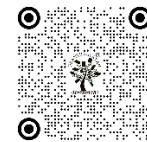


Review Article

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN SHAPING NEWS CONSUMPTION AMONG YOUNG ADULTS: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The review examines studies published between 2012 and 2026 that examine the impact of social media on how young adults consume news. The literature shows that social media has become a main source of news, taking the place of traditional media due to the availability of news through mobile devices in a personalised and continuous manner. (Social media and News Fact Sheet, 2025) Young adults often get their news from websites and platforms designed for social communication and entertainment, and the information they see is shaped by algorithms, their peer networks, influencers, and individual news producers, affecting how reliable it is perceived to be and how it is interpreted. [Duvekot et al. \(2024\)](#) The research shows that social media encourages people to participate by commenting, sharing, and discussing, but it also leads to selective exposure, information overload, news avoidance, and the rapid spread of misinformation. [Heseltine \(2025\)](#) A first search of the Google Scholar database found 25 studies, 19 of which fulfilled the inclusion criteria: four were quantitative, five were mixed-methods, nine were qualitative, and one was a review. [Vázquez-Herrero et al. \(2022\)](#) Each study was assessed for importance and quality, and the selection process is shown in the PRISMA flow diagram. The results show that social media has become a major route for young adults to access news; yet trust in news from social media remains low and is determined by source credibility and verification practices. (Younger adults trust info from social media sites as much as that from national news organizations, 2025) Young adults operate in a mixed-media environment in which traditional media still maintain credibility, while algorithms, peer networks, and visually convenient formats drive exposure and engagement. [Duvekot et al. \(2024\)](#) Even though there is high consumption of digital news, critical engagement is inconsistent, and offline civic participation does not always occur, revealing a gap between awareness and action. [Shearer et al. \(2026, July 16\)](#)

Keywords: Social Media, the Consumption of News, Young Adults, Algorithms, Misinformation, Media Literacy, the Credibility of News, Political Participation

INTRODUCTION

Today's young adults find themselves in a media environment where social platforms serve as the primary channels through which they discover, interpret, and share news. In the last fifteen years, research has shown a steady shift away from traditional, scheduled news routines like television bulletins and newspapers towards easy, customized, and nearly constant access to news through social media. For many young adults, social media functions as both a social and an information-giving environment, with news being encountered by accident while they are engaging in activities such as watching entertainment, keeping in touch with others, or following creators and influencers. This change has important consequences for how young adults understand current

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events, evaluate the reliability of information, and participate in public life [Niles \(2025\)](#). The existing body of literature increasingly regards social media as the primary source of news for young adults, often replacing traditional media as the first point of contact with current affairs. Algorithms, peer networks, influencers, and individual news makers now play a key role in deciding which stories are seen, how they are presented, and how trustworthy they are perceived to be. These factors do encourage involvement, since young users comment on, share, and discuss news within their networks, sometimes being more engaged than when using conventional news formats. On the other hand, the same environment leads to selective exposure, information overload, news avoidance, and the rapid spread of misinformation, raising concerns about the quality of knowledge and democratic participation.

The review examines research conducted between 2012 and 2026 on the role of social media in shaping young adults' news consumption. The time period covered includes the extensive adoption of smartphones and the use of news feeds on several platforms, the growing trend for major social networks to act as distributors of news, and the rise of short-form video and news formats driven by individual content creators that are now the main types of news consumed by young people. When the Google Scholar database was first searched, 25 potentially relevant studies were found. After applying the inclusion criteria and assessing the studies for pertinence and quality, 19 were retained: four quantitative, five mixed-methods, nine qualitative, and one review. Each study was assessed by the extent to which it contributed to understanding of changes in news consumption patterns, the use of news on a particular platform, trust-related factors, and overall thematic and methodological aspects. The selection process is shown in a PRISMA flow diagram, which lists the numbers of records identified, screened, assessed for eligibility, and included, along with the reasons for excluding studies.

This review, based on the results of these 19 studies, aims to provide a thorough understanding of how social media has changed the way young adults consume news.

THE MAIN OBJECTIVES ARE

- To explore how social media has changed the news habits of young adults
- To discover which social media platforms are most frequently used by young adults for getting news and to examine how news is used on these platforms, including different formats (for example, reels, posts, stories).
- To understand what shapes young adults' trust in news they encounter on social media
- To analyse the main themes and methods employed in the current research concerning young adults' consumption of news on social media and point out the major gaps that should be addressed in future studies.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1) What has been the effect of social media on the way young adults consume news?
- 2) What are the social media platforms most linked with young adults' consumption of the news?
- 3) What factors affect the way young adults trust news that they come across on social media?
- 4) What are the main themes and gaps in the current research concerning the consumption of news via social media?

