

## Childhood

### The Ignored Audience A multi-method reception study on children and television news in Albania

Journal:	<i>Childhood</i>
Manuscript ID	CHD-16-0013.R3
Manuscript Type:	Original Manuscript
Keywords:	Television news, children, Albania, reception, political socialisation
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#### Abstract

Children are not considered to be an appropriate audience for news coverage based on their presumed lack of emotional maturity, critical thinking and proper knowledge. This article challenges these views by presenting the opinions of children aged 10-15 who report having watched broadcast news nearly every day. Additionally, the views of adults aged 25-62, are investigated. Children contest to the ways they are being portrayed by the news media and demonstrate their need to be considered as active participants in the public sphere, which is presented by the news media as an exclusive domain for adults.

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News has generally been perceived as a genre that is not appropriate or even dangerous for children (Gunter, Furnahm and Griffiths, 2000). They are usually considered to lack the emotional maturity, critical thinking skills or the proper knowledge for making sense of the news. These views on children are aligned with the development psychology approach (Piaget and Inhelder, 1969), which classifies childhood in terms of “ages and stages”, and as a linear progression towards entry into adulthood. According to James, Jenks and Prout (1998) within this tradition, children are understood as “becoming adults”, as incomplete and incompetent social actors with respect to adults. As a result, Buckingham (2000) argues that children are prevented from engaging and contributing to society in a meaningful way.

On the other hand, the genre of news is considered to be an essential source of information that acts as a teacher of values, ideologies, and beliefs for citizens, while providing images to interpret the world (van Dijk, 2008). The same applies to children. The lack of a presence of children among general news coverage brings into question the potential of the media to facilitate the ways children connect with society (Carter and Davies, 2005).

The purpose of this study is to hear from children what they think about television news and their own portrayal. Albania is of particular interest, keeping in mind that the country of only 2.8 million people is home to a disproportionately high number of television channels. In addition to the public broadcaster (RTSH), there are two private national television channels, 71 private local television channels, and 83 private cable television channels currently operating in Albania (AMA, 2014). Furthermore, eight television channels broadcast only news (Kevin, Pellicano and Scheenberger, 2013). All news channels are privately owned and freely available in most of the country’s territory. It is difficult to assess

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4 the opportunities for news consumption in Albania, as there is no credible or systematic  
5 audience research publicly available.  
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7 Nevertheless, a study conducted with the support of the European Commission  
8 (Nelaj, 2014) found that 73% of the Albanian population placed their highest level of trust in  
9 television news outlets when compared to other media. While no study currently exists on  
10 children's consumption of the news, it may be due to the fact no news service targeted  
11 towards children is offered by any of the television channels currently operating in Albania.  
12 The way in which children see themselves represented in news coverage is still unknown.  
13 Taking this context into consideration, researching the views of children aged 10-15 on  
14 television news, becomes a prerequisite to exploring how the news media addresses this  
15 particular group.  
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19 In this article, the term 'children' is used to refer to the age group 0–18 years,  
20 following the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989). Research  
21 on children as a news audience has typically examined children aged 15-18, due to the  
22 positioning of this specific age group on the boundaries of becoming 'citizens' (see Meijer  
23 2007). When a younger age group is considered, such as 10-15 (see Carter et al., 2009;  
24 Buckingham, 2000) it has mostly been researched in relation to children's television news  
25 format, while in most countries such programs do not exist. Therefore, the views of children  
26 aged 10-15 on news media, still remain unexplored. This study addresses this age gap.  
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30 The present study acknowledges children as active participants in social life and as  
31 actors with potential for having agency of their own (Prout and James, 1997). In the context  
32 of news coverage, this means that children are capable of forming and articulating their own  
33 opinions regarding the news in general, and particularly their own portrayal. The views of  
34 adults on the same topic were investigated, with the study's aim being to check for  
35 differences in news consumption and comprehension between these two groups. In the  
36 following section existing literature on children as a news audience will be examined.  
37 Ultimately we focus our findings on three major themes: children's exposure to television  
38 news; their views on television news; and the role of news in the political socialization of  
39 children. Since news is positively related to civic engagement (see Carter, 2014) it is fruitful  
40 to examine how children in Albania see themselves portrayed in news coverage. Therefore  
41 results could be drawn on how children connect with society and the role that television  
42 news is playing in that respect.  
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### 49 **Children as an audience for news**

