

Survey on Youth and Media in Palestine

Discussion Paper

Conducted by Arab
World for Research and
Development (AWRAD)



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This discussion paper was conceived as a document to encourage debate among youth, media, specialized Civil Society organizations, academics and other concerned stakeholders. Feedback from readers about its findings is very much welcome, and can be sent to UNESCO Ramallah Office: Ramallah@unesco.org

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This study was conducted by: Arab World for Research and Development (AWRAD)



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1. Introduction and Background

UNESCO's Networks of Mediterranean Youth Project (NET-MED Youth)

The NET-MED Youth project¹ is funded by the European Union and implemented by UNESCO in 10 countries of the western and eastern basins of the Mediterranean (including Palestine). The project aims to contribute to the creation of an enabling environment for young women and men to develop their competencies, exercise their rights and meaningfully engage as active citizens. It includes a media-focused component that is instrumental to its other thematic objectives.

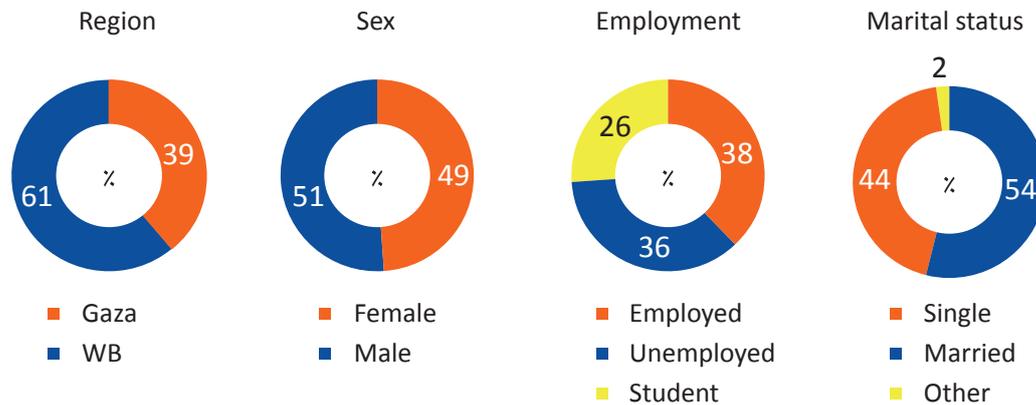
Survey on Palestinian Youth and Media

In order to contribute to the NET-MED Youth's objectives, UNESCO commissioned Arab World for Research and Development (AWRAD) to conduct a survey on Palestinian youth's perceptions regarding national and regional media, in order to facilitate a better understanding of how youth relate to media, and how they engage with and are represented in different media platforms.

¹ <http://www.netmedyouth.org/>
<https://www.facebook.com/netmedyouth/>

Methodology

To accomplish the objectives of this survey, two primary research tools were used: a survey questionnaire (quantitative) and focus group discussions (FGDs) (qualitative). Fieldwork was completed in the period between August 29 and September 7, 2017. The survey questionnaire was administered in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, with a representative sample of 600 young Palestinians aged between 15 and 35 years. More details can be found in the fol



Moreover, four FGDs were conducted (two in the Gaza Strip and two in the West Bank) with two main groups as follows:

Two FGDs with young women and men;

Two FGDs with experts working in the field, such as representatives of youth organizations, media organizations and professionals, young citizen journalists, bloggers and other relevant stakeholders.

Target group	WB		Gaza	
	Number of FGDs	Number of participants	Number of FGDs	Number of participants
Young men and women	1	6 (3F, 3M)	1	15 (7F, 8M)
Experts	1	8 (3F, 5M)	1	8 (3F, 5M)

2. Context

In mid-2016, the total population of Palestine was estimated at 4.82 million, with youth representing 30% of this total (PCBS, 2016). Young Palestinians face many challenges, the most prominent of which being, according to various studies, the issue of unemployment. For instance, in the first quarter of 2016, the rate of youth unemployment reached 39%, with the highest percentage standing at 43% among those aged 20 to 24 years (PCBS, 2016). Moreover, a 2016 Palestinian youth survey revealed that unemployment was stated by the majority of youth polled (54.5%) as being the biggest problem they faced (JMCC, 2016). In addition, according to the UNESCO's "Skills Forecasting Model for Palestine" developed in May 2017, the labour force supply is forecasted to exceed job creation in Palestine during the years 2017-2020.

In addition to unemployment, education is an area regarding which young Palestinians tend to express dissatisfaction. The aforementioned UNESCO's "Skills Forecasting Model in Palestine" has also identified a mismatch between the skills demanded by the Palestinian labour market and those supplied by graduates (UNESCO, 2017). Another contributing factor is the inability of university students to choose their university or area of specialization. Around 12% of them reported that they did not choose their university/college themselves (PCBS, 2016); and in terms of choice of specialization, 26% of males and 24% of females reported not having studied their preferred specialization (Hammami, 2014).

