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# Television: Seen, Heard and Read by Peruvian Adolescents

La televisión: vista, oída y leída por adolescentes peruanos

## ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the current relationship between Peruvian teenagers and television. The information accessed from various sources concluded that adolescents are consuming television extensively, especially the poorer within the country. Teens appreciate the cable television as a source of learning, and its variety and ability to relate it with the world. The interest in cartoons, movies and series –fiction genre in general– affirms the value of this media in society as well as the possibility to make them more familiar with their environment. Information about what happens beyond their localities is a source of reference in their perception of the country. Beyond the cultural conflict from which is generally assessed from the effects that television may have on the rural world, television has a positive sign for the visual deterritorialization, which dissolves the natural relationship between culture and territory. In rural areas, parents and teenagers evaluate television positively because it offers more than just the school itself. In the midst of academic and professional criticism on television, adolescents do not distinguish between traditional media and new media, they are all integrated into their daily lives.

## RESUMEN

El presente trabajo analiza la relación actual de los adolescentes peruanos con la pantalla televisiva. La información consultada en diversas fuentes concluye que los adolescentes siguen consumiendo ampliamente la televisión, especialmente los más pobres de ciudades del interior del Perú. Los adolescentes valoran la televisión por cable como una fuente de aprendizaje, así como por su variedad y por la posibilidad de relacionarlos con el mundo. El interés por los dibujos animados y las series y películas y, en general, por la ficción televisiva, reafirma el sentido que tiene la televisión en familiarizarlos con la sociedad y su entorno. La información de lo que acontece más allá de sus localidades es fuente de referencia en su percepción del país y es compartida en familia. Más allá del conflicto cultural, desde el cual generalmente se ha evaluado los efectos de la televisión en el medio rural, ésta tiene para los adolescentes y sus padres un signo positivo porque favorece la desterritorialización visual al disolver la relación natural entre cultura y territorio geográfico. En el medio rural los padres y los jóvenes valoran a la televisión porque les ofrece más que la propia escuela. En medio de la crítica académica y profesional a la televisión, los adolescentes no distinguen entre medios tradicionales y nuevos medios porque todos ellos están integrados a su vida cotidiana.

## KEYWORDS / PALABRAS CLAVE

Education, communication, television, youth, culture, consumption, technology, media.  
Educación, comunicación, televisión, jóvenes, cultura, consumo, tecnología, medios audiovisuales.

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The debate about television and the concerns about its relationship to education are not limited to the TV screen. They have expanded to include other related screens, such as that of the computer and the cellular phone. No matter how big or small they may be, or where they are located, or if they go with the user according to his or her needs, they are equally important because of what they show, say and communicate. This paper is interested in looking specifically at what is occurring with the TV screen and the focuses and values that Peruvian teenagers take in from it, as well as its effects on their knowledge and opinions about the country and the environment. The discussion on audiovisual media countered text with screen and reduced TV to mere images and sounds. However, «it is common to counter visual forms with verbal forms, the modern day media suspends the opposition between pages and screens in reciprocal transformation: in addition to being heard and read, words are also seen on the screen. Biblical and ancestral, like in the desert, the voice is seen» (Block de Behar, 2009: 15).

For some analysts, the TV screen has been replaced because children and teenagers prefer other screens that are more interactive due to their flexibility, mobility and ability to be manipulated, as opposed to TV, which is more two-dimensional and uni-directional. In this respect, the consumption of television by families, as an important daily activity, has been affected by the increasing use of Internet at home, especially among young people, who diversify their audiovisual consumption towards a multi-mode, multi-channel and multi-platform universe (Tubella, 2008). Others coincide with this observation, from a business perspective and from a fascination with technology, indicating that children and teenagers are abandoning TV genres and TV media stories, leaving space for other forms of digital entertainment.

