Youth Media's Impact on Audience & Channels of Distribution An Exploratory Study

Youth Media's Impact on Audience & Channels of Distribution *An Exploratory Study*

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INTRODUCTION TO STUDY & YOUTH MEDIA FIELD

Youth media represents a powerful and exciting, albeit highly evolving, field of practice and study. Across the nation, youth media programs with widely differing organizational goals and structures are producing content that ranges in subject—from teen sexuality to the war in Iraq—as well as in distribution, from the World Wide Web to local high school instructors. Given the sheer diversity of youth media organizations along multiple dimensions, it is perhaps not surprising that much of the focus so far in defining the field has been on the most significant common element, the youth themselves. Powerful stories abound of youth media organizations' work and relationships with youth producers, as well as anecdotes of youth media's impact on youth producers' personal and professional development. However, the youth media field has little formal, systematic research and evaluation results to substantiate discrete observations of impact.[1] As noted by Dr. Sally Sharp from the University of Michigan, "the plural of anecdote is not evidence."[2] This is true not just for youth media's impact on *youth*, but also on *audiences* and *channels of media distribution*, which are even less explored spheres of influence.

The pressure to substantiate discrete observations of youth media's impact is perceived by some as a relatively recent phenomenon. As one respondent for this study observed, "The field has been funded for many years without a demand for assessment. All of a sudden, funders are saying, 'prove yourselves,' but that hasn't been built into the equation." The growing interest in evaluating youth media's impact can be attributed in part to the significant growth of the field (particularly with the ascendancy of the Internet and electronic media), a growing interest in building a youth media identity and network of practice among individual youth media organizations, as well as a desire to "prove" what many youth media practitioners instinctively know about the power of youth media to transform individuals and larger systems in society.

It is against this backdrop that Social Policy Research Associates (SPR) was contracted in 2004 by the Open Society Institute (OSI) and the Surdna Foundation to conduct a one-year exploratory study of the youth media field's collective impact. In particular, these funders requested a study aimed at better understanding how to measure the impact of youth media on *audiences* and *channels of distribution*, rather than on youth producers. This focus was determined by two key factors. First, while there is relatively little research on youth media's impact as a whole, there is less research on impact on audiences and channels specifically. Second, because youth media overlaps considerably with other youth-focused fields, such as youth development and youth organizing, the media or *product* itself is perhaps what distinguishes youth media most, and therefore merits particular attention.

This exploratory study is not designed to be the definitive "answer" to the question of youth media's impact on audiences and channels of distribution. Rather our goal is to help build the youth media field by addressing some of the gaps in the research and evaluation of youth media's impact. While our primary audience for this report are those funders interested in commissioning a study of youth media's collective impact on *audience* and *channels of distribution*, we also hope that the findings can inspire further study within the research community and ultimately support individual youth media organizations as they consider their own audience impact.

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1 Challenges and Opportunities for This Study

Conducting an exploratory study of collective impact within a field as diverse and burgeoning in nature as youth media presents a number of important challenges and opportunities we want to acknowledge upfront. **The first challenge** is related to isolating youth media's impact on *audience* and *channels of distribution*. We heard very strongly from youth media groups that—for many—youth media's impact also encompasses the critical outcomes that youth producers gain through the *process* of conceptualizing, developing, and disseminating their media products. At an OSI-hosted youth media convening that we attended in New York City in March 2004, we clearly heard two different articulations of intended impact between groups that stress the "youth" and others that stress the "media" within "youth media." Still others see the impact on youth producers and audience as *reinforcing* one other; a youth producer's skills and personal growth ultimately influence the product that reaches audiences, and how an audience responds to a media product also reinforces the impact made on youth producers. Therefore, although we are not addressing youth-level impact within our study, we recognize that, for some youth media groups, youth-level impact may be inextricable from the impact made at the levels of audience and channels of distribution.

A **second more basic and significant challenge** concerns the feasibility of considering the *collective* impact of the youth media field. Given the incredible diversity of youth media organizations, many practitioners, intermediaries, and researchers at the OSI

convening questioned the cohesiveness of the field. In fact, the group discussed whether youth media could even be considered a field—particularly given its relative nascency[3] and shortage of coordinating networks. Representatives talked explicitly about what is needed to define and further professionalize youth media as a field, with a White Paper from the convening stating, "While our organizations represent a diverse assemblage of models, our challenge is to articulate the shared principles and best practices that bring us together as a field."[4] This level of uncertainty about the very identity of youth media naturally has implications for our exploratory study of youth media's impact, in that a single model of youth media impact may not fairly represent the great multitude of youth media organizational models. Put another way, because youth media organizations range widely along such dimensions as their activist versus apolitical orientation, and focus on media product versus process, they may also have widely differing "yardsticks" of success, or desired impact. In addition, the considerable variations *within* the youth media field, participants of the OSI convening also emphasized the differences between youth media and mainstream media that would make existing media impact yardsticks inappropriate to use. For instance, some youth media organizations are relatively unconcerned with the number of people they ultimately reach with their product, but instead are focused on how they have impacted the lives of their youth producers or a select group of audience members.

Despite these two main challenges, we also want to recognize that there are a number of important opportunities that this study can capitalize upon to contribute knowledge to the field. Primary among these is **the tremendous enthusiasm and dedication of those in the youth media field** that we observed firsthand at the youth media convening in New York City. In addition to holding thoughtful discussions and planning sessions on how to best build the youth media field, many expressed a real interest in our study, and participating in various capacities. The second opportunity is **the interconnected nature of youth media with other related areas.** Beyond the existing literature on youth media specifically, we can draw upon other areas— such as mainstream media and ethnic media, social movement/advocacy, social marketing—to review existing studies and frameworks for relevance to measuring youth media's impact. Finally, we believe the timing of this exploratory study presents a tremendous opportunity. As the youth media "field" wrestles with how to conceptualize and communicate audience impact, our hope is the findings presented in this report can add to this critical dialogue.

2 Study Design and Methodology

This exploratory study of youth media's impact was designed to unfold in two major phases. **The first phase,** which began in March 2004 and ends with this report, was designed to be a **learning** process that would inform the building of a framework, or model, for measuring youth media's impact on audiences and channels of distribution. While ultimately dependent upon findings from this first phase, **the second phase** was originally conceived to be a **testing** process, whereby we would pilot test our model in the San Francisco Bay Area in order to see how well the model captures youth media impact.

For the first phase of this study, we drew upon two primary categories of data. The first category was existing research literature on youth media specifically, as well as on impact studies from related areas such as community youth development, mainstream and alternative media, social marketing, and social movement/advocacy. Our literature review helped to inform the overall design and direction of the study, as well as our *Framework for Conceptualizing Youth Media's Impact*, or *Framework*, presented later in this report. The *Framework* is our way of positioning youth media within the broader media landscape, as well as organizing our findings on potential versus observed youth media impacts. The *Framework* was also informed by our second category of data—primary data. We gathered the input and expertise of various stakeholders in the youth media field about measuring youth media's impact on audiences and channels of distribution. Specific primary data sources included the following:

- **Youth media convening hosted by OSI.** At the March 2004 convening in New York City, we learned from youth media practitioners and others' discussions on the state of the field, strategies for building the field, and reactions and suggestions for our proposed study, which were used to formulate the final study design and data collection activities.

- **Telephone interviews.** In August and September 2004, we held in-depth telephone interviews with 18 youth media practitioners, intermediaries, and researchers. Guided by a semi-structured interview protocol, respondents were asked about: targeted levels of impact; challenges and strategies in measuring different levels of impact; suggestions and ideas for measuring impact; and important impact studies and/or measurement tools they could recommend. The interviewees were selected based on peer nominations from our evaluation advisory group (see below) and in collaboration with our client. We aimed to secure input from a diverse group of youth media organizations (e.g., in terms of media type, size, geographic location).

■ **Online survey.** In August 2004, we launched an online survey of youth media organizations. Our broad aim was to solicit input from the universe of youth media organizations on how they conceive of and measure their impact on identified target audiences and channels of distribution. The survey also gathered descriptive information from each respondent, such as media type, frequency of production, and organizational focus. The survey used a range of question types, including multiple responses and open-ended responses.

We emailed the online link to the survey to 224 youth media organizations, a portion of which were provided by Pacific News Service as part of their effort to compile a youth media directory. We also utilized a snowballing technique, in that the original recipients of the survey were asked to pass the survey on to their colleagues in the youth media field. We ultimately received 58 responses, representing an overall response rate of 26 percent. In order to ensure that all recipients met our working definition of youth media,[5] however, we included in the survey an upfront question designed to weed out those respondents who did not meet this definition. Once we excluded those organizations, the number of respondents for purposes of this study was reduced to 45. Given this relatively small number, survey results presented in this report should be interpreted as suggestive rather than definitive.[6]

NOTE: *All survey percentages presented in this report are calculated after excluding non-respondents.*

■ **Teleconferences with advisors.** At key points during the study, we held teleconferences with our advisor, Lissa Soep from *Youth Radio*, and with our evaluation advisory group. While Ms. Soep provided both an academic and practitioner perspective on our study, our evaluation advisory group was comprised mainly of youth media practitioners, who acted as guides and a critical sounding board on both the content and format of our study design and deliverables. The advisory group members were: Gin Ferrara from *Wide Angle Community Media*, Keith Hefner from *Youth Communications*, Claire Holman from *Blunt/Youth Radio*, Maria Marewski from *Children's Media Project*, Meghan McDermott from *Global Action Project*, and Jorge Valdivia from *Radio Arte*.

3 A Snapshot of the Youth Media Field

A diverse and dynamic field with relatively fluid boundaries, the youth media field can represent somewhat of a moving target when it comes to analyzing its basic characteristics or crystallizing its identity. Nonetheless, in order to provide a foundation on which to build our findings and analysis in subsequent chapters, we felt it important to first attempt to present here an introductory snapshot of the field based on survey data, as well as provide a summary of existing research on the field. Exhibit I-1 displays very basic characteristics of the youth media field, ranging from organizational characteristics to the type of media produced. The statistics in this table are based on our own survey data, as well as on survey data collected online by the National Alliance for Media Arts (NAMAC) in 2003.[7]

Exhibit I-1: Snapshot of the Youth Media Field

Makeup of Youth Media

Organizational Structure	Percent of Respondents	Notes
Independent Youth Media Organization	53%	One-third of respondents indicated that their organization bridged several categories, underscoring the multifaceted nature of youth media programs and organizations.
Project of Larger Adult Media Organization	40%	
School-Linked Organization	24%	
Project of a Larger Youth Organization	7%	
Festival	9%	"Other" types of organizations included three that classified themselves as non-profit arts organizations, and one that classified itself as a network of youth media organizations.
Intermediary Organization	7%	
More than One Type Above	36%	
Other	20%	

Age of Organization*		
1-5 Years	48%	The relatively young age of youth media organizations reflects the youth of the field.
6-10 Years	24%	
11-15 Years	14%	Of those organizations that reported that their youth media program was between one to five years old, 19% had been in operation only one or two years.
16-20 Years	5%	
Over 20 Years	9%	

Staffing*		
FULL-TIME STAFF		Staff capacity of individual youth media organizations is generally limited—the majority of organizations have between one and five full-time staff members, and almost one-third have no full-time staff. Organizations appear to rely heavily on part-time staff and volunteers.
0 full-time staff	27%	
1-5 full-time staff	68%	
6-10 full-time staff	3%	
Over 10 full-time staff	1%	

PART-TIME STAFF

0 part-time staff	44%
1-5 part-time staff	41%
6-10 part-time staff	10%
Over 10 part-time staff	5%

VOLUNTEERS

0 volunteers	29%
1-5 volunteers	39%
6-10 volunteers	5%
Over 10 volunteers	27%

CONSULTANTS

0 consultants	42%
1-5 consultants	49%
6-10 consultants	5%
Over 10 consultants	3%

Funding Sources* +

Private Foundations	44%
Individual Donors	51%
State Government	41%
Corporate	47%
Fees for Services	37%
Federal Government	39%
Local Government	41%
Sales/Gate from Distribution or Exhibition of Work	27%

Private foundations are the largest source of funding for youth media organizations—76% receive some measure of foundation funding, and 32% depend on foundations for more than half of all of their funding.

Individual donors are the second largest source of funding for youth media organizations—53% receive some measure of funds from individual donors, but only 2% depend on individual donors for more than half of all of their funding.

Forms of Youth Media

Media Type

Web	62%
Print	56%
Video/Film	56%
Television	33%
Radio	27%
More than One Type Above	78%
Other	13%

Although 62% of respondents produce web-based media, only one organization surveyed produces only web-based media.

A large majority of organizations produce more than one type of media—45% produce two types, 16% produce three types, 13% produce four types, and 4% produce five or more types.

"Other" types of media include photography, digital imaging, animation, audio recording (not for radio), and music production.

Genre of Media	
Individual Stories/Personal Narrative	91%
Commentary on Local Community or Social Issues with a Youth Slant	76%
Commentary on Youth Policy Issues	60%

Other genres of media that fewer organizations produce include documentaries or PSAs (53%), news (51%), and fiction (36%).

Location of Youth Media

Area Type	
Urban	78%
Suburban	16%
Rural	7%

The large majority of survey respondents are located in urban areas.

Geographic Location	
West	36%
East	33%
Midwest	20%
South	11%

Among respondents, there are fairly equal numbers of youth media organizations in the West and East regions of the country, with fewer in the Midwest and the South.

* Data is from the NAMAC survey of youth media.

+ Percentages reported indicate youth media groups who receive up to 50% of their funding from the specified source.

4 Overview of Our Literature Review

While the information provided above provides a basic introduction to the youth media field, prior to discussing our findings, we also thought it important to introduce youth media in context of a broader "research" landscape. In building a field, one of the key steps is knowledge generation.[8] Knowledge development can take the form of multiple types of inquiry and documentation. In the early stages of field development, knowledge generation can range from self-reflection and *self-assessments* of practice among individual organizations, to *theory building* through exploratory studies of field impact, to *explanatory studies* that look at key variables and their relationship to impact. As the field matures, further knowledge can be generated through continued documentation of curricula and *best practices, meta-analyses* of multiple qualitative and quantitative studies, as well as rigorous *process and outcome studies* of whole-scale field impact or particular clusters of strategies.[9]

In our review of research literature on youth media, most examples that we came across were primarily exploratory and explanatory in nature—mapping the field and/or raising issues—rather than serving as examples of experimental or longitudinal studies of impact. This might be expected, given the field's relative newness and growth, as well as its rather fluid identity. Further—while representing critical building blocks in knowledge generation of the youth media field—the *focus* of the majority of position papers, case study documentations, and curriculum documentation that we came across, centered more on youth media as a strategy for supporting skill building, media literacy, and socio-political development of youth producers. We found very little discussing youth media's impact on audiences or channels of distribution. Given that our study was designed, in part, to address a gap in the research on youth media's impact on audiences and channels of distribution, we were not surprised to find no such impact studies in our literature review.