Another key challenging area for youth in Palestine is their extremely limited feeling of political agency in their local communities, and even less so in relation to regional and national politics (Hammami, 2014).

Media, in their many shapes, are a major tool used by youth to discuss and expose the above challenges and many other concerns they face in their daily lives. In February 2017, an online survey carried out among 508 respondents in Palestine under the NET-MED Youth Project revealed that online and social media are the most relevant to youth in Palestine, where 49.6% of respondents (who were mostly youth) thought that social media best represent young people and are the best source of information on matters of concern to them, followed by the internet at 42.7%, while only 5.7% and 1% of respondents chose radio and TV respectively (UNESCO, 2017a). On the other hand, although the use of media by Palestinian youth is dominated by online and social media platforms, the latter are, however, mainly used as a means of communication with friends rather than for content creation. For example, in 2014, a very low 13% of Palestinian youth claimed to have a blog (Hammami, 2014).

A recent media monitoring exercise by UNESCO's NET-MED Youth Project that covered three TV channels in Palestine revealed an underrepresentation of youth in multiple ways, including in terms of youth-focused media content itself as well as young people's influence on the content produced. For example, only 4% of the content monitored was centred on youth. Moreover, among the actors external to the TV channels who were featured in the observed media (i.e., persons being talked about, mentioned, interviewed, participating in a debate, etc.), young people aged between 25 and 35 years did not exceed 11%, and those between

19 and 24 years represented less than 4%. This monitoring also revealed a low representation of women featured in media as external actors (consisting of only 15.8% as compared to 84.2% for men) (UNESCO, 2017). Another report by UNESCO (Media Development Indicators for Palestine) has also emphasized the poor portrayal of women in Palestinian media as well as women's low representation in decision-making positions within media institutions (UNESCO, 2014).

In recent years, several incidents have been reported where journalists have been arrested, interrogated and imprisoned by the Palestinian Security Forces and by the national authorities for expressing their opinions. There is also the recent introduction of a Palestinian cybercrime law, which has been received with controversy among Palestinians, raising concerns about its impact on the freedom of expression. For instance, several arrests of journalists were carried out during the month of July in accordance with this new law, which stresses how it can be threatening to freedom of expression (MADA, 2017). These developments have a direct effect on youth's ability to express their views and concerns freely and without fear of repression.

It is of significant importance to expand youth's presence in media content and their contribution to shaping it, in order to strengthen their voices and their influence on public matters of importance to them. Just as relevant is to facilitate youth's access to reliable sources of public information, so as to support their integration into the realm of national policies (Spencer & Aldouri, 2016).

3. Key Findings

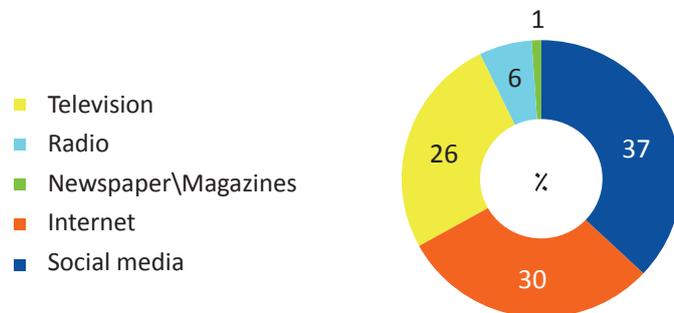
The following section provides an analysis of the key findings regarding youth’s preferred media platforms, their use of new media and their perceptions regarding media outlets and media content, particularly that which is youth-related.

3.1 Preferred Media Platforms: Youth Have Made Their Choice (New Media Are the Trend)

The media platforms that are used the most to obtain news and other content are new media (i.e., social media and the internet) followed by television. Youth use radio and print media the least.

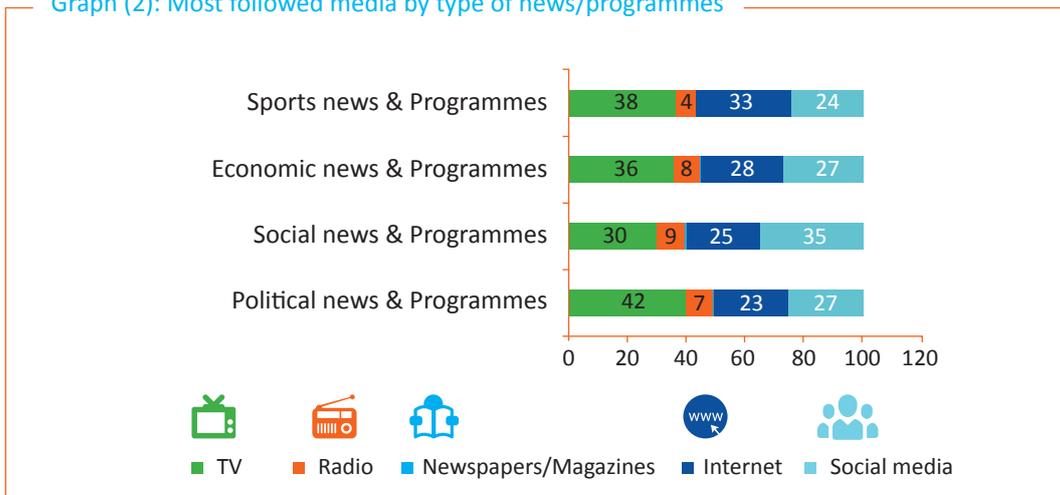
Seventy one percent of Palestinian youth say that they are most interested in following local news and events, 14% are most interested in following regional and international news and events, while 15% don’t follow the news at all.

