

# SMS

*SMS* (RBS TV, Brazil) is a 15-minute documentation that portrays a diverse group of Brazilian high school teenagers in a state school in Porto Alegre. It starts with teens talking about their mobile phones at school (cf. screenshot 1). In class, the headmistress enforces the existing ban on using mobile devices during lessons (cf. screenshot 2). The students are not impressed by this announcement, and then talk one-on-one to the camera about what they use their phones for at school (cf. screenshot 3, 4). These interviews with the students and observations in their everyday school life quickly open up a variety of topics like communication, identity, peer pressure, and finally love (cf. screenshot 5). Although other uses of the mobile phones e.g. for cheating in tests are demonstrated (cf. screenshot 6), the lives and identities of the students take centre stage.

In the beginning, it is difficult to distinguish between the many students, but slowly, the viewers get acquainted to a few teenagers who talk about their unique views and identities (cf. screenshot 7). The programme is loosely structured along a typical school afternoon and ends when the gates of the school close at 5.59 p.m. (cf. screenshot 8).

*SMS* was one of the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 2012 finalists in the 12-15 Fiction & Non-Fiction category.

## International experts' opinions

International experts shared their opinions about *SMS* during the discussion sessions at the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 2012. Many experts expressed their confusion upon watching the programme. They appreciated that the story was based on adolescents' use of mobile phones and messaging. However, they found too many topics and too many characters made *SMS* unclear and hard to understand.

"I was confused. It was a very good beginning and very interesting topic about the use of the phones and messages. But, after that, there were too many people talking all the time, too fast." (male expert, Poland)

"I struggled to find the story. There were so many characters. It didn't really ever get there what the positive uses potentially of these cell phones could be." (female expert, USA)

Some experts tried to explain their feelings of being "left out" and not being able to follow with age differences.

"I think I'm a bit confused, and I think we all are. I'm not 12 or 15 anymore..." (female expert, East Timor)

"14-year-olds are probably watching it and texting at the same time. They are so used to multitasking. Maybe that pace is just normal to them?" (female expert, Germany)

Others thought cultural differences or the Latin American TV system were responsible for this fast-paced style: "It's typical Latin American, very fast, very hip, very much intercutting all the time." (male expert, Norway)



Ill. 1: Multiple voices talk about their first mobile phone



Ill. 2: The headmistress conveys the ban to the class



Ill. 3: The students' reactions in class

“If there are a lot of commercial intermissions, then pieces in-between will be short. You only have short sound and video bites, and you never follow it up because ads are going to come anyway. That’s how I explain it to myself.” (male expert, Germany)

A few experts discussed whether this style could point to a new way of storytelling for the “online generation”.

“We feel the makers of *SMS* try to find a form that reflects the communication between people, and look to find a special form for this. Maybe it is in the traditional way of telling stories, maybe not.” (female expert, Germany)

“It certainly made me think, because all the things I would look for as a programme maker, I was struggling to find. But, I quite liked that, because I was going, ‘Well, wow, am I missing something?’” (male expert, UK)

“It was confusing, but I thought it was one of the best-targeted things. It is all through the kids’ perspective, and you often don’t get that perspective in a way that is believable – all these Meta themes that are going on in their heads at the same time: You are in a school context, but it is all about their social lives.” (female expert, USA)

Target Audience 6.56	Idea 5.76	Script 4.98	Realization 5.34
Average Score per Category by experts’ voters at PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 2012			

### Opinions from teenagers in 7 countries



Ill. 4: A few students talk about their phones in interviews



Ill. 5: The students talk about themselves and about each other



Ill. 6: The mobile phone is also used for cheating in tests

The PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 2012 included the votes of an international youth jury, which was organized in co-operation with broadcasters worldwide. Teens between 12 and 15 in 7 countries discussed and judged 12 programs in the category 12 to 15. Here is the summary of their discussions on the programme *SMS*.

In **Australia**, the youth jury was divided on whether the programme was easy or difficult to understand: “It was really confusing and I didn’t really understand the concept. It was hard to tell who was who. It went way off-topic.” Other members had no problems relating to it: “Being in a high school setting, we are all there now, and the whole drama. We have mobile phones ourselves. It was easier to follow than what most people said.”

“I reckon the phone is, like, the basis of their life. So it all revolves around that, and how they communicate. Although it did go off topic, it was still all around the phone.”

The youth jury in **Cuba** engaged with the programme, and discussed it among themselves: “The programme shows how adolescents feel. I empathize with them a lot because I see myself there.”

“In the beginning I did not understand it, but I think the show has the goal to show us how young people in that country are. I feel that the title *SMS* has not much to do with a SMS. It is about how we, the adolescents, are influenced by fashion or technology.” – “I think the programme does relate with its title, because it is just as an SMS: short, fast, sometimes difficult to understand for its shortened words and its telling a lot of things at the same time.”

Members of the youth jury in **Egypt** did not connect with *SMS* at all. They wondered how this programme reached the final, and had two main objections: “There is no storyline”, “The content is unethical, against our culture.”

The **Macedonian** youth jury did not have to say much about the programme either, and their few opinions on it were divided: “It was very real, like it really happens in school”, “It was like a commercial.”

In **Nigeria**, the discussion of the youth jury centred around the behaviour exhibited by the students which “in some places it wasn’t very appropriate”, and they felt it teaches a lesson by showing negative examples: “I like *SMS* because it teaches you that whenever you are in school you shouldn’t be using your phone, that way you wouldn’t be distracted”. Others critically remarked the programme was “very fast-paced”.

The youth jury from the **Philippines** felt the programme showed adolescents in a realistic way, but felt it lacked models for prosocial behaviour: “This is a very familiar story that happens in high schools. Students lose concentration because of mobile phones.”

“The only thing depicted was reality that happens among the youth.” – “I did not see any values presented.”

The youth jury in the **United States** youth jury felt the programme constantly switched topics, which made it “confusing”. One member deemed the style of *SMS* “really artistic” and elaborated: “It is not designed to entertain people as much as convey an interesting opinion about youth. I liked how it was impressionistic.” His idea to make young people watch it: “follow the students through the year instead of one day. Instead of going off on so many tangents in one episode, you follow how they change throughout high school.”



III. 7: Some of the main characters: Jad, Jonas, Chelsin, Leo and Alexandra



III. 8: A long school day in Porto Alegre is over

*Elke Schlote, Dr. phil. (IZI, Munich, Germany)*

Youth Jury 2012	Score	Rank
Australia	5.4	9
Cuba	8.0	8
Egypt	4.2	10
Macedonia	3.5	12
Nigeria	3.7	10
Philippines	7.0	12
United States	3.8	10