Loy9: Reaching and engaging youth on issues of civic participation in Cambodia

BBC Media Action in Cambodia successfully reaches and engages young people aged 15–24 with key information about democratic institutions and civic participation through Loy9.

The project
Since September 2010, UNDP has funded BBC Media Action in Cambodia to reach young people aged 15–24 with key information about democratic institutions and civic participation. This takes the form of a multimedia project that includes TV, radio, online and mobile content, and live events, known to the public as Loy9 (a slang term of praise among young Cambodians). Its weekly radio phone-in show is broadcast throughout the year, and three series of a combined TV drama and magazine show aired between January 2012 and March 2014.

This project aims to reach young people in Cambodia in order to improve civic knowledge and encourage youth to engage in civic participation. Key programme objectives include improving knowledge and awareness of opportunities for civic participation, gender equality and the skills required for the empowerment of youth.

Research approach
BBC Media Action commissioned a quantitative survey to assess the impact of Loy9 by measuring current levels of young people’s civic attitudes, knowledge and engagement. The survey also captured a snapshot of the ways in which youth in Cambodia engage with a range of media. The survey used a nationally representative sample of 2,597 youth aged 15–24 from all 24 provinces in Cambodia, with face-to-face interviews conducted in August 2013.

Loy9 audience members overwhelmingly agree that Loy9 encourages them to be brave (98%).

Key findings
- Loy9 has been successful in reaching a wide and diverse audience of over two million Cambodian youth, even among those audiences traditionally more difficult to reach with mass media such as rural populations. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of youth in Cambodia have been exposed to at least one Loy9 output.¹
- There is a loyal and regular audience for Loy9, with the majority of the TV and radio audiences reporting engaging with the programmes at least twice a month when they are on air (63% and 53%, respectively).
- Loy9 evokes discussion (34% have discussed it with others) – a key determinant of efficacy and action, and one which is important in a context where voicing and expressing opinions has previously been uncommon.

¹ UNDP, youth survey results 2013.
• Audience members are overwhelmingly positive about the role of Loy9 in increasing their understanding of the civic engagement topics it covers, suggesting it meets audience needs in this area.
• Loy9 audience members overwhelmingly agree that Loy9 encourages them to be brave (98%), and to express their own opinions (96%), and shows them how to get involved in their commune council (92%). These are key areas Loy9 seeks to address.
• The Loy9 audience members are more able to articulate their key national and local concerns, and are more likely to report awareness and understanding of key civic engagement terms, than those not exposed to the outputs.

Project context
The population of Cambodia is the youngest in South East Asia; however, young people have previously been found to have limited awareness of and engagement in civil society and politics. Research among youth in Cambodia in 2010 highlighted these issues, finding that more than 20% of young people in Cambodia were not aware of the National Assembly. Even among those who had heard of this important institution, more than 60% did not know what it was.\(^2\)

Implications and impact
These findings suggest that Loy9 is providing information and encouraging youth, which can support youth participation. A large and diverse audience regularly engages with the programme, often going beyond simple consumption to discussing the programme with others. The audience is overwhelmingly positive about Loy9’s role in increasing their understanding of the civic engagement topics it covers, suggesting it meets audience needs in this area. For example, almost all of the Loy9 audience who recalled the topic of voting and elections (98%) agreed that Loy9 has improved their understanding of it, and 97% of those who recalled the team-work topic felt the same way. This demonstrates the valuable role Loy9 can play in terms of providing important information to youth on civic participation.

It is also apparent from this research that there is a gap between awareness of key civic engagement terms (such as National Assembly, commune council, and democracy) and understanding of these terms among youth. This also applies to awareness of opportunities for civic participation and uptake of these opportunities. However, this gap is less pronounced for the Loy9 audience, who demonstrated higher levels of awareness and understanding of key terms compared with those not exposed. This suggests that Loy9 programming should continue to provide information on specific civic knowledge issues, which helps to aid comprehension and understanding that progresses beyond awareness.

For more information about our research in Cambodia, please see Loy9: Reaching and engaging the Cambodian youth audience on issues of civic participation and Youth in Cambodia: media habits and information sources at www.bbcmediaaction.org

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1 A respondent was considered to have been reached by Loy9 (also described as having been “exposed” to Loy9) if he or she reported having seen, listened to or used a Loy9 output at least once. (This included Loy9 TV, radio, online, and voter education spots, but excluded promotion spots.)