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51 The existing research on children as a news audience has mainly focused on three  
52 areas: children's attitudes towards the news media (exposure, recall and comprehension of  
53 news items), children's emotional reactions to news coverage, and the role of news in  
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4 political socialization and the civic engagement of children (see Alon-Tirosh and Lemish,  
5 2014).  
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7 Research conducted on the attitudes of children towards the news media, challenges  
8 the existing perceptions that “children... regard the news as ‘boring’, and refuse to read  
9 newspapers, tune into television or radio news, or search out news on the internet (Carter,  
10 2013:255). Alon –Tirosh and Lemish’s (2014) study with children (aged 8-15) and youths  
11 (aged 16-18) in Israel found that they expressed a desire to be informed on core national  
12 issues, but asked for a positive framing that removed the scary and gory elements.  
13 Moreover, previous research carried out with kindergarten children in the US and Israel  
14 (Lemish, 1998) found that the participants were interested in the news and this interest was  
15 closely related either to the sociopolitical context of the country (the case of Israeli children),  
16 or to parental mediation (the case of children in the US). Additionally, Carter, Davies, Allan,  
17 Mendes, Milani, and Wass (2009) found that the majority of children aged 8-15 surveyed in  
18 the UK, considered the news to be interesting (96.8%) and more than half of the sample –  
19 112 children – mentioned TV as their ‘favorite place for news’. Furthermore, Ponte (2008) by  
20 interviewing 500 children of different ages, concluded that they showed great enthusiasm  
21 on following both adult and children’s news.  
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23 The second body of research has explored children’s emotional reactions towards  
24 news content. Within these studies, there is a diverse body of knowledge that attempt to  
25 explore such reactions. Some studies (Eron, 1963; Huesmann and Eron, 1986), employ a  
26 psychological perspective and make use of experiments as a method for research. This kind  
27 of research dates back to the 60s and 70s due to the prevailing discourses in that period on  
28 television’s negative influences on children (Eron, 1963; Huesmann and Eron, 1986). Adoni &  
29 Cohen (1980) documented that children show fear or anxiety when exposed to news items  
30 related to the coverage of war, which was a prevailing topic of research in the following  
31 years (Cantor and Nathanson, 1993; Walma van der Molen et al., 2002; Blankenmeyer,  
32 Walker and Svitak, 2009). Other studies have employed a social approach which  
33 acknowledges children’s agency in their use and consumption of television news and has  
34 used qualitative methods as a tool for research. These studies show that children are able to  
35 engage in a more critical way with the news media if news is constructed with children as an  
36 audience in mind (Carter, 2014; Lemish and Gotz, 2007). Recently, there is a growing body of  
37 research that makes a combination of both approaches, by exploring children’s fright  
38 reactions to news media from a psychological approach while making use of qualitative  
39 techniques (see Riddle, 2012; Riddle et al., 2012).  
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41 The ways in which children engage with the news media brings us to the third group  
42 of research: the role of the news media in introducing children to civic engagement.  
43 According to Patterson (2007:5), “there is evidence that news habits developed early in life  
44 effect later use that appeal[s] to civic virtue”. Earlier studies have suggested that children  
45 who watched the news more frequently, were more knowledgeable about the political  
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4 world, demonstrated greater curiosity towards the news, and were more motivated to  
5 actively pursue additional information (Atkin and Gantz, 1987). Recent studies have  
6 documented that viewing both traditional forms of news and nontraditional sources of  
7 political information (late-night comedy shows) increases children's internal political  
8 efficacy, which in turn positively predicts their civic participation (Hoffman and Thomson,  
9 2009). Additionally, authors have sought to research the news media's perception of  
10 children's place in the world and how it shapes their understanding of citizenship  
11 (Livingstone, 2002; Buckingham, 2000). It is argued that if the news media became more  
12 accessible to children, their participation in the public sphere would be enhanced.  
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16 This study aims to explore children's views on their representation in television news  
17 in Albania, in their own words. Additionally, the perspectives of adults on the representation  
18 of children are explored. While research has shown that children see themselves as being  
19 excluded from the typically adult-centered news outlets and that their perspectives are not  
20 taken into consideration (Ponté and Aroldi, 2013; Carter et al., 2009), there has been no  
21 research conducted which relates to the views of adults on how children are being  
22 represented in the news. Keeping in mind the news media's ability to strengthen civic  
23 participation, exploring the views of children and adults as it pertains to the news media is  
24 crucial.  
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### 30 **Methodology**

