

How the media can influence and collaborate in the development of youth participation

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Abstract:

This paper's objective is to deal with the educational potentiality of media in the development of the communicative and participative competences which are clearly needed and an essential part of all civic education. After a description of the situation in Spain at present with reference to the absence of participation and its possible causes, the text refers to the support that educational policy has given to civic education in schools over the last 15 years, and which will, hopefully, help to improve the situation. Secondly, the paper deals with the relationship between media and citizen participation, and analyzes the situation of young Spaniards and their relationship with the media in an attempt to discover if, by using media and new media it would be possible to generate positive attitudes towards participation. Before the conclusions a practical case study where media have been used to motivate youth will be analyzed.

Introduction

As a well-known Spanish writer said not long ago, "Internet is like a ballpoint pen: some use it to write brilliantly, others only use it to play the Lotto" (Millán 2005, 58).

It is common knowledge that information and communication technologies (later referred to as ICTs) were not invented for educational purposes. However, the challenge we are facing nowadays is to find the precise way they can be used in education, and more specifically used for the social and political dimension of education. Or, that is to say, to raise the level of sociability which is one of the treasures missing in contemporary society.

Our purpose in this paper is to deal with the educational virtuality of the media in the development of the communicative and participative competence which we clearly need and which are an essential part of all civic education.

To begin with, we provide a description of the situation in Spain at present with reference to the lack of participation and its possible causes. Later on, we refer to the support that educational policy has given to civic education in schools over the last 15 years in Section 1, which will, hopefully, help to improve the situation.

Secondly, we will consider the relationship between the media and citizen participation, and analyze the situation of young Spaniards and their relationship with the media in an attempt to discover if, by using them, it is possible to generate positive attitudes towards participation. A practical case study where this has been achieved, will occupy the latter part of the section 2, before the conclusion.

1. The situation of civic education in Spain

Spain, like so many western countries, is involved in the *growing tendency* for the promotion of education for citizenship. This can be seen over the last 15 years, particularly by organizing its presence in schools (cf. among the countless bibliographies on the subject: Crick 1998; 2000; Hahn 1998; Bahmueller 1999; Kerr 1999; Naval, Print, Veldhuis 2002).

Education for citizenship is considered as *essential* in order to:

- a) maintain democratic stability,
- b) meet the challenges of contemporary society, especially those that originate from multiculturalism (that is, how to combine unity and diversity). It includes globalization, migratory movements, the emergence of ICTs, the weakening of family links or the loss of a sense of civic commitment which is more worrying when found among young people,
- c) and, in the specific case of Spain, to inspire a feeling of European citizenship.

There is no doubt about the role education can play in this area, but this must be education in its most wide sense, not simply in the formal school environment. It must also include the family, and more generally society and the media.

1.1 Possible causes of lack of participation

In particular, in Spain we find a general trend of a lack of civic compromise and participation. The analysis of data provided by sociological studies will corroborate this statement (e.g. the data on “vital concerns, identity, and political participation” and “values and social participation” found in the *Informe 2004 Juventud en España* published by the Instituto de la Juventud Española, *INJUVE*).

Although there is a more noticeable presence of family and friendship in our milieu than can be found in other areas, there is also a lack of the feeling of community among the young and the old (cf. Naval, *Education for Citizenship in Spain*, in print).

It is true that young people are awakening to solidarity and altruism, but are often sentimental, occasional and sporadic. These gestures or activities are not connected with political life or with the resulting constant civic involvement in the development of civil society (cf. Forbig 2005). There is a lack of social virtues and civic participation. Moreover, there is often a misunderstanding of the true meaning of participation. People often confuse participation with a mere demand for rights.

What does participation mean? What makes us participate? How can this missing participation be revitalized? How can we recover the sociability that we are missing in our hearts?¹

Participation means taking part in what is common to us all, owning part of something or having a share in it. Etymologically, in the Latin *participare*, we can see an active meaning of the verb: “to take part”, and a causative meaning: “to receive part”, which completes the action of giving with that of receiving a participation. Thus, we arrive at another meaning which is that of “informing, giving news, communicating”.

The idea of what is *common* can be found in the root of the two meanings, and the union of those who have something in common is the *community*. Thus participation is an inseparable dimension of any community, and is in the basis of democracy. As Redondo says, there can be no community without participation – participation itself is what makes it possible – as there can be no democracy without participation (cf. Redondo 1999). On this matter Ortega y Gasset very wisely said, “An agreement on intentions presupposes the existence of a society, of people who live together” (1997, 44-45).

But if we complain about this lack of participation, perhaps we should ask ourselves first “What is the cause of this unwillingness to participate?” Only by understanding the causes we will be able to suggest the formative measures to be taken.

In the case of Spain, we can identify *four causes*². The first is political instability, as it reflects an absence of social cohesion. For example, in the last 200 years we have had ten constitutions, many constitutional projects, two republics and a civil war, just to mention a few important milestones.

Secondly, the arena of educational policies has a negative influence on participation. Each new government that comes into power brings with it the desire to reform through education, due to which the laws on education underwent a great deal of political change. Since the *Ley Moyano* in 1857, we have suffered constant changes and have never reached a general agreement on the subject. In the last few years, since the 1978 Constitution, there have been numerous changes in

¹ At this stage it is important to distinguish between solitude that enriches a person, because it gives depth, in contrast to isolation that causes strain and distance from their fellows citizens.

