


Scrolling Through the Feed - How do young people in Portugal consume news on social media?

Scrolling Through the Feed - Como é que os jovens em Portugal consomem notícias nas redes sociais?

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Abstract

Young people are heavily present on social media. Social media is not only used for peer communication, socialization and entertainment consumption, but also has an informative component, providing constant access to updates on current news. This study aims to understand how young people living in Portugal use social media to consume news. The study adopts a qualitative approach. Data was collected through 18 focus group sessions with young people aged 15 to 29. The study population is divided into three phases of youth: adolescents (aged 15 to 19), emerging adults (aged 20 to 24) and young adults (aged 25 to 29), to analyze consumption according to the different stages of youth. The results show that young people of all ages consume news mostly on social media, either actively (choosing to follow news pages and seeking to receive news content) or passively (news content reaches individuals by chance through recommendations from platforms or shares from friends). Depending on the life stage of the young person, differences in news consumption can be found on other platforms or media. It is worth noting that the main social media platforms where young people consume news are Instagram, X/Twitter, TikTok and Facebook (for young adults). Different platforms generate distinct consumption dynamics and source preferences. Young people value political news topics that directly affect their lives. The presentation format is a crucial criterion for younger audiences, highlighting the importance of audiovisual components and short, catchy content. This work also offers suggestions for future research based on the results.

Keywords: news, news consumption, information, social media, young people

Resumo

Os jovens encontram-se fortemente presentes nas redes sociais. As redes sociais não só são usadas para comunicação entre pares, socialização e consumo de entretenimento, mas também têm uma componente informativa, promovendo uma constante atualização sobre as notícias recentes. Este estudo pretende compreender como os jovens que vivem em Portugal utilizam as redes sociais para o seu consumo noticioso. O estudo adota uma abordagem qualitativa. Os dados foram recolhidos através de 18 sessões de focus groups com jovens com idades compreendidas entre os 15 e os 29 anos. A população em estudo considera três fases da juventude: adolescentes (dos 15 e os 19 anos), adultos emergentes (dos 20 aos 24 anos) e jovens adultos (dos 25 aos 29 anos), para analisar o consumo de acordo com diversas fases da juventude. Os resultados apontam que os jovens de todas as idades consomem notícias maioritariamente nas redes sociais, quer ativamente (escolhem seguir páginas de notícias e procuram receber conteúdos de notícias) ou passivamente (os conteúdos noticiosos chegam até aos indivíduos os conteúdos noticiosos chegam aos indivíduos por acaso, através de recomendações das plataformas ou partilhas de amigos). Dependendo da fase de vida do jovem, podem ser encontradas diferenças no consumo de notícias nas plataformas e medias. É de salientar que as principais plataformas de redes sociais onde os jovens consomem notícias são o Instagram, o X/Twitter, o TikTok e o Facebook (para jovens adultos). As diferentes plataformas geram dinâmicas de consumo e

preferências de fonte distintas. Os jovens valorizam os temas das notícias políticas que afetam diretamente as suas vidas. O formato de apresentação é um critério crucial para os públicos mais jovens, destacando-se a importância de componentes audiovisuais e de conteúdos curtos e apelativos. Este trabalho apresenta ainda sugestões para investigação futura com base nos resultados obtidos.

Palavras-chave: notícias, consumo noticioso, informação, redes sociais, jovens.

Introduction

Contemporary youth have grown up with full access to the Internet and online platforms, and social media plays a significant role in their lives, on a social, romantic, family, and professional level (Aichner et al., 2021). Equally, social media has established itself as the place of choice for young people's news consumption (Pérez-Escoda et al., 2021; Russmann & Hess, 2020). New dynamics of information consumption have emerged, fueled by recent technologies, new media, and social media, as well as changes in the distribution methods of news (Antunovic et al., 2018).

This study aims to understand how young people living in Portugal, aged between 15 and 29, consume news and relate to social media for their information consumption. It is also considering for this analysis the comparative study between different stages of youth. This is of interest since news consumption is essential for the formation of public opinion (Klopfenstein Frei et al., 2022), and consequently for civic and political mobilization and participation.