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32 This study included a multi-method exploration of children's and adults' views on  
33 television news in Albania, with a special focus on the portrayal of children, by using  
34 questionnaires, focus group interviews and custom-designed activities. In total, 118  
35 participants, including 64 children (aged 10-15 ) and 54 adults (aged 26-62), were  
36 interviewed in 12 focus groups; 6 with children and 6 with adults, with 8-12 participants  
37 each. We collaborated with the Education projects' team of World Vision Albania and Kosova  
38 (WVA&K)- an international children's rights organization - to conduct the focus groups.<sup>1</sup> The  
39 approach of the organization is to build and empower community groups that are then  
40 engaged in the implementation of several development projects. We made use of the  
41 routine meetings of these community groups. Parental consent was required for all children  
42 who participated. Children's groups were balanced (50% boys and 50% girls), while a bigger  
43 participation among women (74.1%), was noted in the adult groups. This could be explained  
44 by the higher availability of women to participate in activities of this type when compared to  
45 men, due to a higher unemployment rate among this group in Albania (Rusi and Mustafaj,  
46 2013). 12 of the participants in the adults focus groups were teachers (N=54). Nonetheless  
47 all participants in the focus group were asked to reflect on the topic of discussion in their  
48 position as parents or adults- in case they had no parenting experience. In two of the groups  
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4 – one for adults and one for children – representatives from cultural minorities, including  
5 Roma and Egyptians, participated. The focus groups took place in five regions of Albania:  
6 Durres, Tirane, Elbasan, Shkoder and Lezhe, from May to June 2015.  
7

8 The decision to have separate groups for children and adults comes as a reflection on  
9 the fact that children's perspectives may be different from adults' accounts and thus should  
10 be elicited directly from children, while minimizing the risk for adults' intervention (see  
11 Balen et al., 2006). While the decision to recruit participants who are already accustomed to  
12 each other was taken after consulting literature on the topic which states that the social  
13 environment impacts the ability for people to express themselves (Lindlof and Taylor, 2011).  
14 The meetings lasted approximately two hours and were digitally recorded and transcribed  
15 verbatim.  
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19 All focus groups started with a drop-off questionnaire as a way to get some  
20 demographic data on the participants. On the same time it served as a warm up exercise,  
21 having in mind that subsequent activities required an active participation. Considering the  
22 number of participants in each group, the facilitator<sup>2</sup> read aloud all questions and the  
23 participants were invited to address any misunderstanding to the facilitator, directly. All  
24 participants confirmed to have understood all questions before filling in the questionnaire.  
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27 Two slightly different questionnaires were developed for children and adults. For  
28 each template, specific questions on demographic data were asked (name, age, city/village,  
29 and profession for adults) and children's and adults' news viewing habits (where, when,  
30 what, why). The adults' questionnaire comprised several additional questions on parental  
31 involvement in news consumption and the extent to which they encouraged children to  
32 follow news. On the other hand the questionnaires of children posed additional questions on  
33 the quality of children's portrayal in television news and the extent to which they felt  
34 represented in such portrayals. In addition, both children and adults were asked to recall and  
35 write down a news item on children that they recently watched on television.  
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39 Additionally, participants were presented with two activities that were custom-  
40 designed for the study. In the first activity, participants were introduced to 10 pictures, five  
41 of which showed newscasters, and were then asked to identify the newscasters and provide  
42 additional details for each of them. In the second activity, the participants were presented  
43 with a list of 11 news items taken from actual news broadcasts, including two news items  
44 related to children. Participants were first asked to list the news items as they would appear  
45 in an actual news broadcast and then asked list the news items as the group members would  
46 like to see them broadcasted – starting from what they considered as the most important.  
47 These activities had two purposes. First, they aimed to explore the participants' exposure  
48 and familiarity with television news. Second, they aimed to explore their views on the  
49 importance of news items on children. Using creative techniques, especially research with  
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4 children, is a method that is being encouraged in social science research (see O’Cane, 2000).  
5 Consequently, it generates insights into children’s perspectives, while empowering them for  
6 a fuller participation.  
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8 Subsequently, participants watched three news items related to children, taken from  
9 actual news broadcasts. These items belonged to the three topics where children appeared  
10 to be more present in television news in Albania: children as victims, as objects of emotional  
11 appeal and children as performers and were chosen based on an extensive media  
12 monitoring process conducted earlier (see Kaziya, 2016). After each item, the facilitator  
13 asked children and adults their opinions of the news item in general (Is the topic clear? Is it  
14 interesting?) and the portrayal of children in particular (How does this news item make you  
15 feel? Is it representative of children? What is missing? Why?). Notes from the discussions  
16 served as the main data for the analysis, complemented by data from the questionnaires and  
17 meticulous expressions and results from the card activities.  
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20 This study belongs to what Jensen (2011) assesses as the third group of reception  
21 studies, whose concern is to investigate how concretely the media is integrated into both  
22 everyday life and various institutionalized practices. Discursive elements on news stories  
23 related to children are taken as the basis to trace the presence of particular themes and  
24 their reproduction by the audience. These discourses provided further insights on the role of  
25 news as a social action. Analysis of the responses from the focus group discussions  
26 supplemented with qualitative data from the card activities were subjected to a grounded  
27 analysis of emerging themes, using qualitative content analysis procedures (Lindlof and  
28 Taylor, 2011). Additionally demographic data from the questionnaires served as  
29 complementary to qualitative findings, to provide additional information on the  
30 characteristics of both groups.  
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### 38 **News consumption and recall**

