

Mind the Gap! Journalism on Social Media and News Consumption Among Young Audiences

JORGE VÁZQUEZ-HERRERO¹

MARÍA-CRUZ NEGREIRA-REY

JOSÉ SIXTO-GARCÍA

Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, Spain

Social media have become the main gateway to information for young people, helping to determine and shape the young's visions of the present, which is also conditioned by news sharing among users. News media are tasked with remaining relevant to these young audiences and are trying to reach the places where they are digitally most active. By combining quantitative and qualitative methods, two perspectives were analyzed in this study. The first was the news use on social media of young Spanish, French, and British people ($N = 1,528$) aged 18–25. The second was the content dissemination strategies implemented within social networking sites by the 30 most consumed media in these European countries. The results confirm the pre-eminence of social media as channels of information and as alternatives to traditional media, with distributed, incidental consumption throughout the day. Meanwhile, the news media are implementing strategies to get integrated into the platforms that most engage new audiences.

Keywords: audience studies, social media, young people, news sharing, news providers, news use, journalism

Information consumption has been transformed by technological progress, new devices, and new platforms. In the current scenario, smartphones and social media are the main access routes to news (Newman et al., 2021), in addition to being prominent places for interpersonal communication and entertainment. The difficulties for the news media in drawing the attention of users arise because news media are essentially at the mercy of platforms, which have their own logic and algorithmic operations, and whose content is available at the fingertips of the user at practically any time of day or at any place, in an incidental manner. This same

Jorge Vázquez-Herrero: jorge.vazquez@usc.es

María-Cruz Negreira-Rey: cruz.negreira@usc.es

José Sixto-García: jose.sixto@usc.es

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dissemination process is even more challenging as it is conditioned by news sharing (Kümpel, Karnowski, & Keyling, 2015), echo chambers (Wohn & Bowe, 2016), and the adverse context of misinformation (McDougall, Brites, Couto, & Lucas, 2019). Technological artifacts and other objects intervene in journalism (Primo & Zago, 2015); they are not only intermediaries, as happens in this case when employing cross-platform social media (Humphreys, 2013) for news creation, dissemination, and consumption.

When we focus on young people, we observe that many are increasingly less interested in traditional media or in discussing public and current affairs (Peacock & Leavitt, 2016). Young audiences show specific informational interests and needs (Costera Meijer, 2007; Schofield Clark & Marchi, 2017) and have their own rhythms and habits of information consumption (Geers, 2020; Podara, Matsiola, Maniou, & Kalliris, 2019). In general, it is observed that they consume news online, on social platforms and in formats that are pleasing to them (Costera Meijer, 2007; Geers, 2020). Those who consume news incidentally tend to do so while consuming other types of content or performing other activities on social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, or WhatsApp, but not through news or media websites or apps (Galan, Osserman, Parker, & Taylor, 2019).

The gap between traditional media journalism and young audiences can be understood as a disconnect that may grow: Young people no longer see traditional media as the best or only way to be informed, and while they see news as something they should know, they also see it as something that is useful, interesting, or funny (Galan et al., 2019). Therefore, there is great concern about how social networks shape the vision that young people have of today's world (Sveningsson, 2015), and how the media and journalists can connect with them via these platforms, especially on those where they are more active, such as Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube (Newman, 2022). Previous works have described habits and routines about the consumption of social media content. However, in the review of the literature, no concrete data have been found on the characteristics of the social diet of the youth (with regard to the hours or places in which it is carried out, or the frequency), or which follows journalists or news media accounts, or on what young people demand from information before deciding to share it. These concerns are what justify this research—which also incorporates the perspective of the media—in which three fundamental objectives are established:

- O1: To identify young audiences' social media use, their consumption routines, and their choice of platforms.*
- O2: To analyze the use that young people make of social media to get information and the attitudes they have toward news content on these platforms.*
- O3: To study the presence of the news media on social networking sites, their strategies, and their adaptation to young audiences.*

The results of a survey carried out with 1,528 young people (18–25 years old) from Spain, France, and the United Kingdom are presented. The presence and actions of the 30 most consumed digital media outlets in these countries are explored on Instagram, TikTok, and Twitch. These three platforms were chosen because they are widely used by young people, have experienced significant growth in recent years, and

the three social media platforms are sought out and used more recently by news media. Furthermore, seven social media managers from relevant news outlets were contacted. The results are divided into three parts: (1) how young people get their information on social media; (2) how news outlets adapt to social media; and (3) the specific strategies the news media implement to reach this type of audience.

Previous Studies

News Sharing on Social Media

In general, social media are considered sites for entertainment, communication, and news (Thompson, Wang, & Daya, 2020). The growing prominence of social media has allowed users to instantly share news both within and across their social networks (Bhagat & Kim, 2022; Wischnewski, Bruns, & Keller, 2021). The news sharing that is evident on social media platforms has been classified as a form of reciprocal exchange that favors social cohesion between people from as young as 18 to older than 66. In addition, this process entails strategic actions in the sense that users share news that they understand will help to improve their social relationships while they dismiss that which could be offensive or annoying (Goh, Ling, Huang, & Liew, 2019). In Norwegian media, as determined by Kalsnes and Larsson (2018), softer news topics are more frequently shared than harder news topics.