It is therefore fundamental to analyze this issue in view of a young population that only is familiar with these news consumption habits and is increasingly detached from the traditional media. Are young people in Portugal alienated from newspapers and TV news? What are the consequences of consuming news only on social media and staying informed in an increasingly complex mediatized world?

This study is part of a broader investigation, and this paper addresses the first qualitative and exploratory stage of the work. This qualitative study aims to answer the research question: What is the role of social media in the news consumption of young people living in Portugal? To collect the data, eighteen focus group sessions were held between September and November 2023. Six sessions were conducted for each age group under study: teenagers (15 to 19 years old), emerging adults (20 to 24 years old) and young adults (25 to 29 years old).

This article is organized as follows: first there is a brief theoretical framework outlining the literature on this subject, then a methodology chapter, followed by a presentation and discussion of the results. The article culminates in a section that synthesizes the findings of the study. This allows to indicate avenues for future research based on the results presented and a final reflection.

Theoretical Framework

The rapid evolution of technology has revolutionized the way individuals receive information and interact with each other (Dumitru, 2020). Nowadays, the younger generations use an abundance of electronic devices that mediate communication and relationships between peers (Christensen & Rommes, 2019).

Accordingly, young people also choose their smartphones and social media to stay informed about current affairs, consuming news on these platforms (Klopfenstein Frei et al., 2022). Online news consumption presents distinct patterns and characteristics from traditional news media consumption that must be considered (Brites & Kõuts-Klemm, 2018). Consumption on these platforms generates new consumption challenges, it is necessary to distinguish news content from other entertainment, advertising, and social content (Swart & Broersma, 2023). Understanding this phenomenon is relevant since news content helps shape public opinion (Klopfenstein Frei et al., 2022) and news consumption in a digital context can influence political participation (Moeller et al., 2018).

Considering the changes in the distribution and consumption of news content, it is no longer possible to ask whether young people consume news or not as social media enables news to reach users (Ohme et al., 2022). This new reality makes it challenging for individuals to stay informed about current political events, as it is necessary to evaluate the content consumed in terms of its veracity (Swart & Broersma, 2022). Thus, news on social media presents very different patterns compared to consumption in traditional media (Brites & Kõuts-Klemm, 2018). On the one hand, social media provide independent sources with platforms to disseminate their content (Lemaire, 2023), while on the other hand, media companies are also using social media to disseminate their journalistic content (Estrada-García & Gamir-Ríos, 2023; Hendrickx, 2023).

These new media consumption contexts can generate similar patterns of news consumption, especially among younger users (Brites & Kõuts-Klemm, 2018). Different groups and stages of youth tend to have different patterns of information consumption habits, and with increasing age news consumption moves from being accidental to conscious (Klopfenstein Frei et al., 2022). Thus, news consumption by young people is an issue that depends on various factors such as the stage of life, cultural orientation, social context, and perception of citizenship of individuals (Peters et al., 2022)

News content on political, economic, and social issues is also present in young people's feeds, but when it comes to soft news there are differences in content according to gender: boys tend to receive sports content and girls' entertainment and lifestyle content (Nygren et al., 2019). Social media also allows young people to consume information with nuances, in other words, they only consume content on topics that interest them, ignoring topics that they does not find captivating (Russmann & Hess, 2020), and they are only exposed to content that meets their worldviews (Huang & Yang, 2022). Social media platforms allow news content to be created in a variety of formats other than just text (Lowenstein-Barkai & Lev-on, 2022). The formats are adapted to the uniqueness of the various networks and make it possible to create more engaging content for younger audiences (Hendrickx, 2023). Visual formats such as images and videos are preferred by young people (Klopfenstein Frei et al., 2022; Yanardağoğlu, 2021).