39 The most dominant finding from the discussions with children and adults was that  
40 both groups are exposed to television news, almost every day. Regardless of the fact that  
41 adults reported watching the news more often than children, the two card-activities that  
42 were conducted with children and adults revealed additional aspects. In the first activity, in  
43 which children and adults were asked to identify the newscasters based on the photographs  
44 provided; all groups of children were able to distinguish the newscasters from the non-  
45 newscasters. Furthermore, children were able to provide additional details on the  
46 newscasters, such as the television channel that they work for and in some cases the names  
47 of the newscasters. Surprisingly, none of the adult groups were able to identify all of the  
48 newscasters. Most of them were able to identify only two out of five newscasters and in  
49 most cases they confused actors, or political analysts with newscasters. Furthermore none of  
50 the adult groups were able to name any of the newscasters. These findings could be  
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4 explained by the fact that children in general show a better ability than adults to recall visual  
5 information related to television news (Walma van der Molen and van der Voort, 2000).  
6 Additionally, when children and adults were asked to write a news item on children that they  
7 recently watched on television, only 37,5 % (N= 64) of children answered that 'they don't  
8 remember any news item' while the percentage of adults that could not remember a news  
9 item was significantly higher, 53.5 % (N=54). The high percentage of children and adults that  
10 could not recall a news item related to children is related to the fact that news items on  
11 children are difficult to find on television news outlets in Albania (Kaziaj, 2016). Nonetheless,  
12 84.4% of children and 85.2% of adults reported that they would be interested in watching  
13 more news items related to children. These finding is in alignment with previous studies  
14 conducted on the same topic which contradict the belief that children are not interested in  
15 television news (Alon- Tirosh and Lemish, 2014; Carter et. al, 2009).

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17 In the focus groups, adults reported instances of news items that had become  
18 vigorous topics of discussion in the past. One teacher said:

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24 *"I remember one morning entering the class and the pupils immediately asked if I had*  
25 *seen the news of the previous day about two sisters that were kept in chains by their*  
26 *parents. I immediately checked for it in the newspapers when the lesson was over<sup>3</sup>."*  
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28 (man, Lezhe, 31).

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30 Another participant said that for several days children discussed a news item about a pupil  
31 being spanked by his teacher<sup>4</sup>:

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34 *"I could see them watch the video on their mobile phones and comment it with each*  
35 *other"* (woman, Lezhe, 45).