In other recent research, Duffy and Ling (2020) have described the practice of sharing news on social media as a kind of social glue and have concluded that its relevance is increasingly significant. There is no doubt that social media have become an integral part of online news and that this affects how people find, consume, and distribute news (Karnowski, Leonhard, & Kümpel, 2018) although news sharing by users is usually carried out with audiences of similar ages (Kim & Ihm, 2020). Picone, De Wolf, and Robijt (2016) discovered that the main reason for exchanging news stories from Dutch-speaking media outlets in Belgium was the desire to be socially connected although they also found that self-confidence in Internet skills was another determining factor.

If users share news on social media, it seems logical that same news outlets serve as a source of information for other users. Indeed, the number of users who use social media worldwide has grown by 13.2% since 2020 (We Are Social & Hootsuite, 2021); people aged between 18 and 64 spend 2 hours and 45 minutes a day checking social media (with some limitations, this source shows a progressive growth in year-on-year terms). The desire to stay up to date with news and current events was the main reason reported for using social media (36.5%). According to the same study, 56.4% of people aged 18 or older said that they were capable of differentiating between what was true or fake when they accessed the Internet.

Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Instagram, WeChat, and TikTok top the list of the most used social platforms in the world (We Are Social & Hootsuite, 2021) in a context in which technology has changed the information consumption habits of young people and where social media have been, for more than five years, an essential tool not only to communicate and interact but also to consume news (Yuste, 2015) and in which the news value of proximity continues to be an important factor (Massuchin, 2020).

It is not only citizens that use social media to get information: The media themselves use these networks as an information source (Thurman, 2018). This leads to changes in productive routines and in the production of information (Hedman & Djerf-Pierre, 2013; Lasorsa, Lewis, & Holton, 2012; López, 2015). However, research has confirmed that information professionals make limited use of sources from social media (Benaissa, 2018), although the use is high in the case of images, and that most of the news is a combination of information from both traditional sources and social media, as previous studies, such as those by Paulussen and Harder (2014) or De Ramón (2014), have already concluded.

In relation to the incidental consumption of news (Bergström & Jervelycke, 2018; Mitchelstein et al., 2020), in the current news sharing environment, a highly relevant phenomenon is taking place: "news-finds-me." Citizens may perceive that they do not need to seek news because they will be exposed to it and remain well-informed through their peers and social networks (Gil de Zúñiga, Weeks, & Ardèvol-Abreu, 2017), thus social media significantly increases opportunities for people to encounter news incidentally in their online activities (Park & Kaye, 2020). This situation is even more noticeable when innovative formats are used for news sharing, such as self-destructive and ephemeral content (Sixto-García, Rodríguez-Vázquez, & López-García, 2021; Vázquez-Herrero, Direito-Rebollal, & López-García, 2019), but, at the same time, it is necessary to recognize the importance that young people give to relationships of trust in social networks (Gibson & Trnka, 2020). Segado-Boj, Díaz-Campo, Navarro-Asensio, and Remacha-González (2020) found that students with a higher news-finds-me perception tended to rate accuracy and factuality more highly than students with a lower news-finds-me perception.

Within the constant fight against misinformation, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a breeding ground for the transmission of information that had sometimes not been subject to sufficient scrutiny. Thus, for example, in Spain, fact-checking platforms detected more than 300 fake news stories in the first month of the pandemic (Salaverría et al., 2020). Social media is the original source and the main route for the dissemination of false information in 58% of the cases, as stated by García and López (2021).

Young People and Social Media

A recent study concluded that young people use social media in ubiquitous environments to be informed through sources alternative to traditional media although they demand more media literacy to fight against disinformation (Tejedor, Cervi, Martínez, & Tusa, 2021). The frequency of a person's use of social media does not imply their ability to identify the reliability of the sources (Figueira & Oliveira, 2017) though their vocabulary level does seem to play a part (Macedo-Rouet et al., 2020). This correlation highlights the need to improve educational policies for media literacy, even if only from a preventive perspective (Festl, 2021). Despite the fact that the United Kingdom is one of the countries most concerned about eradicating misinformation, only 33.3% of its youth believes that they have the critical skills necessary to gauge the veracity of information (National Literacy Trust, 2020). That young people are exposed to fake news is already a growing concern, as are the implications that are being noted in relation to health (stress and anxiety), democratic quality (loss of trust in institutions and the media), and issues of post-truth (permanent questioning of facts; Herrero-Diz, Conde-Jiménez, & Reyes-de-Cózar, 2021).

