



Commissariaat
voor de Media

Youth, news and social media

A look at the future of news

Summary

[Read more](#)



[cvdm.nl](https://www.cvdm.nl)

Introduction

Studies show that young people are using traditional media less and less, and social media more and more. This is also the case when it comes to information about important events at home and abroad, or news. Previous research by the Dutch Media Authority (Commissariaat voor de Media) such as Digital News Report Netherlands 2023 and 2024 found, in addition to declining use of news, indications of declining news interest among young people and declining trust in the majority of news among those who use social media as their main news source. Among them are many young people.

This prompted the Dutch Media Authority to study how the changing use of news and the increased importance of social media affects young people's use of information and to what extent this has consequences for the position of journalism as a source of information. Young people offer us a window on future news consumption and this project helps us determine what is needed to maintain a pluralistic media landscape.

This summary document contains a highly condensed display of the main findings and conclusions from the research report. The summary is followed by the recommendations of the Dutch Media Authority. For more findings, explanation and background, we kindly refer to the comprehensive report (in Dutch).

Comprehensive research project with unique and large-scale questionnaire survey

The research project consisted first of all of a large-scale questionnaire survey of young people aged 16 to 24 with specific focus on the role social media play in their lives and the habits they have developed to keep themselves informed of what is going on in the world. In addition, this questionnaire survey provides detailed insight into how news interest is broken down into interest in general conventional news ('public interest' news) and interest in news specifically relevant to young people. Unlike other research, we did not ask about trust in the news offer, but about the basic attitude of trust in the news.

To enable comparison with an older generation, the questionnaire was also submitted to 40- to 65-year-olds; the age of many parents of these young people and also the age of many (senior) news and policy makers. This group is also referred to as the 'older generation' in this summary and report. A total of 2,010 16-24-year-olds and 497 40-65-year-olds were surveyed market research firm Ipsos I&O in March 2024.

In addition to an extensive questionnaire survey, we mapped the presence of news brands and other initiatives that spread or deepen news on various social media and engaged with newsmakers on the choices they make about their presence within social media, young people as a target audience and how these are choices are being made.

Irene Costera Meijer (professor emerita Journalism Studies) was part of the core team as senior researcher. She has done a lot of relevant research on changing news consumption and news appreciation among young people. The core team also included researchers Edmund Lauf and Karin Schut on behalf of the Dutch Media Authority.

Key findings

Growing up with social media and news

Young people aged 16 to 24 have grown up with social media. And social media apps have great significance in their lives, according to our questionnaire survey. The first apps young people use are those that allow them to be in direct contact with their friends: first checking what's going on via WhatsApp and Snapchat, and then checking a bit more on Instagram and TikTok. In fact, for 65 percent of young people, social media apps are among the first apps they open. This share is much lower (29 percent) among the older generation. The older generation starts the day as well by orienting themselves via their mobile phone and only then via traditional media. But unlike the younger generation, they first check the news via their phones.

Media use by the older generation has changed as well. This led to less visible news consumption in our homes: more frequent mobile phone checks at the table by parents, making it unclear to young people whether their parents are checking the news or doing something else; less newspapers lying on the table and people are less likely to watch television news at set times together. In short, young people are increasingly growing up in households where news consumption is less of a visible habit. Despite these developments 2 out of 3 young people do regularly talk to their parents/guardians about the news. 62 percent of young people also regularly talk about news with their friends and this proportion increases with age.



Staying informed about what is going on in the world

In order to have a say, it is necessary that young people are also informed about what is going on. 58 percent of young people themselves think they keep abreast of the most important news because it passes by automatically on social media. Only 27 percent consciously spend time every day keeping up with news. Among the older generation this is 56 percent. Consciously engaging with news and actively seeking news while using journalistic sources does increase as young people get older (between 16 and 22 years old). It is also higher among higher education graduates and university graduates but lags behind among young people with a practical education and those from bicultural backgrounds. Where the latter group does show more interest in conventional news topics.

Social media has firmly established itself in the lives of the vast majority of young people. 78 percent of them say that social media keeps them informed about what is going on in the world. Instagram, TikTok, YouTube are the most used platforms for this purpose with 65, 40, and 38 percent users, respectively.

66 percent of young people (also) keep informed about what is going on through family, friends and other acquaintances. All other sources, including journalistic sources such as websites, apps and television news play a significantly smaller role. What is striking is that there are no major differences between groups of young people: while young women use social media and conversations slightly more than young men, the patterns are similar. Young people do differ significantly from the adults surveyed in this respect: far fewer adults aged 40 to 65 use social media or friends and acquaintances to stay informed (37 percent and 25 percent), while the use of journalistic sources such as news sites and apps and television news is much more prevalent among this group (both 68 percent among the older generation, 48 and 46 percent among 16-24 year olds).

For many young people, social media remains an important news source: even among young people with HBO (applied sciences) or WO (university) education and those who do consciously seek out news, social media remains an important way to stay informed even as they get older.