² Cf. Naval, “Education for Citizenship in Spain”. In: Lange, Volker, eds. *Basiswissen Politische Bildung (Handbook on Political Education)*. Baltmannsweiler. Vol. II, forthcoming.

the legislation that have affected education at every level: Ley Orgánica de Estatutos de Centros Docentes, LOECE [Organic Law of Statutes of Teaching Establishments], Ley Orgánica del Desarrollo de la Educación, LODE [Organic Law of Educational Development], Ley de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo, LOGSE [Organic Law of General Organization of the School System], Ley Orgánica de la participación, la evaluación y el gobierno de los centros docentes, LOPEG [Organic Law of Participation, Evaluation, and Governing of Teaching Establishments], Ley Orgánica de la Calidad de la Educación, LOCE [Organic Law of the Quality of Education], Ley Orgánica de Educación, LOE [Organic Law of Education], Ley de Autonomía Universitaria [Law of University Autonomy], etc. The 1978 Constitution managed to balance (cf. Sarabia 2005) freedom of teaching and the right to education quite well, but its development from there on has been extremely varied.

The third cause to be taken into account is the presence within the government of a centralized tendency, which can make social and personal freedom lose strength.

And finally, years ago the cultural level of the average person may have been an obstacle to social participation, which is not the case today. The current dilemma of immigration is a challenge at present to which we will have to respond.

1.2 Educational Policies: LOGSE, LOCE, LOE

If we make a specific study of how education in its social dimension has been treated in Spain in the last few years, there are several key dates and legislative documents which must be highlighted.

We have chosen to mention this aspect of education as *education for citizenship*. We have chosen this term, despite the current controversy about the matter in our country, as the meaning of the expression “political education” does not really identify with what we wish to express. This is mainly because it brings to mind another type of education, which is more indoctrination than a truly educational effort. On the other hand, we disagree with a reductionistic view of “education for citizenship” which would exclude aspects of a theoretical framework, either cultural or religious. Education for citizenship, that is the necessary search for coexistence, does not exclude diversity, but respects and promotes it as much as possible, so that there is no conflict between personal identity and loyalty to one’s nation.

It is this phenomenon – Spain is becoming more and more multi-cultural – that suggests the need to reconsider some of the major concepts of social and political philosophy. These include, for example, citizenship, representation, democracy, frontiers, sovereignty, the rights of the groups and those of the individual, Europe, pluralism, tolerance, integration, national identity and respect.

The 1978 Spanish Constitution stated that: “Education will have as an objective the entire development of personality with respect to the democratic principles of coexistence and the fundamental rights and liberties” (art. 27.2). Spanish governments during the last decades have undergone some legislative reforms, which have directly affected the field of civic education. We are referring to the *Ley Orgánica de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo*, LOGSE [*Law on General Organization of the Educational System*], which has regulated the Spanish education system over the last fifteen years.

The 1990 LOGSE is the first reference to take civic education into account as one of the cross-curricular subjects, and goes so far as to state that it is the quintessential cross-curricular subject, which unifies all other subjects (Rodríguez Rojo 1996). This cross-curricular element has its pros and cons, and perhaps more of the latter. It has been proven by experience, given that this subject in many centers, particularly state-run schools, has been reduced to almost nothing, for example, a weekly one-hour “tutorial” or isolated acts during the academic year, such as Constitution Day or the Day of the Tree. That is, the result is very different from what was initially intended, as it was hoped that, by a sort of “infusion”, this subject would permeate the whole school curriculum positively.

The declaration of principles stated in the legislative document, was not as effective as had been intended. The citizen profile of the ministerial proposal (1990) has the following characteristics: 1) development of universal structures for moral judgment which allow the adoption of general value principles such as justice or solidarity; 2) acquisition of that dialogue competence which gives a predisposition for fair agreement and democratic participation; 3) development of a personal image and a lifestyle in agreement with personally desired values; 4) acquisition of knowledge which allows critical and creative dialogue along with reality with the development of contextualised and just norms and projects; 5) development of skills which favor coherence between reason and moral action; 6) recognition and assimilation of universally desired values [*Declaration of Human Rights and the Spanish Constitution*]; and 7) comprehension, respect and construction of fair rules for coexistence that will regulate collective life.

There were several reasons why this model for moral and civic education was not as successful as expected. The first probably lies outside the school. It is reasonable to believe that civic education

should begin in the family, and continue in society with the support of the media. It would be wrong to lay all the responsibility on the school, or worse still, to blame schools for its failure.

We need to reclaim those other areas of informal education. In the second part of this paper we will deal with one of them, the media, as a powerful means, when used correctly, to encourage social participation.

There are also reservations about the efficiency of a cross-curricular model that includes a lack of curricular definition and thus, its position within the time and space of the school: if it is up to everyone, then in fact, it runs the risk of not being done by anyone. Therefore, in later projects, the tendency has been to more clearly define its place in the curriculum, wherein full definition of content, evaluation, and teacher training should be included.

But this is not easy, as can be seen in some debates which have been held in Spain in the last few years, such as those brought about by the priority of Humanities within the secondary school curriculum, or the discrepancies which stemmed from the *Ley Orgánica de Calidad de la Educación*, LOCE [*Law on Quality Education*]³. These are examples of the difficulties created by tensions between the local, regional, national, European and worldwide authorities, which end in devising complicated civic education projects for our schools.