Other research has noted that between 40% and 50% of young people are almost constantly on social media via their mobile phones (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). They seek entertainment (Ifinedo, 2016), personal enjoyment (Leu & Maykel, 2016), and to show their day-to-day life (Fu & Cook, 2021), but do not necessarily seek to educate themselves since young people still rely more on traditional media than on social networking sites to consume this sort of information (Elvestad, Phillips, & Feuerstein, 2018). Fernández, Rodríguez-Virgili, and Serrano-Puche (2020) explored people's willingness to express political opinions on social media. They found that users aged 25 to 34 who did not situate themselves at the political extremes were fearful of expressing themselves freely on social media. Younger users were less susceptible to this social pressure. The assessment of the risks associated with the dissemination of content on social media, particularly regarding privacy, is another issue that researchers have identified as worrisome in the relationships between young people and social networks (Youn & Shin, 2020).

Methods

To discover the informational uses and preferences of young people on social media, this study uses two complementary methods: First, a survey was carried out; then, an exploratory study of the presence and activity of the media on relevant platforms was conducted. This study was bolstered by the opinions and experiences of social media management teams.

The survey collected data through a systematic and structured quantitative method (Hansen & Machin, 2013). An online questionnaire was used that consisted of nine demographic characterization questions and 56 closed-response questions using scaled, multiple choice, and binary responses. The questionnaire was divided into four parts: (1) identification, (2) use of social media, (3) informational preferences on social media, and (4) news content by platform. This questionnaire was answered in the participants' own language. The survey was conducted between May 19 and May 31, 2021.

The sample of participants was limited to the target demographic of 18- to 25-year-olds from Spain, the United Kingdom, and France. These countries were selected to represent three different areas in terms of language and location, with a similar population (between 47 and 67 million inhabitants) and media of international relevance, because of their projection in other regions of the world. A total of 1,528 valid responses were collected through random sampling and with an equal distribution by gender: 50.1% women, 48.7% men, and 1.2% other genders or people who did not want to answer the question. Regarding nationalities, 52.5% were Spanish, 26.0% French, and 21.5% British because of prerequisites in the research design to develop a comparative analysis. The average age was around 21 years. As can be seen in Table 1, in terms of educational attainment, 30.9% had already completed their secondary education. The next most common response was having already finished undergraduate university studies. Unsurprisingly, in terms of employment, the majority were students (47.6%).

Table 1. Characteristics of the Sample (N = 1,528).

		%
Nationality	British	21.5
	French	26.0
	Spanish	52.5
Gender	Female	50.1
	Male	48.7
	Other	1.2
Age	Average	21.2
Education	Less than a school leaving certificate	6.0
	Secondary school leaving certificate or equivalent	30.9
	Vocational training	21.8
	Undergraduate university studies	24.9
	Bachelor's degree	8.5
	Master's degree	6.8
	Doctorate	1.1
Employment	Employed person	32.8
	Self-employed	6.2
	Unemployed, in active job search	9.0
	Unemployed, not currently looking for work	1.8
	Student	47.6
	Retired	0.3
	Houseworker	1.0
	Unable to work	1.3

In the second phase of the research, the social media presence of the 10 most consumed digital media outlets in each of the countries in the sample—Spain, France, and the United Kingdom—was studied according to data from the *Digital News Report 2021* (Newman et al., 2021). As Instagram, TikTok, and Twitch are the most popular emerging social media among young people, the profiles of the 10 digital media outlets on those platforms were examined. The 10 latest publications of each profile were analyzed to identify the formats used, the adaptation to the logic of each platform, and the possible strategies for participation and younger audience capture. This exploratory study was carried out during October 2021.

In addition, a series of contacts were carried out with those responsible for managing the social media accounts of the most highly consumed media from Spain, France, and the United Kingdom, according to the *Digital News Report 2021* (Newman et al., 2021). Seven of the 30 media outlets included in the sample—*Brut.*, *El Mundo*, *El País*, *Le Figaro*, *Le Parisien*, RTVE, and *The Telegraph*—responded to a self-administered questionnaire sent via email. These points of view were collected between October and November 2021. The questionnaire addressed the following seven issues: (1) the composition of the social media team, (2) specific strategies for 18-to-25-year-old audiences, (3) the objectives of their social media presence, (4) reach, (5) agenda, (6) original content, and (7) challenges for the future.

Results

Two pieces of contextual data that reveal the behavior and attitudes of the young audience are that 41.4% dedicate more than 5 hours a day to the Internet, and that 71.8% state that they are very interested or extremely interested in being informed about what is happening in their environment and in the world. Having found that young people spend a significant number of hours each day on the Internet, and that they claim to be interested in staying informed, we describe below how they make use of social media and what their informational preferences on these platforms are.