One of the more prominent pieces we found on youth media impact was Campbell et al.'s paper, *Sticking with My Dreams: Defining and Refining Youth Media in the 21st Century,* which examines the emergence and status of youth media, and takes inventory of what is and is not known about youth media impact. The paper briefly reviews: (1) components of youth media such as distribution, content, structure, youth participants, and funding; and (2) goals and philosophies behind youth media—youth voice/social change, career development, youth development, media literacy, and academic enhancement. The paper also discusses the extent to which youth media is a "tool or a field," in part by showing how youth media organizations balance or emphasize youth development and/or media production goals. With regards to studying impact, Campbell et al. (2001) concludes that resource and capacity challenges, as well as a lack of unifying goals, translates to youth media organizations' difficulty in reflecting on best

practice and conducting impact evaluations. They state that, "largely due to the diversity of youth media programs, there has not been a study of the impact of youth media on youth producers, audiences, or society at large." Instead, most of the research literature concentrates on the *potential* of youth media, and most data collected has been concerned with the extent to which youth media products are picked up by mainstream media. They point out that, "even with its worldwide reach, Children's Express (DC) has 'never been able to secure funding for a significant study' of program impact."

The relative shortage of youth media research, particularly that concerned with impact, encouraged us to turn to other, related fields for guidance and models that might be applicable to youth media. We first focused on a growing subset of literature within the youth development arena that focuses on young people as leaders and actors within community change efforts. Within this literature, youth media is included among the youth-led strategies for community change, along with such strategies as youth organizing, youth-led action research, service-learning, youth entrepreneurship, and youth governance. We thought this area might be especially promising since field leaders and researchers also theorize a dual-level goal of youth and community impact resulting from youth-led community action strategies. Most research studies to date, however, have focused on attempting to systematically study the impact of youth-led community action on *youth actors,* while relying on powerful anecdotal examples to illustrate impact on their *communities* and make the case for these strategies as "youth development plus." Literature conceptualizing and documenting the community impact that emerges from these youth-led efforts is largely undeveloped to date, and therefore yields few transferable findings for a study of youth media's impact on audience and channels of distribution.

We also explored literature on audience impact within the media research field. While largely focused on studies of mainstream or commercial media, this area is connected to youth media in terms of the obvious common denominator of media production. Given the abundance of existing media impact research conducted by social scientists and industry researchers, we were able to identify some key findings (summarized in Part III of this report) that might help inform a collective study of youth media's impact. Overall, however, substantial differences between mainstream commercial media and youth media limit the application of our findings. For instance, mainstream media organizations operate on a level far removed from that of typical youth media organizations—e.g., in terms of staff, capacity, resources, circulation, and reach. Furthermore, youth media organizations are often driven by very different goals than their mainstream counterparts. Specifically, many youth media organizations are equally if not more concerned with the process of media production for their youth producers, than the media product itself.

In building a field, one of the key steps is knowledge generation.

We explored class media—or media that offers content tailored for particular sub-groups of the mass media audience, such as media based on race, ethnicity, sex, or language—as an area of media research that might be closer to the youth media field. Specifically, "ethnic media explain local, state, and national issues, provide news and entertainment from the mother country, and link [consumers] with others who share their nationality, race, or culture."[10] Many youth media organizations also cover local, state, and national issues news from a youth-specific perspective, as well as provide youth-specific news and entertainment. While we have integrated useful findings from two recent studies of ethnic media's impact—conducted by the Public Research Institute and by New California Media—we found that issues of scope and salience limited transferability of ethnic media studies to youth media. For instance, it is unclear whether the two types of media are generally comparable in size and capacity, particularly when many youth media programs are part of a larger adult media organization. It is also unclear to what extent a youth identity is as salient as one based on race, ethnicity, culture, or any number of other factors. This, in turn, could significantly influence the reach and expected impact of the media at hand. Finally, the relative dearth of studies on ethnic media also hinders this field's usefulness as a model for studying youth media's impact.

Finally, assuming potential similarities in the types of impact targeted by both areas, **SPR also explored the possibility of applying lessons from areas such as social marketing and social movements.** We found a number of examples of youth-targeted social marketing campaigns, such as the state of Florida's anti-smoking "Truth" campaign, and the MTV-Kaiser Family Foundation sexual awareness campaign. Similar to the youth media field, these social marketing campaigns are using various media to reach a specific, youth audience, while competing against a host of confounding factors such as peer pressure and mainstream media "noise." However, a significant number of youth media organizations are more concerned with providing a forum for individual youth expression, rather than advocating a specific behavior, such as not smoking or wearing a condom. Furthermore, while some youth media organizations may indeed advocate behaviors as specific as these, more likely than not, they may be a discrete piece of a larger media product (e.g., one article in a weekly periodical), rather than a continuous and concentrated focus or campaign. Despite these differences, we did find interesting lessons about how to best reach youth audiences (e.g., involving youth in the creation of the campaign, positioning the desired behavior as a youth choice), as well as some information about efforts for evaluating the impact of social marketing messages, which are discussed later in this report.

In the end, what we found was very scant research on youth media generally, on youth media impact specifically, and on how related fields might be of significant use in attempting to measure the impact of youth media. The nascency and sheer diversity of the youth media field contribute to this shortage, as do the key differences between (1) youth media and other youth-oriented fields, and (2) youth media and other media fields in the way they target and measure impact. These fundamental differences discouraged us from conducting a more exhaustive literature review of related fields for specific and transferable impact-measurement tools.

5 Overview of Remainder of Report

The remainder of this report is divided into two sections. In Part II, we discuss the tremendous potential impact of the youth media field, using the *Framework for Conceptualizing Youth Media's Impact* to organize the multiple levels of impact on audiences and channels of distribution that youth media groups say that they are targeting. Also within this chapter, we discuss the range of factors that influence youth media's ability to impact these audiences and channels of distribution. In Part III, we focus on measuring youth media's impact. We first look at the extent to which youth media groups are measuring impact on audience and channels of distribution and their strategies for doing so. We then discuss how media research and other related fields measure impact. Finally, we close in Part IV with a summary of key findings and a discussion of our findings' implications for continued research on youth media's impact and for phase two of our study.

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1 Hanh, Cliff. "Valuing Evaluation: Youth Media Begins Proving Itself." *Youth Media Reporter.* Open Society Institute. December 10, 2002.

2 Campbell, Patricia B., L. Hoey, and L. Perlman (2001). *Sticking with My Dreams: Defining and Refining Youth Media in the 21st Century.* Campbell-Kibler Associates, Inc.

3 This discussion is not to imply that youth media itself is new, as stated in a White Paper distributed at the OSI/Surdna youth media convening, New York City, March 2004: "While it is only in the past five years or so that some of us speak of a 'youth media field,' young people have been making media for almost forty years." Coryat, Diana and Steven Goodman (2004). "Developing the Youth Media Field: Perspectives from Two Practitioners."

4 Coryat, Diana and Steven Goodman (2004). "Developing the Youth Media Field: Perspectives from Two Practitioners." A White Paper distributed at the OSI/Surdna youth media convening, New York City, March 2004.

5 For the purposes of this study, our operational definition of youth media is one borrowed from Campbell et al. (2001), that is: "media conceived, developed, and produced by youth and disseminated to others." Campbell, Patricia B., L. Hoey, and L. Perlman (2001). *Sticking with My Dreams: Defining and Refining Youth Media in the 21st Century.* Campbell-Kibler Associates, Inc.

6 While 25 percent is not a highly unusual response rate for mail surveys, it is impossible to interpret the "real" response rate among youth media organizations, given that we are unsure to what extent all of those we sent the survey represented youth media organizations that would have met the definition of youth media put forth by this study. For example, if a large proportion of the 224 original survey recipients did not meet the definition of youth media, then the response rate of youth media organizations would be much higher.

7 The survey data was presented as part of a paper entitled "Mapping the Field: A Survey of Youth Media Organizations in the United States." The paper was included in NAMAC's A Closer Look Media Arts 2003: Case Studies from NAMAC's Youth Media Initiative. NAMAC's survey data is based on 59 respondents.

8 At the OSI/Surdna youth media convening in March 2004, knowledge generation was discussed as an area key to professionalizing the field along with such specific factors as: ongoing forums for peer-to-peer professional development, online clearinghouses and resources for sharing best practices and curricula, establishing standards of practice, etc.

9 While knowledge generation can be broadly conceived as progressing along a continuum, this process is rarely coordinated and therefore oftentimes occurs concurrently across multiple study-types, and across multiple researchers, intermediaries, and practitioners.

10 Gutierrez, Felix. (2002). "Communicating to and About All Californians." Institute for Justice and Journalism, Annenberg School for Communication, University of Southern California.

THE POTENTIAL IMPACT OF YOUTH MEDIA

Part II

The youth media field holds promise for tremendous impact. Some studies already exist that document impact on youth **producers** of media; as a youth programming strategy, those in the field have observed that youth media can build the skills and transform the lives of youth producers.[1] Youth authentically conceiving, developing, and producing media products have been shown to foster important individual level outcomes, such as youth voice, critical thinking, research, literacy, writing, media skills and broader youth and career development outcomes.[2] While largely unexplored to date through systematic study, youth media also has potential to simultaneously affect the **audiences** that the youth are reaching with their messages. Further, through their very efforts, youth media groups have the potential to influence the channels of distribution within which they work, and ultimately influence how youth voice is received and valued—within media circles as well as within our broader society.

This chapter focuses on documenting the potential impact youth media groups may be having on their audiences and channels of distribution. We first discuss the rich diversity of radio, television, film, print, and Internet messages that youth media groups are currently producing and the range of audiences being targeted by these messages. Then we present the potential impact that youth media groups have on audiences and on their channels of distribution. Toward this end, we present our *Framework for Conceptualizing Youth Media's Impact* to describe the potential impact of the youth media field, based on our literature review and interviews with youth media practitioners, intermediaries, and media researchers. Finally, we close this chapter with a detailed discussion of the key factors that determine and influence youth media's potential impact.

1 What Is Youth Media Saying?

Youth media organizations produce a range of youth-created work that is diverse in medium and genre, in order to present information and express opinions about a wide array of topics. Youth media strongly believes that youth voice is critical, and that there is true power in young people's creative self-expression. Without the right to vote, young people are often seen as witnesses to and casualties of the effects of current public policy—the depressed job market, elusive health care, and inequitable educational resources. Across the country, young people recognize that they have ideas to express about society and the motivation to comment upon and influence the reality that affects their everyday lives.

Youth media provides young people the means to elevate their voices to the public sphere. Through an array of creative and innovative youth media *products*, the diverse voices of the nation's younger generations are being expressed. Youth in Berkeley, California stream radio shows over the Internet, while youth in Baltimore, Maryland create short narrative videos in collaboration with other community groups. Across the country, young people are providing online content for youth websites, showing original films at festivals, publishing zines, and distributing news from a youth perspective throughout entire school systems. They are investigating conditions in juvenile prisons, unleashing the silenced voices of foster care youth, and communicating with youth from many nations across the globe.

Through these varied products, young people are conveying powerful *messages* across a wide range of issue areas. The topics listed in **Exhibit II-1** were given by our survey respondents as the major issues they had covered in the last twelve months. As evidenced by this table, youth media covers issues that directly reflect and affect the experiences of young people, their families, and their communities. From articles about international conflicts such as the war in Iraq and the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, to videos about the abuse of OxyContin in rural America, to radio exposés about gang violence and girls, young people are voicing opinions on topics new and old in a way not often heard through mainstream media.

Exhibit II-1: Content of Youth Media Messages in Order of Frequency

Category	Examples
General Teen Issues	• Family Communication • Growing Up • Faith
Education, School Reform	• School Budget Cuts • Local School Reform • No Child Left Behind • What if the Supreme Court Ruled Against Brown in 1954?
Health Issues	• HIV/AIDS and Teen Sexuality • Teen Obesity • Depression • Alcoholism
Issues of Crime, Violence, and Incarceration	• Male Aggression and Violence • Overcrowded Conditions in Juvenile Hall • Youth-Police Interactions • Violence Against Asian Americans • Domestic Violence • Kids on Death Row
Voting/Election	• Democratic and Republican National Conventions • Local and National Elections • Youth Voting • Importance of Voting
War on Iraq	• U.S. Treatment of Iraqi Prisoners • Conditions for Kids in Iraq • Personal Stories of Fear and Security • Peace in the World
Urban Life	• Urban Growth and Gentrification • Relocation of Public Housing Families • Homeless Teenagers
Race & Gender Issues	• Bi-Racial Identity • Sexism • Racial Stereotypes/Racism
LGBTQ Issues/Gay Marriage	• Gay Youth Identity • Legalization of Gay Marriage
Youth Activism	• Social Justice • Youth Organizing • Anti-Corporate Globalization Activism
Youth and the Media	• Effects of Advertising and Media • Corporate Marketing to Youth • Gender Issues in Advertising
International Issues	• Child Poverty and Exploitation on a Global Scale • Immigration • Muslims/Islam • U.S. Intervention Abroad
Environmental Issues	• Animal Rights • Environment
Foster Care	• Youth Foster Care Crisis in L.A. County • Aging Out of Foster Care

2 Who Are Youth Media's Audiences?

As diverse as youth media groups are, the audiences youth media groups target to impact with their messages are accordingly rich and varied. While we did hear a desire for "everyone" to be exposed to youth media messages, most groups articulated specific target groups that they are aiming to reach. In particular, these target groups are typically defined by age, geography, ethnic group, or occupation. Generally, youth media groups were able to differentiate between their primary target audience—the main group of audience members that they want their media product to reach and impact—and their potential secondary audiences—groups outside their primary target audience who the organizations still hope to be influenced by their products. Exhibit II-2 and Exhibit II-3 summarize the types of primary and secondary audiences that youth media groups reported targeting in our online survey.

Primary Target Audiences

The potential geographic scope of youth media's collective audience is extremely broad. Seventy-seven percent of survey respondents target local audiences, in a specific county, city, or neighborhood. Additionally, 28% of the organizations have national target audiences, and 12% of the organizations target statewide audiences. Twelve percent target international audiences in addition to national audiences, largely to encourage dialogue between American youth and youth from other countries. Overall, the geographic scope of each group's audience is highly driven by their location and type of medium.

