

*Summary*

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Overall, television is the mass medium of the era in South America. While more people have access to radio, television consumes more of the audience's time, much more of the advertisers' budgets, and television networks are widely thought to have the most cultural, economic and political power of all media. Brazil has been characterized in its own media as the „country of television“ because the television audience is so large and because the medium is perceived to have a great impact. While a large majority of South Americans either can afford a television set or have communal access to one, many, if not most of the people, are too poor to have many other leisure options, which is why they watch television so much.

Language and culture limit access to television and print media in some countries. In the Andean region, significant population minorities still speak only indigenous languages. While local radio stations often serve such language groups, major print media and television networks do not. Although radio still dominates some rural areas as the main medium, most small town and rural audiences are rapidly gaining access to television, by satellite dish if not by local broadcast. Television is more centralized and entertainment oriented than radio. Latin American television tends to be dominated by a few large networks, such as TV Globo in Brazil, Teletrece in Chile, Televisa in Mexico or Venevision in Venezuela. These networks are usually owned by family groups which also own other media. Television content is dominated by locally or regionally produced versions of popular global genres: soap operas, variety shows, sports, news, music, reality shows, sitcoms and talk shows.

Most Latin American countries have developed two or three commercial television networks and often a government or educational channel, although the latter stations are usually underfunded and tend to produce relatively little. Television networks have tended to dominate the landscape because of the high cost of production, which require the economies of scale of central program production and network distribution. Commercial television has also developed because it has been funded strongly by advertisers who wish to reach the mass audience that television provides. Television in Latin America has become known for several characteristic program genres: telenovelas (prime time serials), live variety shows, live regional music, and solo and ensemble comedies.

*For a long period of time, most of the South American press and broadcasting systems have had very close connection to government. They tended to be fairly good examples of what has been termed the authoritarian media model. Both print and broadcast media have been largely privately owned but government involvement has often been heavy. In actual practice, many South American governments maintain substantial control over broadcast media. Licences, while in theory guaranteed, can be quickly canceled. Under many regimes in a number of countries the process for granting and maintaining broadcasting licenses has become a source of political control and political patronage. In many places, some regulations have focused on governing the behavior of private concessions, particularly in moral terms but also in political terms. Financial pressures are also considerable.*

*The media in Latin America retain a regional distinctiveness in many ways despite the pressures of competition from global conglomerates. Most media are owned by private family groups, which themselves are conglomerates of newspaper, radio, television and Internet. While some of those groups have bought or started media in other Latin American countries, ownership remains mainly national. Although the dominant media groups tend to have a very close relationship with government, this cozy relationship is diminishing in some countries due to political and media competition.*