This consumption on social media opens the door to new vulnerabilities in information consumption. Considering that anyone can create and disseminate content on social media, it is up to the user to distinguish facts from disinformation (Ohme et al., 2022). The proliferation of content containing disinformation and fake news is considered a current social problem (Luo et al., 2022; Simko et al., 2021), which is associated with the growth of social media (Schulz et al., 2022). The promotion of content directly to users through algorithms embedded in social media is something that users should also be wary of (Klopfenstein Frei et al., 2022). The new generations are aware of the existence of algorithms and have some understanding of how they condition the content they receive (Swart, 2021a). Despite this, it is

necessary to consider the far-reaching implications of these recommendations on users' consumption and access to information.

Younger people are frequent users of social media, but this does not mean that they have high levels of media literacy (Swart, 2021b), and younger people often overestimate their ability to recognize the veracity of online news content (Corbu et al., 2022; Gehrke et al., 2024). It is therefore necessary to understand how to pass on media and news literacy knowledge to new generations efficiently. This knowledge cannot simply be applied equally to any platform. News literacy tactics need to be applied taking into account the specificities of different platforms and learned as technologies evolve, which means that news literacy cannot be stagnant knowledge (Swart, 2021b). This underlines the relevance of understanding young people's news consumption patterns and the role of the new media in these processes so that, in an informed and conscious way, we can take concrete measures to train the new generations in informed, safe and critical consumption.

Methodology

This study's research question is: *What is the role of social media in news consumption of young people living in Portugal?*

Five research objectives were established to answer this question:

1. To understand the role of social media in news consumption and on which social media platforms young people most consume news.
2. On social media platforms, on which profiles young people consume news and how it reaches them.
3. To analyze whether there is a complement to news consumption on social media through other means of communication, and which ones.
4. To highlight the news topics that attract young people's attention.
5. How young people perceive the news format, and whether the format is relevant to their news consumption.

All these objectives are analyzed in relation to and in comparison, with the different stages of youth of this study.

This investigation uses a qualitative methodology and selects focus groups as the data collection method, as this enables the perspective of the group on a given topic to be obtained (Craft et al., 2016) and common ground to be established between the participants (Wunderlich et al., 2022). This study is the first part of a broader investigation. The qualitative phase of this work aims to respond to the defined objectives by understanding the characteristics of the online news consumption of the population under study. The aim of this first exploratory approach is to understand the dynamics of info communications and to support the construction of quantitative data collection tools.

The research population is young people living in Portugal between 15 and 29 years old. Three age groups were established for the research: teenagers (aged 15 to 19), emerging adults (aged 20 to 24) and young adults (aged 25 to 29). This decision to choose sub-groups of the population makes it possible to study the relationship with information consumption and social media throughout the different stages of life and youth. The division of youth stage subgroups was based on (Arnett, 2014) theory of Emerging Adulthood and on the age divisions used in the 2021 Census statistical surveys.

To collect the data, 18 focus group sessions were held, 6 for each age group under study. Each session had approximately 12 participants, both male and female. Participants were recruited through partnerships with local (Aveiro region) institutions such as a secondary school, a higher education establishment, local businesses, and through a snowball invitation strategy. All participants signed informed consent forms, and, in the case of underage participants, their parents or guardians formally consented to their participation in the session.

The sessions followed a pre-formulated script, lasted approximately 1 hour and were conducted using a round table approach. The data was collected through audiovisual recording and then transcribed, analyzed, and afterwards compared. The sessions took place between September and November 2023. As for the subtitles of the focus group transcripts in the following results chapter, these consist of the age group the young people belong to, the number of the session in question (using the letter S followed by the number), the sex of the participant and the letter of an initial assigned to the participant to distinguish them and simultaneously preserve their anonymity. The sessions were conducted in Portuguese and translated into English for this paper.

Results and Discussion

The role of social media in news consumption

The results of the focus groups suggest that social media is the main platform where young people consume information. Throughout the sessions, across the various age groups, social media stood out as the main medium used for individual news consumption. Social media platforms are therefore chosen by young people for their consumption of current news.

