

Television: Chronicle of a death foretold?

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Not only is TV not endangered, but it also has a unifying social impact on the nuclear family across the country. This is the main conclusion of a cross-Canada study—Are the Kids All Right?—on the television viewing habits of families with at least one child aged between 9 and 12 years. The study was conducted by a team of researchers led by André H. Caron, professor of communications at Université de Montréal and Director of the Centre for Youth and Media Studies (CYMS).

"Young Canadians today live in a different world than that experienced by previous generations. In this context, many well-placed observers have predicted the impending death of television," says Dr. Caron. "We wanted to test the veracity of this statement, so we set out to meet 80 different families (over 200 participants) to determine the current place of the small screen that has shaped so many childhoods since its creation."

Presentation of the study

The study was conducted over three years in two phases. In the first phase, more than 500 Canadian children's [television programs](#) were analyzed. The results, published in 2010, showed the decisive quality of Canadian productions. On the other hand, it also revealed significant gaps in the availability and diversity of programs geared specifically to children aged between 9 and 12 years. The second phase of the study consisted of a thorough examination of the appropriation of media by families and children: in addition to the role, perception, and influence of TV, the study examined how children make use of new screen-based

media such as computers, video game consoles, and smartphones. Based on this approach, the researchers interviewed Canadian families in their everyday environment (their homes) in five Canadian cities: St. John's, Montréal, Toronto, Calgary, and Vancouver. The researchers also used the method of focus groups, composed respectively of children, fathers, mothers, and [young adolescents](#) in each city.

Results: highlights

"In the evening, when we're all sitting together, it's family TV time"

The results of the study show that, as in the past, television remains the media platform best suited to shared family experiences in the five regions visited. Families continue to attribute value and importance to TV. The results also suggest that second screens (tablets, smartphones, etc.) are still not widely used by this group and are not a threat to television: when present, they complement it. Thus, children and parents interviewed across the country consider television as far from being endangered since, because of its dimensions, it is the only screen in the house that allows family members to gather together and watch their favourite shows.

The study also highlighted regional differences in content and practices surrounding television use. For example, the greatest number of hours spent watching TV was in St. John's, Newfoundland, while that city also had the best balance of time spent on outdoor activities. In Calgary, parents' approaches were by far the most traditional, with greater involvement in decisions regarding program choice and number of viewing hours. In Quebec, there was a desire of parents for more programming for 9-12 year olds, preferably from Quebec.

Canadian content: are children loyal?

The findings also show that parents question the lack of content offered to their children. "Indeed, from pre-school to around 7-8 years, children are relatively loyal to Canadian programming since producers here offer a variety of programs known for their quality. After that, there is a sort of vacuum, and Canadian content for this group becomes more and more rare," laments Caron. Thus, their loyalty to Canadian television fades with time. "However, the 9-12 year old period is a good time to revive [children's](#) interest in Canadian [television](#) programming because they still want to spend time with their families and cherish these moments of closeness watching TV together. For Canadian producers, it's about long-term loyalty to TV 'made in Canada,'" concludes the researcher.

Provided by University of Montreal

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