REVIEW STRATEGY

The research was conducted to identify studies analysing the role of Social Media in Shaping News Consumption Among Young Adults. The Google Scholar database was used to find the relevant articles. Keywords that were used for the search were: (1) "Social media" AND "news consumption" AND "young adults" (2) "Social media" AND "news consumption" AND "youth" (3) "Social media" AND "news consumption" AND "credibility" (5) "Social media" AND "news consumption" AND "trust" (6) "Social media" AND "news literacy" AND "young people" (7) "Social media" AND "news consumption" AND "misinformation" (8) "Digital media" AND "news consumption" AND "young adults" (9) "Social media platforms" AND "news consumption" AND "youth" (10) "Social media" AND "political news" AND "young people" and (10) "Social media" AND "civic participation" AND "youth" [Table 1](#).

Table 1

Table 1 Number of Research Articles for the Searched Keyword			
Keyword/Combination of Keyword	Database	Year	No of Result
"Social media" AND "news consumption" AND "young adults"	Google Scholar	2012-2026	6,370
"Social media" AND "news consumption" AND "youth"	Google Scholar	2012-2026	11,900
"Social media" AND "news consumption" AND "credibility"	Google Scholar	2012-2026	16,000
"Social media" AND "news consumption" AND "trust"	Google Scholar	2012-2026	18,400
"Social media" AND "news literacy" AND "young people"	Google Scholar	2012-2026	2,540

"Social media" AND "news consumption" AND "misinformation"	Google Scholar	2012-2026	16,100
"Digital media" AND "news consumption" AND "young adults"	Google Scholar	2012-2026	3,390
"Social media platforms" AND "news consumption" AND "youth"	Google Scholar	2012-2026	6,050
"Social media" AND "political news" AND "young people"	Google Scholar	2012-2026	7,910
"Social media" AND "civic participation" AND "youth"	Google Scholar	2012-2026	18,800

INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA

The review included full-text research papers published over the past fifteen years. All selected articles were in English, with non-peer-reviewed papers and duplicates excluded from the final set. A total of 30 articles relevant to the research question were chosen. Duplicate papers were removed after the inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied, and 13 articles were selected for inclusion in the review, as shown in the PRISMA diagram [Figure 1. Purba et al. \(2023\)](#)

Figure 1

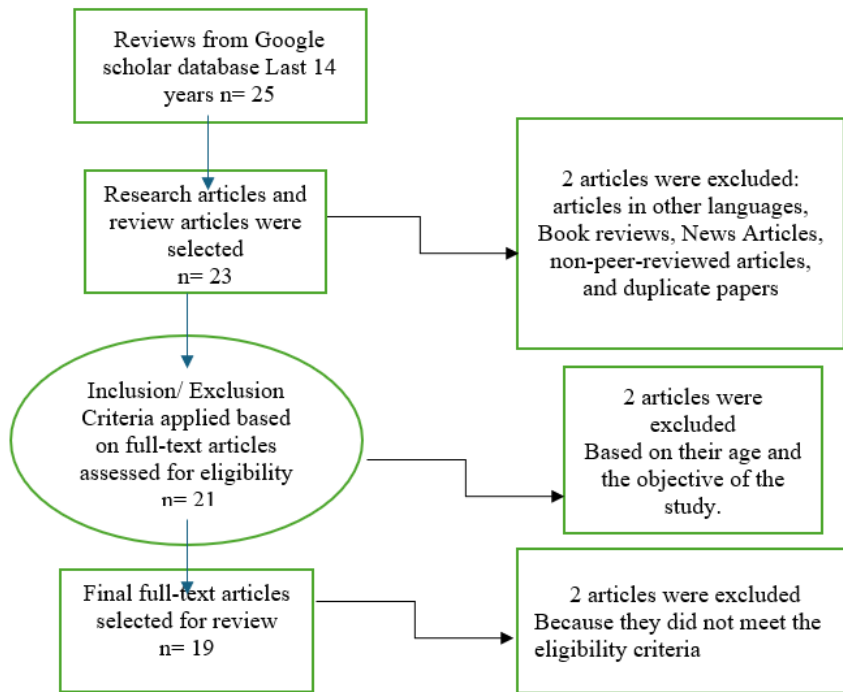


Figure 1 PRISMA Diagram Detailing the Study Identification and Selection Process, PRISMA, Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses

LITERATURE FINDINGS

Reviews obtained from the Google database, focusing on young adults aged 18 to 25 [Higley \(2019\)](#), were examined to investigate their role in influencing news consumption. As part of the design, 13 reviews were chosen. These studies comprised qualitative, quantitative, mixed-method, and review types. [Table 2](#) presents the studies selected for the review, along with their Aims, Samples, Methods, and Findings.