Graph (1): Most followed media to obtain news and information



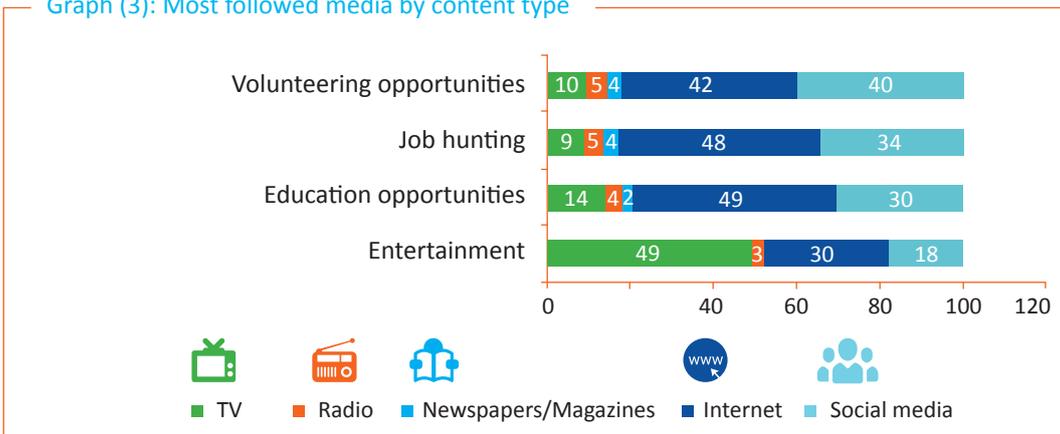
New media platforms are utilized the most by youth in the case of all types of news and programmes they were asked about. Youth use new media the most when it comes to social programmes (60%), followed by sports programmes (57%) and economic programmes (55%). The highest use of TV corresponds to political programmes (42%), followed by sports programmes (38%). Radio is still being followed, but at a much lower percentage, while print media is hardly being followed.

Graph (2): Most followed media by type of news/programmes



TV and new media are tied for first place in terms of young followers when it comes to entertainment content. However, the number of young respondents who choose new media platforms far exceeds those who prefer TV to search for job, educational and volunteering opportunities. Radio is being followed at a much lower rate, while print media are hardly being cited as a source of information, even in the case of job hunting.

Graph (3): Most followed media by content type



3.2 New Media: Rich Menu of Options Offered

Most Frequently Used Social Media Platforms

Facebook is the most frequently used social network, with 71% of youth surveyed referring to it, followed by WhatsApp (17%), Snapchat (6%) and Instagram (5%). Skype and Twitter are the least frequently used, at around 1% each.

Moreover, 71% of youth stated that communicating with friends was the main purpose for using their preferred

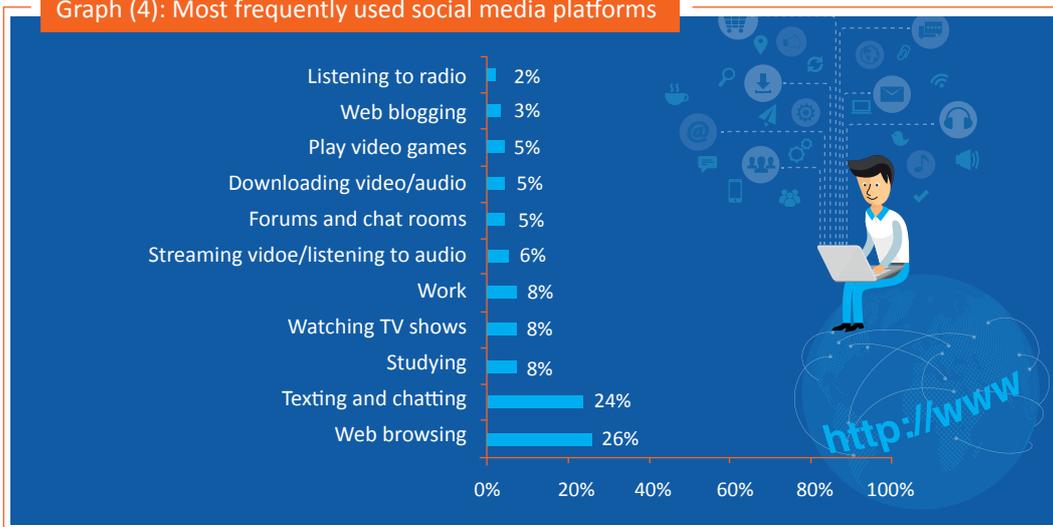


social network, followed by those who said they primarily used it to keep up with the news at 17%, while making new friends, watching videos and finding a job were mentioned less frequently.