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37 Children from the Shkoder focus groups brought up this case. When asked about their choice  
38 to discuss this particular item, they said:

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41 *"Because that teacher was in our school" (Boy, 10 years, Shkoder) and "because we*  
42 *are curious to know why would someone do such a thing as abusing a child" (Girl, 13,*  
43 *Shkoder).*

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45 The discussion about the video opened up a debate in the group concerning whether the  
46 video should or should not have been broadcast by the news media. One girl was against the  
47 broadcast of this video:

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50 *"I think it was not right that the media broadcast the video because the teacher was*  
51 *filmed inappropriately. The teacher is 'a second parent' and she just used different*  
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4 *methods to educate that child. I am sure that she didn't do it just for fun.*" (girl, 12,  
5 Shkoder).  
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7 On the other hand, one of her classmates contested her by saying:  
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10 *"I think it was right that the news media broadcast the video because the child goes*  
11 *to school to [receive] an education and not to be abused. If the child doesn't behave*  
12 *well, then the teacher can call his parents, but not abuse him."* (boy, 12, Shkoder).  
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15 Significantly, the girl and the boy in the above descriptions take two oppositional  
16 stands, which not only question the ethical ways in which teachers should behave, but also  
17 spell out their knowledge of what is ethical and not ethical in the news coverage. By  
18 justifying the behavior of her teacher, the girl clearly tries to show to the group and the  
19 interviewer her position as a child who is obedient to adult's rules and acknowledges them  
20 as an unquestioned authority. Her choice of words 'the teacher is a second parent' is a  
21 phrase that was frequently used in poetry about teachers during the communist era (before  
22 the 90s). The boy on the other hand, refuses to take the role of the 'obedient child' in  
23 relation to teachers, but still positions himself under adult supervision, namely, his parents.  
24 Even though both children express different opinions on the ethical behavior of news media,  
25 they share the same viewpoint related to their relationship with adults namely, that children  
26 need to submit to adult's supervision. This is in coherence with the news media's  
27 representation of children which reinforces an adult perspective on children (Kazaj, 2016).  
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31 It is interesting to note that several examples brought up in discussions in both  
32 groups, children's and adults', were related to children as victims. One explanation could be  
33 that news items on crime and violence are more often found in Albania's television news  
34 media when compared to other topics (idem). Furthermore, in both cases we can see that  
35 proximity (Galtung and Ruge, 1965) plays an important role in news items that children  
36 choose to discuss. According to Alon-Tirosh and Lemish (2014), research shows that children  
37 express anxiety over more concrete threats to themselves and their loved ones. This points  
38 to the importance of the ethical coverage of children in news and the need to avoid scary  
39 elements or unjustified details on the victims, redundantly used in news media.  
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#### 45 **Children's presence and voice in the news**

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48 This study explored television news with a special focus on news items related to  
49 children. On these grounds, children and adults were asked about their perception of the  
50 broadcast frequency of these news items. The majority of children 56.3 % (N=64), answered  
51 that 'there is less than one news item on children per week'. A considerable percentage of  
52 children, 32.8 % (N=64) believed that 'there is at least one news item on children per week'.  
53 Three children or 4.6% (N=64) believed that 'there are no news items on children at all on  
54 television'. In general adults reported similar perceptions, but 10 adults, or 18.5 % (N=54)  
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4 believed that 'there are no news items on children at all on television'. This is a much higher  
5 percentage than in the case of children. International research findings on the  
6 representation of children in news confirms that children are often absent from news  
7 coverage (Carter, 2014; Ponte, 2008).  
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10 Focus group discussions provided a deeper understanding on the views for the lack of  
11 children's presence in television news coverage. When children were asked 'why do you  
12 think there are fewer news items about children' some responded:  
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15 *"Because news [outlets] deal more with politics, and children are of no special interest*  
16 *to the news"* (girl, 11, Durres).  
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18 *"I think news [stories] are organized only for the people who have influence. If we*  
19 *organize an activity in our school, nobody cares about it, but if a politician or someone*  
20 *famous joins the activity, then the news media will for sure broadcast the activity".*  
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22 (boy, 12, Shkoder)  
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25 Children attributed their lack of presence in news coverage to the fact that news  
26 media outlets in Albania offer an overwhelming amount of attention to politics and political  
27 actors. As such, children are not considered to be interesting news subjects. The two quotes  
28 above suggest that children recognize the existence of a hierarchy of news values (Harcup  
29 and O'Neill, 2001) in Albanian television news. They see themselves as being positioned at  
30 the bottom of this hierarchy and they acknowledge their powerlessness in comparison to  
31 adults.  
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35 Adults shared the same opinions for the lack of children's presence in the news  
36 media:  
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39 *"Once, a journalist came to us for the celebrations for the 1<sup>st</sup> of June<sup>5</sup>, and*  
40 *started asking questions about local elections".* (woman, 40, Durres)  
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42 *"I have never seen a news item with just children celebrating. There must be either*  
43 *the presence of a politician, or a foreign ambassador, mostly the American*  
44 *ambassador, so that the news media reports on that activity!"* (man, 33, Tirane).  
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47 Reports on media in Albania highlight the disproportionate presence of political  
48 actors as a serious issue that can harm the independence of the news media. As a  
49 monitoring report from the Balkan Media Barometer (Lani, 2013) states, 'media outlets in  
50 Albania are increasingly becoming similar to political parties'. This perception questions the  
51 role of the news media in Albania to provide a platform for citizen-participation, particularly  
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4 their encouragement of the participation of children.