Table 2

Table 2 Literature Review Matrix: Social Media and News Consumption among Young Adults						
Sl. No	Author(s)/ Year	Title of Study	Aim	Sample	Method	Findings
1	Basanta Kumar Rupakheti (2025)	Social Media's Role in Shaping Political News Consumption in Nepal	To examine how social media changes political news consumption patterns and its relationship with public trust in news sources in Kathmandu, Nepal.	Secondary literature and regional studies; focus on political news users/youth in Kathmandu.	Literature-based study using secondary data, thematic synthesis and theoretical analysis.	Facebook, YouTube and X emerged as major political news sources among Kathmandu youth. Social media provides speed and engagement but also increases exposure to misinformation, filter bubbles, echo chambers and declining trust. Traditional media remains relevant, especially in rural Nepal.
2	Pedro Farias-Batlle, Alba Córdoba-Cabús, and Bernardo Gómez-Calderón (2024)	Young People and Social Networks: News Consumption Habits and Credibility of the News	To examine how Spanish young people access and interact with news on social networks and identify factors influencing their trust in news.	1,067 Spanish young people aged 15–24; five focus groups with 97 participants.	Mixed methods: nationally representative online questionnaire and five focus groups; quantitative analysis and qualitative coding.	Social networks were the most common news source. Young people often encountered news incidentally and rarely fact-checked it. Trust was generally low and was influenced by age, education, sex and ideological position. The media outlet posting the news was the strongest credibility factor.
3	Uta Rusmann and Andreas Hess (2020)	News Consumption and Trust in Online and Social Media: An In-depth Qualitative Study of Young Adults in Austria	To understand young adults' news consumption and their trust in online, social and traditional media, including channels, sources and content.	35 young adults aged 18–25 in Austria.	Semi-structured qualitative interviews; interviews were transcribed and analysed using qualitative content analysis.	Digital and social media were major news sources, but traditional media were more trusted. News often 'found' young adults through social media, apps and peer recommendations. Peers were important information influencers, while participants showed limited critical engagement with misinformation and echo chambers.
4	Lu Huiyu (2025)	The Role of Social Media in Shaping News Consumption	To analyse how social media algorithms, user trust mechanisms and platform characteristics reshape news consumption patterns, with attention to China and Belarus.	216 social media users in China and Belarus.	Literature review, comparative analysis, video-news content analysis and multilingual questionnaire survey.	Chinese users mainly used WeChat, Douyin and Weibo and showed greater acceptance of algorithms and institutional verification. Belarusian users relied on Telegram, TikTok and Instagram and were more likely to cross-check news across platforms. Media environments shaped trust, verification and willingness to pay for news.

5	Chris Peters, Kim Christian Schrøder, Josephine Lehaff, and Julie Vulpus (2021)	News as They Know It: Young Adults' Information Repertoires in the Digital Media Landscape	To investigate the information repertoires, preferences and everyday experiences of young adults in the digital media landscape.	24 Danish young adults aged 18–24.	Mixed-method design combining individual interviews, Q-sort methodology and think-aloud protocols; thematic analysis and factor analysis.	Five information repertoires were identified: online traditionalist, depth-seeking audiophile, digital news seeker, interpersonal networker and non-news information seeker. Facebook acted as an important news hub, while search engines and interpersonal networks supported information seeking. Social and face-to-face networks strongly shaped news use.
6	Iryna Pentina and Monideepa Tarafdar (2014)	From 'Information' to 'Knowing': Exploring the Role of Social Media in Contemporary News Consumption	To investigate contemporary news consumption and the role of social media in managing information overload, supporting sense-making and civic knowledge formation.	112 interview transcripts from a diverse cross-section of U.S. news consumers.	Qualitative content analysis of 112 interview transcripts using information-overload and sense-making perspectives.	Social media helps users curate, filter and share news, but the large volume of information can create overload and biased perspectives. Users rely on social filtering and networks to make sense of information. The study highlights implications for civic knowledge and news organizations.
7	Mason Walker and Katerina Eva Matsa / Pew Research Center (2021)	News Consumption Across Social Media in 2021: More than Half of Twitter Users Get News on the Site Regularly	To examine how Americans obtain news across major social media platforms and how news use differs by platform.	11,178 U.S. adults.	National survey conducted by Pew Research Center.	News consumption differed substantially by platform. Twitter users were especially likely to get news regularly, while Facebook, YouTube and other platforms also served as important news sources. The report demonstrates the growing role of social media in news exposure and the distinct news-use patterns associated with individual platforms.
8	Nadine Klopfenstein Frei, Valery Wyss, Aleksandra Gnach, and Wibke Weber (2024)	'It's a Matter of Age': Four Dimensions of Youths' News Consumption	To determine how and where young people in Switzerland can be reached with news and to examine their news expectations and consumption patterns.	66 Swiss adolescents aged 12–20 from German-, French- and Italian-speaking regions.	Mixed-methods design with pre-interviews, focus groups, diary studies, mobile-phone tracking, trace interviews and retrospective interviews; triangulation of data.	Four dimensions characterised youth news consumption: duration/timing, habits and behaviour, restrictions, and media literacy. Social media became particularly important for 15–17-year-olds, while 18–20-year-olds developed more stable individual patterns. Young people preferred visual formats such as pictures, videos and memes.