Getting Information on Social Media

The overwhelming majority (93.8%) of the young people surveyed use social media to get information. This leaves no doubt as to the relevance of social media as a tool to stay informed on current events. Those same young people stated that they use social media for that purpose throughout the day. They go on social media—from most to least frequent—in bed on waking (more than half); before going to sleep; during their free time; while having breakfast, lunch, or dinner; during breaks from work or classes; in the bathroom; on journeys home; while commuting to work or to the study center; during the work or school day; and, to a lesser extent, while performing housework, as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2. Use of Social Media According to the Time of Day (n = 1,433).

	Daily (%)	Several Times a Week (%)	Weekly (%)	Occasionally (%)	Never (%)
When waking up in bed	52.3	25.1	9.1	9.0	4.6
While eating breakfast, lunch, or dinner	37.8	28.6	15.5	12.6	5.4
Commuting to work or school	26.7	23.4	16.3	19.8	13.7
During the work or school day	22.8	20.4	14.5	24.8	17.5
During breaks from work or classes	28.7	25.5	16.0	21.3	8.5
On the way home	27.1	21.6	15.1	20.3	15.8
While doing housework	16.5	18.8	16.1	24.2	24.4
In the bathroom	28.0	18.6	13.9	19.3	20.2
In bed before sleep	39.2	20.9	14.3	15.8	9.8
In free time	39.1	26.0	15.1	15.3	4.5

Young people show consolidated routines of information consumption through social media (Table 3). Two of three (33.6%) agreed that they follow the news media and journalists for regular information, and almost three-quarters believed that doing so in this way allows access to diverse information from various media sources and editorial lines. In fact, they stated that they prefer to follow profiles of their interest on social media instead of getting information from journalistic media. They recognized the incidental nature of news consumption, since they stated they consume news without specifically looking for news stories—information that is confirmed when considering both the news content viewed and the news media and journalists followed by young people (Figure 1).

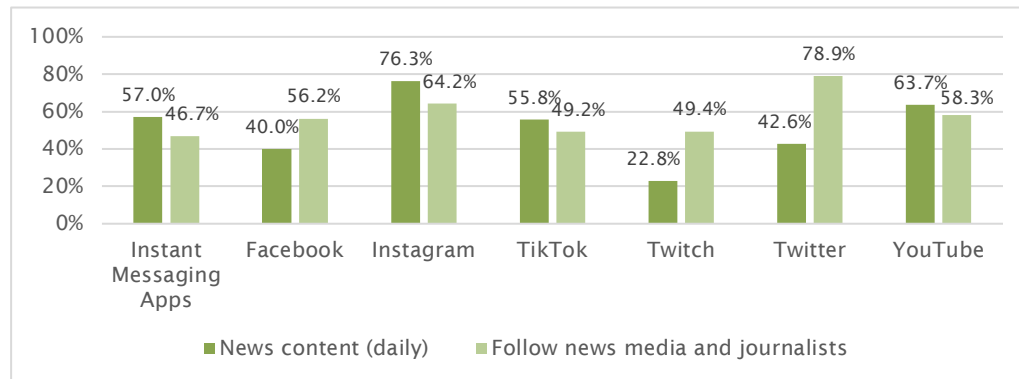


Figure 1. Comparison of news content seen and news media and journalists followed.

They were aware of the high risk of receiving false information, and many stated that they try to verify the original sources of news stories found on social media. However, more than a third admitted to sharing information without reading the full content—only the headline or the notification—and, in turn, acknowledged that they received news sent or recommended by other users through social media and instant messaging apps. By country, it is notable that the British people surveyed perceived less risk of receiving false information through social media despite the practice of sharing news without reading the full content being more prevalent there.

Table 3. Consumption of Information on Social Media, Responses Valued on a Scale of 1–5 (n = 1,433).

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Totally Agree (%)	Totally Disagree (%)
I follow news media and journalists on social media to get information on a regular basis	3.84	1.115	33.6	4.6
I get informed about news on social media without specifically seeking it out	3.93	0.961	31.4	1.6
Informing myself on social media allows me to access diverse information from various media and trends	4.04	0.947	38.2	1.3
I prefer to follow profiles of interest to me on social media rather than to get information from the news media	3.76	1.043	28.5	2.2
There is a high risk of receiving false information on social media	4.01	1.056	42.4	2.2
I try to verify the original source of news content found on social media	3.83	1.084	33.5	2.9
I share information without reading the full content	2.84	1.366	14.5	22.7
I receive information sent or recommended by other users and friends via social media and instant messaging apps	3.67	1.071	23.7	4.3

Regarding the platforms used in the previous 24 hours to obtain information, Instagram, YouTube, instant messaging apps, TikTok, and Twitter stand out with more than 50% of the young people surveyed. As is clear from Figure 2, compared with checking these platforms for general use, daily consultation for information is a frequent routine. Below, we explain young people's news use on each platform, differentiating the "classic" and well-established ones—Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube—from the of-the-moment or booming ones—Instagram, TikTok, and Twitch.