Exhibit II-2: Youth Media's Primary Audiences

	Percentage of Respondents
Young People	91%
Adults	58%
Policymakers/Decision makers	33%
Young People AND Adults	49%
Young People ONLY	40%
Adults and Policymakers ONLY	9%

Survey and interview data also reinforced the assumption that young people are a primary target audience for the majority of youth media organizations. Of the survey respondents, 91% target youth as a primary audience, with 40% organizations targeting youth alone as their primary audience.[3] Only nine percent of survey respondents do not include young people as a target audience, and instead target adults and/or policymakers.

Half of the survey respondents indicated that **both** youth and adults make up their primary target audience. In some cases, this is because organizations are seeking to reach as many audience members as possible and are less concerned with the exact makeup of their audience. In other cases, the explicit goal behind including both youth and adult audiences is related to promoting dialogue across age groups.

Further describing their audience, several youth media organizations indicated that they were targeting specific subgroups of the population. For example, incarcerated youth and youth in the foster care system were commonly cited as targeted subgroups of youth media efforts. Notably, youth media groups indicated that subgroups of the population that they target can vacillate depending on the content of the media product and its intended impact. For example, the audience subgroups that *Global Action Project (GAP)* targets are defined by the issue being covered in the media product. One piece covered the conflict in Northern Ireland, and the finished product targeted an Irish and English audience. With a piece about prostitution, GAP hoped to reach youth at risk for involvement in "the life," and they sent the piece to juvenile detention facilities and foster homes. In another example, anti-war activists used videos created by young refugees from war-torn countries as first person testimony of living through war.

Secondary Audiences

Exhibit II-3: Youth Media's Secondary Audiences

	Percentage of Respondents
Educators	71%
Youth Workers (social workers, probation officers, counselors)	40%
Parents	32%
Policymakers/Decision makers	18%
Community Groups	11%
Young People	11%
Media Professionals	5%

Many youth media organizations identified secondary audiences for their media products. Upon interacting with the media product, these audiences may experience differing impacts than the primary target audience. Common secondary audiences are adults who work with youth or are concerned with youth issues, such as educators, parents, social workers, youth workers (including adults working with teens in foster care and juvenile hall), and policymakers. The impact of a youth media product can be very different for a parent or a prison guard than a young person, but it is nevertheless an important impact for many organizations. For some organizations, adults who work with youth are both

channels of distribution *and* secondary audiences. An example would be a teacher who uses a youth media product in his/her classroom—the students may be the primary target audience, but the product has certain important impacts on the teacher as well. Community leaders, activists, artists, students, siblings, and other youth media producers are other secondary audiences named by youth media organizations in our survey.

3 What Is Youth Media's Intended Impact on These Audiences?

Since the primary aim of our study is to explore how youth media's impact on audiences and channels of distribution might be measured, the question of youth media's **intended impact** is critical. Recognizing the broadness of the term "impact," our first goal was to both unpack and organize the different types and levels of impact that might emerge as a result of audience exposure to youth media messages.

Framework for Conceptualizing Youth Media's Impact

Exhibit II-4 proposes the first part of our Framework that begins to describe the potential impact of the youth media field. It is based upon our literature review, as well as interviews with youth media practitioners, intermediaries, and media researchers. This part of the Framework conceptualizes three **levels** of impact—individual impact, collective impact, and systemic impact—which are seen as building upon each other. For example, while an individual is the first receiver of a media message, that individual operates as part of a larger collective that can also be affected by the message. Only as multiple individuals and collectives are influenced by youth media do we anticipate broader systemic and social change impact. However, it is important to note that systemic-level impact is not always the result of a linear, accumulated progression from individual to collective to systemic. As one of our respondents described, there may be more of a "lightning effect," in that a particularly salient message has an immediate, system-wide impact.

The framework also describes three **types** of impact that typically appear in media research studies—affective impact, cognitive impact, and behavioral impact. **Affective impact** refers to emotional reactions that an audience member may experience as a result of their exposure to a media product. For instance, affective impact is concerned with whether the audience reacted positively or negatively to the message, as well as the emotions that it engendered, such as empathy, rage, or sadness. Affective impact is typically fleeting, but can be reinforced over time and with repeated exposure. **Cognitive impact** refers to an audience member's attention to and comprehension of a media product. In *Media Research Methods: Measuring Audiences, Reactions and Impact*, Barrie Gunter refers to three types of cognitive impact—changes in **agenda-setting** (i.e., changes in what people think about as a result of media exposure), **factual learning** (i.e., increased

knowledge about a particular subject area), and ***cultivation of beliefs and opinion*** (i.e., changes in audience members' perception of reality).[4] ***Behavioral impact*** refers to changes in how an audience member acts or behaves as a direct or indirect result of their exposure to media.

Exhibit II-4:
Framework for Conceptualizing Youth Media's Impact
Part I: Impact on Audience

Affective Reaction
(i.e., like/dislike, empathy, frustration, reduced feelings of isolation)

Individual Impact

Cognitive Impact
(i.e., increased knowledge about specific issues, understanding of/value for youth perspectives, critical thinking skills, tolerance of difference/respect for rights of others)

Behavioral Impact
(i.e., discussion of issues w/others, considering media when making personal decisions, empowered to take specific action)

Collective Impact
* Greater sense of community across youth media audiences
* Improved collective perception of youth
* Greater sense of youth empowerment

Systemic Impact
* Increased integration of youth issues and voices in media
* Increased engagement of underrepresented voices in social discourse
* Greater accountability to youth within systems that serve them

An individual audience member can have an affective reaction to a media product (e.g., like/dislike of a youth-produced commentary on smoking), a cognitive change (e.g., in terms of their awareness or beliefs about the dangers of smoking), as well as a behavioral change (e.g., an attempt to stop smoking). At the systemic level, these types of reactions or responses can also occur—for example, society's improved perception of youth as a cognitive impact. Changes in policy, in response to particular youth messages, would be an example of a systemic, behavioral impact.

In the following sections, we further explore this proposed Framework and how it relates to the way in which youth media groups describe their intended impact on audiences and channels of distribution. While each youth media organization describes the intended impact of their media products on audiences in a different language, key cross-cutting themes emerged that directly map to our Framework.

Youth Media's Intended Impact at the Individual Level

At the individual level, many youth media groups shared that one of their primary goals is to evoke an *affective reaction* from individuals within their target audience. Extending beyond the typical "like" or "dislike" response that is often the goal of many mainstream media efforts, some youth media efforts intentionally appeal to their audience on a very personal, intimate level and can therefore evoke strong emotional responses such as frustration, empathy, or sadness among individual audience members. For example, one youth media organization shared that they connect American youth to young people in war-torn countries in an effort to "put a face to statistics," and to unmask the emotional reality of political decisions. For groups that target primarily youth audiences, many shared that a common intended affective impact of their efforts is to "reduce feelings of isolation" and "change youth's self-perception" or "level of confidence" by making a connection to the experiences and ideas conveyed through youth-produced media. One group discussed what this looks like in their rural context, where youth interested in social justice can often feel isolated; mitigating these feelings of isolation was the intended impact of a recent online piece by a rural teen opposed to the war who talked about how unpopular it was to take this position in his community.

Beyond an immediate affective reaction, another commonly cited type of impact that youth media groups want to have on individual audience members is *cognitive impact*—changes both in what audience members think about and in *how* they think about it. Specifically, the types of cognitive changes that youth media groups hoped to realize in individual audience members included:

■ **Increased awareness and knowledge about specific issues.** Youth media intends to provide audience members with new information to increase awareness and interest in subjects as diverse as obesity, immigration laws, and the environment; groups shared that in many cases, they have a *responsibility* to raise awareness on some of these issues that simply are not being covered by mainstream media. On the survey, three-quarters of respondents (76%) listed raising young people's awareness or knowledge of youth issues as an intended impact on their primary audience. Whether a message is expressed in the form of a factual news message, a youth commentary, or a film documentary, youth media groups not only want young people to be aware of issues, but also to be able to clearly comprehend the issue or debate presented.

■ **Increased understanding of and value for youth perspectives.** Beyond just general awareness or knowledge about particular issues, youth media groups are fully aware that the unique voice that they bring to social dialogue

is that of the youth producers themselves. For groups that target adults especially, interview respondents shared that a main goal is for adults to not only be more informed about issues, but—more importantly—for them to be aware of and understand *youth* perspectives on the issue. In some cases, youth media groups described this type of intended impact as targeted at *specific* adults, such as local legislators, the mayor's office, or members of Congress.

■ **Improved critical thinking skills.** Media literacy and the development of critical thinking skills were mentioned by several organizations as intended individual-level impact. A few youth media groups described this as an especially important intended impact of their efforts, in part because of all of the counter messages that youth audiences might experience that "criminalize" and "victimize" them. Impact on adult critical thinking was equally emphasized by other groups; one group stated: "We want adults to be more informed about how adult decisions affect young people. Like instead of blaming a young person for a crime, blame the community that has no place for young people to hang out on Friday nights. Look at the larger systemic issues."

■ **Increased tolerance of difference and respect for the rights of others.** Through their media products, several youth media organizations indicated that they hoped to impart upon their audience members an increased tolerance and appreciation of diversity and respect for human rights—across lines of age, gender, class, political orientation, sexual orientation, etc. This was particularly the case with youth media groups that indicated that their organizational mission was tied to goals of social change or social justice.

The ultimate goal of many youth media groups, however, is often to influence audience member *behaviors or actions*. Three examples of behavioral impact that youth media groups intended for individual audience members were as follows:

Youth media efforts intentionally appeal to their audience on a very personal, intimate level.

■ **Audience member actively discusses issues with others.** On the survey, 76% of respondents said creating youth-to-youth dialogue is an intended impact. Many youth media groups intend to inspire dialogue through their efforts, with audiences "actively thinking about and talking [about what they saw/heard/read]." For example, one group located within a highly religious area did a piece on teen suicide that inspired dialogue that ultimately got more people in the broader community aware of the issue. Other groups stated that they hope that their efforts inspire youth to share what they are learning with adults in their lives; almost three-quarters of survey respondents listed facilitating dialogue between adults and young people as an intended impact of their media efforts.

■ **Audience member considers media message when making personal decisions.** Several youth media organizations specifically intend their media products to influence the decisions young people make about health and sexuality, such as having protected sex and being tested for AIDS. A few youth media organizations indicated that they specifically provide links to resources such as crisis lines, health clinics, and voter information. The hope is that, by understanding that there are others like them dealing with the same issues, individual youth will seek out and utilize these resources for help.

■ **Audience member is empowered to take action on an issue.** Many youth media organizations hope that their audiences will move "beyond information to action." The content of youth media products can cover pressing social issues in an engaging way and give youth the motivation and support to act. Almost three-quarters (73%) of survey respondents said that inspiring youth to take action on social or political issues was an intended impact of their youth media organization. For some groups, "action" was conveyed broadly; other groups had specific social change actions in mind such as voting, contacting their political representative, or community organizing. In some cases, youth media groups reported providing support for audience members to take such action—for example, by providing online links to direct action that they can take, developing supplemental materials (such as a "Know Your Rights" booklet), or conducting community trainings.

Youth Media's Intended Impact at the Collective Level

Some interview respondents argued that the true power of youth media is the creation of a "collective" that extends beyond simply the sum of all the individuals within the audience. Similarly, then, youth media's *impact* must consider a greater collective impact that is more than just the accumulation of individual level impacts. The synergy that arises from the collective experience of youth media is captured within the examples of intended "collective level" impact youth media groups described below:

■ **Greater sense of community across youth media audiences.** According to one individual whom we interviewed, "media is morphing into a different role" which moves beyond straight information-sharing to the formation of a virtual *community*. This community is sustained by a sense of connection that emerges through the sharing of common and uncommon experiences. The affective impact of feeling a part of a greater youth media community decreases a sense of isolation that might otherwise be felt within society. Although we did not hear this *explicitly* shared as an intended collective impact from the many groups with whom we spoke, our sense was that this

point is implicitly included within the description of goals and intended impact that youth media groups shared with us.

■ **Improved collective perception of youth—by adults and by youth themselves.** Given the perceived mainstream media portrayal of young people as "apathetic" or "violent," youth media groups aim to impact the collective perception of young people by presenting alternative views of young people as opinion leaders, changemakers, and productive members of society. Two-thirds of the survey respondents (64%) said changing adult and/or societal beliefs or perceptions of youth is an intended impact of their youth media organization. As one practitioner stated, "We want audiences to see young people as a positive force in society." Another stated, "Youth media shows that young people do care about issues and the world." A number of youth media groups described their intentions to shift this perception within young people themselves; half of the survey respondents (51%) listed improving youth attitudes about other youth as an intended impact of their youth media organization.

Youth Media's Intended Impact on Systemic Level [5]

Finally, most youth media groups articulated formal or informal systemic or social change goals for their organization that extended beyond the individuals and collective audiences with whom their product comes in contact. While the efforts of youth media groups can certainly contribute to impact at this level, there is a general recognition that a multitude of factors exist that can both facilitate and impede the types of systemic changes that youth media groups intend—many of which are beyond their control. Themes of intended impact at the systemic or social change level included:

■ **Increased integration of youth issues and voices in media.** By producing a type of "alternative" media, youth media groups intend to change the culture of media to reflect the diversity of opinions that exist throughout the country. It is really important that the media be diversified and really now we've got just a few news outlets and they are all reporting the same information and the same news over and over. The more people we can have out there, the more different news outlets with different perspectives, the better off everyone will be," noted one individual. "I think youth are the best chance of that happening because they are not as entrenched in the way of thinking as adult media producers. They are willing to take chances and step out on a ledge, take some risks and get a good story." Some organizations intend to change the culture of media by "bringing pressure to local media channels" to include diverse voices in their work. One respondent shared that they aim to explicitly provide new and current information to audiences that the mainstream media is not writing about: "In the presidential election, where is the discussion about teen gangs? …The foster care crisis?"

" We want adults to be more informed about how adult decisions affect young people. Like instead of blaming a young person for a crime, blame the community that has no place for young people to hang out on Friday nights. "

■ **Increased engagement of underrepresented voices in social discourse.** Most youth media organizations with whom we spoke indicated that they prioritized raising the issues of underrepresented communities that do not traditionally have a voice—such as immigrants, foster care youth, LGBTQ youth, incarcerated youth, or even communities of color more broadly. Youth media groups with whom we spoke believe that the critical thinking and dialogue stimulated by interacting with youth media products can ultimately lead to engaged communities, more participation in the political system, and ultimately to increased social discourse on issues of social justice and equality. One interview respondent explained, "The increased participation of young people as creators of media [models] involvement in civic life, young people participating as leaders."