5 Furthermore, adults argue that there is a hierarchy in news items related to children.  
6 News coverage mostly features activities related to children in the capital of Tirana, or news  
7 items on children from cultural minorities, such as Roma or Egyptian, which mostly cover  
8 topics of poverty or trafficking. According to adults, children from rural areas are rarely  
9 present in television news:  
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13 *“Children from rural areas organize lots of activities, but they don’t appear in*  
14 *television news [broadcasts]. The news media is not interested in children from rural areas,*  
15 *they are abandoned”* (woman, 47, Elbasan).  
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18 This perception is confirmed by recent findings from a monitoring process of news in  
19 Albania, where only seven news items out of 157 focused on children from rural areas, while  
20 94 news items from the same sample focused on children or events taking place in Tirana,  
21 the capital (Kaziaj, 2016).  
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23 Furthermore, children and adults report that they rarely see children being quoted in  
24 television news coverage. One of the girls, who was once interviewed for a news event,  
25 described her experience by saying:  
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28 *“I was interviewed for an activity that we organized with other schools in Tirana.*  
29 *When I went to school the next day I was famous. It is one of the best experiences of*  
30 *my life”* (girl, 11 Durres).  
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33 This statement clearly shows the significance of such an event, and illustrates the  
34 impact it can have on the life of a child. None of the other children present had anything to  
35 add after the girl shared her experience. It seemed as if the fact that she had been  
36 interviewed for television news gave her a special status among her peers and she took a  
37 leading role in the discussions. This points to the need and importance of the news media to  
38 provide a voice for children and to influence the ways they see themselves being involved in  
39 activities that are happening around them. As previous research has found, children use the  
40 news media as one of the strategies for understanding the world around them and their  
41 place in the world (Carter and Alan, 2005; Livingstone, 2002; Buckingham, 2000).  
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#### 46 **Children, news and politics**

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48 In order to grasp a holistic understanding of children’s and adult’s opinions on the quality of  
49 children’s portrayal in television news, participants were presented with three news items  
50 where children appeared as subjects and were invited to share their thoughts on the  
51 portrayal of children.  
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54 Among participants, children stated that news coverage enforces the idea that only  
55 children who live in the capital are active and engaged in activities occurring in schools or  
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4 communities. Further, the participants stated that, other children are quite invisible and  
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communities. Further, the participants stated that, other children are quite invisible and  
journalists are not interested in their stories. According to a girl:

*“The only case when journalists came to my town was when a newly married girl  
killed her mother- in law” (girl, 14, Tirane<sup>6</sup>).*

Additionally, children stated that the media generalizes certain phenomena related  
to their age group. According to them, media coverage often portrays older children (14 and  
up) as being abusive of alcohol and drugs, or in engaging in promiscuous sexual  
relationships. As one boy participating in the focus groups in Tirana said:

*“This is wrong, as this judgment is based only on what journalists perceive” (boy, 15,  
Tirane).*

Furthermore, children were able to assess how their portrayal in the news affects the  
ways adults think of them. A boy that participated in the focus group discussions in Tirana,  
where some of the participants belonged to the Roma community, said:

