest problems regarding media rights for youth is simply lack of coverage of children and young people in the news. What little coverage

there is too often portrays youth in the context of sensationalist issues, e.g., child abuse, exploitation and violence, with little respect for the dignity and privacy of the children and scant opportunity for young people to speak for themselves. Young people around the world feel excluded from or disrespected by the media when they are portrayed simplistically as superficial, apathetic, poverty stricken or delinquent.

The 2001 UNICEF-sponsored study in Buenos Aires, Montevideo and Santiago on students' (14-17) perceptions of urban security issues is a good example of the media's powerful role in setting agendas and shaping opinions and images of youth. The study showed young people in these cities felt the media do not portray youth realistically or sympathetically. Media—and television in particular—often present a negative and exaggerated picture of young people as juvenile delinquents. A majority of respondents perceived from the media that youth commit more crimes than adults, crimes of equal gravity to those of adults, and crimes at an earlier age than in previous years. This kind of inaccurate and inflammatory coverage tends to distort public and political debate in favor of repressive, rather than preventive, educational solutions to growing violence in many societies.

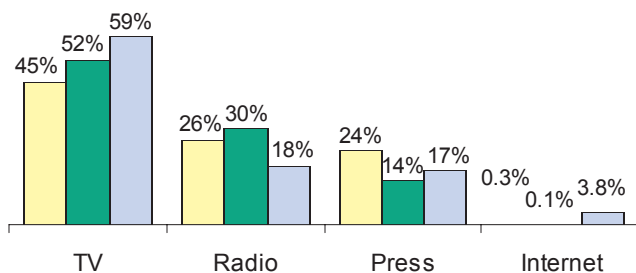
Participation of Children & Young People in the Media

Dozens of examples of young people's participation in the media attest to their interest in the world around them, especially if given the chance to meaningfully express themselves on issues affecting them. A growing number of interest groups and media organizations have become involved, creating numerous opportunities for young people to participate in media. Participation takes many forms—content development, production, professional skills training and media education—and applies to television, radio, the internet, print media, video, photography and CDs.

The most visible and successful youth participation programs are usually those that incorporate

South Asia: Yesterday Reach, 15-19 Year-Olds

India Bangladesh Pakistan



InterMedia Surveys 2003; India n=1,071, Bangladesh n=654, Pakistan n=912



the ideals of “genuine and effective” participation, i.e., an environment in which young people are involved in every step of the process from planning to evaluation. Challenges to “genuine and effective” participation include: getting adults to let go; creating an environment at home or school where participation is serious and encouraged; overcoming cultural norms that children should be seen and not heard; and generating enough funds to sustain projects.

Youth participation in media generates highly positive outcomes for the young people themselves, as synthesized by the UNESCO Clearinghouse’s 2001 Yearbook *Outlooks on Children and Media*:

—A strengthened sense of pride, power and self-esteem as a result of feeling their voices are worth listening to, that they are part of their community, and that they have achieved an understanding of others and of their own culture.

—A wish to see their own everyday dreams and their own local, social and ethnic culture and reality portrayed in the media.

—Strengthened ability and curiosity, and increased media competence, i.e., their critical understanding of the media.

—Greater social justice engendered by allowing young people who do not manage well in traditional, print-based schools to take part in audio-visual media production.

—Greater interest and involvement in society on their own terms, which in turn inspires action to improve coverage of youth issues in the media and the situations in their own communities.

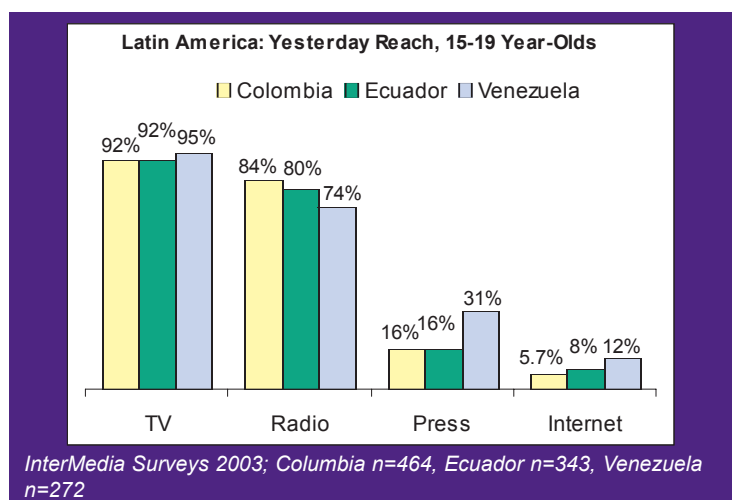
The UNESCO International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media (www.nordicom.gu.se) is a good source for information on specific projects and issues involving children, youth and media around the world. In addition, UNICEF has two useful websites. The MAGIC website (www.unicef.org/magic) showcases media projects by, with and for children around the world, along with other links and information. The Voices of Youth pages (www.unicef.org/voy) feature young people’s thoughts about media in their own countries, in their own words.