■ **Greater accountability to youth within systems that serve them.** Some youth media groups target specific systems for change—such as the educational system, the foster care system, the juvenile justice system, etc. Others are more interested in influencing broader social policy in multiple areas. Through investigative reporting, youth-produced documentaries, and youth commentary, youth media groups believe that they are contributing to a cultural shift in which institutions and broader social policy are more attuned to youth perspectives and more accountable to their issues and needs. For example, a number of groups covered both the Democratic and Republican National Conventions to present a "youth point of view on what the government should do about the environment, immigration, and prison versus education."

Intended Impact on Secondary Audiences

There is less information available about the intended impact of youth media products on secondary audiences. Although organizations acknowledged the importance of impacting secondary audiences, they prioritize making and measuring impact on their primary target audience with their existing funds and staff capacity. For many youth media organizations, even measuring impact on *primary* target audiences is beyond their current organizational capacity. However, through the survey and interviews, respondents were able to identify intended impacts on secondary audiences, despite their lack of resources to target this audience or systematically measure these impacts.

Youth media can provide insight into youth culture and understanding about challenges young people face today.

As previously discussed, youth media groups largely define their secondary audiences as adults, or more specifically, adults who work with young people. For these audiences, youth media can provide youth workers insight into youth culture and understanding about the challenges young people face today. Likewise, on the survey, the two main intended impacts on secondary audiences listed by respondents were: changing adult

and/or societal beliefs or perceptions of youth (69%), and facilitating dialogue between adults and young people (64%). Youth media can provide a common starting point from which young people and adults can discuss issues. In addition, youth media can make adults and broader society aware that young people care about important issues and are critical, engaged community members and citizens.

4 What Is Youth Media's Potential Impact on Channels of Distribution?

Through this study, we have also been exploring youth media's impact on **channels of distribution** as well as on audience. However, in our interviews and analysis of survey data, it became clear that, although many youth media groups have impacts on channels of distribution, few are intentional. Staff of youth media organizations are interested and excited about impacting channels of distribution, but find that they do not have the time or resources to do as much outreach as they would like.

Types of Channels of Distribution

Youth media organizations utilize myriad channels for distribution of their products, ranging from traditional channels of media distribution such as public access television, to non-traditional channels such as teachers. Exhibit II-5 depicts the diversity of targeted channels of distribution within the youth media field, as reported by survey respondents.

Exhibit II-5: Youth Media's Channels of Distribution

	Percentage of Respondents	Examples
Educational Institutions	76%	Public middle and high schools, teachers, school district cable stations
Public Media Channels	64%	PBS, NPR, Youth Today, KQED Public Television, Manhattan Neighborhood Network, Detroit PEG Access Channels, Seattle's Community Access TV
Festivals	62%	Hamptons International Film Festival, San Diego Film Festival, Austin Film Festival, Edgeworks Film Festival, Third Coast Audio Festival, Atlanta Film Festival, Reel Teens Film Festival, MD Film Festival, Michigan Student Film and Video Festival, Do It Your Damn Self Festival, San Diego Girls Festival, and the NW Youth People's Festival
Community Distribution	55%	YMCAs, Boys & Girls Clubs, YO! Center, Youth Action Center, libraries, malls, teen health clinics, art galleries, community centers, and local coffee shops
Membership Distribution	43%	Individual subscriptions, listservs, and subscriptions to a parent publication
Other Institutions	40%	Juvenile detention facilities, foster care agencies, and group homes, health foundations, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, police academies, and rehabilitation centers
Corporate Media Channels	26%	NBC affiliate, the New York Daily News, USA Today, Cosmo Girl, MTV, Time Warner Cable, The L.A. Times, HBO, Latino USA, and the New York Times

According to survey respondents, educational institutions are the most common channels of distribution for youth media products. Several organizations consider teachers, or other members of the secondary target audience, to be a potential channel of distribution to the primary audience. Youth media products are also strategically disseminated to other public institutions that serve target audience members, such as juvenile detention centers and foster care group homes. Public media channels are the second most common channel of distribution for youth media, yet several organizations expressed frustration and difficulty with getting youth media products on public media channels. The fact that only one-quarter of the survey respondents target corporate media channels is an indicator of the difficulty youth media organizations face when trying to access these mainstream channels, and/or their relative lack of interest in doing so.

Some channels of distribution are utilized differently by organizations producing different types of media. For instance, festivals play a key role in the dissemination of youth media products for organizations that produce film or radio products. Community distribution is primarily used for print media, although several organizations creating radio and film products are using community screenings and events as a method of distribution. Another channel of distribution mentioned by several youth media groups is the organization's website. Through online content and direct mail order of products, web-savvy organizations have access to a channel of distribution over which they have complete control.

Potential Impact on Channels of Distribution

When asked about their "intended impact" on channels of distribution, most groups indicated that—while an overarching goal within their work—this level of impact was less of a strategic priority for them. However, several anecdotal examples of impact on channels of distribution that surfaced through our interviews with youth media groups hint at the potential impact of youth media in this area.

For example, some respondents thought that they had made an impact on the *type of content* distributed by their channels of distribution. One respondent described the effect their radio products had on festivals: "When we first attended the NFCB (National Federation of Community Broadcasters)…other projects were trying to emulate NPR, but since then we've noticed changes, especially at the Third Coast Festival and NFCB, it's not just voice-over reading script anymore, it's more experimental. I'd like to think that we had a lot to do with that." In another example, a youth-produced newspaper shared that they often call reporters at their local mainstream newspaper to "tell them what we think that they should be talking about." As a result, the group reports that two issues covered by their youth media publication became front-page stories.

Staff at youth media organizations are interested and excited about impacting channels of distribution, but find they do not have the time or resources.

Other organizations found that their youth media products are impacting the *practices of* channels of distribution. In one instance, a mainstream media distributor approached the youth media organization to assist them in creating a youth section of their website. After learning about the process of creating youth media, the channel "saw how challenging it is to support student writers" and, prioritizing the voices of youth, made sure to provide adequate time for producing a quality product. For another youth media organization, youth well-trained in media production are being hired by local TV stations: "The local NBC affiliate recently hired their first high school student employee. There are program alumni in every TV station in Milwaukee." Another example of impact on channels of distribution is the *Public Radio Exchange (PRX)*—a nonprofit service for distribution, peer review, and listening of radio pieces. PRX has begun developing a youth-specific radio project called Generation PRX. And finally, in summing up their potential impact on channels of distribution, one interview respondent simply stated, "If I found out that because of our stories, young people are even just interviewed more often about **all** issues, not just 'youth issues,' that would be a great outcome."

While not the primary focus of their efforts, some directors of youth media organizations shared that they consider impacting channels of distribution as a step toward creating broader level change in the country and the world. "Our type of media (youth media) is inherently different than news journalism today, which is primarily for entertainment value," commented one interview respondent. "We really need to change the media culture from the [existing] binary of alternative media versus mainstream media. We need all media to be mainstream, while maintaining the critical pieces. It's about media justice, or democratizing media."

> " *If I found out that because of our stories, young people are even just interviewed more often about all issues, not just 'youth issues,' that would be a great outcome.* "

5 What Are Factors that Influence Youth Media's Impact on Audience and Channels of Distribution?

The challenge of measuring youth media's impact is the myriad potential factors that might influence this impact. Youth media groups with whom we spoke emphasized the strategic choices that they make and the challenges that they face in producing and disseminating their product—both of which have profound bearing on the level of impact that they can have on the audiences that they are trying to reach. They stressed the "real world" contexts in which they operate, and were clear that their impact on audience and channels of distribution needed to be examined in context of how their organizations are set up, where they are located, the types of impact that they **hope to** have, their priorities with regards to audience impact versus impact on youth producers, the channels of distribution they access, the reach and frequency of their product, among many other factors.

This last section therefore focuses on presenting some of these key influencing factors that have been identified through our literature review, survey, and interviews with youth media groups, intermediaries, and media researchers. These are visually presented in the second part of our Framework (Exhibit II-6) on the next page. Reinforced by recommendations from youth media practitioners with whom we spoke, we felt that including a discussion of the multifaceted range of inputs that go into producing—and, on the audience side, *receiving*—youth media is critical for considering a study of youth media's impact. In particular, especially given the diverse contexts of youth media efforts and their range of intended impacts, we wanted to ensure that any discussion of impact did not create unrealistic "universal" expectations of impact across all groups.

Exhibit II-6: Framework for Conceptualizing Youth Media's Impact
Part II: Factors Influencing Youth Media's Impact on Audience & Channels of Distribution

Organizational Context

Goals/Mission
Staff Capacity
Resources & Funding
Youth Producers
Geographical Context

Partnerships

Product

Message
Genre
Quality

Channels of Distribution

Type of Channel
Means of Distribution
(Mediated/Direct, Indirect)

Reach

Frequency
Scope
Timing
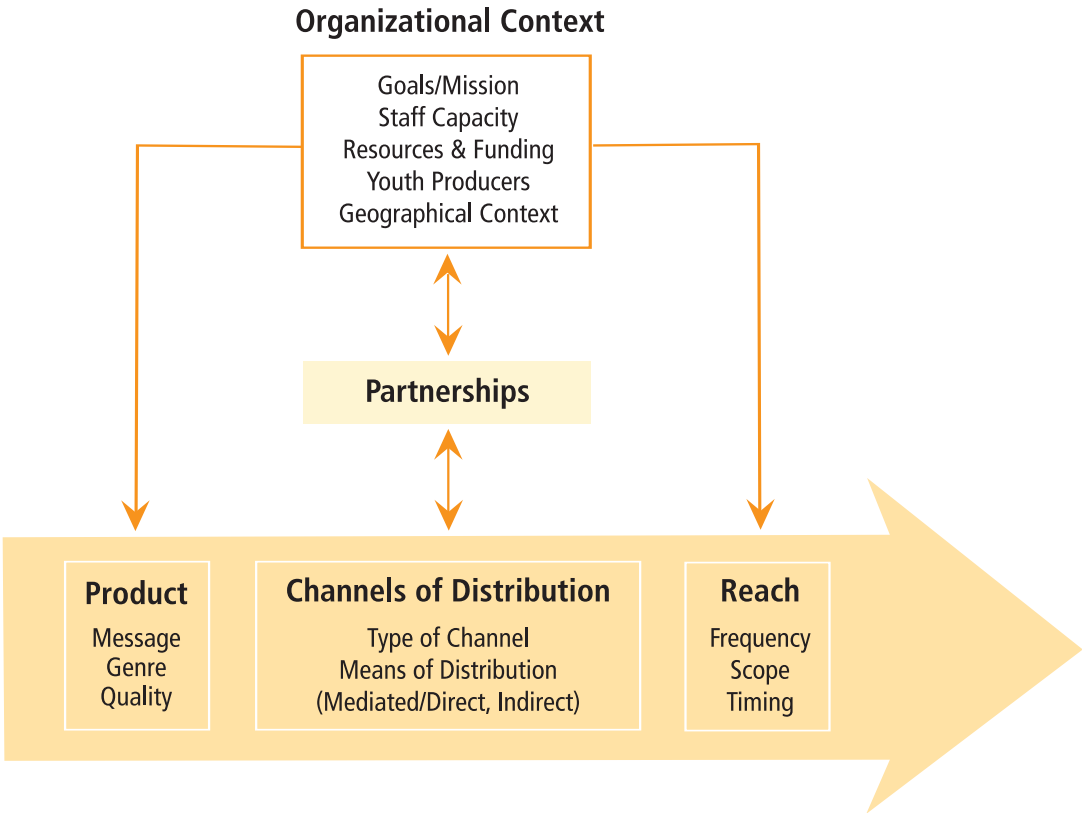
Organizational Context

As summarized in the "Snapshot of the Youth Media Field" section of the first chapter, youth media groups are located all around the country, ranging in maturity and size, funding sources, and affiliation—some independent, some a project of a larger adult media organization, or some a project of a larger youth organization. According to those who we interviewed, the organizational context of a youth media group has major implications for both intended and actual impact of an individual youth media group's efforts. In particular, across youth media groups, some specific organizational themes arose, which are discussed below.

- **Organizational Goals/Mission.** Youth media groups captured within our study represented a range of organizational missions—including missions related to lifting up youth voice, promoting youth career skills in media, increasing media literacy, advancing social change/social justice, creating a forum for artistic self-expression, etc. Some respondents indicated that these missions strongly influence their ability to secure funding, determine media messages, access channels of distribution, and facilitate partnerships with other organizations. They also strongly influence their intended scope of audience impact. For example, a youth media group whose priorities center on artistic self-expression may intended to impact individuals who come in contact with their products; a youth media groups whose mission is related to social justice may aim for more systems-level impact as a result of their work.

  In fact, organizational missions can guide to what extent youth media groups even choose to invest in impacting audiences and channels of distribution *at all.* Specifically, we found through our survey that many organizations place considerable or greater priority on the process of supporting young people in producing media, than they do on the media product itself. For example, on our survey of youth media organizations, only 9% indicated that the primary focus of their organization is "on the production of quality media products for dissemination"; 74% indicated that their priorities were *balanced* between "production of quality media products" and "providing positive developmental experiences for youth producers" with whom they work, and 16% indicated that their priorities were primarily on "the healthy development of youth producers."

- **Staff Capacity.** Staff capacity is another area that was said to affect the frequency, scope, and timing of youth media products, all of which ultimately influence the extent of audience impact. As indicated in our "Snapshot of the Youth Media Field" in the first chapter, the majority of youth media organizations have between one and five full-time staff members, with many relying heavily on part-time staff and volunteers to run their organizations. According to youth media organizations,

organizational understaffing has severely limited the time available to contact channels of distribution or partners at other organizations to disseminate their media product once a quality product is developed. One interview respondent explained, "It's not easy to get things on other public radio networks…part of the challenge is that we don't have someone pitching our stuff, just two part-time staff members. Our priority is working with kids and creating the show—you have to have that before you can promote." Fully staffed youth media organizations (or organizations that were part of larger media organizations) were seen as likely to be able to engage in activities that might amplify their impact—for example by fostering strategic partnerships, developing accompanying curricula, or facilitating discussion at individual screenings.

■ **Resources and Funding.** Obviously, the resources at a youth media organization's disposal will largely determine the size of the audience they can reach and the types of channels of distribution to which they have access. Additionally, however, youth media groups shared that the *source* of their funding has implications for their intended scope and impact—particularly with regard to issues that they can and cannot address. As indicated in the "Snapshot of the Youth Media Field," 44% of youth media groups receive up to 50% of their funding from foundations, and 41% receive up to 50% of their funding from state sources. A few organizations indicated that they have projects funded by different funders in specific content areas, such as health or immigration. While youth producers ultimately make the final decisions about what specific issues to cover, in these cases, the issues are within these broad areas. Youth media organizations indicated that they sometimes limit themselves in making decisions about content as a result of the funding landscape. For example, one respondent feared that too much of a focus on "social change" might negatively affect the organization's funding with a conservative funder. Another respondent shared that a positively received radio program focused on LGBTQ issues still resulted in a loss of foundation support when one program officer said he would not want his child involved in a program that had a project with this focus. On the opposite end, one group shared their perception that remaining politically neutral hurt their ability to gain funding, noting that, "Organizations that have political bias have greater access to funding. We are the only site in the U.S. today that offers young people politically neutral content and debate forum. It should be better for us, but it is difficult. Our ability to work with certain government organizations is limited unless we adopt certain content policies, which we will not."