*“When we see Roma children begging in the news, people think, ‘well it is always like  
this with Roma children as they have nothing better to do’. But this happens because  
there is no other news items on Roma children rather than begging” (boy,13, Tirane) .*

According to the children:

*“The news aims to attract people’s attention and that is why they come up with  
emotional items” (girl, 11,Shkoder).*

*“The news targets an adult audience and by portraying children as victims they try to  
appeal to their parents and not to the children themselves” (boy, 15, Tirane).*

As the above examples show, most children evaluate their portrayal in television  
news coverage as negative. This was the case for a previous study conducted in Albania with  
older children aged, 13-18 (Nelaj, 2014) in which they assessed their portrayal in the media  
as negative, namely: disorganized, intolerant and violent. Although this study did not  
consider children’s portrayal in news coverage, but within the media in general, it still  
provides some insights into how children in Albania see themselves being included in  
media’s content. It can be said that the ways in which news coverage represents children, is  
harmonized with the ways children are included in the overall content of the media in  
Albania.

When the children were asked ‘which topics are more likely to include children?’ a  
difference was noted in the answers provided by boys and girls. Most girls mentioned topics

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4 that can be considered hard news, such as crime, violence, or accidents, while boys  
5 mentioned topics that can be considered soft news, such as celebrations, or arts and culture.  
6 This apparently surprising finding is supported by results from a 2016 monitoring study  
7 (Kazaj,2016), which found that boys were mostly portrayed as objects of emotional appeal  
8 in television news coverage in Albania, while girls were mostly portrayed as victims.  
9 Consequently, when girls and boys were asked to recall news items on children, they  
10 focused more on news items that they perceived to be directly related to them. In a way it  
11 can be said that they have internalized the ways in which the news media portrays them.  
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15 After reviewing the transcripts from the focus group discussions, we noted a clear-  
16 cut difference noted on the topics that children and adults recalled discussing more often  
17 with each other. When asked ‘which news items did you discuss recently with your  
18 children?’, most parents took a moralizing, educative or patronizing stand to the question.  
19 They used expressions such as:  
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21 *“I discussed the exams with my child, as it is really important to make them*  
22 *understand that their future relies on their success in exams”, or “Even though I don’t*  
23 *like football myself I always discuss the football news with my son because I know*  
24 *that he likes it a lot”, “I discussed a news item about ISIS, as I felt that my child was*  
25 *scared”.*  
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30 In all these expressions there is an underlying assumption that parents carry through  
31 in their answers, namely that children lack the critical thinking skills to make sense of the  
32 news. On the other hand, children answered quite differently to the question ‘which news  
33 items did you discuss recently with your parents?’. Most of them recalled news items that  
34 dealt with politics (elections, corruption, politicians):  
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37 *“I discussed a news item about some politicians that were accused of providing*  
38 *packages of flour to some people in remote areas in order to get their votes in the*  
39 *coming elections” (boy, 14, Shkoder).*  
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42 Children frequently mentioned politics as a topic of discussion. They used the word  
43 politics as a way to refer to the actions of politicians. Furthermore, they were able to  
44 mention several cases of corruption of well-known politicians that were featured in news  
45 coverage and expressed their opinions on how such actions could have implications for the  
46 economy of the country. Such views refute the perspective that children are not interested  
47 in politics or political matters (Rideout, Foehr and Roberts, 2010). As Buckingham (1999:178)  
48 states, ‘young people’s cynicism about politics should be interpreted as a result of exclusion  
49 and disenfranchisement, rather than ignorance or immaturity’. The prevailing presence of  
50 politics in discussions among children might be influenced by the overwhelming presence of  
51 political actors in Albanian news coverage (Lani, 2013). Nevertheless, politics was not  
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4 mentioned in the adult group discussions to the same extent that it was mentioned during  
5 the children's group discussions. Furthermore, children began talking about politics when  
6 asked to report on the news items they discuss more often with their parents. In the words  
7 of Buckingham (2000), this can be seen as a sign of children being urged to be 'mature' and  
8 constantly reminded that they are not free from the adult's prohibitions and controls.  
9 Children's discussions concerning political matters can be seen as a way of acquiring  
10 legitimacy from adults, by showing their 'maturity' in discussing topics that they perceive as  
11 belonging to adults. Children try to enter the public sphere, which is portrayed by the news  
12 media as being exclusively an adult domain, from which children are excluded. In doing so  
13 they ask for more consideration from media professionals in presenting their realities. As  
14 one of children participating in the discussions stated:

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20 *"We know that journalists choose certain news items on children because they want to grab*  
21 *the attention of their viewers, but by doing so they miss some very important aspects of*  
22 *'what life is like for a child today in Albania'. It is not only about the negative phenomenon or*  
23 *the other extreme, celebrations, it is also about how we live our routines, what we think of it,*  
24 *what is missing in our lives and what can be improved!"* (girl, 12, Elbasan).  
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## 27 **Conclusion**

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30 Results from the present study shed light on children's consumption and views on  
31 television news coverage in Albania, with a special focus on their own portrayal. By putting  
32 children's views next to adults', this study explored differences among these two groups in  
33 terms of news consumption and news comprehension. There are no news services for  
34 children in Albania, therefore they are exposed to the same news programs as adults on a  
35 regular basis, as this study found. Findings suggest that both groups – children (aged 10-15)  
36 and adults (25-65) – have a considerable preference for watching television news, which  
37 they consider a very important source of information on political, social or cultural problems.  
38 Furthermore, both groups acknowledge the indifference of news media towards children.  
39 The vast majority of the participants in both groups had difficulties recalling a news item on  
40 children that they had recently seen on television. Nonetheless, an ample percentage of  
41 children and adults reported that they would be interested in watching more news items  
42 related to children. While the interest of adults in news coverage is taken for granted due to  
43 the belief that adults are main targets for news outlets, the noticeable interest of children in  
44 television news is hidden. Seeking information on issues related to politics is seen as a way  
45 of understanding one's place in society and a way of expressing a desire for civic  
46 engagement. These sentiments were further strengthened by the selection of news topics  
47 that children reported discussing more often with their parents, which were related to  
48 politics, corruption or elections.  
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4 Children reported that they do not see themselves being represented in news  
5 coverage. According to them two categories are mostly found on news broadcasts: children  
6 from Roma or Egyptian communities; who are mostly portrayed as victims, or children living  
7 in the center of Tirana; who are mostly portrayed in celebrative events. Children who  
8 participated in this study rejected these portrayals as being representative of their realities.  
9 Furthermore, they point to the consequences that such portrayals can have to their  
10 positioning in society. They express an urgency for news to be related more to their realities  
11 and to avoid generalizations. This finding lends support to other research studies, which  
12 argue that news coverage portrays children in limited frames, and does not take their  
13 perspectives into consideration (Carter, 2014; Ponte & Aroldi, 2013). Findings need to be  
14 related to the context of the news media in Albania, which is reportedly squeezed in  
15 between the political and business interests of a bunch of media tycoons (Halo, Hyseni,  
16 Matlija and Aleksandridis, 2015). As such, the news media is centered around politics and  
17 political actors rather than serving as a source of information for its citizens and being  
18 inclusive to their voices. Nevertheless, research conducted in other countries has also found  
19 that children and their issues are almost invisible in news media coverage, and that media  
20 outlets do not provide a platform for children to participate (Carter, 2014, Ponte, 2007;  
21 Fullertone, 2004). As such, findings from this study could appeal to media professionals to  
22 begin considering children both as an audience and subjects for their daily work. Being  
23 inclusive to children's perspectives would enhance their civic engagement, while diversifying  
24 sources of news coverage for a larger audience. Additionally, children's views on the news  
25 media and their attitudes towards such a medium could be used by researchers, policy-  
26 makers or children's rights activists to seek more consideration of children's' perspectives as  
27 a way of fulfilling their right to participation and facilitating their presence in the public  
28 sphere, as a fundamental right for democratic societies.  
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#### 41 Notes

- 42 1. One of the authors was part of this organization, from 2009-2013.
- 43 2. One of the authors traveled to Albania for this purpose and facilitated all the focus  
44 groups.
- 45 3. News item broadcasted, Oct 28, 2009.
- 46 4. News item broadcasted, Oct 16, 2015.
- 47 5. Celebrated as 'The Children's Day' in all schools in the country.
- 48 6. The case that the girl recalls happened in Peshkopi, her home town.
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