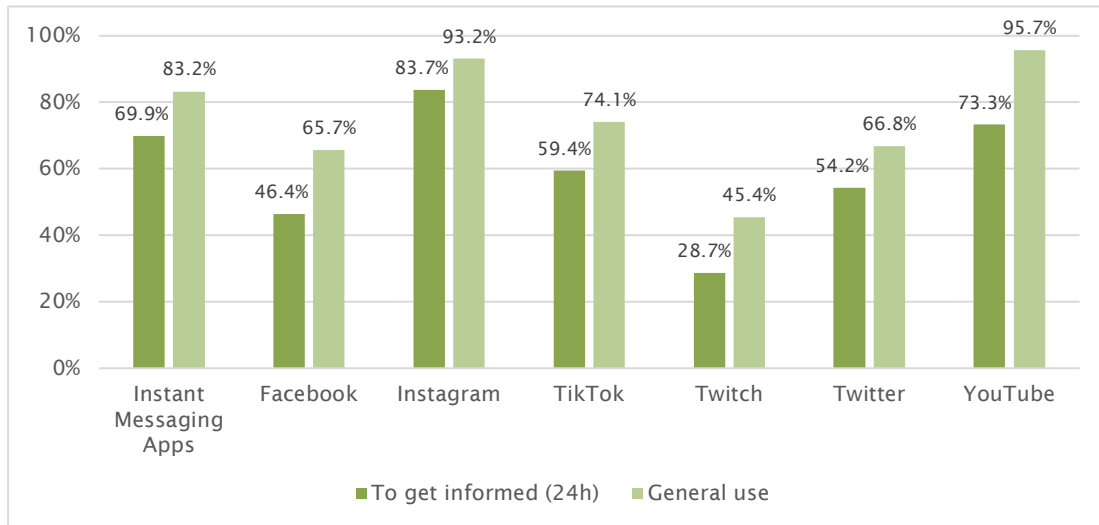


Figure 2. Platforms used for getting information (over the last 24 hours) and for general use.

The Classic Platforms

Beginning with Facebook, 65.7% of young people use this platform: 40.0% find information on it at least daily while 27.0% never see news content. Half of the respondents know and follow news media or journalists on Facebook ($M = 3.52$; $SD = 1.252$ on a 1–5 scale).

Two-thirds (66.8%) of those surveyed use Twitter: 42.6% find information on a daily basis and 24.8% never find news on this social media platform. However, 78.9% of respondents said that they know and follow news media and journalists ($M = 3.87$; $SD = 1.143$), so it is the top platform in this category.

YouTube is the platform most used by young people (95.7%). Almost two-thirds (63.7%) find information on it on a daily basis, and 58.3% use it to follow news media and journalists ($M = 3.59$; $SD = 1.217$).

Instant messaging apps are used by 83.2% of those surveyed: 57.0% state that they see news content on them on a daily basis. However, less than half are in news media or journalists' groups and channels (46.7%) or would like to find more information sources on these apps (46.3%) though they value the directness with which information can be accessed.

Of-the-Moment Platforms

A large number of young people use Instagram (93.2%), making it the second most used platform after YouTube. Many see information daily (76.3%), and only 4.9% never access news content. It also ranks second in terms of users knowing and following news media and journalists (64.2%; $M = 3.74$; $SD = 1.171$). Young people see Instagram as a suitable platform for journalistic information ($M = 3.51$; $SD = 1.110$), and they emphasize that it allows information to be obtained in a more visual way ($M = 3.90$; $SD = 1.017$). More than half (57.1%) are informed about the news through ephemeral stories from the news media and journalists.

TikTok is the third most popular platform for young people (74.1% users). As part of their use of the app, 55.8% see information daily while 21.1% have never seen news content on the platform. Almost half the users know and follow news media or journalists (49.2%; $M = 3.32$; $SD = 1.339$). Respondents stated that TikTok is a platform suitable for journalism, though not overwhelmingly ($M = 3.18$; $SD = 1.272$) as 31.8% opposed this statement. On a positive note, TikTok allows people to access current affairs in an entertaining and fun way ($M = 3.66$; $SD = 1.144$) and encourages the younger generation to learn about journalistic media ($M = 3.70$; $SD = 1.133$)—though around 15% do not agree with these statements.

Finally, Twitch is the least used platform (45.4%) and is also the one with the lowest perception about the frequency with which young people view news content: 22.8% do so daily while 44.0% never see it. At levels close to TikTok, only 49.4% know and follow news media or journalists on Twitch ($M = 3.33$; $SD = 1.265$). According to young people, the platform is suitable for journalistic information ($M = 3.30$; $SD = 1.235$), allowing information to be obtained interactively and directly through streamers ($M = 3.53$; $SD = 1.139$). For 51.8% of those questioned, it is the space where they find channels on topics and perspectives that they cannot find through journalistic media.