■ **Youth Producers.** Another organizational factor that can dramatically influence an individual youth media organization's message (and therefore audience impact) is the youth producers themselves. Youth media organizations often work with particular subgroups of youth, whether those subgroups be defined by socioeconomic status,

racial/ethnic background, sexual orientation, geographic context, or some other factor. Common backgrounds or experiences among youth producers can naturally lead them to favor particular issues or messages. While youth media groups certainly provide guidance to youth producers, they do not control specific messages or framing. Because youth voice is of primary importance to most youth media groups, compromising this voice in favor of extending potential impact on an audience or channel of distribution would be rare.

The type and amount of ***training*** youth producers receive impacts the quality of the end product, which in turn can affect how widely the product will be disseminated and how it might be received. Depending on organizational priorities, the style and depth of training programs varies widely among the youth media organizations we interviewed. Youth media groups shared that training can range from formal two-year trainings that cover communication theory and provide scaffolded skill-building opportunities for youth producers, to intensive day-long trainings in four skills areas (reporting, hosting, studio production, and on-air engineering) combined with ample on-the-job training. In other examples, youth spend 32 hours per semester taking media classes that range from news writing, to media law and ethics, to classes exploring portrayals of gender, race, and class in the media, while in another organization, youth are trained in community media, popular education, and critical literacy.

- **Geographical Context.** Finally, and most commonly cited, the organization's ***geographic context*** has major implications for a youth media organization's potential impact; many groups indicated that this factor should be considered as a key variable within a study of youth media's impact. We heard that a group's ability to have one's message heard is tremendously different in small, rural, or suburban markets where there are very few competing media outlets (and therefore youth media efforts may be more amplified) versus in large urban centers that are saturated with media. Groups operating in more socially conservative environments shared that they have met resistance from distributors when covering controversial or "taboo" issues, such as safe sex or gay marriage; one group shared that their paper was banned in a local high school for an article supporting gay teens. Certain geographic contexts are also less open to youth voices, or ***multicultural youth*** voices in particular; one group shared that they are challenged in reaching their target audience because "adult gatekeepers think teens should not talk about issues, should not have access to safer sex resources. Others think that our paper is too black…just some of the racial segregation and stereotyping that occur in the South."

Geographical context also ***indirectly*** affects audience impact because of an organization's ability to recruit youth for their program and structure how they operate. One group said that it was a challenge to be located where many alternative youth

organizations vie for their youth participants; another said that they benefited from being located where their program was the only one offering youth media training. Still another group indicated, "We benefit from the fact that it's easy for kids to be independent in New York City. We have sister organizations in Indianapolis and Marquette, they have less flexibility, they always have to drive kids to do interviews. Here the independence young people have is a huge part of the program, giving youth the power to go out on their own to do interviews. We have thirteen year olds going to do interviews by themselves, because they can get there on the subway."

The Product

Another significant factor that differs significantly across youth media groups and clearly influences their potential impact is the product itself. According to our survey, the main types within the youth media field are Internet-based media, print media, video/film, television, and radio, with other, less common forms including photography, digital imaging, animation, audio recording, and music production. The actual products developed can range from one-time, feature-length films, to 60-second radio pieces distributed to thousands of listeners, to targeted web-based communications updated daily. This diversity implies that consideration of the specific youth media products at hand will be critical within any study of impact across the youth media field.

According to youth media groups, taking into account the product's *genre, message,* and overall *quality* will also be important. As indicated in the "Snapshot of the Youth Media Field," the most frequently chosen genres among our survey respondents were personal narrative and commentary style. The genre of the product can affect audiences in different ways—audiences can connect on an emotional level to a personal story, or they could see it as biased and partial. The message itself—its specific content, and its framing —can also affect audiences in different ways. For example, one would expect greater affective response from audience members exposed to a candid narrative of a youth's personal struggle with his weight, while audience members exposed to an investigative piece on injustice within youth detention facilities might experience more cognitive-level impact. The tension some youth media organizations may feel between their youth and adult target audiences may influence both the product's genre and message. Finally, several youth media interviewees noted that the *quality* of the product itself significantly influences audience impact—and even more so—influences impact on channels of distribution. In particular, according to youth media groups, the quality of the product will not only influence whether an audience member chooses to see/read/hear the message, but it can also have implications for how credible the information being conveyed is perceived, and whether a channel of distribution will even pick up a product for dissemination.

Channels of Distribution

A third factor of influence on impact is related to the channel of distribution that a youth media group utilizes. Certainly, the **type** of distribution channel can have a profound effect on the reach of their product and the types of audiences that are exposed to their message. A youth media film distributed through a festival reaches an audience already motivated to seek out a youth-produced message. A youth media product distributed through a school district can impact the thinking of a large, captive audience of in-school youth. Targeted distribution of youth media products to policymakers within the juvenile justice system may have a chance of influencing systemic change. Inserting a youth media piece within a mainstream paper may reach a wider audience of adults, but perhaps at a more superficial level.

An interesting finding from our research is the importance of the **means** of distribution, or specifically, the difference in potential impact between organizations that use unmediated or mediated strategies of distribution. Most youth media groups appear to engage in unmediated distribution; their role ends after the audience member has received the media product—or perhaps even earlier, with the "drop-off" of the media product at specific locations. The audience member has no guidance on how to process what they are seeing/hearing/reading—instead reacting to and interacting with the product based solely on his or her own life experiences and knowledge of the subject. This is the strategy of many mainstream media producers, whose aim is to simply reach as many people as possible.

During our interviews, we noticed that several youth media organizations use a **mediated** means of distribution in order to shape and deepen the experience an audience member has with the media product. This strategy is intended to engage fewer audience members but affect them in a more meaningful way. *L.A. Youth* presents a good example of mediated distribution; their media product is sent to over 1,400 teachers accompanied by a content-specific curriculum and lesson plan to help the teacher engage their students through critical thinking and writing exercises. Another example of mediated distribution is the public screenings of film or video work, where youth show the product and then stimulate a dialogue with audience members about the piece. A representative from GAP shared that the youth who planned and executed screenings with a subsequent discussion found this dynamic interaction with their audience to be the most rewarding part of the media-making process. It provided an opportunity to expand upon information and themes presented within the film, and to deepen the potential impact on audience members.

Reach

Many of the aforementioned factors—organizational context, funding, type of product, channels of distribution—dictate the ***frequency, scope,*** and ***timing*** of a youth media product's distribution, which directly influences the potential impact on audience. Again, we found great diversity across these factors among youth media groups. From our survey we found that the majority of youth media groups produce products rather infrequently, such as on a quarterly or annual basis; exceptions are web-based media, which is updated more frequently, and print media, the majority of which is produced weekly. However, because so many youth media organizations appear to produce multiple types of media, one would expect this cross-platform approach to have positive implications for ultimate impact. The survey data also showed that the scope of audiences targeted ranged from those targeting local audiences (77%) defined as a specific county, city, or neighborhood, to those aiming for a statewide audience (12%), national audience (28%), or international audience (12%).[6] Actual reach varied from less than 100 individuals attending a screening, to the millions reached by *Youth Radio*. Finally, largely unexplored at this point in the study, but presumably critical for understanding potential and actual youth media impact, is consideration of the timing of when a product is released. For example, we assume that coverage of the Democratic or Republican National Convention directly after they have occurred, versus one month later, would have differing impacts on audience. One youth media group indicated that, especially when working within youth's academic schedules, timing is not a factor that they can easily control.

Partnerships

The final influencing factor captured within Exhibit II-6 was raised across multiple youth media groups with whom we spoke: ***partnerships***. This factor is visually set off from the factors that we have discussed up to this point because we so strongly heard from youth media organizations that partnerships can amplify potential impact by influencing everything from organizational factors, to message, to channels of distribution, to a group's reach. Youth media groups shared that partnerships with other organizations can affect the levels and types of intended audience impact in several distinct ways. First, partnering with another organization can help youth media groups provide more depth and information about an issue. For example, if a youth-made video about abortion rights is shown as part of a campaign for women's rights led by a youth organizing group, the impact of the media message on an audience is potentially greater. Second, partnering with other organizations can increase the reach of the message, and therefore increase the strength of the message. Tapping into the networks and members of other organizations can provide more audience members and more resources to reach those members. Third, if a message is presented to the audience in several different formats, the mix of media types will ensure

that the message reaches audience members who may react more strongly to particular types of media. Finally, collective efforts among youth media groups can result in collective exposure. VOX Atlanta is a member of Global Eye, a national collaboration of youth media groups that includes L.A. Youth, Youth Connection, Gumbo, and others, with a deliberate emphasis on stories concerning global issues, multi-cultural issues, and immigration.

Partnerships were seen as especially key when considering the social change impact of youth media. Some youth media organizations see themselves as "part of a toolkit for change that involves different players with different strengths." A few organizations described the powerful role of partnerships in creating a larger movement. "In New York City, there are more collective efforts; the NYC Youth Video Festival *Urban Visionaries* gives us collective exposure. I feel that in the city we have a sharing environment among groups, not competition," explained one respondent. "For the RNC we are preparing other youth organizations [to do interviews] as part of a collective effort to make a bigger impact." Still, organizations not located in areas densely populated with youth media activity can feel that there is not enough funding for youth media groups to collaborate and learn from each other. Some organizations recognize that partnering with other organizations is a crucial way to address social issues. Staff from *Appalshop* explained, "It is tough here [in Appalachia], there is a major lack of diversity. The ability to have our kids see youth media from diverse populations, in New York for example, is very powerful. Race, sexuality, and religion are tough issues out here." By partnering with other organizations, Appalshop is able to express the unique qualities of the Appalachian culture to the rest of the country, while bringing in issues and stories from other areas to encourage dialogue in the local community.

Partnerships were seen as especially key when considering the social change impact of youth media.

Confounding Factors Related to Audience

Finally—beyond the factors already discussed that are largely under a youth media organization's control— media researchers helped to articulate additional intervening factors that influence how an audience *receives and interacts* with a media message. These factors include an individual's personal context, their "media life," and their sense of trust of the media source. Given their potential influence on the ultimate impact that youth media groups might have, these factors often accounted for in studies of media impact. For example, media researchers with whom we spoke talked about selecting their survey sample and incorporating individual-level data into their survey analysis.

No matter how carefully youth media's messages are produced and disseminated, there are infinite permutations of *personal context* factors that may mediate the impact of that

message. Primary among these are the racial/ethnic identity, the political, educational and socioeconomic background of the audience member, as well as how they have been socialized around the specific issue being presented. This personal lens—largely outside the control of youth media groups—can unwittingly amplify or mitigate youth media's impact.

Another outside intervening factor is the audience member's "media life." Audiences can potentially be exposed to hundreds of additional media messages that might support or compete with those of the youth media. Researchers emphasize the importance of under-standing how an audience member's exposure to a youth media product fits in with their overall media experience. On a related note, researchers also discussed focusing on the *relationship* the audience member has with the youth media product. Youth audiences in particular are likely hearing multiple messages from parents, peers, churches, schools, mainstream media, as well as other sources. Understanding the relative value that the audience member places on each of these, as well as their sense of trust and connection with the youth media source in particular, can have a strong influence on the type and level of impact youth media achieves. "Viewing one of our videos is just a drop in the ocean of media that audiences experience," explained one respondent. "The majority of media promotes stereotypes of youth that criminalize them."

Summary

The framework presented in this chapter (the full version of which is captured in Exhibit II-7) aims to lays the groundwork for conceptualizing youth media's impact on audience and channels of distribution. Emerging from the experiences of youth media groups themselves, it is meant to provide some initial thinking with regard to the scope of the youth media field's impact in these areas, as well as to lay to out some of the causal paths that may influence this impact. We anticipate that the broad outcome categories identified through this framework (e.g., increased awareness and knowledge about specific issues, increased understanding of youth perspectives, increased integration of youth voices in media, etc.) will serve as a starting point for further refinement, such that appropriate measurement scales for individual affective, cognitive, and behavioral impact, collective impact, and systemic impact can be both identified and tested. Further, the data collected through our efforts suggest promising lines of inquiry that might be pursued within a future study with a larger sample of organizations. In particular, testing hypotheses on the effects of specific variables (such as media type, genre, message, channels of distribution, organizational or geographic context, etc.) on impact can help build knowledge and support practice that ultimately advances professionalization of the youth media field.