In this paper we will discuss a series of studies performed in Peru, in the city of Lima and especially in other provinces, as they show slightly different realities. Studies carried out by the Radio and Television Council (CONCORTV) and the TV-Cultura association, aimed at producing quality and alternative television as well as academic research projects, maintain that television is still the most significantly consumed media type among teenagers, that the dominance of television is holding strong, and that television plays an integrative function amidst the civilization of images. Cable TV, in particular, arouses interest among the youngest consumers and is appreciated for its informative and formative value.

Throughout this paper we will cover and explain the ties between teenagers and television in Peru, considering that the trend towards consumption of national television responds to the way the country is geographically and socially structured, as a product of centralization and extreme inequality. Television is most important in areas that are farther away from main cities and regional capitals, as well as among the poorest economic sectors.

In a study on teenagers and adults performed by the National Radio and Television Council (CONCORTV) it was found that television (98.5%) and radio (91.5%) are the media types with highest presence and distribution. These are followed by the cellular phone (77.8%) and DVDs (77.4%). While Internet comes in at only 25%, cable TV comes in at 60% in Lima, which is reduced to nearly half this percentage in provinces, although access is greater through «pirated» or illegal connections (CONCORTV, 2009).

The study adds that most teenagers and adults watch TV with their family, primarily news and movies. Why these genres? News narrates and makes a part of the country public, especially Lima, and tells about politics, celebrities, crime and accidents. Movies offer fictional tales that are long-standing and culturally significant because they present stories with touching and exciting characters. In both cases, there are media narrations that are attractive and allow teenagers and adults to comment on them and share opinions during their daily lives. What meaning do these genres give to life, and why do they attract such interest? We return to questions posed when TV only competed with the radio and the cinema, but that remain relevant now that television is still being watched, although –as we have been claiming– also heard and read. TV can stay on for many hours and only be heard, as it can also offer text to accompany the images and sounds. For Buonano, fiction performs three functions: the first qualifies as fabulating, because it brings to life the thirst for stories that lies within us, satisfying the deep and universal pleasure to listen, to let oneself get carried away in the story, activating identification and reading abilities for diverse genres. A second is related to familiarization with the social world of shared beliefs, creating a «common meaning» of daily life. And, a third is the upholding of community, allowing heterogeneous audiences to share common topics and issues (Buonano, 1999: 62-66). Rincón (2006) comments that TV is fundamentally a means of expression and storytelling, with formats that very often appeal to emotions, such as magazines, contests, musicals,

docudramas, talk shows, reality shows and, in general, the lighter styles of entertainment and information. It must be added that, despite the academic distinction between new media and traditional media, like TV, this difference does not appear relevant to teenagers. It has more to do with a «media atmosphere», as affirmed by Murdochowicz, in which each type of communication media cannot be analyzed separately, but rather from its insertion in daily life. One type of media does not displace another, but rather it is articulated within the context of its location, the common value associated with it and its use (Morduchowicz, 2008).

Opinion surveys carried out in 2010 on habits and attitudes towards radio and TV identify the high daily consumption of television, especially among the poorest sectors, specifying that more than 85% of the population watches TV on a daily basis in their homes or somewhere else. Even so, has the amount of time spent on watching TV been reduced? Results from other research studies show that this depends on several factors. For example, the CONCERTV report shows that age and gender are two influential aspects. Children and teenagers, who are quite flexible in their consumption, share access to TV with other

activities in their daily lives. Tubella indicates that: «Age is revealed as a determining factor in the patterns of incorporation and use of media and technology and communication practices (...), minors under the age of 18 more openly combine specific times for the use and consumption of all types of technology and media, with a tendency towards flexibility, which includes the consumption of TV» (Tubella, 2008: 89). Likewise, men watch less TV than women, due to their greater freedom of access to public spaces.

Some sources show TV to be the most entertaining, informative, and truthful form of media, as well as the one that is closer to people. These results are surprising when compared to the critical debate of academics and analysts who insist on the deficient quality of information and trivial entertainment that TV provides. Nevertheless, TV is more

appreciated by those with fewer resources –the poorest– as a privileged source of entertainment and information. Some claim that these results are explained by the poor critical capacity of the less educated social sectors. My explanation is directed towards the possibilities that TV gives them in spite of their shortcomings, and towards the presence and meaning that television holds in their daily lives.