Asked if they would like to find more news media and journalists on these three platforms, users responded that they would like to see them on Instagram, TikTok, and Twitch, in that order of preference.

Media Presence on and Adaptation to Social Media

A review of the social media profiles of the most consumed digital media in the three European countries in the sample (Table 4) showed a strong presence on the classic platforms, since all of them maintain active profiles on Facebook and Twitter. Their presence is also robust on YouTube (29 of 30), a well-established platform that is the most used by the young people surveyed. Regarding instant messaging apps, just more than a third of the media distribute their news through Telegram's broadcast channels—mainly in the United Kingdom and Spain—while the use of WhatsApp is exceptional as there are few organizations using it.

In relation to the emerging social media, the presence of news media outlets on Instagram is pronounced (29 of 30). It is a native mobile platform that has diversified its formats and is the second most used social media platform by survey respondents. Despite appearing on the international market only recently, 21 of 30 news media outlets have a presence on TikTok. Those who have a presence on Twitch

are still a minority (7 of 30), despite the diversification of content on the platform and the growing popularity of some streamers.

Table 4. Digital Media Presence on Social Media (N = 30).

Social Media	Presence
Facebook	30
Twitter	30
YouTube	29
Instagram	29
TikTok	21
Telegram	11
Twitch	7
WhatsApp	1

Facebook and Twitter are the platforms on which media outlets have accumulated the most followers. One level below in terms of followers are YouTube and Instagram. On TikTok and Twitch, the size of the follower communities is more diverse (see supplementary material²). Regarding the strategies and formats used by the media on the different platforms, various degrees and forms of adaptation to Instagram, TikTok, and Twitch are observed. These constitute the object of study because they are emerging networks on which young people are particularly active.

Topical images tend to predominate on Instagram feeds. They are mostly edited with headlines or prominent statements, and are accompanied by the publication of an informative text. In the use of the ephemeral stories, the diffusion of news in individual slides—consisting of photographic imagery and a headline—is often found. From there, the user can swipe up to the media website. Ephemeral stories with more complex editing are used for special coverage, adaptation of reports, or other more specific topics and are often saved as “story highlights” on the profile. In the use of stories, the French outlet *Brut.* stands out—on almost all their slides, elements of interaction are integrated, and the active participation of the audience is sought.

The adaptation to Instagram’s native video formats is more diverse. Almost all the cases analyzed make use of IGTV. However, because most of the “reels” format is still not standardized, profiles such as the BBC, HuffPost, and Sky News do not use it.

In its adaptation to the IGTV long-video format, British media outlets such as the BBC stand out, adapting reports and other current news coverage for vertical consumption, with text and subtitles that allow the viewer to follow the video with the sound off. *The Guardian* is notable for its informative videos adapted to the format, highlighting international topics, and the “video explainer” guided by experts or journalists. Sky News produces informative videos of up to more than 6 minutes that adapt the coverage of

² “Presence and followers of news media on social media platforms,” available at <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.20254305.v1>

in-depth topics and summaries of the Daily Climate Show, as does the French BFM TV with adapted informative videos, many of them guided by journalists. *Le Parisien* has videos of up to 6 or 7 minutes with adapted reports, testimonies, and explanatory topics conducted by journalists and carefully edited with text and visualizations. Opinion videos predominate on *Le Figaro*, and long videos on social and cultural topics on *Brut*.

Although “reels” came to Instagram after the rise of TikTok, examples of an adaptation to the format for informational purposes were found among the media outlets studied here. The Spanish *El Mundo* creates specific content by combining explanatory news videos, videos about striking current events, and pieces about fact-checking by El Verificador, frequently conducted by a journalist. In videos from *The Guardian*, *20 Minutes*, or BFM TV, the informative nature of the content is also evident. The images and text are adapted to the format, and the pieces are often narrated or conducted by journalists. In the French *Le Figaro*, the creation of “reels” corresponds to different sections: opinion videos, others labeled as “Fabrique” about crafts, and “De suite” videos with testimonies or experiences. In *Brut*, informative videos and others with adapted news images predominate, among which are fragments of the live footage created by the media outlet on the platform.

TikTok is the most recent newcomer to the international market and the one that is forcing media adaptation at the fastest rate. Media outlets appropriate their aesthetics and language to alter content for informational purposes. This is certainly true of *El Mundo*, which relaunched its profile in September 2021 with videos created specifically for TikTok. These videos involve current affairs, compilations of headlines, explanatory videos, and summaries of live shows with guests, El Verificador, as well as other content. All videos are presented by a journalist. It is common for this and other accounts such as RTVE News or *Le Figaro* to seek virality using hashtags such as #fyp, #tiktokacademie, or #aprendecontiktok. In addition to the use of specific hashtags or popular sounds, the media are regularly eager to expand the reach of their publications by combining strictly informative videos with others in which unusual images or those that are highly emotional in nature are clear. Others, like the sports media outlet *Marca* frequently collaborate with other popular accounts, such as those of the Europa League, Manchester City, or Liverpool FC. Media such as *The Guardian*, the BBC, Sky News, *The Telegraph*, *20 Minutes*, and *Le Parisien* have also adapted to the platform.