Exhibit II-7: Framework for Conceptualizing Youth Media's Impact (full version)

FACTORS INFLUENCING IMPACT
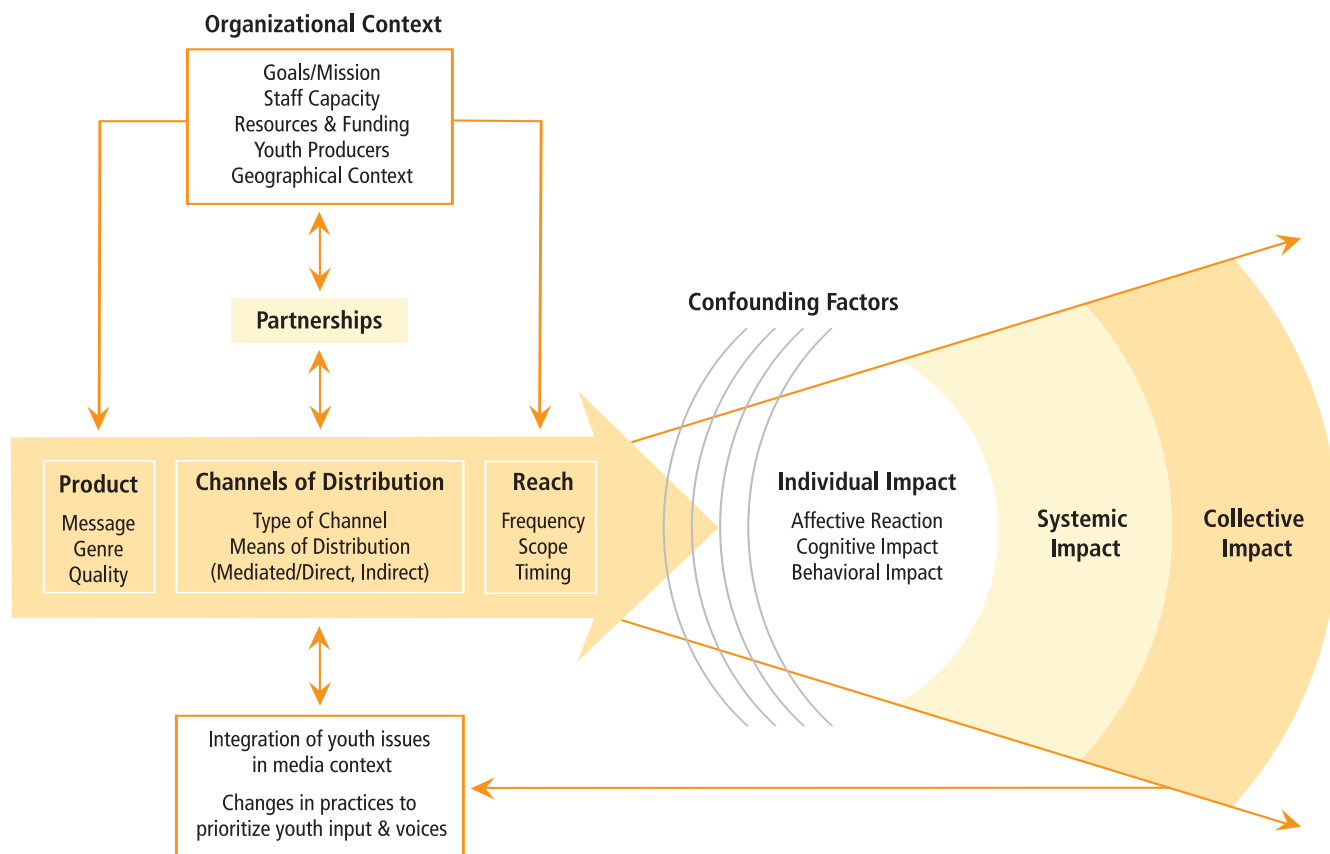
IMPACT ON CHANNELS OF DISTRIBUTION

The next chapter will focus on how youth media organizations are currently documenting their intended impact on audience and channels of distribution, with the aim of understanding how this might have implications for a collective study of the field. In addition, we will present key findings from related fields and conclude with potential directions for such a study.

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1 Hernandez, M. "Youth Media: Transforming Lives, Building Communities, and Fostering Understanding." *Grantmakers for Children, Youth, and Families Insight Newsletter.*

2 Campbell et al., 2001.

3 Notably, within the category of those who target "youth only," are two types of groups. Some groups see youth as their primary target audience but are open to adult audiences as well. On the other hand, some groups who target "youth only" do so with the intention of excluding adults and specifically creating youth-only safe space through explicit considerations of youth culture and language.

4 Gunter, B. (2000) *Media Research Methods: Measuring Audiences, Reactions and Impact.* Sage Publications, London.

5. Notably, almost all youth media groups articulated their intended systemic impact at an organizational level rather than on a field level, perhaps reflecting a relative lack of coordination in the field. While most groups agreed that the larger youth media field could have a broader social change impact, they were vague as to what this might look like.

6. Percentages do not add to 100% because respondents could indicate more than one category.

Part III	MEASURING YOUTH MEDIA'S IMPACT

The previous chapter discussed how youth media organizations are conceptualizing their impact on audience and channels of distribution, as well as the multitude of factors that influences this impact. This chapter will now turn to *measuring* potential impact. In particular, we will report how youth media groups are currently measuring their impact on audiences and channels of distribution, the types of strategies and tools that they are using, as well as the challenges that they face in this endeavor. We will then compare the measurement tools currently being used by youth media practitioners with those used in mainstream media research and in other fields, with the goal of exploring implications for the feasibility of a study of youth media's collective impact on audiences and channels of distribution.

1 The Youth Media Field: Who Is Measuring Impact on Audience?

As described in the previous chapter, youth media organizations that we interviewed and surveyed indicated a wide range of impact that they hope to have on target audiences. However, we found that few organizations are actually attempting to *measure* this impact. As depicted in Exhibit III-1 below, just over half of youth media groups surveyed indicated that they track audience responses to their youth media messages, with a *full third reporting that they do not track audience responses at all.*

Exhibit III-1: Surveyed Youth Media Groups Tracking Audience Responses

	# of Groups	Percentage
Tracking	26	58%
Not Tracking	16	36%
No Response	3	4%
Total	45	100%

Even among those organizations that are tracking audience response, we found that the type of information that is currently being tracked is fairly limited. Notably, we found very few organizations measuring the multiple levels of impact depicted in the *Framework for Conceptualizing Youth Media's Impact* (and articulated as the intended impacts of many youth media groups). Rather, the types of information tracked typically included

audience demographic information, immediate affective responses to the product (such as whether the audience member liked or disliked what they saw/heard/read), audience feedback on the types of issues to cover in the future, and suggestions for product improvement. For several reasons, few groups are including additional inquiry about additional **impact** that may have resulted from their audience's exposure to the media product, such as changes in audience knowledge, perspective, or behavior.[1] Although many groups recognized that this would be valuable information for them to gather, none of the youth media groups in our study reported looking at any **accumulated** impact of multiple exposures to their youth media products over an extended period of time.

The percentage of youth media groups that are attempting to track the impact of their products on **secondary audiences** drops even more considerably. Virtually no one reported tracking impact on secondary audiences, with many stating that this was "beyond the scope of what they are able to do at this point." The exceptions to this rule were organizations that had clearly identifiable secondary audiences. For instance, **LA Youth** has a controlled circulation of over 1,400 teachers in Los Angeles. Every year, teachers receive a postcard asking if they would like to renew their classroom subscription to the newspaper. Staff follow up with each teacher over the phone to gather information about the teacher's needs, and they conduct random samplings of teachers during the year to get their feedback. Additionally, teachers fill out annual surveys about their use of the newspaper.

Barriers to Measuring Audience Impact

Several youth media groups shared that a main reason for not focusing more on measuring audience impact was the sheer difficulty of the undertaking. Some groups indicated that they were systematically measuring impact on their youth **producers** in part because this was an area for which they could access measurement tools and document measurable change. One respondent explained that their emphasis on measuring impact on the youth who were producing the media emerged simply because they are "readily accessible and easy to survey." In addition, for some youth media groups, measuring impact on youth producers was especially prioritized because of their organization's mission as a youth development organization or because of the project's explicit support from youth development funders. Measuring impact on audience was associated with a number of challenges:

■ **Staff resources and expertise.** The number one reason cited for not measuring impact on audience was related to staff resources and expertise. Youth media groups across the board shared that their focus on producing a quality product—while simultaneously supporting the learning and positive development of youth pro- ducers—leaves little time to think through a comprehensive strategy for measuring

impact. Groups indicated that staff require time and support to articulate their intended impact, design appropriate instruments to evaluate this impact, administer the evaluation, and process the gathered data.

■ **Identifying the audience.** Youth media groups also reported that fundamental challenges in identifying their actual audience limit their ability to measure impact. Radio and television audiences were described as especially difficult to identify. Print media groups without a controlled circulation also reported challenges in identifying their audiences, explaining, that there is "no way to know who receives [our magazine] once it gets to our distribution points."

The introduction of secondary audiences added another layer of complexity; the potentially different impact on audiences who are outside the target group is seen as beyond the scope of what many groups are able to measure.

■ **Access to audiences.** Even those youth media groups with quantifiable audiences (e.g., via screenings, online visitors) described the process of getting people to fill out surveys without providing incentives as challenging. Further, even if they are successful in getting an audience member to fill out a survey, most do not have systems in place to follow-up with this audience member to measure any long-term impact resulting from their media product. Youth audiences were said to be particularly difficult to access, since youth may not have resources for postage on mail surveys, or may not have Internet access for online surveys. Youth under the age of 18 present additional challenges; one youth media group targeting this sub-group indicated that they were unable to survey them without parental permission.

■ **Attribution.** Finally, youth media groups also acknowledged the perceived limitations of any data that they might be able to collect. While some groups felt that they might be able to get good information on whether their audience liked or disliked what they saw/read/heard, a few indicated that they are not confident that any impact on audience could be attributed to their product. For example, one group observed: "If a teen reads an article in our magazine and decides to seek counseling . . . did the article 'cause' the teen's improvement? The counseling? Would the teen have sought counseling anyway?" Uncertainty about the causal links that can be drawn from studying audience impact may naturally prohibit groups from investing heavily in tracking impact at this level.

Despite the challenges articulated, many youth media groups with whom we spoke indicated a strong interest around building their capacity to measure audience impact. As one interview respondent observed, "You can feel people at screenings, they are so moved. It's clear they leave thinking of young people in different ways. But right now we

don't track [this] impact systematically. Anecdotally, we have some feedback on impact, **but we want more."** Across the board, youth media practitioners that we came in contact with saw the value of the research that we were conducting on behalf of the Open Society Institute and Surdna Foundation and expressed a strong desire to know what we were finding so that it might inform their respective efforts to measure impact.

2 How Are Youth Media Groups Measuring Impact on Audience?

Among those that have made an investment in measuring their audience impact, we were interested in the types of strategies and tools currently being used. The following section first summarizes the strategies and tools youth media groups use when measuring *media exposure* (a necessary precursor to measuring impact), then summarizes the strategies and tools that youth media groups are currently using to measure their *audience impact*. Where appropriate, we highlight tools that youth media groups have found to be particularly useful in their efforts.

Strategies and Tools for Measuring Media Reach

A strong majority of youth media groups reported information related to their circulation or reach. As one respondent shared, "we are mostly interested in numbers—how many groups do we send tapes to? How many people come to our screenings?" In fact, we found that, in many cases, youth media groups that reported they were tracking "impact," were using numbers of people either reading, viewing, or hearing their message as "evidence" of impact. Some youth media organizations have made the argument that circulation/reach statistics can actually provide some indication of their impact, particularly when some monetary cost is associated with gaining access to the media product (i.e., the purchase of a video tape or paying admission for attendance of a screening event). In most cases, however, we consider data on media reach to be most useful for providing a sense of the *potential scope* of impact, since measurements of circulation or reach may not necessarily translate into changes in audience's thinking or behavior.

As indicated in Exhibit III-2 below, in measuring media reach, many youth media organizations that we surveyed rely on tools available through their channels of distribution as their primary method of measuring reach. The most popular method for measuring reach is using data about the circulation, viewership, or listenership of a parent or partner media organization (32%). This was especially the case for television and radio youth media outlets whose parent organization had access to common audience approximation tools such as Arbitron and/or Nielson. While this information may be easy and relatively inexpensive to obtain since parent or partner organizations often have dedicated

resources to track this type of information, youth media groups acknowledge that these measures may not be a reliable estimate of how many people actually viewed, read, or listened to a particular media product. For instance, a youth-authored column may be published in a newspaper with a large circulation, but the youth media organization is not able to obtain information about who actually read the column or even saw it; likewise, a public radio station broadcasting a youth radio program may be able to calculate an estimate of how many people were tuned into their radios for some discrete timeframe, but are unable to obtain information about whether or not those people listened to the program in its entirety.

Exhibit III-2: Methods Used for Measuring Reach

Methods Used	Percentage of Youth Media
Using Data on Parent/Partner Organization's Reach	32%
Event Attendance	17%
Subscriptions & Mailing Lists	15%
Tracking Unique Web Visits	15%
Cable Access Ratings (Nielson)	12%
Festival Participation	12%
School Population	7%
Surveys	7%
Arbitron	5%
Carriage Reports	5%
Phone Calls/Audience Response Log	5%
Product Sales	5%
Other	5%

Other popular strategies for measuring the reach of youth media—more often reported by film, print, and web media outlets—included leveraging information available to them internally, such as the number of people attending media screening events (17%), the number of people on subscription and mailing lists (15%), or unique web visits (15%). Because these numbers represent a controlled audience, they may provide a more accurate gauge of how many people are actually paying attention to the media product.

Strategies for Measuring Audience Impact

The limited number of youth media organizations we surveyed that are tracking actual audience impact (and described what methods they employed) are using a variety of measurement methods. This information is summarized in Exhibit III-3. Notably, we found that many of the tools described below do not serve the sole purpose of assessing audience impact. Rather, the tools often serve multiple purposes, including supplying information on audience demographics, providing guidance on the types of information to cover, or informing product improvement. For groups that are more concerned with the process of developing youth producers, feedback also serves as a learning vehicle for youth to positively "receive criticism as part of the media making process."

Exhibit III-3: Current Youth Media Impact Measurement Methods of Those Who Report Tracking Impact (26)

Impact Measurement Tool	Respondents Using Impact Measurement Tool
Tracking of Letters and Calls	35%
Surveys:	
Mail-In	31%
Live Event	23%
Dialogue After Screening	12%
Monitoring of Essay Submissions	8%
Reprint/Rebroadcast of Media Product	8%
Focus Groups	4%
Independent Evaluation	4%
Web Bulletin	4%

As shown above, 35% of youth media groups indicated that a common means of gathering information on impact is through tracking *letters and calls* from audience members. Some youth media groups that we interviewed shared that they had developed formal systems for cataloguing and tracking audience responses. While acknowledging the overall anecdotal nature of these feedback/ response mechanisms, one group reported that the thousands of anecdotes they have logged provide them a useful critical mass of data points that can be easily analyzed for impact trends. Several groups described letters and calls as indicators of what their audience is getting out of their experience:

"*We see the number of responses as an indicator of the quality of the reader's experience, that they were engaged.*"

"*Sometimes we have call-in shows, and youth report what they learned during the show. If a lot of young people call, we think, oh, people are watching.* "

Letters and calls, however, were acknowledged by respondents as imperfect indicators. Not only are they not systematically collected, but also, according to youth media groups that we interviewed, the types of feedback that youth media groups receive do not always provide information related to impact. Letters and calls were described as ranging from data on how audiences became better informed as a result of what they heard/saw/read, to complaints and/or criticism of quality or style, such as the use of improper grammar.

Another common strategy that youth media groups report using for assessing audience impact is an ***audience survey***. These take the form of (1) surveys filled out directly after being exposed to youth media (i.e., as inserts in magazines or newspapers, after film screenings, at events of listening audiences, or as part of a web visit) or (2) periodic mail surveys of audience members. They can also range from thoughtfully developed questionnaires that capture information related to impact that an organization is interested in tracking to "quick and dirty" audience surveys. Unlike letters and calls, surveys allow youth media groups to proactively seek out reactions and feedback from audience members. For example, Radio Arte shared that in a three-month period, over 500 people filled out surveys provided at live concert events.