Priority Uses of the Internet

Half of the youth surveyed said they use the internet for web browsing on the one hand, and for texting and chatting on the other (with these two categories registering respectively 26% and 24% of responses). The purposes of internet use that were the least chosen were web blogging (3%) and listening to radio (2%).

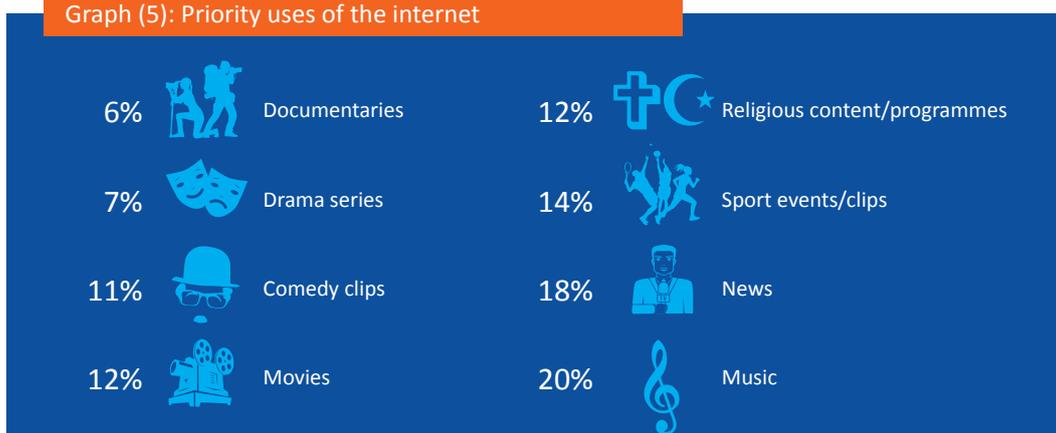
Graph (4): Most frequently used social media platforms



Prioritization of Content Followed on the Internet

Music is the number one priority for Palestinian youth in terms of type of content they look for on the internet, followed by news, sports, religious content and movies. The type of content that was least prioritized corresponded to documentaries.

Graph (5): Priority uses of the internet



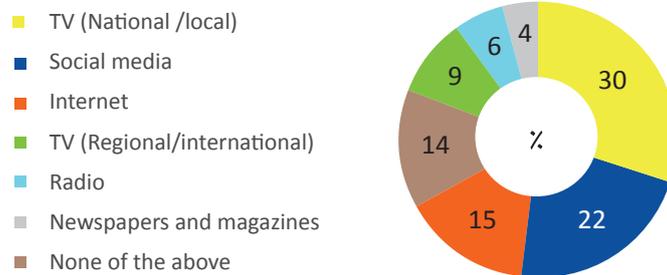
3.3 Assessment and Perceptions of Media

The following section provides an analysis of the opinions of youth regarding the media, particularly concerning their credibility, their content and the extent to which they mainstream youth issues and views and integrate marginalized groups. It also looks into youth's perceptions towards freedom of expression.

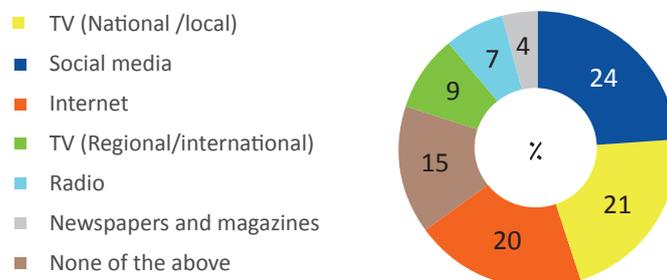
Credibility, Independence and Accessibility: No Media Outlet Is Perfect, but Accessibility Is Increasingly a Decisive Factor among Youth

Traditional media, and particularly television channels, are considered to be most credible (with 49% of respondents choosing TV, radio or newspapers and magazines as the most credible sources), while new media are considered to be most independent (44%) and convenient (42%).