The new law for education which has been approved in parliament, LOE (2006, *Law on Education*), aims to reinforce the curricular status of civic education. The LOE introduces the area of "citizenship education" into Primary Schools. It foresees its presence in the fourth year of Compulsory Secondary Schools and in no less than one of the three initial years, in all final years of Secondary Schools, and refers to it as an objective in professional training and in the education of adults. The debate stemming from this proposal is marked in diverse areas. "Some are in favor of this new area, as a necessary step for a democratic society, and have insisted that it should be taught at all stages from year three of Primary onwards, as well as being included in teacher training programs. Others, however, reject the proposal since they see it as an instrument of indoctrination at the service of political ideology and a very biased view of what moral education should be" (Naval, Jover, forthcoming; cf. MEC 2005, 74-76).

In this sense, a historical revision of the different developments that education for citizenship has had in our country, both on theoretical and legislative levels over the last 100 years, shows that it has always been an instrument for the constitution of a desired type of society and a means of political practice and ideals.

This historical confirmation may explain certain attitudes of distrust towards the proposals to include citizenship education in the curriculum of our schools, such as that projected in the new *Ley Orgánica de Educación*, LOE [*Law on Education*], and being discussed at the moment in Spain (cf. Naval, Jover 2006, forthcoming).

1.3 School, society, family, media

There is no doubt that education for citizenship has many challenges to meet. What is decisive is the definition of a correct theoretical framework, which will allow us to find an answer to the question, "What education, for what citizenship?"

Another point that will have to be dealt with is the importance of finding synergies, a labor divided among the different educational areas of influence: family, school, society, media, especially to answer the demands that globalization imposes. Education must not ignore the social impact of the media and ICTs on young people in particular (cf. Lupia, Philpot 2005). In civic education the challenge is to convert the media and technology into tools to promote confidence and social participation, which we will now discuss.

2. Media and participation

Evidently, the media play an important role in democratic societies (Bogart 1998). Over and above being mere opportunities for escape from everyday reality and entertainment, the media are entrusted with making public affairs clear and comprehensible to the public, and thanks to the media, citizens can exercise their right to being informed. This civic right means that the media are responsible for presenting objective and truthful information, that allows for the discernment of opinions which favors one to act freely (Dahlgren 1994).

In spite of the fact that this argument forms the very basis of the media, and justifies its regulation by the State, it is frequently true that media companies appear to avoid this responsibility by referring exclusively to the citizen's responsibility to choose among the possibilities offered. The fact

³ The *Law on Quality Education* (LOCE) was passed by the *Partido Popular* (People's Party) in December 2002 as an alternative to the LOGSE. The *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (Socialist Party), PSOE, has prepared the *Law on Education* (LOE) as an alternative to the LOCE.

that much of the media depend on companies that are quoted on the stock exchange means that their responsibility to be truthful is subject to the logic of economic results (Bogart 1998, 3). This implies that the media often lose sight of their role as shapers of public opinion, and their contribution is very poor and their content of little value. They simply offer entertainment.

Traditionally, the health of a democracy has been measured, amongst other factors, by the existence of plurality in information. This allows the public to see different versions of reality before taking their own standpoints, and this is what justifies laws on market share in the media, that are designed to ensure diversity in the supply of content.

The influence of the media on the public's concept of political and social reality has been studied for a long time. It is not a question of propaganda, but it is true that until the arrival of Internet, thanks to which people can go directly to the information source, the media controlled what was publicly debated. The concept of *agenda setting*, of the media as *gatekeepers*, can be seen again and again media studies (Dearing, Rogers 1996; Barber 2004).

Obviously, it would be oversimplified to state that this responsibility lies exclusively in the hands of the media. Every social agent should be involved, and the members of the community themselves should actively find the necessary data in order to form their opinions, and should be capable of contributing to public opinion. But if we look at the reality of the matter, and the growth of sources and motivations for information, it is practically impossible for someone with an eight-hour working day and a family, to have enough time to carry out an in-depth study of information. In most cases, we leave this task to the media, either for simplification or because of laziness. This results in considering that if something is not covered by the media, it does not exist.

The basic idea of what has been said is to emphasize the central role of the media in a democratic society as shapers of the public sphere. Although we realize they are not the only ones responsible, it is also reasonable to recognize how the public uses them as a window to reality.

We will now dig further into our knowledge of the young Spanish public and begin with their use of the media. This will be the first indicator of their possible level of exposure to matters of public interest. Together with this, we will analyze the important role played by interactive media, Internet and cell phones, as a means to spreading information among this public giving them the possibility to promote participation. And finally, we will explain about a real case study carried out in Spain for the elections to approve the European Constitution, that was addressed to the young, and was a great success.

2.1 Young Spaniards and the conventional media

When analyzing the consumer preferences of young Spaniards, two fundamental criteria are taken into account: the type of media and the type of content. The media analyzed are television and the press. With regard to the content, we will consider their preference for informative or cultural content, or for leisure and entertainment. With regard to the age group considered "young", and without wishing to start arguments, it seemed particularly significant to observe the behavior of adolescents (under 18) and to compare them to those between 18 and 20 years of age. For many young people reaching the age of majority, means assuming new responsibilities such as working or studying abroad, which should imply greater civic responsibility.