Finally, a few groups (almost all youth video/film and television projects) indicated that structured ***dialogues or focus groups*** held after distributing youth media products serve as a primary way to gather feedback on the potential impact of their product. Again, these post-viewing sessions were typically described as also serving other purposes. For example, for groups like MNN Youth Channel, "peer to peer discussions" after screenings serve as a mediated form of dissemination. In other cases, focus groups after screenings provide a vehicle for feedback on how to improve the product.

Letters and calls were acknowledged by respondents as imperfect indicators.

Examples of Impact Measurement Strategies

While most groups indicate that they are still struggling with the question of measuring audience impact, we did come across some examples of groups that are attempting to systematically measure impact. Although they are not all necessarily innovative in approach, they present good examples of how some youth media groups are approaching measuring their impact on audiences:

- **LA Youth.** The Los Angeles based youth newspaper LA Youth has been publishing for over 17 years. They have amassed a readership of 400,000 readers and a circulation of 120,000 copies of each issue. The newspaper has a controlled circulation that includes classrooms and libraries throughout LA County. In order to measure the impact of the newspaper on the students and teachers it reaches, LA Youth uses several different measurement tools. One tool used to measure impact on the newspaper's primary audience—teens in LA County—is a bi-annual readership survey which garnered more than 600 responses from youth last year. The readership survey includes questions about where they got a copy of LA Youth, how many times they had previously seen the newspaper, and what type of lifestyle changes they have made as a result of reading the newspaper. One result from the 2002 readership survey was that over 20% of LA Youth readers changed a habit after reading one or more articles in the paper. In addition to the readership surveys, LA Youth gathers feedback through the over 250 letters they receive every month in response to the newspaper which they read and consider at staff meetings. LA Youth also maintains connections with teachers, one of their main secondary audiences. Through annual renewal forms and telephone calls, random sampling of teachers throughout the year, and teacher surveys, LA Youth gathers information about how the newspaper is being used in classrooms and the usefulness of the teaching curricula that are included.

- **Wide Angle.** Its location in Baltimore, Maryland causes a number of challenges for Wide Angle Community Media. Funding is sometimes challenging in a relatively conservative environment. Additionally, one of the main potential channels of distribution for video and film, the public access channel, is controlled by the Mayor's office. As a result, Wide Angle has not been able to access this channel, which is a barrier for them to reaching students in Baltimore area schools. Still, Wide Angle has been able to gather information about its impact on audiences through the public screenings and events they hold about nine times per year. The annual "Let's Make Our Own TV!" screening brings approximately 100 adults and youth together from across the city, and the smaller screenings generally attract about 50 people. At each event, Wide Angle distributes audience surveys, and they generally receive about a 50% response rate. The surveys are designed to measure the clarity and impact of the message. Questions include: "Was the message clear?" and "Did the message inspire you to take action?"

One survey following a screening about education asked audience members if they felt that youth voice could make a difference in school reform, and if the videos changed their perspective, gave them new information, or inspired them to take action.

■ **Youth Noise.** Youth Noise is an independent youth media organization that aims to be a launching pad for the civic engagement of youth. The organization is utilizing the unique ability of Internet-based media to the fullest in order to gather information about its audience. Users must register with the website before they can post comments and Youth Noise uses the registration form to gather a plethora of demographic information about their audience. For instance, the organization knows that they have users from over 176 different countries and that users are primarily female, although this is beginning to balance out. Website activity is tracked at specific levels—the number of page views, the time spent on the website, the number of board postings by audience members, the number of unique viewers, the use of toolkits, and the number of audience members that link to partner organization websites. The staff collects volumes of information from the youth themselves as they post comments on the site's boards. In addition, Youth Noise conducts an annual survey of their user base, using a qualitative approach to measure the impact of the website. The survey asked a number of open-ended questions about the impact of the website on attitudes and volunteering levels, and learned that they had affected the point of view of 600 respondents. Already planning for the next user survey, Youth Noise will ask more specific questions in order to fine tune their assessment of impact.

■ **Youth Communication: Metro Atlanta.** Youth Communication: Metro Atlanta (YC) is an independent youth media organization offering youth in the Atlanta metro area the opportunity to express themselves without censorship. The organization regularly produces a newspaper called VOX and maintains a website, and they partner with programs serving refugee and immigrant youth and adjudicated and foster youth. YC utilizes several strategies to measure circulation and impact on their audience. The organization measure circulation using quality control—they evaluate the usage of the paper at the distributors, not just the raw number of papers distributed. For example, the organization learned that some distributors were not distributing all of their papers, so they decreased the number to those distributors while increasing the overall number of distribution locations. Through an annual reader survey, YC asks for demographic information, pass-along ratios, recall ability, and an impact assessment of personal behavior, community involvement, and tolerance. For example, on the last survey, 89% of respondents considered themselves more tolerant of people who are different than them as a result of reading VOX. In addition, YC staff check in with a sampling of teachers at public, private, and alternative schools who use VOX in the classroom to learn how the product influences their lessons.

3 The Youth Media Field: Measuring Impact on Channels of Distribution

As previously discussed, most youth media groups that we surveyed and spoke with agreed that influencing channels of distribution is an important aspect of their work. At the same time, however, almost no groups that we spoke with indicated that they systematically measured impact at this level. The one exception was *Children's PressLine*, a news service that targets adult and policymaker audiences with the goal of integrating youth voice into public policy decisions. Perhaps due to their focus on reaching adult audiences, Children's PressLine was one of the few youth media groups that indicated that they are very conscious of the need to impact channels of distribution, and the only one that we spoke to who has systematically attempted to measure impact through evaluation forms sent to the channels who pick up their stories. For example, after distributing their coverage of the Democratic National Convention, the organization sent an evaluation form to the channels that ran their articles.

The rest of the youth media groups with whom we spoke overwhelmingly relied on anecdotal evidence of their impact on channels of distribution. Overall, the youth media organizations in our study acknowledge the importance of affecting channels of distribution, and value this level of impact as a step toward greater social and policy change. However, there is a dearth of resources, strategies, and tools available to groups to facilitate measurement of these important outcomes.

4 Findings from the Media Research & Other Related Fields[2]

This next section will move beyond what is currently taking place in youth media organizations, and focus on what might be learned about measuring impact from media research and other related fields. This section draws from multiple sources, including a review of media research literature,[3] a review of some studies from related fields, interviews with media researchers, as well as feedback from youth media groups themselves on what might be an "ideal" strategy for measuring their impact (if time and resources were not considerations). Exhibit III-4 summarizes some of the main strategies that emerged from our scan of existing tools for measuring media impact on audiences. While we recognize that many of the strategies captured within this table may be impractical for studying the impact of youth media organizations, we include them to show how academic media researchers and industry researchers might approach a study of youth media impact.

Overall, we found that most studies measuring media impact appeared to be much less comprehensive in scope than a study of the collective impact of the youth media field. For example, many studies focus on measuring the impact of particular medium on a particular variable (e.g., cartoons on child aggression), or measuring the impact of one

particular media product (e.g., audience reaction to a particular film or television show). Studies of behavioral effects in particular usually focus on a particular social, political, consumer, or health-related behavior that is a result of media exposure.[4] Studies outside of the media research field, such as how public service announcements (PSAs) influence audience behavior (i.e., smoking cessation, etc.), also typically focus on the impact of a single PSA or campaign. The limited examples of attempts at whole-scale impact of an entire field that we came across included studies of ethnic media—including the Public Research Institute's Study on Ethnic Media Use in California and New California Media's study on the reach, impact, and potential of ethnic media. Even within these examples, the primary aim centered on quantifying the readership, viewership, and listenership of ethnic media, not on capturing the entirety of ethnic media field's full affective, cognitive, and behavioral impact on their target audiences.

Further, we found that the majority of published studies on media impact were rigorous in approach, with methodologically strong designs.[5] As shown in Exhibit III-4, establishing a causal link between media exposure and audience impact typically requires experimental research strategies. Most commonly, this takes the form of laboratory studies where two groups of people are selected to participate as research subjects; an experimental group undergoes media exposure, while a control group does not. This strategy allows the researcher to control for some of the intervening variables that can mitigate the media's impact, such as personal background, amount of overall media consumption, political perspectives, etc. A major limitation of such an approach, however, is only capturing the more immediate effects of media exposure on individuals—long-term cognitive or behavioral impact on audience may occur over time.[6] Further, this methodological approach is not well-suited to capturing media's impact at collective or systemic levels.

Studies outside of a laboratory setting typically consist of large cross-sectional surveys of audiences that stratify samples according to audience demographics, and run statistical regressions of impact while holding key personal and external variables constant. Cross-sectional surveys are somewhat limited in that they can "reveal degrees of association between claimed media usage and other attitudinal or behavioral measures on individuals, but cannot prove cause-effect relationships" (Gunter, 2000). However, they can still provide credible findings about the reach and impact of media within a real-world context if the sampling frame for the survey is significant enough to represent a good cross-section of the media audience. For example, in their ground-breaking quantitative studies of ethnic media's impact, the Public Research Institute Study surveyed 1,600 respondents (in multiple languages) and the New California Media study interviewed 2,000 California multi-lingual residents to conclusively document the reach and impact of the field.

Exhibit III-4:
Range of Strategies Currently Used in Media Research

	Measurement Strategies Establishing Association	Measurement Strategies Establishing Causation
Affective Impact:	■ Surveys of random samples of viewing audiences rating the quality, enjoyment, or "miss-ability" of programming. ■ Audience diaries of their reaction to exposure to media products.	■ On-line real-time assessment of emotional or physiological changes resulting from exposure to media.
Cognitive Impact: Agenda-setting	■ Parallel analyses of media coverage of specified topics and general public awareness of those topics; audience exposure to media can also be included in survey to establish a link between media exposure and awareness.	■ Experimental studies measuring issue awareness as a function of controlled exposure to pre-selected media materials.
Cultivation of Beliefs and Opinion	■ Correlational surveys of self-reported media exposure and opinions about topics with parallel content analyses of media output.	■ Experiments measuring changes in perceptions as a function of exposure to pre-selected media content.
Factual Learning	■ Correlational surveys of media exposure and topic-related knowledge. ■ Field surveys testing audience retention of media content from specific outputs. ■ Qualitative reception studies learning from media using focus groups, in-depth interviews, and discourse analysis.	■ Controlled experimental studies for specific, natural media output (or for artificially produced media outputs). ■ Controlled experimental studies comparing information retention from different media.
Behavioral Impact:	■ Cross-sectional surveys. Measurement of self-reported media user behavior in relation to their level of media exposure at a certain point in time. ■ Longitudinal surveys. Measurement of self-reported media user behavior in relation to measure of media exposure at several different points in time; done using the same group of respondents at each different point in time or with different groups at each different point in time.	Quasi-experimental studies including: ■ Field experiments where pre-existing groups are chosen as the experimental and control groups. ■ Natural experiments where pre-existing groups already have different media exposures and act as natural experimental and control groups.
Collective Impact:	■ Longitudinal surveys. Tracking of media users to measure sustained contact between user and media source, other media users. ■ Network mapping. Map communication between physical places—does youth media create communities beyond place-based affiliations? Issue-based communities?	
Social Change/ Systemic Impact:	■ Longitudinal policy analysis. Track policy change on issues specifically targeted by youth media. ■ Longitudinal media analysis. Content analysis to measure changes in the representation of youth in the media.	

Industry-based assessments of impact on television and radio audiences we came across were equally as rigorous, including strategies such as (1) on-line strategies that measure audience reactions during and/or immediately after media exposure (e.g., through surveys, or through electronic response instruments that can capture real-time affective or even physiological responses), or (2) off-line measurement of audience opinions through large scale surveys or tracking systems such as Nielson or Arbitron. Because these assessments were typically driven by a need to gather advertising or marketing information, or to inform network programming decisions, they appeared to focus more on capturing the immediate affective impact of media on audience members.

Studies of social marketing campaign impact were more likely to focus on cognitive, behavioral, and/or social change emerging from their efforts. The few studies that we came across to capture this level of impact appeared to utilize rigorous multi-method strategies that often required significant time and resource investment. For example, in order to evaluate the impact of the Kaiser Family Foundation/MTV's social marketing campaign, researchers utilized a number of methods, including focus groups to test responses to specific public service announcements, dial testing, call-back surveys, national telephone surveys, and regression analysis used to isolate the effect of the sexual awareness campaign on viewers' attitudes and behaviors.

Notably—described by researchers with whom we spoke as the most "powerful" approach to measuring impact, and described by youth media organizations with whom we spoke as their "ideal" approach to measuring impact—we did not come across any useful *longitudinal* studies of media's impact that might have transferability to studying youth media's impact. According to researchers with whom we spoke, the added variable of lapsing time requires another significant layer of both resource intensity and complexity in study design. Within a methodologically sound longitudinal study audience members would be ideally tracked and surveyed multiple times.

Implications for a Study of Youth Media's Collective Impact

Overall, we found existing research on media's impact and studies of impact from related fields to be useful for informing a *conceptual* approach to measuring youth media's impact. In particular, the *Framework for Conceptualizing Youth Media's Impact* presented earlier in this report borrows from multiple media research studies of audience impact that also separate out measures of audience reach, reaction, cognitive/behavioral changes, and systemic changes. Some of the scales from surveys that measure changes in audience along these dimensions therefore may be adapted for use within studies of youth media's impact. Findings from existing studies also provide clarity on potential intervening factors to consider in measuring impact—for example, factors such as

exposure to competing media messages, personal background and context, and trust or perceived credibility of the media source.

However, we found very little in the way of research designs or methodologies that might be *practically* applied to developing a definitive study of the collective impact of the youth media field. In particular, the time- and resource-intensive nature of the studies that we came across seemed far beyond the youth media field's available capacity. Further, we felt there to be a disconnect between many of the approaches that we came across (e.g., an outside researcher coming in to "study" impact), and the ground-up, grassroots nature of the youth media field. Finally, we did not come across a viable whole-scale model for studying the collective impact of the field that can account for the different permutations of youth media as well as their different levels of targeted impact. This reinforces our earlier observation that media studies are often concerned with the impact of a *particular* medium on a *particular* variable.

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1 For example, some organizations ask their audience members whether they were "inspired to take action" as a result of exposure to a youth media product, or whether they attribute any "lifestyle changes" to their connection to youth media. These surveys are described in more detail in the next section of the chapter, "How Are Youth Media Groups Measuring Impact on Audience?"

2 This section focuses solely on existing studies of audience impact. Measuring youth media's impact on *channels of distribution* is much more uncharted territory; we found very little in the way of existing studies in this area.