Only a minority of media were found to have a presence on Twitch. This is a sign that the other media outlets are still devising their plans on how to best make use of that platform. The Spanish *elDiario.es* periodically broadcasts interviews (*Conectados*), which are also published on YouTube, on the media’s website, and in podcast format. In addition, it broadcasts some offline events, such as celebrations of the organization’s ninth anniversary. Sports newspaper *Marca* uses a format created specifically for Twitch in which a journalist—who may be accompanied by other commentators—reviews the biggest news of the week. Additionally, it broadcasts coverage of special sporting events such as the Nations League final. RTVE has taken advantage of the popularity of sporting events to broadcast a series of live shows about La Vuelta cycling competition, creating specific content for the platform, and adapting to the aesthetics of the streamer. French television station BFM TV diversifies its livestreams on Twitch by providing commentary from the newsroom and guest opinions on cultural or current issues. Content has centered on analysis with reporters in Kabul, going back to school in the context of a pandemic, or a special of 9/11. *Brut* has no

videos saved on its Twitch profile although ads of livestreams can be found on the platform, which appear simultaneously on Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter.

Media Strategies Designed to Connect With Young Audiences

The opinions and experiences of the professionals in charge of the management of social media in the analyzed media provide insight into some of the strategies implemented to connect with younger audiences.³ All these media outlets have specialized teams, which often include young journalists, to manage social media presence. Though not hired only for their youth, *Le Parisien* have explained that these young people were chosen as video editors for Instagram and TikTok "because they know perfectly, being themselves users, how those media work, and it is also important to show young faces on those platforms." RTVE expressed a similar idea, saying that young journalists "connect much more with the audience of that age group and communicate using the language of those social media."

The teams surveyed recognize that one objective of their presence on social media is to broaden and diversify their audience. To attract the younger demographic (18–25), they decided to dedicate resources to platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. In addition to reporting and trying to drive traffic to their websites, media outlets like *Brut.* aim to "create an active and participatory community through content that informs, inspires and raises awareness." *Le Parisien* says it is present on the new platforms to create "brand presence and build a younger community." RTVE is concerned with "listening to the audience and seeing what interests them, what they like, and responding to their queries."

In general, news media adapt their content to suit the formats of each social media platform. They may also alter the topics or purpose of the publications. Though media companies such as *El Mundo* and *Le Figaro* claim to publish almost the same content on Facebook and Twitter albeit with a more political or informative nature, these same media outlets, and others such as *Le Parisien* and *El País*, have stated that they create specific content for Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat. *Le Parisien* claims to produce "content that we only publish on a certain social media profile, such as TikTok videos, more informal and following the language and use of this platform" while *El País* made the following statement: "There are contents that we only publish on a certain network, such as the videos we are sharing on TikTok, which are more informal and adapt to the language and uses of the platform."

Understanding the issues that appeal to young people is also part of the adaptation to the different platforms and the quest to reach the younger audience. *Brut.* has said that it works with social and cultural issues adapted for young audiences and "draws on trends to see what stories can be interesting, such as talking about K-Pop or figures like Tokischa in the musical field." *El País* has identified the issues of education, mental health, job insecurity, housing, and famous people as those who have the greatest impact on young people. They and other news media such as *El Mundo* and RTVE acknowledge that they are on Instagram and TikTok to publish more entertainment-based content, linked to societal issues and personalities, as well as more explanatory and didactic content.

³ The quotations in this section come from the survey participants.

Achieving the objective of connecting with a younger audience via social media entails challenges and targets. One of them is, as *El Mundo* points out, "to find a balance between informing, entertaining, encouraging the reading of verified information and even "training.'" At *Brut.*, achieving such goals in an environment "in which you compete via stories or on TikTok with your neighbor's new cat, the night out with the boy you like, or the user generated content videos about an earthquake in Mexico City" is far from easy as "the challenge is to become just as relevant as those real and natural stories." The RTVE team recognizes the difficulties in maintaining the attention and interest of the young audience, which "is the most difficult and demanding audience when deciding whether they follow you or not."

An asset that helps to overcome these obstacles, as indicated by *El País*, is "to have young journalists who share the codes and concerns of this group, who understand more visual formats and current narratives so that more and more users under 25 years of age read us." The primary objective of the media presence on social networking sites is, as mentioned by *The Telegraph*, "to work out the best lines to sell our journalism to young people." *Le Parisien* concurs, saying that it is prepared to "spend money on resources to try to catch young people, but we don't know yet if it will pay for information on the future." *Le Figaro* admits that connecting with young people continues to be "one of our weak points," adding that "it is a medium- and long-term project." Its presence on social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, or Snapchat "seeks to etch the *Figaro* brand on young people so that they become potential subscribers in two, three, four or five years."