A few examples of the growing number of successful media projects and programs for and with children and young people:

ANDI—The Brazilian News Agency for Children’s Rights monitors media coverage of children and youth, and trains and works closely with journalists in their reporting on children and youth-related issues. ANDI’s efforts have led to greatly increased and improved coverage of children and youth issues in the Brazilian media and the model is now being applied in eight other Latin American countries.

TROC—The Young Reporter of Albania. Dozens of young people, from 13 to 18, from

all over the country receive training on this weekly TV news magazine program. Students learn all aspects of video news production and are responsible for planning and producing the weekly program with limited adult guidance. The program is very popular in Albania and in neighboring countries among young viewers who value TROC as the first socially responsive TV show that provides perspectives from all over the country.



Mukto Khobor (Free News)—The widely viewed weekly, 25-minute news and current affairs program in Bangladesh, is produced by youth 11 to 17. It focuses on children and child rights issues, and provides a forum for young people to express their views, empowers young journalists with specialized skills, inspires young viewers who see the success of their peers' work in the media, and shows young people have valuable input on current problems.

Children and Broadcasting

Foundation for Africa—Created in

1995 to ensure the implementation of the Africa Charter on Children and Broadcasting, and to sensitize broadcasters and producers to the need for good-quality children's television. CBFA targets young people 9 to 16, media professionals and broadcasters, conducting workshops, production seminars, screenings and meetings, with a focus on the needs and rights of children in Africa.

Prior to the video project I had been quite shy and would have found it difficult; now, though, I have a lot of confidence, and since I feel that FGM [female genital mutilation] is a wrong practice that must be ended, I don't hesitate to talk to anyone about it.

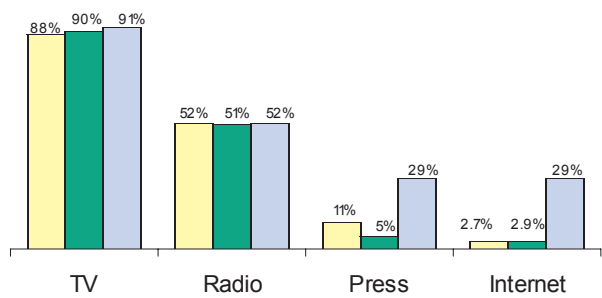
—Member of the Video and Community Dreams project, Egypt

Egypt's Video and the Community Dreams project

expands the knowledge and experience of the Center for Development and Population Activities' "New Horizons" program and empowers and strengthens the voices of young women and girls in Egyptian society. Teams of women from four different Egyptian communities gain confidence in their video production skills, and in their ability to address challenging or sensitive topics. Team members gain new visibility as spokespeople and leaders and have helped to break down stereotypes. The teams' tapes have been used to spark discussion and promote the search for local solutions in each community.

Middle East: Yesterday Reach, 15-19 Year-Olds

■ Egypt ■ Jordan ■ Qatar



InterMedia Surveys 2003; Egypt n=345, Jordan n=221, Qatar n=151

Advocacy Through Media

In the last two decades, media for children and youth have become more of a global issue. Numerous players have begun to realize children's rights through the media—whether to ensure young audiences have access to diversified and high-quality media content, create opportunities for young people's voices to be heard, push for ethical coverage of children and youth, and strive for (self-) regulation of the media and for quality media education.

A broad range of governmental and non-governmental initiatives and activities speak to the growing commitment to realize children's rights through the media. Numerous meetings, conferences and summits have taken place on the subject. Excellent guidelines have been written on how to report on children's issues as well as how to ensure effective youth participation in media. Many important studies have been done exploring young people's media habits and the effects of media on youth attitudes and behavior. Broadcasters and advertisers have adopted voluntary codes to ensure inappropriate material isn't aired during hours when young people watch or listen. Legislation has been passed requiring television and radio stations to devote a percentage of airtime to quality children's

programming. Numerous media consumer and watchdog groups hold the media to account when they do not live up to minimum standards and their social responsibilities toward the public, including children.

While these are surely encouraging signs, serious obstacles to advocating for children and youth through the media remain, among them the lack of funding and political will, cultural differences, and the need for far more training for youth and for those producing material about or for young audiences. Such efforts must continue to harness the enormous positive potential of the increasingly powerful global media to make a real difference in children's lives around the world by informing them, listening to them and ultimately empowering them.

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www.childrennow.org
www.commensensemedia.org
www.comminit.com/children
www.unicef.org/magic
www.unicef.org/voy
www.nordicom.gu.se
www.ifj.or

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