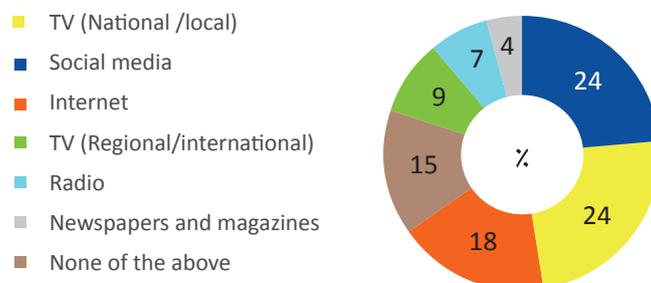
Graph (6): Prioritization of content followed on the internet



Graph (7): Most credible source of information and news



Graph (8): Most independent source of information and news



In terms of credibility, youth are still not fully convinced that new media outlets have the same level of professionalism, as defined by accurate information, verification and sufficient detail. According to one of the male youth, (Gaza) *New media outlets, including websites and Facebook, are hasty to publish information without verification or investigation; they end up disseminating rumours.* [All the quotes of the youth who participated in the FGDs, inserted in italic blue font in the present paper, are adapted translations of the corresponding Arabic oral statements]

This lack of credibility is also due to perceptions of control of the media by the state, including the monitoring of media content by “intelligence agencies.” According to the survey, a majority of youth believe that all media outlets are controlled, monitored and censored by state institutions. This perception was confirmed by a majority of the participants in the FGDs. A young female respondent (West Bank) stated: *Young people do not trust the media and do not believe their news because they cater to the government and, as such, they self-censor. We have no idea if their news and information are driven by facts or by a hidden agenda.*

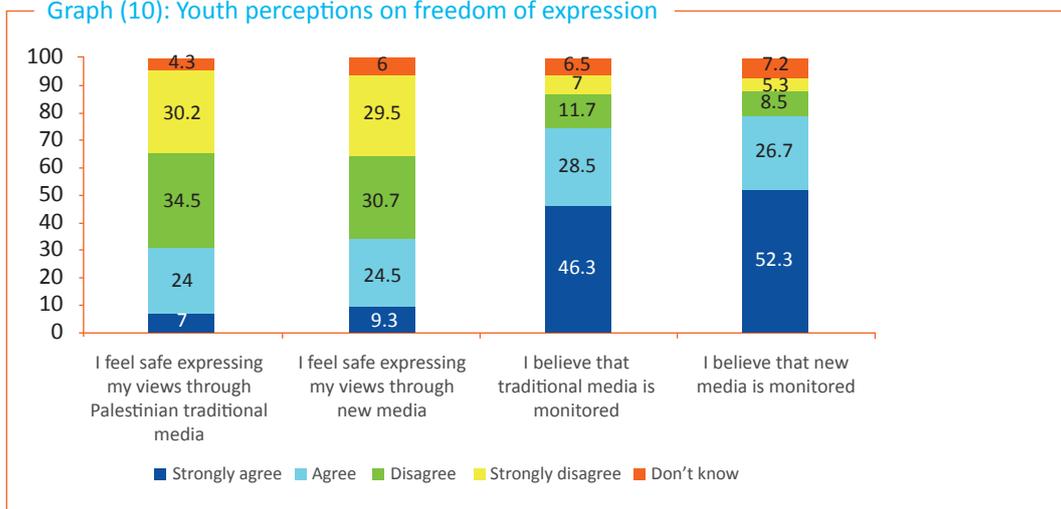
Focus group participants who believe that new media are the most independent provided the following reasoning:

Pluralism and variance: Many have argued that youth have a much larger scope of options to select from in terms of websites and Facebook pages/groups. As such, they have a better chance to view a number of sources, compare and make up their own mind.

Youth participation: Through new media, young people are more able to view material that is youth-oriented, as there are many options that cater to them and their interests (sports, entertainment, scholarships, etc.).

Content: As data from the focus group discussions show, youth believe that new media are more disposed to present and discuss youth-related issues, such as employment and educational opportunities.

Graph (10): Youth perceptions on freedom of expression



Nevertheless, not all young people are enthusiastic; many are highly concerned about their safety when expressing themselves as well as about media being monitored (especially new media). As much as 60% of respondents feel unsafe when expressing themselves through new media. In addition, a slightly higher percentage of youth (79%) believe that new media are being monitored, as compared to those who think that traditional media are (74.8%).

The widespread concerns among youth regarding censorship may have been boosted lately due to several incidents of arrest of journalists and citizens on grounds related to posting content on social media. In addition, the recent approval of the Cybercrime Law (n. 16/2017) in Palestine has raised concerns regarding freedom of expression and privacy online, notably by the provisions that allow for the blocking of websites and the restriction of online expression.