Conclusions

In line with previous studies, it can be confirmed here that mobile devices and social media have established themselves as one of the main access routes to news (Newman et al., 2021). They also exist as a space for entertainment and interpersonal communication (Thompson, Wang, & Daya, 2020). News sharing (Kümpel, Karnowski, & Keyling, 2015) fosters socialization through these platforms, thus promoting sources of information that are alternative to and diverge from traditional media. This is especially true for younger audiences. The information consumption of young people on social networks is widespread and distributed via different platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, instant messaging apps, TikTok, or Twitter (O1). Such consumption is also incidental in nature since these users come into contact with news without specifically seeking it out. In addition, this consumption of information occurs throughout the day although it is more intense at its beginning and end. Media companies must, therefore, make their news more friendly to consume through more intuitive and interactive websites and apps and create more native formats for mobile devices and social platforms to connect with the routines and places of news use among young audiences (Galan et al., 2019).

Regarding the practices and attitudes of news consumption on social media (O2), users state that social media platforms provide access to diverse information from various media sources and offer insight into different trends. For these reasons, they prefer to follow profiles that they are already interested in, rather than relying on journalistic media. The time that younger generations—especially Gen Z—spend consuming content via mobiles and platforms is increasing, and news brands play a small role here (Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, & Kleis Nielsen, 2019). News media need to connect with young people not only through a good experience on the platforms but also with news content that is interesting to them

(Click & Schwartz, 2019; Costera Meijer, 2007). Young audiences look for a broad news agenda, but not a repetitive one, free of politicized opinions, in which a negative view of reality does not predominate, and which responds to their needs (Galan et al., 2019). If they do not find it in the traditional media, they will rely on other types of actors (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein, & Matassi, 2018).

There is an awareness of misinformation, but users recognize that news sharing is put into practice even when the shared content has not been read or verified. The platformization of journalism makes news providers largely dependent on the conditions established by popular communication platforms on a constant basis. YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok are the platforms where young people spend the most time, where they find entertaining content, celebrities, and influencers and also where there is a greater consumption of information. Exposure to news is more frequent on these platforms than via the voluntary monitoring of news media and journalists. Hybridization in these communication spaces, together with the incidental nature of consumption, poses important challenges for journalism and its professionals in terms of its role in society (Mellado & Hermida, 2021), maintenance of credibility, and trust of audiences that exist outside of traditional media.

To broaden and diversify the audience, and especially to attract the youth, the news media are present on the most popular social media, and increasingly too on emerging platforms (O3). The greatest challenge faced by those responsible for the news media lies in the necessary adaptation to new platforms, each with its own methods and unique language. The young are treated as a long-term commitment. Attracting their attention by appealing to their interests and providing unique ways in which they express themselves can mean securing a long-term loyalty to a journalistic brand and, over time, an increase in regular readers and subscribers—as shown by *Le Monde* corporation, which has already succeeded in building loyalty among its young audience through social networks and reinforcing its subscriber acquisition strategy (Dreyfus & Fenoglio, 2022).

The strategies implemented by the news media on the social media networks (O3) show the dedication of resources to the various platforms, especially Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat. Also worth noting is the incorporation of young journalists into the management teams of the networks, who are valuable both for their proximity to the public and their knowledge of the language of each platform. The content is more visual in nature, often in the form of videos or ephemeral content, adjusted to the features of each social media platform, and reflective of the interests of young people—be they social issues, mental health, employment issues, or housing. Media priorities are often driven by trends and their ability to participate. However, not mentioned are certain important aspects in the informational routines of young people, such as the moments of the day in which they access information, incidental consumption, or news sharing. While news literacy behaviors should evolve because of changes in the patterns of news use (Swart, 2021), journalistic actions on social media must constantly evolve as well. If journalistic media fail to prove themselves to be reliable and useful agents for young audiences, the gap between this audience and the media may extend over time and cause a generational disconnect in the medium and long term.

The study shows some limitations, such as the 23% response rate of social media managers and the concept of “getting information,” which may vary among the surveyed subjects despite being a fundamental element to assess news habits. The selection of countries and the imbalance in sample sizes

are also limitations that must be acknowledged although the comparative analyses did not reveal significant differences. Furthermore, there are important challenges for journalism, like the pursuit of profitability and sustainability of journalistic practices on social media platforms—which are sometimes subject to the conditions of the platforms and structured in a fixed way to achieve impact and relevance—occurring alongside attempts to reach an audience that is increasingly distant from traditional media. The research presents an overview of consumption and the relationship between news media and young audiences at a key moment in journalistic history. What is required is a periodic and critical review of journalism on/for platforms in a context determined by disinformation, disintermediation, and the proliferation of alternative media and sources, to reduce the gap between the needs of the young audience and the social role of the news media.

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