9	I. Amaral and P. Silveira (2017)	Young People and Their Practices of Access and Consumption of News in Social Media	To understand how young adults appropriate social media for monitoring current events and developing media literacy and civic participation.	24 Portuguese university students from different family and social backgrounds.	Qualitative methodology using four focus groups.	Young people showed passive and largely online news consumption, scepticism toward traditional media, distrust of digital media and a broad perception of fake news. Civic engagement was limited, and participants questioned the relevance of active participation.
10	Sabine Geers (2020)	News Consumption Across Media Platforms and Content: A Typology of Young News Users	To identify young people's news repertoires based on combined platform use and content preferences and examine variation by social background.	1,084 Dutch adolescents aged 16–21.	Quantitative survey; statistical classification of news repertoires.	Four news repertoires were identified: minimalists, omnivores, traditionalists and online news users. Platform-based repertoires were associated with content preferences. Many young people still used traditional media, especially those interested in domestic politics, while online news users preferred more entertaining content.
11	Joëlle Swart (2023)	Tactics of News Literacy: How Young People Access, Evaluate, and Engage with News on Social Media	To explore when news literacy becomes meaningful in everyday social media use and how young people access, evaluate and engage with news.	36 young people aged 16–22 in the Netherlands.	Semi-structured, in-depth interviews; inductive thematic analysis.	Young people used strategies to navigate algorithmic platforms, evaluate news credibility and decide whether to engage with content. News literacy was shown as situated knowledge shaped by platform structures, social contexts, motivation and perceived agency rather than as a fixed set of skills.
12	Lisa Schwaiger, Daniel Vogler, and Mark Eisenegger (2022)	Change in News Access, Change in Expectations? How Young Social Media Users in Switzerland Evaluate the Functions and Quality of News	To investigate how young adults who mainly use social media for news evaluate the quality, functions and expectations of journalistic news.	19 young adults aged 20–25 in Switzerland.	Multimethod qualitative online study using innovative online research tools.	Although participants rarely used traditional news channels, they still valued professional journalistic standards such as actuality and veracity. Sociability, identification and discussion were important functions of news. Participants preferred attractive audiovisual formats, easy-to-understand content and news integrated into everyday life.