This concern about censorship was cited by several participants in the focus group discussions. As explained by one male participant in the West Bank, *Some of the so-called independent websites and TV channels consolidate their own interests by siding with government policies at the expense of youth and other marginalized groups.*

The data from the survey questionnaire and the focus group discussions also show that youth tend to see new media as the most convenient source of news and information. A young female from Gaza expressed such view as follows: *The internet is so versatile; if I want to search for anything useful in terms of education, work or fun, I look to the internet and Facebook. There is always something new and recent there.*

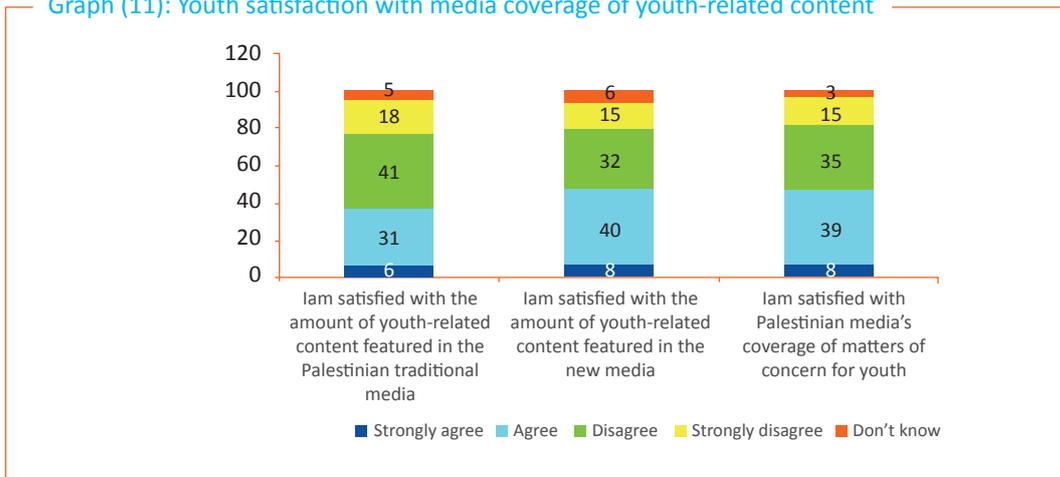
Another young female from the West Bank pointed out the ease of accessibility and availability of new media, which, to some young people, provides a sense of security and stability: *I sit by myself most of the time; I do not find anyone to talk to; I feel alone at home and in school. So, I turn to social media for company, for hours and hours, and it will always be there.*

3.4 Media and Youth-Related Content

Youth tend to be positive when asked a general question about the role of Palestinian media. As much as 60% say that media play a positive role in the lives of youth, while 36% disagree with such being the case. When asked to evaluate specific media aspects, however, youth tend to be more critical:

- As much as 60% are dissatisfied with the youth-related content presented in traditional media; and 47% feel the same way about new media; and
- Fifty percent of youth are dissatisfied with the Palestinian media coverage of youth concerns.

Graph (11): Youth satisfaction with media coverage of youth-related content



The results of the survey questionnaire and the focus group discussions confirm the notion that the media do not pay sufficient attention to major issues of concern to youth, including unemployment, which seems to be the single most important issue for young people . As much as 49% of the youth

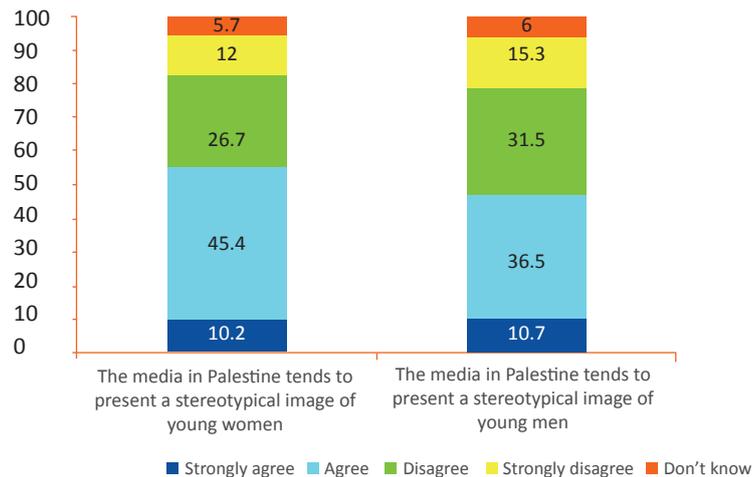
surveyed are dissatisfied with the role of Palestinian media in terms of how they treat the topic of unemployment. Moreover, young people who participated in the focus groups expressed several concerns regarding media coverage of unemployment, including what they perceived as the inability of media to influence decision-makers or other relevant parties to take action to tackle the issue. In addition, young people found that the approaches used to talk about unemployment in the media are very traditional, such as talk shows featuring officials (who, according to one of the young male participants in the focus groups in Gaza, *talk in general terms, provide promises and are not held accountable by the media*) or reports that present unemployment statistics and economic information without humanizing the issue or showing the daily lives of unemployed young Palestinians in Gaza.

As indicated in a previous section, while only 17% of respondents said they preferred to search for jobs through traditional media outlets, as much as 83% said they did that through new media. Nevertheless, it is also important to remember that job hunting ranked as one of the least important uses of social media, with about 1% of the youth who use social networks saying that their main use of these media was for such purpose. Indeed, LinkedIn, a leading professional social network in terms of job searching, was the least utilized social networking site among the Palestinian youth that took part in the survey.

