

Young people and the news

Media consumption patterns have changed profoundly in recent years, creating challenges for traditional news companies. News media are now faced with digitally native younger generations who often pay more attention to influencers and celebrities than they do to journalists, even when it comes to news. The teaching of media literacy skills is more necessary than ever to help people – especially children and young people – understand the difference between news circulating on social media and news provided by professional media sources.

Social media platforms as news channels for young generations

Young people [mostly consume](#) news online, which makes them [vulnerable](#) to encountering inaccurate information. Up to 96 % of young people in the EU [use the internet](#) daily, and 84 % of them use it to participate in social media networks. In 2023, almost half the EU population aged 16 to 29 reported seeing messages online that were [hostile or degrading](#) towards groups of people or individuals. A [report](#) ahead of this year's World Economic Forum in Davos estimated that the biggest short-term risk globally stems from artificial intelligence-generated misinformation and disinformation, capable of flooding global information systems with false narratives, and leading to widening societal and political divides.

Media consumption patterns in general have been changing rapidly, with citizens increasingly using online services and digital devices. However, the change is even more striking when comparing young people's news consumption patterns with those of older generations, who were used to watching the news on television and reading their trusted newspaper.

According to the Reuters Institute Digital News Reports, 'social natives', those who grew up in the world of the social, participatory web, [differ from](#) 'digital natives', who grew up before the rise of social networks. For the 'first social media generation' in particular, social media have become one of the main sources of news. As audiences for media organisations, these young people are increasingly hard to reach.

News brands to which older generations were accustomed tend to be less meaningful for youngsters. While those over 35 are likely to go first directly to a news site, those born after the mid-1990s first turn to social media and messaging apps such as Instagram, TikTok and Snapchat. The [Eurobarometer Media & News Survey 2023](#) showed that, while older respondents prefer to use the website of a news source (for instance, a newspaper) to access news, younger respondents are more likely to read articles or posts that appear on their online social networks, or content shared by friends on messaging apps.

What is 'wrong' with the traditional news, according to the young people surveyed

While the younger generations are curious about a [broad range of topics](#), from environment to sexuality, they see the traditional news as dealing mostly with repetitive and narrow issues – something that does not satisfy their needs. Younger generations tend to have little interest in many conventional news offers such as politics or economics, oriented towards older generations' habits, interests and values. When it comes to news topics, they pay more attention to celebrities and social media influencers than to journalists or media companies, and prefer the more personality-based, personalised options offered by social media. Younger users also seem to [take a wider view](#) of what is 'news', including updates on music, sport, food, fitness, fashion and travel. Celebrity, sports and music news tend to [dominate](#) teens' social media news diet.

Furthermore, young people tend to prefer video-based news. The Reuters Institute [2023 Digital News Report](#) showed that video-based networks, such as YouTube and TikTok, are growing fast across the world, and are increasingly the gateways for younger audiences to access their news.

EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service

Author: Tarja Laaninen with Ka Yeong Kim, Members' Research Service
PE 766.238 – November 2024



This document is prepared for, and addressed to, the Members and staff of the European Parliament as background material to assist them in their parliamentary work. The content of the document is the sole responsibility of its author(s) and any opinions expressed herein should not be taken to represent an official position of the Parliament. Reproduction and translation for non-commercial purposes are authorised, provided the source is acknowledged and the European Parliament is given prior notice and sent a copy. © European Union, 2024

epprs@ep.europa.eu (contact) <http://www.epprs.eu.parl.union.eu> (intranet) <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank> (internet) <http://eothinktank.eu> (blog)

These audiences are also [particularly suspicious](#) and less trusting of *all* information. This means they are also sceptical of news organisations' agendas, which makes them look for more diverse voices and perspectives. Mainstream news brands are not inherently more valued for impartiality by some young people. Many young people also consider that media organisations should take a stand on issues such as climate change, and [think](#) that journalists should be free to express their personal views on social media.

Shifting habits, changing formats

Illustrating the changes, while television was still the most likely [first source](#) of morning news for the over-35s in 2019, nearly half (45 %) of 18- to 24-year-olds already got their first news of the day through their smartphone. According to the Reuters Institute 2023 Digital News Report, for 84 % of 18- to 24-year-olds, the internet is the principal way of following news. With those young people's reliance on mobile devices, much of their media use is on-demand and algorithmically personalised.

In its [Trends and Predictions 2024](#) report, the Reuters Institute observes that individual young news video creators can have more followers and regular video views than the BBC or *New York Times* combined, even for important stories such as Gaza. In France, the Reuters Institute [2024 Digital News Report](#) notes, a young YouTuber, Hugo Travers – known online as Hugo Décrypte – has become a leading news source for young people in the country, with 2.6 million subscribers on YouTube and 5.7 million on TikTok. The social media generation is unlikely to start reading a newspaper or watching television news at 30, as this news influencer was quoted as saying. This poses a challenge for traditional news brands, which need to consider ways of appealing to next-generation audiences.

In addition to individual [news influencers](#), some youth-focused news brands have built large audiences too. These brands are engaging young people by using younger hosts and a different agenda, including more climate-, social justice- and mental health-related content, for example. Several ideologically motivated investigation sites exist, as well, which often criticise traditional news organisations for under-playing important issues. Most of these sites are co-operatives relying on crowdfunding.

Another emerging trend is that, in all the countries surveyed in the Reuters Institute reports so far, women tend to be [absent](#) in the video-based news market, with 'mostly male hosts armed with oversized microphones talking to mostly male guests'. Many young people, however, still might have an '[anchor news brand](#)' they will turn to when a major story breaks and needs verifying, and many of them also still like to consume a range of formats, including text, video and audio.

European Parliament

In its 2023 [resolution](#) on the new European strategy for better internet for kids (BIK+), Parliament called for the EU and Member States to invest more in education in order to ensure digital literacy. In a further 2023 [resolution](#) on addictive design of online services and consumer protection, Parliament called for an evaluation of the addictive and mental health effects of social media platforms, and a review of existing EU legislation if necessary. In its 2021 [resolution](#) on Europe's Media in the Digital Decade, Parliament recommended establishing a permanent 'news media fund', to safeguard the independence of European journalists and journalism, and guarantee the freedom of the press.

Examples of related EU policies

The EU [supports news media](#) through the Creative Europe programme's [MEDIA](#) and [cross-sectoral](#) strands, under research programmes, as well as in [pilot projects](#) proposed by the European Parliament. In its [media and audiovisual action plan](#), the European Commission decided to launch a [news initiative](#), bundling existing and new policy actions and financial support for the news media sector. The new [European Media Freedom Act](#) will apply as of August 2025. Furthermore, over the past 10 years, the EU has [stepped up](#) its efforts to counter disinformation.

The [Audiovisual Media Services Directive](#) requires Member States to develop their citizens' media literacy skills so as to empower them to navigate the news environment in the digital era, to enhance critical thinking and the ability to identify disinformation.