In a study performed on rural Peruvian communities in the city of Huaraz by the anthropologist Rocío Trinidad (2001), it is shown that TV is the preferred media of entertainment for children and teenagers. As opposed to the critical arguments of

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teachers, for parents, television is fundamental because it keeps them and their children informed of events beyond the local sphere. Trinidad observes the existence of a social obligation to be informed, because external events affect their immediate interests and allow them to experience the feeling of fear and vulnerability before events such as mudslides, car accidents or earthquakes, for example. The frequently debated contradiction between life in rural areas and TV images is not seen as such, since the latter would provide an encounter between their Andean identities and those of the Western world, allowing children and teenagers to move easily between one and the other. This different «other» on TV allows them to compare their own lives with the characters on programs such as soap operas, as well as to identify reprehensible behavior such as abuse and

cheating, and to value the more independent role of women (Trinidad, 2001).

The researcher adds that parents and their children appreciate «the correct use of Spanish» on TV, because it is learned better than in school; as well as the socially recognized ways of speaking, dressing, fashion, including models of respect and hygiene. TV contributes to the early stimulation of learning, motivating children and teenagers to migrate, an indicator of possible access to progress. Beyond the cultural conflict from which the effects of TV on rural areas have generally been examined, TV holds for them a positive sign of visual deterritorialization, which dissolves the natural relationship between culture and geographical territory. Just as school is associated with the light and the

possibility for improvement within the Andean symbolic universe, it appears that TV also offers this: «If education, (...) essentially continues to mean having a head for thinking, eyes for seeing and reading, and a mouth for speaking, expressing and defending oneself, media provides a mouth (to speak better), eyes (to see what is happening beyond the local sphere) and a head (for knowing and, above all, learning how to behave properly)» (Trinidad, 2001).

Two studies carried out in 2008 and 2010 by TVCultura, explored how adolescents between 11 and 13, and 14 and 18, appropriate technology in different cities of Peru. It showed the time spent on watching TV: 43% watch two hours of TV a day and another 45% watch 3 to 4 hours. 35.8% watch TV between 4:00 and 8:00 in the afternoon, and 24.4% watch between 8:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m.; the younger group watches at earlier times, and the older group at later times. Although they tend to watch many different types of programs, there is a special preference for cartoons among boys and girls, especially between the ages of 11 and 13. This preference deserves analysis, since it deals with children who are transitioning into adolescence, but for whom fantasy presents the possibility of escaping from conflictive and violent situations, both in family and society, through its images and stories. On the other hand, the gender factor also plays a role: males prefer movies and sports programs, while females prefer series, musicals, and also soap

operas, as it is shown in the following chart (TVCultura, 2008).

Teenagers manifest—in the studies carried out by TVCultura—a relative interest for what is going on in the country, their city and the world. It should be

TV shows watched by gender and age (%)

	Total	Men	Women	11/13	14/16
Cartoons/Animation	55.8	60.3	51.5	64.4	47.0
Movies	52.6	60.2	45.2	47.6	57.8
Series	46.9	43.0	50.8	45.2	48.7
Musicals	42.2	38.6	45.7	36.2	48.3
Sports	31.6	44.0	19.5	30.4	32.8
Comedy	30.7	31.9	29.5	28.2	33.3
News	30.5	32.4	28.6	28.3	32.8
Contests	30.1	26.0	34.2	34.9	25.2
Soap operas	16.2	03.7	28.4	11.9	20.6
Reports/Interviews	10.9	12.4	9.50	08.5	13.5
Magazines	10.4	13.3	7.50	07.9	13.0
Documentaries	01.0	01.6	00.4	01.5	00.4

specified that it is not related with an interest in politics, but rather an interest in culture, entertainment and sports. The majority (85%) watches TV programs to stay informed about the country, and they do so with their family. With regards to this, Vilches maintains that they continue to prefer local information, and not even CNN, much less Euronews, can substitute it. The same happens with TV fiction because the national programs continue to attract greater audiences (Rincón, 2006). It should be added that a high number of those surveyed use the Internet for up to two hours a day to aid them with their schoolwork, to write messages, although also to chat on MSN messenger, especially girls, in comparison to boys who prefer video games (TVCultura, 2008).