The media's portrayal of young women and men:

The majority of respondents (56%) believe that media present a stereotypical image of young women, while 39% disagree with this statement. They are split in terms of their views on how the media portray young men, with 47% believing that the image of young men conveyed by the media is stereotypical and 47% disagreeing with this. Young participants in the focus groups explained:

Graph (12): Youth perceptions of media's portrayal of young women and men



They [the media] tend to show young women only as young brides and incompetent; many of us are neither (Young woman, Gaza).

In the news, we are either victims of honour killing, mothers of martyrs or prisoners; but we are many other things: we are doctors, pharmacists, lawyers... and we have brains and emotions (Young woman, West Bank).

Others disagreed with views such as the above and argued that media in general - and new media in particular - provide new images of empowered women:

We see female hosts of programmes; [through the media] we are exposed to women ministers, entrepreneurs, leaders from around the world, Palestinian young women participating in car racing, etc. (Young man, West Bank).

We see a number of NGOs, especially women organizations, trying to portray female role models, including in leadership positions, through the media; there is Sawt Al Nisaa and La Meen Al Haq (Young woman, Gaza).

As for young men, the main challenge to most is the presentation of traditional images that reinforce a uni-definition of what constitutes *manhood*:

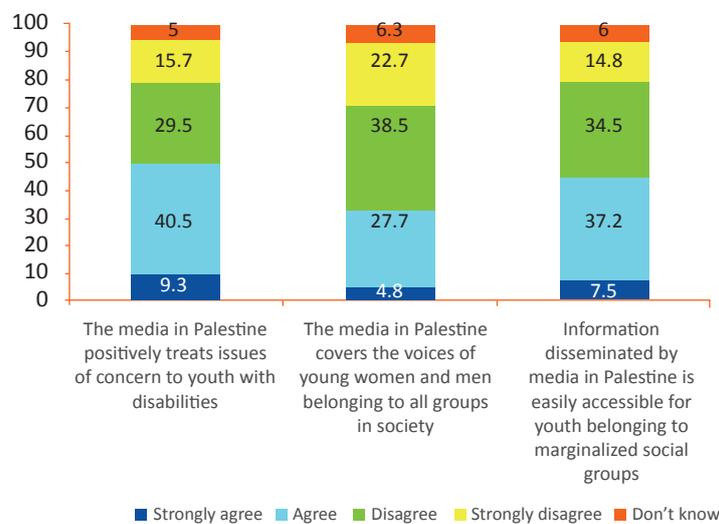
We are presented as Si-Al Sayed, all powerful breadwinners and domineering; most of us men will never live up to that standard; I am not sure that I want to be that (Young man, Gaza).

Palestinian media present the images of successful male politicians and political activists, in addition to some NGO leaders, but no images of young males who are suffering and work very hard as workers and farmers (Young man, West Bank).

The media and persons with disabilities:

While 50% of respondents believed that Palestinian media positively treat issues of concern to youth with disability, as many as 45% disagreed with this statement. It was interesting to note that youth in the focus groups were unable to cite any media programmes that address the issue of disability. When asked why, then, so many respondents perceived media in a positive way in this regard, one of the male youth in Gaza argued: *The fact that people are positive in evaluating mainstream media in relation to disability [while not being able to be specific on this issue] is in itself a sign of lack of care and awareness on the one hand, and a weak commitment to the issue of disability on the other.*

Graph (13): Youth perceptions of media content in relation to youth with disabilities and to marginalized groups



Another young female from Gaza explained why she thought some respondents had expressed dissatisfaction regarding media's treatment of this topic: *The media are a reflection of society; the issue of disability is not high on the agenda and, as such, the media do not care.*

Access to the media by the marginalized and the vulnerable:

Views regarding Palestinian mainstream media and their content are also influenced by perceptions of their treatment of various marginalized groups.

Equal representation of the voices of all youth and the accessibility of information were reported as issues of concern among respondents. To 61% of youth participating in the survey, Palestinian media do not cover the voices of all groups in society (indicating geographic, partisan and social class bias). In addition, 49% believe that the media do not make information easily accessible for youth hailing from marginalized groups. Young people explained during the focus groups discussions:

Young people in Gaza are under huge amounts of stress; how many media features do you see on that issue? They assume that we should just suffer in silence, and the neglect of youth issues by our own media only normalizes the suffering and the devastation (Young man, Gaza).

Let's look at youth in Jerusalem and Area C, where they suffer on a daily basis; the media instead [of showing their suffering] present songs, dancing and silly videos from all over the world (Young woman, West Bank).