"The news comes to us through social media." (teenager, S4, male, T)

"I think it goes hand in hand, on social media it's what's nearby, you just pick up your mobile phone and go in, so it's my biggest source for getting news (...)" (young adult, S5, female, M)

This result is in line with the literature, which emphasizes the informative aspect of social media (Silveira & Amaral, 2018a). On these platforms, information "reaches" individuals (Russmann & Hess, 2020), which leads to new consumption dynamics employed by younger generations who have had access to this type of consumption all their lives. Considering that younger people are very present online they are exposed to information content whether they want it or not (Ohme et al., 2022). It should be emphasized that social media, compared to traditional media such as newspapers, radio and television, provide a direct and diversified transmission of content on current affairs (Andersen et al., 2020). Thus, news consumption on social media takes place between entertainment content and social posts. For young people who are interested in keeping updated on current political events, this is where news content finds its way to them (Ekström & Shehata, 2018).

Instagram, X/Twitter and TikTok stand out as the main platforms where young people consume news. Facebook is less prominent among younger people, many of whom claim not to use or have an account on this platform, but older young people, young adults (25-29), still have a presence on this social platform.

"It comes to us, but some of it is us who have to go looking for it. I get a lot of news on Twitter, but I get news through pages that I follow." (emerging adult, S6, female, T)

"Me, more Facebook, but maybe the majority at the moment is Instagram." (young adult, S1, male, R)

Where and how young people consume news on the social media platforms

Throughout the focus group sessions, it was possible to understand that there are two distinct ways of receiving and consuming news content on social media. On one side, there was evidence of active news consumption, i.e., young people try to receive news content on the social media from pages of newspapers or newscasts or independent news pages. This way, being followers of these profiles, the information arrives through these pages directly into their feeds. On the other hand, passive consumption is apparent, where news comes to them via shares of their friends or recommended content appearing in their feeds.

The efforts of the traditional media, newspapers, and TV news programs, to adapt to social media formats and be present on these various platforms is significant (Estrada-García & Gamir-Ríos, 2023), using Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, etc. as platforms for disseminating news content (Hendrickx, 2021). This question is extremely important for the debate, since it is wrong to generalize the idea that young people are alienated from traditional journalistic outlets. As we can see here, interested young people are still connected to and value these communication channels that come from the traditional media, but they prefer their online presence in the places where younger people already are: social media.

"The traditional channels, SIC Notícias, TVI, Expresso and Público are the ones I follow because they're considered more reliable, they're well-known and they're the references at home." (emerging adult, S5, male, P)

"I watch the news online through the social media of the news programs of the main channels RTP, CNN, SIC Notícias. It's a bit based on that." (young adult, S4, female, S)

"I sometimes watch the television newscast and find out the news, but I also follow the newspapers' pages on insta and so on and read the news" (teenager, S5, female, J)

The practice of following newspaper or TV news pages on social media is a habit of young people who are interested in current affairs and want to stay informed. Of course, this type of preference raises some questions. The alienation of local news consumption is one of the issues to watch out for. In general, the young people interviewed consume national and international news also because that is what they find online, and it is rare for local newspapers, radio and television stations to have the same capacity (in terms of human and financial resources) as the big national agencies to migrate to online contexts.

Regarding the transfer and connection between social media platforms and newspaper websites or news apps, when young people are interested in the subject of a news item, they tend to follow the link to the article to see the full piece. However, it is rare for young people to subscribe to newspapers, which means that in many situations they are unable to access the full article.

"I follow several news pages on Instagram, I don't have time to watch TV, so I open Instagram, and I always see the news, then I go to the link to see the full story." (emerging adult, S4, male, A)

It should be noted that it was possible to identify a different dynamic in information consumption on the X/Twitter platform in contrast to Instagram and Facebook. On the X/Twitter platform, information is received mainly through non-journalistic sources, through trending topics and over what users are commenting on. On Instagram, on the other hand, the professional visual component with a credible appearance is valued by users in favor of content from newspaper and TV news pages. This preference does not apply to X/Twitter, because when users search for a current topic on this platform, it's generally to "see what others are saying".