An academic research study performed in three Peruvian cities showed that TV continues to be the most significantly consumed media type, although cable TV is most preferred by school-age children. Younger children watch more TV than the older ones (an average of 95% in the 1st year of secondary education, and nearly 90% in the 5th year), and the latter listen to the radio more than the younger ones (55% vs. 45%). The results are coherent with the greater freedom of the older students to access public areas and individualize their consumption through their more private relationship to music. There is a tendency to replace TV with other activities as the students get older. The older students and students

Activities performed by students in 1 <sup>st</sup> and 5 <sup>th</sup> year of secondary education by type of school, city and gender							
1 <sup>st</sup> YEAR SECONDARY	Public	Private	Cuzco	Iquitos	Chiclayo	Male	Female
Watch TV	95.5	94	91.4	98.0	95.9	92.9	96.9
Listen to the radio	45.9	34.4	47.7	44.9	36.4	31.6	53.7
Video games	11.4	16.1	15.8	19.6	11.4	24.2	07.9
Internet	11.8	27.7	26.0	11.2	23.9	25.5	16.3
Go to the movies	04.4	09.1	06.1	14.4	03.9	08.9	07.1
Go to the park	14.5	13.8	20.6	16.7	10.1	14.3	17.6
Play in the neighborhood	21.8	22.8	20.2	35.1	13.8	23.7	21.9
Go to night clubs	01.5	1.2	3.2	0.80	01.6	02.6	01.3
Play sports	54.0	50.1	61.3	56.7	46.1	64.8	46.3
<b>5<sup>th</sup> YEAR SECONDARY</b>							
Watch TV	87.8	88.3	85.7	91.9	89.8	87.7	90.1
Listen to the radio	55.7	51.6	63.9	56.9	47.8	50.1	62.5
Video games	07.6	15.0	14.3	15.9	5.4	19.8	04.6
Internet	31.4	45.5	41.2	36.1	43.7	36.3	43.8
Go to the movies	02.8	06.7	05.0	09.6	04.8	07.5	5.6
Go to the park	07.4	09.4	12.5	08.8	05.5	09.0	09.1
Play in the neighborhood	12.1	10.1	16.1	16.6	07.5	15.3	12.2
Go to night clubs	06.4	10.3	11.8	10.8	07.7	11.8	08.9
Play sports	41.9	42.9	47.2	51.0	35.0	59.1	31.1

from private schools can use the Internet more frequently for economic reasons and satisfy their curiosity more freely and at more flexible times. The younger students tend to spend more time in the neighborhood with their friends, while the others go in groups to dance clubs. Children and teenagers devote more time to sports, especially boys and younger children. It should be highlighted that there is an aspect that expresses the reconfiguration of gender relations: in the consumption of TV and interactive technologies, the differences between men and women are fading. Women have become «equal» to men in terms of consumption, and this is a cultural change, which is even more pronounced in provinces (Quiroz, 2008: 132).

The testimonies of these young people are very eloquent when referring to TV and expressing their opinions on the importance of information, their perception of the country and their preference for local and national news over international news: «Thanks to the news, we all know what is going on around us, about the earthquakes, kidnappings, fires (Cuzco, private school, 5<sup>th</sup> year secondary). But they cover more news about Lima, because Lima is important for politics (Iquitos, public school, 1<sup>st</sup> year secondary). The news is nice... we hear about

accidents, murders... they kidnapped a child in Lima and rescued him for 5,000 sols... we sometimes talk about these things with the tutor (Iquitos, public school, 1<sup>st</sup> year secondary). We also find out about what is happening in the United States, about the war (Iquitos, public school, 1<sup>st</sup> year secondary)» (Quiroz, 2008: 136). They also express a critical perspective and their expectations: «When I watch national TV, I see the news and I don't like it because they only show crime and rape of teenagers, whereas on cable I also like watching my channel number 28 Discovery Channel, documentaries, channel 46, and I don't want to watch national TV, because cable has more things (Iquitos, private school, 5<sup>th</sup> year secondary). I wish I had my black and white TV to watch my DVDs to buy CDs and to see Ronaldo's games» (Chiclayo, public school, male, 1<sup>st</sup> year secondary).