Television

The most consumed medium by Spanish society is television, according to the data of the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE)* – the official main source of data in Spain: 60% of the time spent on the media is on television. In the case of young people, it is striking that this is the group that spends the least amount of time watching television. For young people of 15-17 and of 18-20, their weekly viewing time is distributed as follows:

Table 1⁴: Hours of TV watched per week

	Aged 15-17	Aged 18-20	Aged 21-24	Aged 25-29	Total (Aged 15-29)
1-6 hours	16.3	21.1	22.2	22.3	21.1
7-10 hours	22.8	25.9	28.9	29.2	27.5
11-15 hours	22.1	22.1	19.5	21.1	21.0
+15 hours	31.0	22.1	19.3	17.8	21.1
N/A	7.8	8.8	10.1	9.5	9.3
AVERAGE	14.3	12.7	11.9	11.9	12.4

Source: Own, based on *Instituto de la Juventud: Informe Juventud en España 2004*, 369.

This data is significant: almost half of those between 18 and 20 watch less than 10 hours of television per week, which is more or less one and a half hours per day. In the youngest age group, the percentage is slightly higher. As these teenagers grow up, their consumption falls. According to the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística*, INE, (National Institute of Statistics) the official source of data in Spain, the average for television viewing per day is 119 minutes, in contrast to the data produced by SOFRES, a commercial audio-monitoring service⁵, which states the average is 211 minutes. In any case, despite the great difference in numbers, it is clear that young people watch less television than the average Spaniard.

Daily newspapers

With reference to reading newspapers, in the Spanish market, according to the *Estudio General de Medios (EGM)*, the most important study of consumption of the media in Spain, 40% of citizens over the age of 15 read a daily newspaper. This figure drops to 25,6% for young people. With the same breakdown as in the case of television, the data is as follows:

Table 2: Frequency of newspaper reading

	Aged 15-17	Aged 18-20	Aged 21-24	Aged 25-29	Total (Aged 15-29)
Daily	11.9	19.9	28.4	31.8	25.6
Several times a week	12.5	17.9	20.4	22.3	19.5
Once a week	15.4	15.4	17.0	14.5	15.1
Once a month	5.8	4.9	4.8	3.7	4.6
Very occasionally	10.1	10.2	9.4	7.8	9.1
Never	42.8	28.5	21.4	18.9	25
N/A	1,4	1.5	0.9	1.0	1.1

Source: Own, based on *Instituto de la Juventud: Informe Juventud en España 2004*, 376.

In this case, it is particularly significant that 40% of the youngest group between the ages of 15 and 17 admit to never reading a newspaper. This percentage drops greatly as they get older.

The content

Young people watch less television than the national average, and read noticeably fewer newspapers. The data on the content they prefer to consult in these media qualify their answers.

⁴ The tables are our own based on information published in the *Informe de la Juventud en España 2004*, Injuve, Madrid. Said report considers people between the ages of 15 and 29 to be young. Following the objectives of this document, we only deal with two age groups: 15-17 & 18-20. In some tables, there is another column which indicates the total value of the sample. (15-29 years old).

⁵ SOFRES AM is the company which has a panel of households in Spain with audimeters to measure the audiences of television programs.

Table 3: Television content preferred by young people

	Aged 15-17	Aged 18-20	Aged 21-24	Aged 25-29	Total (Aged 15-29)
Movies	16.3	23.6	24.9	28.8	24.8
Series	29.3	21.8	18.3	12.2	16.3
Sport	13.3	15.1	13.0	10.7	12.6
News programs	1.7	4.3	8.1	12.3	8.1
Reality shows & gossip	10.1	7.3	8.9	7.8	7.8
Documentaries	2.0	4.0	5.6	7.6	5.5
Cartoons	7.4	4.7	3.0	1.4	3.3
Soaps	3.4	3	1.7	2.5	2.5
Quizzes	3	1.8	2.6	2.1	2.3
Music Programs	3.4	2.6	1.0	1.3	1.8
Comic Series	2.2	1.2	1.2	0.8	1.2
Debates	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.3
Others	4.2	3.4	2.8	3.1	3.2
Everything	1.6	1.4	1.8	1.5	1.6
Not at all	0.8	1.5	1.6	2.1	1.7
N/A	4.2	4.2	5.6	5.6	5.1

Source: *Instituto de la Juventud: Informe Juventud en España 2004*, 371.

In this case, the content that could be considered to be closer to the area of participation, culture, information or public debate makes up no more than 15% of the total of the media consumption. For the younger group, between 15 and 17, it barely reaches 4%, and is only 8% in the next age group. Their main use of television is, therefore, for entertainment, for cinema and fiction in general.

With regard to the press, we find something similar, although here we must refer to the phenomenon of the complimentary free press, which, like in the rest of Europe, has reached the cities of Spain, and is associated with public transport, frequently used by youths. Thus, it is not surprising that *20 Minutos* is in third position in the classification of most-read newspapers, although it is read by only 4.7% of the group. The most-read newspaper, *El País*, gives general news, with 12.7% of the market, and in second place we have a sports newspaper, *Marca*, with 12.5%. If we separate the data by age groups, it is distributed as follows:

Table 4: Preferred content in daily newspapers

	Aged 15-17	Aged 18-20	Aged 21-24	Aged 25-29	Total (Aged 15-29)
El País	7.2	11.7	12.9	14.5	12.7
Marca	20.8	19.9	11.6	7.9	12.5
20 Minutos	5.0	4.6	5.5	4.1	4.7

Source: Own, based on *Instituto de la Juventud: Informe Juventud en España 2004*, 378.