3 In particular, we draw heavily from a useful book authored by Barrie Gunter, entitled *Media Research Methods: Measuring Audiences, Reactions and Impact.* This book examines the range of research methodologies used across multiple media research contexts, and provides a number of helpful research references in its bibliography.

4 Gunter, (2000).

5 Because they may not be in the public domain, we did not come across very many "exploratory" or "explanatory" studies of media impact. Our assumption is that—due to their knowledge generating nature—methodological approaches within these types of studies may be less rigorous in nature.

6 While experiments can include measurements that are taken over an extended period of time, the resources required for doing so are significant.

Part IV | SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS & IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In the last chapter, we ended by discussing the broad implications of findings from media research and related fields for future youth media impact studies. In this final chapter, we concentrate on developing these implications a bit further—in particular, by articulating some of the potential pathways our study could follow next. To ensure that these pathways, or options, are presented in the context of our study's key findings, we first summarize these key findings below.

1 Summary of Key Findings from This Exploratory Study

Several key findings emerged from this study's first phase that have implications for the future direction of a study of youth media's impact on audiences and channels of distribution:

- **Literature on youth media is still relatively nascent.** While existing literature makes critical contributions to youth media field development, it currently consists of theory building, mapping studies, exploratory studies, and documentation of promising practices. Very little exists on measuring youth media's impact, and nothing exists that explicitly focuses on audience impact. This highlights the need for a range of studies to inform this area. Related areas of mainstream and alternative media research, social marketing, and social movements provide potential models to support study development.

- **Youth media has tremendous potential impact on audiences and channels of distribution.** Our survey and in-depth interviews with youth media groups reveal a wide range of intended impacts on individuals, collectives, and systems, and on a wide range of audiences. Broad potential outcome categories articulated at each of these levels (e.g., increased awareness of issues, understanding of youth perspectives, critical thinking skills, tolerance of differences, discussion on issues, empowerment for action, etc.) lay the groundwork for further exploration that can lead to the development of appropriate impact measurement scales.

■ **As testimony to the great diversity within the youth media field, a wide range of factors exist that influence youth media's impact.** These factors were raised by youth media groups as critical to consider when studying youth media's "collective" impact. Far from a monolithic group, youth media organizations describe differences across organizational context (including missions, staff capacity, resources and funding, youth producers and geographic context), across ***products*** that they produce (in terms of message, genre, and quality), across ***channels of distribution*** (both in terms of types and means of distribution), and in their ***overall reach*** (including frequency, scope, and timing of their product's distribution). All of these factors have profound influence on how any individual group both conceptualizes and realizes impact on audience and channels of distribution.

■ **Despite the wide range of intended impact articulated by youth media groups, few are actually <u>measuring</u> this impact.** Fifty-eight percent of youth media groups are tracking the impact of their efforts. However, most groups are tracking the reach of their products or audience's reaction to the media products through tracking of letters and calls, surveys of audience, or audience focus groups. Very few are systematically collecting data related to changes in individuals' thinking or behavior as a result of exposure to youth media, or changes at the collective or systematic level. The percentage of groups measuring impact on secondary audiences or channels of distribution drops off considerably. This finding implies great potential for further exploration of strategies/tools to support measurement of audience impact, and raises questions about the ***readiness*** of the field to support a collective study of impact.

■ **The reasonableness of a whole-scale study of youth media's impact appears tenuous.** While studies of impact from mainstream and alternative media and social marketing may provide a source of useful strategies for conceptualizing what a collective study of the youth media field might look like, these studies appear to have a fundamental and practical disconnect from our understanding of the youth media field's current needs and readiness. Youth media organizations are still debating their identity and cohesiveness as a field and further defining their exact audiences. While youth media organizations in our study expressed a real hunger for knowledge and tools around youth media impact, for many, impact measurement is at a very early stage of development, particularly given resource constraints. This level of readiness does not appear conducive to a whole-scale study of youth media's impact. Furthermore,

the very ***character*** of the youth media field does not appear conducive to a whole-scale study of impact. The heterogeneity of youth media organizations along several dimensions that determine intended impact—as well as a common desire to concentrate on depth in addition to or instead of breadth of impact—is misaligned with a whole-scale study.

2 Potential Directions for a Study of Youth Media's Impact

These findings, from existing research as well as our own data collection, have practical implications for moving ahead with a study of youth media's impact. We see four broad potential directions to consider pursuing—each with its own set of associated advantages and challenges, and each reflecting differing priorities for continued research. Each of these directions would serve as a valuable contribution to building the knowledge base of the youth media field. The directions range from pursuing studies documenting youth media's impact, to commissioning additional exploratory/explanatory studies of youth media's impact, to supporting self-assessment of youth media groups to ultimately inform a meta-study of the field's impact in the long-term. We describe each of these potential directions below.

Pursuing a Study of the Collective Impact of Youth Media

Should the youth media field amass both sufficient will and necessary resources to pursue a study of youth media's collective impact on its audiences, such a study could be modeled after studies conducted by the Public Research Institute and New California Media on the reach, impact, and potential of ***ethnic media***. In particular, the study could consist of a large-scale survey of likely youth media audience populations within a select geographic region, such as the San Francisco Bay Area. Survey questions would capture the reach of youth media, as well as audience members' perceptions of youth media content/quality. While such a survey would not capture the full range of youth media's potential impact, it may provide valuable insight into how youth media is penetrating its intended audiences.

Addressing challenges within the design of this study would require significant investment of resources. Specifically, coming up with a sampling frame that is both reflective of youth media's target audiences, as well as small enough to be meaningfully reflective of likely youth media audience members, would present a significant challenge. In the New California Media study, 2,000 individuals were surveyed to represent an easily identifiable group of nearly 17 million ethnic Californians. In contrast, youth media organizations have a broader likely audience among youth and adults across a wide range of demographic profiles. A second challenge would be the defining of youth media and isolating

exposure to authentic youth media products. Audience members surveyed may not be familiar with what youth media is, or know the extent to which they have actually viewed youth media products (versus adult produced media that mimics youth media products).

Beyond the high level of resources required, we see a number of additional major trade-offs to consider within this approach. In particular, while it may be valuable to get a stronger sense of youth media's reach, this approach has limited ability to measure deeper-level impact of youth media on audience members. While a one-time survey could certainly ask audience members to indicate whether exposure to youth media changed their knowledge levels or opinions, or led them to take action in some way, the meaningfulness of the data could be significantly limited by: the variation of the youth media *genre* they were exposed to (e.g., news versus commentary); their memory of youth media exposure, particularly if it was a relatively isolated exposure as opposed to more consistent viewer-ship/readership; variation among individuals in terms of how much time has elapsed between exposure and the survey; and the innumerable other confounding factors that would come into play (e.g., personal views and experiences). Another challenge with a one-time survey is that, unlike longitudinal surveys, it would be unable to account for effects that might occur over time (as opposed to changes that occur immediately upon exposure).

Finally, and most importantly, taking this approach to continued study appears misaligned with the realities of youth media organizations. First, the richness and depth of intended impact articulated by youth media organizations may be lost within a large-scale quantitative study, and might be better suited—at least initially—to more qualitative studies that can draw out the texture and nuances of audience impact. Secondly, focusing on the breadth of youth media's collective impact may lead to negative findings in terms of the raw reach of youth media, and may miss the *depth* of impact among those organizations that are deliberately and meaningfully connecting with a much smaller group of individuals.

Focusing on Narrower Study of Youth Media's Impact

As previously discussed, part of the challenge in a proposed study of collective youth media impact is the heterogeneity of the field along multiple dimensions. In looking to other media studies for guidance, one option to consider would be narrowing down the *parameters* of a youth media impact study. With a narrowed scope, the study could still be concerned with one or all of the types of impact (affective, cognitive, behavioral). The study would also still need to grapple with the issues of (1) time and frequency of measurement, and (2) cause-effect relationship. By narrowing scope, however, the study would be much more feasible to conduct and, while perhaps not capturing the entirety of

the field's impact, can still serve a valuable function of supporting knowledge generation in the field.

Specific forms that such a study might take include: studies of youth media's impact on specific *variables* (e.g., improved audience perception of youth), on specific *audiences* (e.g., particular age-groups of youth), or within specific *media* (e.g., radio, television, film). Again, cross-sectional surveys would support inquiry in these areas. However, while such surveys can prove degrees of association between claimed media usage and other attitudinal or behavioral measures on individuals, an experiment would be the strongest methodology for "proving" a cause-effect relationship. Narrowing the scope of impact may allow researchers to conduct more controlled experiments where specific subsections of audience might be exposed to specific types of media to measure impact on specific variables. Admittedly, such a set-up would be able to measure only the more immediate effects of media exposure while cognitive and behavioral changes might occur over time.[1] Further, while an artificial environment—in an office or "laboratory" with assigned control and experimental groups—provides a significant degree of researcher control, it can be limited in its "real world" implications. As stated by Gunter (2000), "Experiments in artificial environments may only prove that media *can* prove certain effects, not that they *do*" (italics added).

Another option for narrowing the study would be to focus on the efforts of one or two promising youth media groups, or to focus on a collaborative of youth media groups coordinated around a single message. Throughout the first phase of our study, we heard many respondents talk about the potential impact of a coordinated youth media effort— e.g., multiple youth media organizations working on a targeted issue. Earlier in this report, we discussed why such a collaboration might be expected to bring about greater impact (e.g., more resources at hand, a single message reaching people through various vehicles, etc.). A study that examines the impact of a coordinated youth media message has the advantage of beginning to address the potential of the field, while still keeping to a reasonable scope in terms of media subject, type, and/or target audience. Furthermore, judging from our interviews, there appear to be good examples of partnerships to draw upon.

One of the primary challenges to this approach is that it appears to be more suited to a particular *genre* of youth media—namely media that is aimed at persuading its audiences to do or think something in particular (e.g., refrain from buying products tested on animals). As a result, this course of study would not reflect the youth media organizations and products that are dedicated simply to providing a youth perspective on "mainstream" issues such as education and health care, or youth coverage of youth-specific issues.

Finally, this course of study might have questionable implications for the future funding landscape of youth media. If one of the core purposes of an impact study is to "prove" the value of a youth media investment, and this particular course of study were to demonstrate impact, funders may take the results as a sign that future funding should be directed toward coordinated youth media efforts, rather than individual organization efforts, the latter of which would not be fairly evaluated within the scope of this course of study. Furthermore, to what extent would demonstrating the impact of a coordinated youth media message reflect the trends and preferences of the youth media field at large? Are such coordinated efforts a growing trend and source of excitement and energy for individual organizations in the youth media field? Our interviews at least hinted at collaboration as a positive trend; as one respondent noted, "If there was a way that six groups could come together across the country, choose an issue, and with funding create surveys, analyze the issue, research…we would need a year, but I think we would see impact on a field level."

Generating Additional Knowledge About Youth Media's Impact

In thinking about strategically building the knowledge base of the youth media field, it is possible that commissioning studies of impact may simply be premature at this point. The field may benefit from further exploratory or process studies of youth media's impact that can better support impact studies in the future. Further exploratory or process studies can complement the growing literature conceptualizing the impact of youth media on youth producers and documenting promising practices for realizing this impact.

Further exploratory or process studies might take the form of detailed qualitative documentation of the process by which youth media groups conceptualize and realize their intended impact on audiences and channels of distribution. While perhaps not getting at the "definitive" impact of youth media, important challenges, promising practices, and lessons learned may emerge from these process studies that can support greater professionalization of the field.

Other exploratory studies that may support future youth media impact studies may include conducting an inventory and testing applicability of specific outcomes measurement scales from related areas to youth media. For example, the television industry has developed a number of scales to measure audiences' affective responses to media exposure. While these may be limited in "proving" the impact of youth media, they can contribute to further professionalization of the field by setting the stage for more tailored and appropriate impact measurement tools. Part of the larger field-building conversation we heard at the youth convening in March 2004 was this specific need for shared standards of practice and measurement with which the field could better define itself.

Supporting Self-Assessment of Youth Media Organizations

While one priority for continued study of youth media impact is a better understanding of the collective impact of youth media, we heard from many of our interviewees a real desire for tools, strategies, and assistance in measuring impact on an individual organization level so that youth media practitioners will be better equipped to demonstrate their effects to funders and channels of distribution, among others. We also heard, both directly and indirectly, that the youth media field may not be quite ready for a collective impact study. Given these perspectives, another possible course of continued study would involve developing practical, customizable tools for youth media groups to begin documenting their impact, based on a collective framework for conceptualizing youth media's impact (such as the Framework presented in this report). This proposed course of study could start by building off any existing tools (e.g., sample audience surveys from interviewees) and customizing them for the use of particular groups and piloting them in a select region, such as the San Francisco Bay Area. Pilot-testing could culminate in some form of sponsored youth media convening to share what has been learned and discuss the implications for future evaluative efforts of individual youth media organizations.

This course of study would be valuable for building the capacity of individual organizations, as well as set the stage for future study of youth media impact by generating comparable data across youth media groups that can be looked at collectively. We anticipate two potential challenges with this approach, however. First, if they are investing organizational resources in measuring impact, many youth media organizations will likely want to approach articulation of their impact both on audience and on *youth producers*. Further, even with capacity-building efforts and customizable tools, it is highly unlikely that individual youth organizations will be able to invest in the type of efforts needed to prove a causal link between their work and observed outcomes.

3 Conclusion

Our first phase of study has yielded rich data for the difficult task of defining and measuring youth media's impact. We have drawn upon existing studies in youth media and related fields, as well as a wide range of youth media stakeholders, to help identify the pieces of the puzzle. The completion of Phase I represents a critical juncture for youth media studies in general, as well as our study in particular. Given the data and perspectives that we have gathered from the field, we feel it is critical to reassess the best direction for our study moving forward. The options presented above represent our initial thinking about broad courses of action for continued study of youth media impact. However, we anticipate more detailed discussions with our client, among other parties,

about the merits and drawbacks about each of these broad courses, as well as brain-storming alternative options that might be entirely new, or some combination of previously presented options.

No matter what form these discussions take, we feel that there are several key factors to be considered—primarily that of the *purpose* of the study (in particular, whether further study can meet the needs of multiple stakeholders); the *specificity* of the study (in particular, to what extent the study can be better focused to ensure more meaningful findings); the *alignment* of the study with the reality of the field (in particular, trying to ensure that the study reflects critical realities or trends in the field—e.g., a focus on depth versus breadth of impact, etc.); and the *flexibility* of the study (in particular, designing future study to incorporate the varied individual contexts of youth media groups, even when focusing on a particular impact of interest).

We look forward to the second phase of study as an opportunity to continue work within this exciting area and to help contribute to youth media's development as a field of practice and research.

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1 While experiments can involve measurements over time, the resources for doing so would be exorbitant.