"I use Twitter (X) a lot to find information, I usually read news on Facebook but if I want to know more, I go to Twitter because it's easy to search and find out what people are all saying about it." (young adult, S5, female, M)

This result should alert us to consider the social media platforms where news consumption takes place when we analyze it. Consumption therefore differs not only in the format in which content is presented, but also in the relationships that are established between platforms and users, fostering criteria of preference for different sources and different dynamics.

A complement to news consumption outside of social media

In addition to social media, other forms of news consumption were mentioned by the participants. Television is still very present, especially among the ones who still live with their parents, since watching TV news is an integral part of most family dynamics. Watching the news at mealtimes, particularly during dinner, is an established practice in most of the the participants' families. This practice is part of the daily routine of young teenagers who still live with their parents and is one of the main ways they keep up to date with current affairs, with a degree of frequency nearly on the level of consumption on social media (namely Instagram, TikTok and X/Twitter). This highlights the role that television still plays in daily media consumption (Silveira & Amaral, 2018a). Television plays the role of establishing a meeting point around which the household converges, and is an important part of everyday family life (Saxbe et al., 2011).

"I usually watch the news on the television when my parents are watching." (teenager, S2, female, F)

As well as the television news being a means of receiving information, it also plays the role of validating the information received on social media, in other words, it performs a fact-checking function for young people.

"I saw it on social media, and then I saw it on the TV news, and since it was on the television news, I consider it to be true." (emerging adult, S5, female, C)

This result is in line with the literature because, although young people mainly consume news on social media, they continue to rely more on traditional media to report the news correctly (Feio et al., 2023; Russmann & Hess, 2020). This detects possible multi-media consumption that is interrelated. This goes hand and hand with the results presented earlier about preferences for news pages on social media considered familiar. The habit of watching the news at mealtimes tends to disappear, according to the participants, when they leave their parents' home to go to university or when they become emancipated and have their own home. It's therefore a habit that only happens in the specific context of the family of origin and does not usually carry over into other phases of the individual's life.

It is also worth highlighting the role of parents in transmitting information and promoting interest in current news. This role is evident among teenagers, with parents being one of the main sources of information.

"My parent's comment (the news) with me." (teenager, S5, female, C)

Further on other media: subscribing to newspapers is an unusual practice among young people. The minority who does subscribe to newspapers tend to be older, young adults with a keen interest in current political affairs and with a higher education qualification. Podcasts appear to be an emerging platform for generalized or niche information consumption, and for opinion or commentary programs.

News topics that attract young people's attention

Young people practice nuanced news consumption. They give preference to topics that are of interest to them, and these preferences are maximized by social media algorithms. This result is in line with previous studies because, as young people don't tend to consume, for example, a newspaper and are exposed to various themes and topics, they cultivate selective news consumption (Russmann & Hess, 2020).

There are generalized topics of interest throughout the stages of youth according to the tastes of individuals, such as sport and technology (generally for men) and lifestyle (mostly for women). This leads to the repeated reproduction of gender patterns and stereotypes (Nygren et al., 2019).

In terms of politics, these are more volatile throughout the stages of youth and there are primary topics of interest in each age group. In the adolescent phase, the most important issues are the access rules to higher education and national exams, tuition fees and teachers' strikes. For emerging adults, there are policies on free transport for students, youth emigration and measures for displaced university students. For young adults, the topics of affordable housing, wages and economic policies stand out. It's clear that the topics of interest are associated with the different stages of life.

"My news consumption always ends up being more linked to what I experience, I pay a rent, so I look for information and I look for news linked to issues that impact my life." (emerging adult, S5, male, J)

"I think it's more things that affect us or will affect us in the future, for example, the housing issue, because we're going to university soon. So, issues that are more connected to us." (teenager, S5, female, A)

"I think it's more a matter for us, the students. The school exams, for example, last year they were discussing whether they were going to be mandatory, I think that's when we were all glued to the news to see what they were going to say, because it's something we care a lot about, and for our future it's crucial." (teenager, S4, male, P)

The relevance of format to news consumption

The format in which the news is broadcast carries a lot of weight with young audiences. Text, especially long text, pushes younger people away.