To summarize: Sports papers – there is only one example in the table – have the greatest readership among the younger group, and a slightly lower percentage in the following group. Again, the informative value of newspapers does not appear to appeal too much to young people.

In Appendix I there is further information on the preferences of young people when they choose the content of the media.

2.2 New technologies, Internet and cell phones as means of communication

The new information and communication technologies are one of the defining elements of contemporary society, to which they have even given a name: information society. Much has been written about these technologies as communication media. Obviously, these new technologies are a tool, a means of communication, but they have also given shape to a means of communication: a space where information is shown for public consultation or consumption. The use of this media is radically different from conventional information sources: the interactive character of technology,

and the fact that it needs a proactive user, marks both the experience of the media and the users. The uni-directionality and linearity in the construction of a certain discourse disappear in this interactive environment.

For this reason, some people believe that the compulsory participation in experiencing the interactive media will be the first step in later participation in other areas, particularly those of the public area (López Escobar 2003). This is the direction taken in the research of Livingstone, Bober and Helsper (2004), which offers an encouraging vision in this sense, although it also states that there is room for great improvement.

Young people have a head start: their predilection for this technology is clear, and their level of penetration and use is extremely high, far above that of the rest of the community. The social status given by this technology, or the fact that it allows them to be constantly in contact with their peer group, explains its popularity. Of the different information and communication technologies, Internet and cell phones are the most significant.

Internet

According to the latest data from the EGM, 33% of Spaniards use the Internet. In the case of young people, the *Juventud en España 2004* survey, shows the following data: 40.7% have access to a computer and an Internet connection. The average time spent on Internet is 9 hours a week: a high percentage of young people spend the same time, or even less, watching television, as can be see in epigraph II.1.

Their favorite activities on Internet are surfing (use of the World Wide Web), and sending or receiving e-mails and chatting. In the former case, the main objective of surfing is to find information, and in the second case, to communicate with friends.

Table 5: Main uses of Internet and frequency of use

		Aged 15-17	Aged 18-20
Surfing the web	Several times a day	15.0	14.0
	Several times a week	22.3	22.3
	Other frequencies	30.7	33.4
	Never	32.0	30.4
e-mail	Several times a day	13.8	13.5
	Several times a week	19.4	20.6
	Other frequencies	28.1	29.8
	Never	38.6	36.1
Chat	Several times a day	8.9	6.2
	Several times a week	17.2	11.7
	Other frequencies	27.9	34.3
	Never	41.2	42.1

Source: Own, based on *Instituto de la Juventud: Informe Juventud en España 2004*, 604.

There is still a significant number of people, young people in this case, who do not have access to information and communication technologies. The digital fracture produced by the existence of economic or cultural barriers, which hampers access to the information society, may also affect their education for participation.

Cell phones

According to a recent report of the International Communications Union (2005), Spain is in fourth place worldwide with reference to the number of cell phones per inhabitant. In fact, 93,9% of the population use this technology. The first three countries on the list are: Italy (109%), United Kingdom (102.8%) and Taiwan (100%).⁶

This first figure gives an idea of the incredible popularity of this technology among Spanish society. As for young people, 90% have cell phones (INJUVE 2004, 593) and several studies have shown they have become indispensable for interpersonal communications within this group (Naval, Sádaba, Bringué 2003).

⁶ http://www2.noticiasdot.com/publicaciones2005/1105/1911/noticias/noticias_191105-04.htm

Table 6: Main uses of cell phones and frequency of use

		Aged 15-17	Aged 18-20
Talking to friends	A lot/quite a lot	70,6	73,4
	Little/not at all	29,2	26,4
	N/A	0,3	0,2
Talking to family	A lot/quite a lot	42,8	51,7
	Little/not at all	56,8	48,0
	N/A	0,4	0,3
Work	A lot/quite a lot	0,9	8,1
	Little/not at all	8,4	23,8
	Not applicable	89,8	64,2
	NC	0,9	4,0
Play	A lot/quite a lot	28,6	19,3
	Little/not at all	70,8	79,7
	N/A	0,6	1,0

Source: Own, based on *Instituto de la Juventud: Informe Juventud en España 2004*, 612.

The table shows that the basic reason why young people use cell phones is to be in contact with their peers, obviously not for work reasons, and, to a certain extent, for games. The telephone is a means of communication which, using the latest developments, may become a *personal media center*: the third generation of cell phones allows videos to be received by phone, and many already have radios, music players, and even video cameras.

2.3 Interactivity and participation

Information technology is a very good description of the digital generation, or the *net generation*, as the use and ownership of technological gadgets is considerable amongst this group of young people (Tapscott 1997). These media, apart from their technological appeal and up-to-date image, have a more important characteristic: interactivity, that is, the possibility of taking part in the communicative processes which, thanks to technology, work can be accomplished quickly, instantly and with an array of information (text, audio, video, music). As we have seen, young people use this power preferably to communicate with their peers, their friends, and thus the means of strengthening pre-existing social links.

However, there can be other ways of understanding this interactivity. According to Livingstone, Bober and Helsper (2004, 3): "the Internet is widely hailed as the technology to bring direct participatory democracy to the masses, enabling citizens to become actively engaged in the political process". It is common to connect the development of technologies, mainly Internet, with the appearance of citizens into the public sphere. Internet offers a media platform of great impact and coverage, for the transmission of messages, exchange of opinion or obtaining information.

