

Book Review: Youth and Media

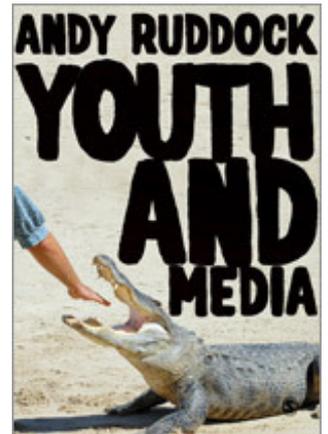
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*When societies worry about media effects, why do they focus so much on young people? Is advertising to blame for binge drinking? Do films and video games inspire school shootings? Aiming to tackle these kinds of questions, **Youth and Media** considers why young people are often at the centre of how we understand the media. This is an important area of research and **Youth and Media** is a good introductory text on the subject, concludes **Barbara J. Cooke**.*

Youth and Media. Andy Ruddock. SAGE Publications. March 2013.

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As the media takes an increasing roll in our personal lives and how we communicate, many parents, researchers, and even media organisations themselves have raised concern over how this inescapable exposure affects our youth. This has been particularly true for the discourses surrounding violent video games, explicit music, and recently body image (see for example, [Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty](#)). Researchers from many disciplines from neuroscience (e.g., [Carnagey, Anderson, & Bartholow, 2007](#)) to criminology ([Huesmann, 2007](#)) have tackled the study of youth and media using their own respective designs and methodology. In *Youth and Media*, [Andy Ruddock](#) explores these issues from a media studies perspective and advocates for an effects research methodology.



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Using a series of case studies running the gamut from [Kony 2012](#) to the life and times of [Jackass star Bam Margera](#), Ruddock discusses how and why youth media studies matter, how it should be studied, and what we can learn from the findings. The book covers the influence and effect of media on youth in several contexts; in addition to the examples already mentioned, he covers the [Ryan Florence and David Cameron incident](#), Insane Clown Posse and censorship, the Columbine high school shootings, child soldiers, and much more. Consequently, the book does provide a good introductory discussion of a variety of key topics in the study of youth and the media, and does an excellent job of revealing the complexity of the relationship between youth and the media.

Ruddock also makes an excellent case for effects research as the most appropriate approach to studying media effects within the field of media studies. He advocates for a mixed methods approach to studying media effects, as neither solely quantitative nor qualitative methods yield valid and reliable results. He argues that qualitative research is an essential supplement to quantitative research as the latter cannot necessarily establish the underlying mechanisms of media effects or subjective media effects, but quantitative research can detect relationships/correlations and the presence of effects.

Throughout his ten chapters Ruddock frames his discussion in a recurring cyclical figure that flows in the following cycle: Research Question, Underlying issue about media influence, Relevant literature, Exemplifying case study, Outcomes, and Lesson for understanding media influence. This consistency in presentation is a strength of the book, adding some structure to a large and varied subject matter. This is a particularly good structure for students, Ruddock's intended audience.

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book does cover such an expansive range of material, I will only make specific comments on two chapters. Chapter 6, “Understanding media violence: School Shootings, media stories and the framing of social reality”, explores how profit-driven media leads to the commodification of violence. Ruddock argues that the media frames violence such as the Columbine shootings in a manner to suggest that the world is far more dangerous and disorderly than it actually is; he states, “Media power is about highlighting, repeating and interpreting; school shootings are frequently brought to our attention as common events that represent a series of coherent dangers to social order” (p. 107). Ruddock argues that the media create interpretations and archetypes for violent events, like school shootings, and attempt to apply this understanding to similar events even when they do not fit. He also discusses how this happens not only with news media, but with social media as well, as exemplified by the Finnish school shootings. Young people are participating, even if unwittingly, in the proliferation of the profit-driven framing of violence by the media. This is a thought-provoking chapter, but there are many aspects of media coverage of school shootings that I would liked to have seen addressed, such as the effects of media coverage on instigating future school shootings.

In chapter 7, “Understanding advertising and marketing: Students and alcohol”, Ruddock explores the influence of the media on students’ alcohol consumption. He states that while on the surface media education and marketing bans may seem like solutions to the problem of youth binge drinking, they are only partial solutions. The chapter demonstrates that the relationship between alcohol marketing and students’ alcohol consumption is complex and ever changing, with newer forms of technology and media regularly hitting the streets. Students are generally aware that they are being marketed to and often voluntarily participate in the marketing (e.g., mobile phone apps). Ruddock also argues that some of the current quantitative economic research conducted in this area has failed to account for mediating variables in the relationship between youth and alcohol, such as cultural differences and the aforementioned willingness to participate in marketing driven exercises. This chapter provides excellent insights into the relationship between alcohol companies and student desires and choices.

Studying the effects of the media on young people is an important area of research, and *Youth and Media* is a good cursory introduction to research on the topic. Seasoned readers may feel that far more in-depth analysis would be welcome and that each chapter is in fact worthy of its own book, but *Youth and Media* does not promise to be anything more than an introductory text on the topic, so I will reserve any harsh criticism and simply state that while the media effects approach is an important methodology within media studies, the analysis executed throughout the book would benefit from a more interdisciplinary approach. Ruddock does have a flare for the overdramatic statement and a habit of oversimplifying concepts/situations. But nonetheless, *Youth and Media* is a good introductory text on the subject and students of media, sociology and violence will find it an excellent place to start.

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