I watch 2 or 3 hours of TV, but when I have a test I can't watch TV because I don't learn anything (Chiclayo, public school, female, 1<sup>st</sup> year secondary) (Quiroz, 2008: 137).

They show their preference for cartoons, because they stimulate their imagination and help them forget their problems: «Cartoons make me laugh, they're fun, and I forget about my problems (Chiclayo, public school, male, 5<sup>th</sup> year secondary). Cartoons make you

Cable TV, by type of school, city and gender

1 <sup>st</sup> Year SECONDARY	Public	Private	Cuzco	Iquitos	Chiclayo	Male	Female
Watch cable TV	19.4	52.6	29.6	35.1	38.2	36.7	31.6
Learn from cable TV	86.5	85.8	85.4	85.3	88.1	85.4	87.1
5 <sup>th</sup> YEAR SECONDARY							
Watch cable TV	25.4	57.8	33.7	41.7	39.1	41.4	34.7
Learn from cable TV	94.2	97.2	96.8	94.5	97.2	97.0	94.9

laugh, they're fun... they take you back to when you were younger, your childhood, you can escape because sometimes you're sad, you escape from that sadness, you forget about your problems, they make you change, they make you different (Chiclayo, public school, male, 5<sup>th</sup> year secondary). With regards to other types of media: I have fun watching TV and listening to the radio... with DVDs and the TV... creating songs, poetry and cooking... listening to music and watching videos... going out on the weekend (Chiclayo, public school, male, 5<sup>th</sup> year secondary)» (Quiroz, 2008: 137).

TV not only takes up students' leisure time, but also their affective time. The images privilege responses that are close to their emotions, which come directly from the materiality of signs, music, colors and their dynamism, according to Joan Ferrés. The sensory over-stimulation boosts the feeling of meaning, the senses to the detriment of meaning, the dominance of the visible over the intelligible, in a fast-paced era of primary emotions and the hijacking of rationality (Ferrés, 2008).

The case of cable TV should be highlighted, as it is increasingly more present and preferred by teenagers. They associate it not only with entertainment, but also with information and learning, even more so than the Internet. Cable TV is appreciated for its quality and variety, and recognized as a source of learning. More than 80% of 1<sup>st</sup> year secondary students and more than 90% of 5<sup>th</sup> year students declare having learned through cable TV. That is, it has become a highly valued source of knowledge (Quiroz, 2008: 141).

The opinions about cable TV are very positive. The older students prefer it because of the variety on offer and because they can select programs and channels, an argument which is coherent with their age. The model of thematic channels, different from open signal TV, responds to the more defined personal interests during adolescence. The younger students, especially those from public schools, highlight

adult programs, curious about their prohibited content. There is no doubt that their opinions about the possibility of learning are associated with the various topics and genres offered on cable. They appreciate the history and cultural channels because they offer knowledge that is even more illustrative than at school. They value information from other countries and in other languages, including the news, as well as references for medicine, science, food, monuments and geography. They feel like part of the world and restore fiction as a source of learning models of behavior and professionalism.