Blogs, for example, have become extremely prominent in the last few years, they have become the voices of those who criticize the war in Iraq, for instance. Another example: in the American presidential campaign in 2004, where they were successful in changing the messages of the major media companies. What distinguishes blogs is their personal character, most are written by someone unknown to the public, simply a private citizen who dares to raise their voice and speak out.

There are many examples of how Internet is becoming a tool for mobilization and social participation. In the case of Spain, we need only remember what happened on March 11, 2004, which was quickly picked up by certain social groups who by using the web and cell phones, managed to convert citizen discontent with the measures taken by the government into a public, participative act.

Therefore, it would be advantageous if young people saw technology not merely as a cheap, quick tool for communication or entertainment, but also as a starting point to learn about public affairs.

2.4 A case study: young people, media and participation

Background

On October 29 2004, the Heads of State and Government of the member States of the European Union signed the Constitution in Rome. From that point on, each Member State would determine the process for ratification of the written Constitution in their respective countries.

Spain opted for convoking a referendum, with a consultative rather than binding character, after which the Parliament would be responsible for ratifying the Constitution. After fixing February 20, 2005 as the date for the referendum, Spain became the first State to convoke a referendum of this type. At the time, the country was being governed by a party that considered that the referendum should become a testimony in support of their management of the country, after they came to power on the heels of the tragedy of 3-11. This fact, combined with the urgency of approving the Constitution itself, made the electoral campaign during the time leading up to the referendum especially intense. In fact, the government committed itself to respect the results from the elections, even though the referendum did not have a legally binding character.

This point of departure caused the development of numerous incidents in the electoral campaign. Since the “No” groups considered that the government itself was pushing for a “Yes” vote, and in so doing was breaking the Electoral Law. Along with this, one must note the precocity of the dates for the referendum: only four months after the text was approved in Rome, it was presented to the citizens of Spain. In January 2005, 84% of those polled indicated that they had no knowledge of the content of the text itself. At the end of this same month, this percentage went up to 90%.

The Government feared that a rejection of the constitutional text could be seen as a rejection of Europe, and this would have extra importance if, in addition, the youth did not participate in the election. For this reason, the activity which focused on this segment of the population was especially significant, as we will see in the next sections.

The Case: *Referendum Plus*

In spite of the scant interest shown by young people in public affairs, and that the main media companies appear to be unappealing in their presentation of the subject as a priority, there are examples and experiences which prove that there is still hope. Young people, when they are motivated, respond positively to the proposals of participation.

We continue with a specific case from Spain in 2005. It was a political communication campaign promoted by the *Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores* [Ministry of External Affairs] by means of the *Consejo de la Juventud de España* [Spanish Youth Council], which was designed to make young people realize the importance of making their voices heard in elections; specifically in the Referendum for the ratification of the European Constitution, which was held on February 20, 2005.

Historically, participation in European elections has been low, particularly among young people, who presented a differential of 15% compared to the participation of adults in the general elections in the year 2000. The text of the Constitution was dense, long (600 pages) and it was practically impossible to shorten or give in-depth explanations in the communication campaign.

One of the concerns of campaign promoters was that a low participation rate would project a feeling of indifference that would damage the concept of Europe. So, young people, between the ages of 18 and 21, who were about to vote for the first time, were chosen as the subject of this campaign.

Those in charge of the campaign realized young people were barely interested in messages from the media. In order to get their attention, they decided to adapt the code and the media chosen to communicate with youth, keeping away from an institutional tone. They used a youth code and manufactured a youth product. To reach this public, which is media-shy, they decided to include all the disciplines of commercial communication⁷ and a wide range of media.

The proposal for the campaign was to produce, launch and distribute a real energy drink, which was called *Referéndum Plus*, which, according to its slogan, “fought idleness and apathy... stimulating the motor system to approach the ballot boxes”. 500,000 cans were distributed in cinemas and universities, spots were placed on television, radio and in the press, and there was *product placement* on successful television series.

The public relations campaign had a special relevance: it involved politicians and opinion-makers. This meant that the campaign appeared on prime time programs and not on news programs but as entertainment, and became more attractive for the target. Also, an interactive website was designed with banners and an e-mail to generate interest. On certain social events the drink was presented for the opinion-makers to try.

⁷ Publicity, promotion, public relations, sponsorship or direct marketing are considered different disciplines.

The aim of the campaign was to motivate young people, to keep them informed, in an attractive and relaxed way, of the importance of their participation in the referendum. There are three main elements that produced encouraging results. Firstly, the use of a young, free and easy tone for the campaign, with the broad range of informative elements. Secondly, the fact they were shown on programs that are not usually connected with information. Thirdly, the well-designed use of interactive resources. On February 20, 2005, 33% more young people voted than the national average in the referendum and 58% more than in the previous general elections.

This data shows that the media is an excellent way of getting a message across to young people, and may be used to interest them in participating. However, the basis must be an exhaustive knowledge of their media consumption habits, and the capacity to adapt the message flexibly and creatively to a code they find familiar and attractive.

A campaign such as the current one shows the power, but also the risk, involved with pushing for a particular electoral decision without previously having promoted critical sensibility on the part of the electorate, so that the citizens would be able to make their own decision based on sufficient criteria, and act accordingly. The danger of indoctrination is present as a latent attack on personal liberty.