Regional variance was noted as the survey results show higher levels of dissatisfaction among Gaza youth compared to West Bank youth. For example, 58% of youth in Gaza are not satisfied with Palestinian media coverage of matters of concern for them, while this figure amounted to 44% among the youth of the West Bank. Moreover, the issues of concern that youth in Gaza and in the West Bank believe media should further address also varied:

- In Gaza, the issues cited included the closing and opening of the borders, electricity, drugs, suicide incidents among young people, patients trapped in Gaza, early marriage, violence against women, the negative ramifications of the presence of guns in many homes and unemployment.
- In the West Bank, youth referred to the following: army and settler violence, checkpoints, unemployment, drugs, weak political and community participation and voluntarism, domestic violence and inequality in access to education and jobs.

4. Recommendations

In line with the findings of the survey and the focus groups, the following are the key recommendations for future efforts aiming to improve youth representation in media:

General Recommendations

- Enable youth to produce their own content on issues of relevance to them, utilizing social media and the internet and their potential in terms of facilitating young people's self-expression. This can include working with individual young Palestinians to advance and build their capacities in media production (e.g., blogging), or supporting existing youth media initiatives to expand and grow (e.g., Filistin Al-Shabab, Itijah initiative and others).
- Underpin the leading social and political role that youth can play, by promoting their use of media in general, and new media in particular, to effectively lobby and advocate for issues of concern to them.
- Support youth entrepreneurship and economic opportunities through building young people's capacity to better utilize the potential of new media with a view to benefit from local, regional and international opportunities. For instance, efforts can be deployed to create awareness and train youth to use LinkedIn or other similar social media platforms so that they can take a more proactive role when it comes to employment and career planning.
- Work with technical and vocational education and training (TVET) organizations in Palestine in order to enhance their reach among young Palestinians through the utilization of various media platforms. Media can play a major role in changing attitudes towards TVET and informing youth about the value of such programmes for building solid careers that match the needs of the Palestinian society.
- Support universities and media centres to improve the quality of media training and education that they provide to young Palestinians, and initiate training programmes or courses that focus on youth media. Capacity building programmes can also be created in cooperation with centres that focus on building the capacity of young citizen journalists, with a view to improve and increase their content creation and coverage of their own interests and issues.
- Initiate a network that connects youth with media outlets (both traditional and new media) in order to encourage dialogue and cooperation among them and work towards improving youth content coverage.
- Support the creation of a network or communication platform that brings together media institutions, youth media initiatives, civil society organizations (CSOs) and international organizations that work with youth in Palestine. Such networking and

communication can guide, inform and improve media coverage of youth issues and concerns.

- Support independent media initiatives and organizations that focus on youth issues and could provide a much-needed space for young Palestinians who are not finding themselves in current media platforms, which they view as lacking objectivity and credibility. Such independent media platforms can improve youth content creation away from the impact of political parties, private sector or other influential parties.

Media Advocacy Campaign Actions

- Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were formulated with regard to supporting media advocacy campaigns concerning youth and media in Palestine:
- There is a need to advocate for increased youth participation in media in general, and more specifically in decision-making positions within traditional media institutions. Such advocacy campaigns can benefit from using data and statistics about this issue, especially when talking about youth programmes.
- Promoting freedom of speech in media in general would have a great impact on the ability of youth to share ideas and opinions freely through various media platforms. The issues that really matter to youth can neither be discussed nor resolved if young Palestinians do not feel safe when expressing themselves.
- Any advocacy campaign needs to be region-specific; in other terms, what applies in the West Bank does not necessarily apply in Gaza, as clearly seen in this study. In addition, young people in areas such as East Jerusalem and Area C must be targeted.
- Any advocacy campaign must also be gender-sensitive, gender-responsive and gender-transformative. Young women's representation in media in terms of content and participation reflects social gender inequality existing at a larger scale; any media campaign should therefore put emphasis on this aspect, as well as the power of media actors to both reinforce and combat stereotypes not only in media content but also in society as a whole.
- For the abovementioned reason, any campaign must portray positive images of young women and men, persons with disability and youth from marginalized groups and regions.

Outreach Strategy Targeting Media

- The results of this study underscore the following recommendations to be taken into account by any outreach strategy aiming to improve the representation of youth in media:
- Conduct workshops and sessions to inform media institutions and disseminate information on youth's interests, issues and concerns, using research-based data and information. Such workshops can help media institutions develop more relevant content vis-à-vis youth. This should also take into consideration the different needs of diverse groups of youth based on their age group, geographic location, sex and other factors.

- Encourage media institutions to develop a long-term strategy regarding youth-related content, in order to guarantee a consistent, permanent and relevant coverage. Such a strategy needs to be long-term, clear, based on youth's interests and concerns and – to a great extent – led and advised by youth.
- Support media institutions by providing training and capacity-building to improve the youth-related content they produce and the way they cover topics of relevance to young Palestinians. This can include building the skills of journalists working with-in media institutions to enable them to create youth-relevant content as well as to produce such content using creative and original methods (multimedia approaches, infographics, etc.) that attract young Palestinians and are in line with international standards.

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