"If it is text, it must be accompanied by images, if it's a "testament" I give up." (teenager, S1, male, D)

Visual, short and to the point content is more valued by the young audience.

"More video, more images! They attract more attention, I don't like reading, reading, reading..." (teenager, S2, female, M)

"In my opinion, watching a video is more captivating, because reading, if it's a very long piece, I get halfway through and I get tired." (teenager, S3, female, A)

"I also prefer video, or even images, even if it is just the text above the image. If it is text, it must be in focus. I prefer video, it is the best" (emerging adult, S2, male, N)

Images and videos are therefore extremely favored by young people on social media, and visual media consumption is more appealing (Klopfenstein Frei et al., 2022; Lowenstein-Barkai & Lev-on, 2022; Yanardağoğlu, 2021). Social media platforms thus allow news content to be created in more captivating formats (Hendrickx, 2021). The results emphasize that young people want to be captivated by content.

"We are human, and we need someone to capture our attention." (young adult, female, S1, L)

And as well as being captivating, the content must be of a length that does not allow young people to get bored or lose interest. Short videos are therefore highly favored not only on the platforms themselves, but also in the consumption of young audiences.

"I know what has the most impact, which is videos, and that's statistically proven, and I think that's what works best for me. I'm not interested in a single video that's only seconds long, or a video that's already three minutes long. I get halfway through, and I give up, I don't care anymore." (young adult, female, S2, I)

"A video ends up being easier, but even if the video is very long and I'm not very patient I won't follow everything." (emerging adult, S6, male, P)

Summary of results

This study answers the research question: What is the role of social media in news consumption of young people living in Portugal? From the outset, based on the 18 *focus group* sessions held to collect data, social media plays a central role in the lives of young people, including in their news consumption. Social media is the main platform where young people consume news and are informed about current affairs, and this is homogeneous throughout all the stages of youth. What differs between the stages of youth is the role that other media and the family play in news consumption, which decreases as the person gets older. This relationship between young people and television news comes from family media practices, where television is very present in the social moments of Portuguese families, especially at mealtimes. This characteristic of the media practices of the Portuguese population is significant and has an impact on the consumption of the youngest.

The different social media platforms imply different media consumption formats. Young people choose Instagram, X/Twitter, Tiktok (and even older people) Facebook as the social media for their news consumption. The different networks require different content formats, including short texts, images, and short videos. Images and video are the formats preferred by young people. They consider it essential for the content to be eye-catching and appealing to capture their attention; for the most part, long text requires a great deal of commitment and therefore tends to be ignored. In addition to the format, the length of the content is relevant, and short, direct content is preferable. In the same way that long texts are rejected, videos that are too long are discarded, considered to be exhaustive.

The fact that young people turn to social media for their news consumption does not mean that they have stopped consuming journalistic content. It was found that young people who are interested in news tend to follow, mainly on the social media platform Instagram, the pages of leading newspapers or TV news

programs that they are familiar with. The migration from traditional media to social media means that there is still a connection to journalistic content from sources they consider reliable. However, on other platforms, particularly X/Twitter, it was no longer possible to find the same pattern of source preference, which could mean more vulnerability in news consumption.

Regarding the topics that young people prefer to consume, two results can be highlighted. Political issues are of interest to young people, but there is a strong preference for political issues that have a direct impact on their lives and the stages of life they are in. This preference is relevant because it can have consequences in terms of alienating them from other political issues currently being discussed and favoring news consumption that focuses on the individual rather than the collective. It is also possible to point out that gender stereotypes are propagated in the consumption of soft news on social media, where boys are mainly shown sports and technology news, and girls are shown lifestyle news. There are also nuances to this consumption, because unlike traditional media, such as newspapers and TV news, which require consumption of different topics and areas, young people in the new media are directed to the topics that interest them, ignoring the rest.