3. Conclusion

These results should make us reflect on how effective the correct use of the media is for the promotion of participation. But we must be careful not to confuse what “seems to be” with what “is”. The media persuade people to participate, but this persuasion which is characteristic of the media, must be based on knowledge and critical thinking, if in the long term we want it to be effective and respectful of personal dignity. For this reason the three objectives that Classical Rhetoric mentions in persuading are required: teaching, pleasing, and moving. The three together are the driving force for actions that shape personality. They generate stable habits of behavior in the listener; in our case, positive civic habits which will be long-lasting: civic virtues.

In fact, the Spanish media often dismiss their role as shapers of public opinion, and the data also show that young people do not use the media to learn about the reality of their surroundings, but rather use it for entertainment and amusement purposes. This shows a double neglect of obligations: that of the media whose duty it is to help apply the right to information, of which they are the guarantors; and that of young people to take an active role in their society, based on the information they acquire.

The new information and communication technologies have great potential in this area, as they have the approval and appreciation of young people. However, they do not make a significant contribution to the values of social participation. For this reason it is important for the mass media to promote campaigns which would make certain attitudes attractive to young people, making them aware of their obligations, and encouraging them, by use of the appropriate vernacular and codes, to find information and do as they should.

In order to be more actively involved in the civic education of youths, the media should begin by accepting their limitations: their very structure gives them the capacity to inform, that is, to present subjects and events of interest, but hardly ever to produce in-depth information or attitudes that require practice, exercise, time and profound analysis. They should also offer the information in the correct place and through the opportune channels, and adapt the message to the content that have the greatest appeal for youths.

The communications media have the capacity to attract the interest of the youth, and even, as the explained case shows, to achieve a given response from them. But this also highlights that this capacity can come close to manipulation, if an authentic commitment to present alternatives does not exist so that the public has access to the criteria necessary for making a decision based on critical thinking. In this case, electoral participation appeared to be an end in itself, rather than being a method for favoring the common good.

It is also the responsibility of the family and the school to pay more attention to the role of the media as an assistant or partner in the shaping of knowledge and civic attitudes, as a complement to their own work. And, in particular, parents and teachers should add basic information and content to the information offered by the media. Used within a suitable framework, the media can be an attractive possibility for consideration of more seminal areas.

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<http://www.unav.es/english/information/governing/concepcionnaval/default.html>

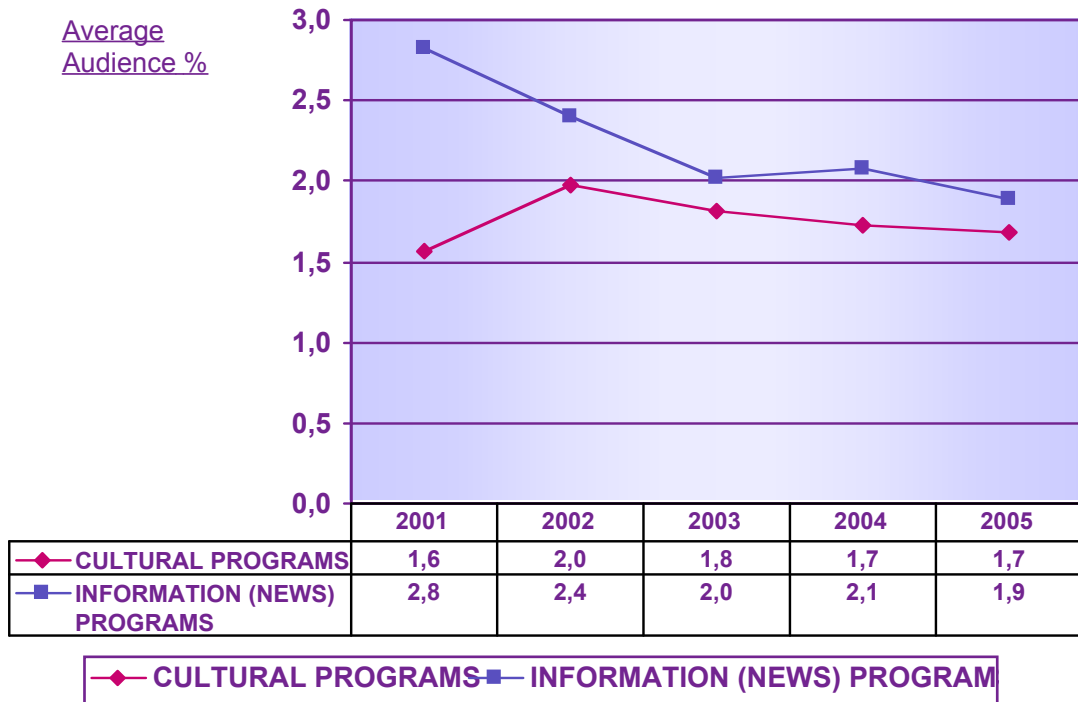
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http://www.unav.es/fcom/profesores/sadaba_chelazquer.htm

Annex 1

Graph 1: Average audience evolution of TV cultural and news (information) content.
Target: aged 13-24.