13	Saman Nasir, Anjum Zia, and Aemen Khalid (2024)	Mainstream Media and Social Media News Consumption Patterns of Youth in Lahore, Pakistan	To investigate news consumption patterns among Pakistani youth and compare their use of mainstream and social media for political and entertainment news.	275 university students aged 15–24 in Lahore, Pakistan.	Quantitative survey using an online Google Form, guided by Uses and Gratifications Theory.	Social media was strongly preferred, with 78% using it for social interaction, surveillance, knowledge and entertainment. Traditional media such as newspapers and radio had declined, while television remained popular. Social media was also preferred for educational searches and information use.
14	Oscar Westlund (2015)	News Consumption in an Age of Mobile Media: Patterns, People, Place, and Participation	To conceptualise and review the transformation of news consumption in the age of mobile media and highlight emerging patterns, people, places and forms of participation.	Not applicable; editorial/special-section article drawing on prior research.	Conceptual and literature-based editorial review introducing a special section on mobile news consumption.	Mobile devices have transformed news access by providing continuous, personal and portable access to news and other media. Mobile news is connected to everyday routines, habits, needs and participation. The article highlights the need for empirical research into emerging mobile news-consumption patterns.
15	Fulufhelo Oscar Makananise (2022)	Youth Experiences with News Media Consumption: The Pursuit for Newsworthy Information in the Digital Age	To explore youth experiences, perceptions and practices in consuming and pursuing newsworthy information through mainstream and digital media.	20 youth aged 18–34 from Thohoyandou, South Africa.	Exploratory qualitative design; purposive sampling; semi-structured interviews; thematic analysis.	Young people depended heavily on digital platforms because they were accessible, affordable and fast, but television and newspapers were still preferred for credibility, authenticity and accurate production. The study recommended accurate digital news and participatory approaches that engage youth.
16	Sagit Dinnar and Hillel Nossek (2026)	Exploring News Consumption and Political and Civic Participation among Youth	To examine the relationship between youth news consumption and political and civic participation in a conflict-driven society.	673 Israeli youth aged 15–18 in a nationwide survey and 36 participants in in-depth interviews.	Mixed methods: nationwide quantitative survey and qualitative in-depth interviews.	Youth primarily consumed news through social media, YouTube and satirical television, but face-to-face civic and political participation remained low. A gap existed between perceived ability to influence society and actual involvement, suggesting that digital news consumption may itself be perceived as participation.

17	Anna Podara, Maria Matsiola, Theodora A. Maniou, and George Kalliris (2019)	News Usage Patterns of Young Adults in the Era of Interactive Journalism	To examine young adults' online news-consumption behaviour and whether interactive reporting is compatible with their preferences.	16 English-speaking university students aged 18–25 from journalism/mass communication programmes in Greece and Cyprus (two focus groups).	Qualitative focus-group study combined with a case study of The Guardian's 'NSA Files: Decoded' interactive report and a questionnaire.	Participants preferred online news but generally favoured simple, coherent text-based narratives over highly interactive formats. Many preferred researching topics independently through Google and comparing sources. Interactive multimedia elements were often seen as distracting, and credibility was associated with personal cross-checking.
18	Rosengard et al. (2014)	Students and Social News: How College Students Share News Through social media	To examine how college students consume and share news through social media and to determine whether they obtain news primarily through social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter or directly from news sources such as newspapers, websites, news stations, and mobile applications.	College students/young news consumers.	Quantitative research approach	The study found that social media plays an important role in exposing college students to news. However, students often relied on other internet sources to confirm or verify news encountered through social media. Local news was found to be less important to students, although college-town and community-related information could attract their attention. Social media functioned as an important gateway for discovering and sharing news, while other online sources remained important for verification.
19	Williamson et al. (2012)	Young Adults and Everyday-Life Information: The Role of News Media	To examine how young adults seek information for their everyday lives and to investigate the role of news media, particularly print and online newspapers, in providing everyday-life information.	34 university students aged 18–25 years from an Australian university.	qualitative, interpretivist approach. First, 20 students were interviewed about their news-seeking behaviour, including the topics and sources they used. Then, 14 students participated in verbal protocol analysis involving tasks related to online and print newspapers. Follow-up interviews explored how students sought everyday-life information and whether they had encountered such information incidentally through newspapers.	The study found that traditional print media continued to play a role in the everyday information practices of young adults. Although social media was considered important, participants mainly viewed it as a means of communicating with friends rather than gathering news. Purposeful information seeking was more likely to take place online, while both print and online newspapers continued to provide information incidentally. students used different media according to their information needs and purposes.

Theme 1: Social Media as a Major Gateway to News Consumption

Another important theme is the ongoing worry about the credibility and trustworthiness of the news. Even though young people

The literature also highlights the risks inherent in the news environment on social media, especially misinformation and



Despite the growth of social media, the reviewed literature demonstrates that traditional media remain relevant, particularly for credibility, accuracy, and professionally produced news. [Duvokot et al. \(2024\)](#) Newspapers, television, and other established news sources continue to be used by some young people, although their roles have changed. Several studies indicate that traditional media is less frequently used as the primary source for everyday news discovery but continues to provide trusted or incidental information. [Bennett \(2012\)](#) Some young people combine traditional and digital sources according to their information needs, while others use traditional media to verify information encountered online. Thus, the literature suggests a hybrid media consumption pattern rather than a complete displacement of traditional media.