These results are in line with the findings of other studies carried out with this population in Portugal. As in Morais et al. (2023) research, news consumption takes place mainly on social media and there is a practice of young people following profiles from traditional communication channels on these platforms. Silveira & Amaral (2018b) study also shows that young people consume news, if only accidentally, but the study identifies Facebook as the main platform for consumption. Considering that the study was published in 2018, it's clear that this consumption preference has migrated between platforms. This shows the ephemeral nature of the platforms' popularity, with changing preferences, types of content format and different interaction patterns. This aspect should be alerted to in education for media consumption, since the platforms continue to change in popularity and use, it is necessary to implement cross-platform media literacy programs and strategies that allow knowledge to be adapted to different social media platforms with different consumption characteristics.

Future Work

As future work, to deepen research on this topic, two avenues of endeavor are envisaged. Primarily, it is of interest to analyze information consumption on social media with young people's online political mobilization and participation to understand how these two phenomena interact. A quantitative study will be conducted based on these results with the aim of obtaining a representative sample of young Portuguese people. To this end, this exploratory phase of the work was essential to identify specific characteristics of young Portuguese people's news consumption habits to be included in the data collection instrument.

Based on this study, other relevant topics can also be highlighted for further research: what are the long-term effects of nuanced news consumption by young people, and whether consumption of short news content (such as short videos and images) can lead to a simplistic perception of the information presented in news content. It should also be noted that the results point to different news consumption based on the social media in question: while young people on Instagram prefer to follow national or international news pages, on X/twitter the content they consume comes mainly from their peers and the trending tweets of the

moment. These divergences between practices across platforms should also be explored in greater depth to understand whether they allow for complementary consumption, or if, on the contrary, individuals only subscribe to one of them, which could have implications for the veracity of their consumption and the polarization of the content they receive.

Closing Remarks

This study has highlighted characteristics of the news consumption of young people of different ages living in Portugal, understanding the features that are in line with the literature and highlighting cultural aspects that should be explored in depth in future studies. It is clear that social media has had a drastic impact on the way citizens consume information (Gehrke et al., 2024), and this is unmistakable among young people, who highlight this medium as their favorite way to stay connected. It is important, however, to understand that there is a relationship between social media and traditional media, a migration between these two worlds (Ren et al., 2024). Business models, formats and news circulation have adapted to online media (Shin et al., 2024). This means that it is possible for an interested individual to mainly consume news via social media, but for that information to originate from journalistic sources in the traditional media (newspapers, radio, television) that are present on social media. However, disinterested young people can be completely alienated from information on current political affairs, not following news pages and belonging to groups of similarly disinterested individuals who do not share news content and who do not receive news recommendations. We consider this to be the crucial output of the work. The social context of the young people, their family background, their cultural capital and socio-economic status are essential to define whether the individual will be aware of the news, informed and, consequently, whether they will participate civically and have a political interest (Hartley, 2018; Peters et al., 2022; Yanardağoğlu, 2021). This should concern us - academics, politicians and civil society in general - and mobilize us to seek ways of minimizing these generational inequalities.

It is important to highlight the exploratory nature of the study. It is a qualitative study that does not have a statistically representative sample of the population, which can be considered a limitation. However, it should be noted that care was taken to obtain a sample of a considerable size, considering the different ages, genders, levels of education, training areas and professional situations of the interviewees, which allows us to consider this a robust sample. Of course, to verify whether these insights can be generalized to the Portuguese population and whether there are relationships between practices and habits and the socio-economic characteristics of individuals, a quantitative approach will be developed.

It is considered relevant to continue studying this phenomenon since it is essential to understand how the news consumption habits of the new generations are changing and how this can affect the construction of public opinion. This study has the potential to promote debate on the role of policymakers, educators and the media in promoting media literacy and adapting to the new realities and challenges of news consumption in new media.

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