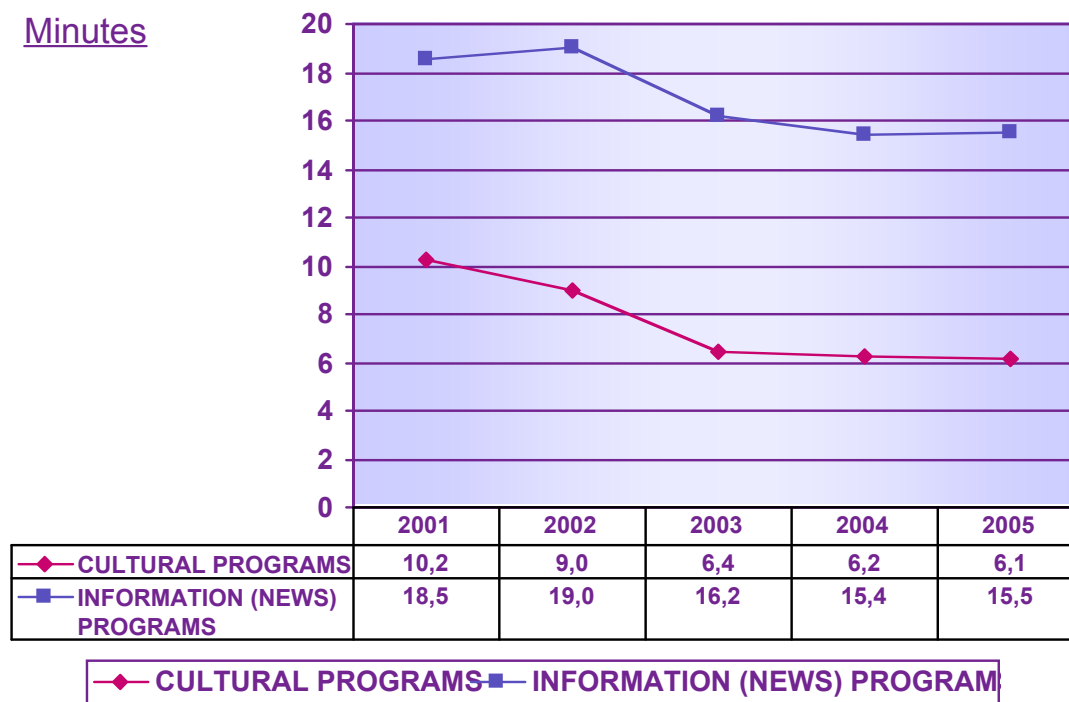
Source: TNS, elaborated by Mindshare for this paper.



As it could be inferred from this graph, the interest of the 13-24 years old in news and cultural television programs is not relevant. It is significant that for the last five years information related programs have dropped quite dramatically. 2004 was an exception: 11-M events could be a reasonable explanation, also because during those days it was not possible to watch any other content on Spanish television than news.

Graph 2: Evolution of daily viewed minutes of TV cultural and news (information) content.
Target: aged 13-24.

Source: TNS, elaborated by Mindshare for this paper.

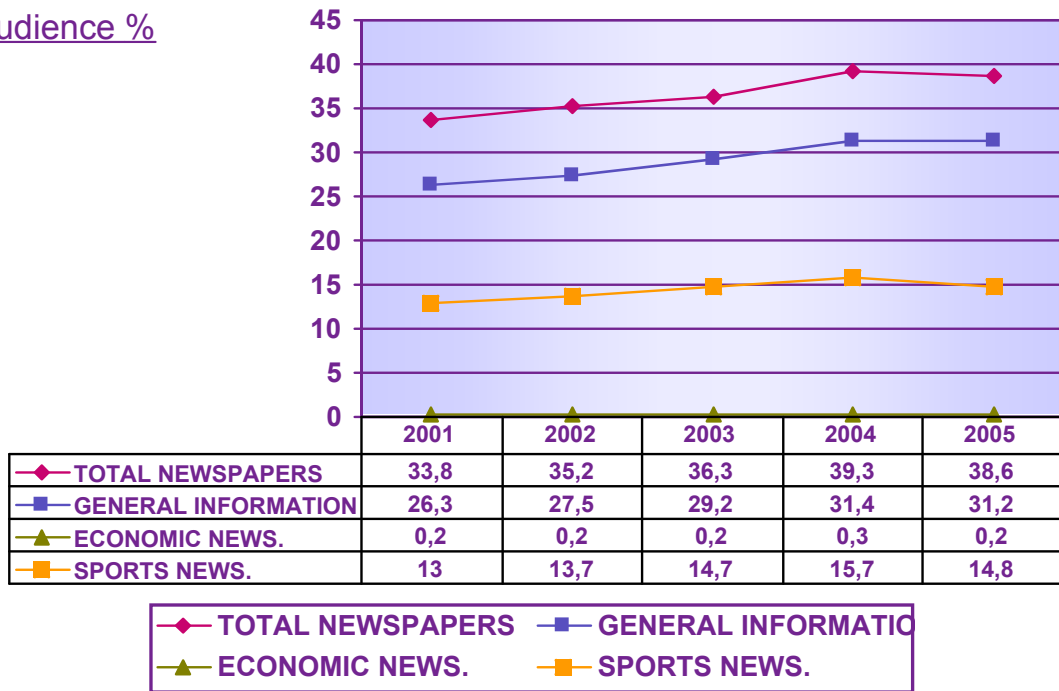


The consumption measures in daily viewed minutes has the same shape: in total, in 2005, young people (13.-24) dedicated 21,6 minutes per day to news or cultural content. In a whole day, those people watch around 90-100 minutes of television.

Graph 3: Newspaper audience evolution by typology.
Target: aged 14-24 años.

Source: EGM Acumulados, elaborated by Mindshare for this paper.

Audience %



Newspapers consumption is slightly different: information newspapers, with the arrival of the free-press, have been going up for the last years.