A major issue is the impact of internet platform features, including algorithms and personalization, on how people consume news. [Forman-Katz \(2025\)](#) The news habits of young people vary depending on the platforms they use, their age, interests, social surroundings, and information needs. Algorithms affect the visibility and spread of news, while the specific features of each platform determine how information is encountered and consumed. For example, studies comparing China and Belarus show that differences in platform usage, trust, and verification practices depend on the local media environment. (Social media use and academic performance among college students: the chain mediating roles of social anxiety and fear of missing out and the moderating effect of teacher-student relationship, 2025) Research on young people's news literacy also reveals that users develop strategies for navigating algorithmically structured platforms. [Swart \(2020\)](#) This shows that young people's news consumption cannot be explained simply by their use of social media; it is also necessary to consider which platform they use and how that platform shapes their exposure to information.

[illegible]

News literacy appears as an additional important theme. The studies indicate that young people use different strategies to assess, interpret, and manage news encountered online. [Swart \(2021\)](#) These include comparing sources, checking information through search engines, evaluating the credibility of publishers and deciding whether to engage with particular content. Nevertheless, critical engagement is inconsistent. Some studies report limited fact-checking and awareness of misinformation, while others show that young people actively develop strategies for evaluating online news. [Cotter and Thorson \(2022\)](#) News literacy is therefore presented not simply as a fixed ability. The literature shows that the way people get news is closely linked to their social relationships and the information practices they carry out in daily life. (Young adults and everyday-life information: The role of news media, 2012, pp. 258-264) Young people usually obtain news from their friends, through their personal networks, via recommendations, and through social interactions. (Young Adults and the Future of News, 2025) The peer networks people have can affect the information they come across, discuss, and share. In addition to being a source of news, social media has several other functions, such as enabling communication, providing entertainment, offering education, and assisting with everyday information-seeking. [Kormelink et al. \(2026\)](#) As a result, news consumption by young people is becoming an increasingly central part of their broader social and digital activities and is no longer a separate, intentional act of information-seeking. Consequently, news consumption among young people

The literature further demonstrates that news consumption is strongly connected with social relationships and everyday information practices. Young people often receive news through friends, interpersonal networks, recommendations and social interactions. Peer networks can influence what information is encountered, discussed, and shared. Social media also serves multiple purposes beyond news consumption, including communication, entertainment, education, and everyday information-seeking. Consequently, news consumption among young people is increasingly embedded within their broader social and digital routines rather than occurring as a separate, deliberate activity.

A final theme concerns the relationship between news consumption and civic or political participation. Although young people consume substantial amounts of political and current-affairs information through social media, this does not necessarily translate into active political or civic participation. [Egan et al. \(2026\)](#) The studies indicate a gap between digital exposure to news and actual involvement in face-to-face civic or political activities. [Nanz and Matthes \(2022\)](#) In some cases, young people may perceive consuming or engaging with political information online as a form of participation. This suggests that increased digital news consumption may contribute to awareness and perceived participation lacking necessarily producing corresponding levels of offline civic engagement. [Zúñiga et al. \(2012\)](#)



LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The review is constrained by its reliance on a single database (Google Scholar) and a relatively small number of studies (19), which could affect both the comprehensiveness and the generalizability of the results. Since most of the included studies are cross-sectional and context-specific, and since the term "young adults" is defined in different ways across a wide range of methodological approaches, it is difficult to make direct comparisons or draw causal conclusions. [Duvekot et al. \(2024\)](#). Moreover, although there is a strong presence of qualitative and mixed-methods research, which provides a great deal of detail, quantitative evidence on the size and direction of effects (for example, on trust or participation) remains limited. [Yang and DeHart \(2016\)](#). Future research, therefore, needs to focus on using longitudinal and experimental designs to clarify the causal relationships among news use on platforms, trust, and civic outcomes, and should go beyond Western contexts to include a wider range of young people. At the same time, educators, news organizations, and the platforms themselves should work together to develop targeted news literacy programs and clear, visually appealing news formats that incorporate algorithmic awareness and source evaluation, and to make platform design changes that reduce the circulation of misinformation.

CONCLUSION

The study showed that social media has turned youth news consumption into a hybrid type of platform, offering greater access to information. Yet trust, critical thinking, and involvement outside the internet have not kept pace with this change. The main issue is no longer simply whether young people get news, but how the structures of social platforms, their algorithms, different formats, peer networks, and commercial interests influence the news they see, how they assess its credibility, and whether it leads to informed democratic engagement. If this is to be addressed, there will need to be coordinated action among research, education, journalism, and platform governance to ensure that the digital news environment cultivates both awareness and genuine participation among young adults.

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