In their testimonies, teenagers talk at length about the variety on offer. The good thing is that there you can choose, and there are all of the channels that you want to watch, when you want to watch (Iquitos, public school, 1<sup>st</sup> year secondary). «I watch it somewhere else... it has more channels, more programs, it is more advanced, you can see what is happening in the world, it also teaches us about the life of animals... I like movies... on Discovery Channel there have been scientists that have found a dinosaur at the North Pole... on cable there is more information and learning, I like cartoons, songs, sports, fashion shows (Iquitos, public school, 5<sup>th</sup> year secondary). There are more channels... more variety... it is more up-to-date... there are more and better series (Iquitos, private school, 5<sup>th</sup> year secondary). The gourmet cooking (female) and cartoons (male)» (Cuzco, private school, 1<sup>st</sup> year secondary) (Quiroz, 2008: 144).

About learning they mention: There's a Discovery Channel that teaches you the difference between animals (Cuzco, public school, female, 1<sup>st</sup> year secondary). «They talk about plants, animals, different things about science, values related to what nature is... Animal Planet also (Cuzco, private school, 1<sup>st</sup> year secondary). That program that researches animals, and you can see an animal, the dinosaurs... there are different things taught on different channels that can help you in your life (Chiclayo, public school, 1<sup>st</sup> year secondary). They tell stories like the ones about

Egyptians, that and on the other one they talk about things, inventions, all of that (Chiclayo, private school, 1st year secondary). On cable there are programs that are educational, that teach you, they teach you like on the computer too (Chiclayo, private school, 5<sup>th</sup> year secondary). I like when they talk about operations, so you're watching, it's amazing... there are some that show series, like police shows and while they are narrating the story you learn more about what it's like to be a lawyer, or a doctor... a detective (Chiclayo, private school, 5<sup>th</sup> year secondary)» (Quiroz: 2008: 144).

The students' testimonies reaffirm the sense of the images as a way to learn and have fun. They distance themselves a little from open signal TV because of its poor quality, and they lean towards cable TV because it allows them to choose and to satisfy with their individual interests. The lack of cable TV in their homes is not an obstacle for them, they know it perfectly well and access it at friends', neighbors' and family members' homes.

This relationship between TV and other types of media allows teenagers to construct their own horizon, even one that breaks with the family and school horizon. They establish an implicit association between «culture» (understood as information and knowledge) and cable TV. They mention channels such as the Discovery Channel, History Channel, National Geographic and Warner in addition to the Disney Channel, MTV, FOX, HBO and Hallmark. At the same time, they talk about cartoons, like those from Japan, and also sports, especially soccer. They feel they are in contact with realities that are broader than their immediate realities –family and local– through informative programs, documentaries, series and movies. In summary, this allows us to maintain that their abilities and knowledge do not come solely from school, but also from the culture outside the classroom.

We can see a certain intellectual distancing from their teachers because they can live and experience other languages, knowledge and writings. Without a doubt, «the information that they obtain is less structured, fragmented and is inserted in the culture of simultaneity, of change, of speed, of dynamics and non-permanence, all of which is related to their attitude towards life» (Murdochowicz, 2008: 37).

I would like to conclude by suggesting that we are experiencing a drastic change in communication practices because of the transience of information, the value of visibility and the new forms of communication, as well as social networks. Although there is

a generational gap and a distance between the world inside and outside of the classroom, children and teenagers integrate different types of media in their daily lives. Even if TV continues to hold importance as part of the media atmosphere, the trend is towards coexistence with other types of media and other types of screens, with which we can participate and interact. The traditional socio-economic distances shown by the family income levels, the living spaces and location of the homes, the type of school and the region where they live, are all met with different access to technology. This means that the digital gap has joined economic inequality, although the latter is not reduced by access to technological devices and connectivity, as there is still a relationship to the abilities to use the information as a symbolic and reflexive resource to produce and exchange knowledge.

There is definitely a difference between children and teenagers whose families encourage their interpretation of images, the exercise of opinion and the development of multiple abilities, and those from urban-marginal and rural families, where domestic violence occurs more frequently, intellectual stimulation is weaker and the parents are not well educated. It is not merely a technological issue. For this reason it has been important to offer a look at the values and perceptions of teenagers from marginal and rural sectors, for whom TV holds a different value, given the condition of exclusion from which they express themselves.

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