The way respondents get to see news on social media varies by platform, but 'it comes by accidentally or automatically' is the most frequently given answer. The fact that news items frequently come by automatically makes sure that many young people stay informed.

Checking whether something is correct

Social media tops the list when it comes to staying informed about what is going on, but to check if something is correct, search engines such as Google are the main source (59 percent). News websites or apps follow at a distance with 36 percent. About a fifth of young people also continue to use social media for reliability checks. Google and other search engines are even more important for finding out more about a particular topic or message: 65 percent of young people use search engines for this purpose and 36 percent visit a news website or app for this purpose. In this, young people do not differ from the older generation, which also mainly uses search engines for in-depth information and verification. Of course, one can also get in touch with journalistic reporting via Google, for example, or end up on a journalistic site, but whether or not this happens is ultimately determined by the search engine.

If we compare journalistic sources (news websites and apps, television news, radio news, newspapers and magazines) as a whole with social media and search engines collectively, it is clear that young people mainly rely on the big tech companies for their information: 86 percent use their services to stay informed, 82 percent for depth and 71 percent for control. Journalistic sources collectively score considerably lower at 79 (staying informed) and 51 percent for both depth and control. The older generation also frequently and easily uses algorithm-determined information, but to stay informed, 94 percent of this group still goes to journalistic sources. The routines young people learn now will determine their news preferences in the future, so it is not to be

expected that they will return to using journalistic sources in later life to the same extent as the older generation does currently.

The comparison between journalistic sources on the one hand and social media and search engines on the other is relevant because the latter group does not produce news itself but determines access to it through algorithms.

Basic attitude of trust in the news

Much is said and written about news coverage and trust in it. In this study, we approached this topic in a new way to gain more insight into what trust in the news means to young people.

40 percent of young people aged 16 to 24 simply trust the news and best recognize themselves in the description: "Of course, news organizations do make a mistake sometimes, but if it's good they fix it quickly". 30 percent chose "Normally, I trust the news, except on topics I have a lot of experience with myself. If I want to know more about that, I have my own sources". 24 percent adopt a more critical attitude and never just assume the news is true and reliable: "...So if a report is really important, I always check it with news from another news organization". Again, this group still assumes trust in news organizations.

It is different with the fourth statement representing a basic attitude of distrust, which only 6 percent of young people choose: "I don't trust mainstream news anymore. That is why I mainly look for information on alternative sites." This 6 percent is similar to the proportion found among the older generation with this survey. In this 6 percent, young people with a practical education, men and bicultural youth are overrepresented.

There is no reason to assume that most young people do not trust the news. On the contrary, with an inquisitive and sometimes critical attitude, 94 percent of young people adopt a basic attitude of trust.

Young people who see their parents using and talking about news and who take news with them at school show higher rates of trust and lower shares for basic critical and distrustful attitudes.

News interest

Interest in news is usually measured by a simple overall question such as "how much are you interested in the news?". Without exception, this yields the picture that young people are less interested in news than older groups. One explanation for the lower news interest is that when young people hear the word 'news', they think of topics such as politics, economics and foreign news. And these are conventional news topics that young people personally perceive as less relevant because - in their eyes - these are further away from them.

In our study we did not ask for an estimate of interest in news in a general sense but presented a total of 23 fictitious headlines to respondents and asked how interested they were in the messages. For the analysis, the news items were divided into several categories: general conventional news (general, domestic, political and foreign news), youth conventional news (the same type of news items but with relevant angle for young people), other news (human interest, sports) and other news for young people (idem, aimed at young people).

As age increases and education becomes more theoretical, young people become interested in more news topics. At the subject level itself, interest then increases particularly in conventional news topics such as politics, foreign news, sustainability, discrimination and economic news. The youngest group of 16- and

17-year-olds shows less interest in news across the board. Only reports on the latest fashion trends and the minimum youth wage¹ break this trend.

When it comes to conventional news with a youth angle or youth theme, interest among young people is much higher. The proportion of young people interested in at least 3 of the news items shown rises from 51 percent with general conventional news to 69 percent when conventional news for young people is added. Among 40–65 year olds, the percentage interested in conventional news for younger people is much lower than among young people (44 percent compared to 58 percent among young people). This shows that relevance is very important for news interest, for both younger and older ones. Gender plays an expected role as well in this area. Among young people, men are more interested in topics in the category of sports, economy (making money), working out and gaming, while women, on the other hand, are more interested in topics referring to social inequality and the social side of fashion and cosmetics.

Besides sociodemographic factors, the background of young people is important. While young people from migrant and bicultural backgrounds make less use of mainstream professional news sources, they are more interested in conventional news topics in this study. And home situation matters as well. If parents or guardians follow the news and talk about it, young people are significantly more interested in news. School lessons on journalism and news are also positively related to interest in news.

When it comes to making news interesting within social media, the place where young people are, more than two-thirds of young people appreciate it when different perspectives are highlighted, explanations are given as to why something is important, and news is delivered that is interesting to young people. In addition, design is important for young people, much more so than for older people.

News brands: awareness, usage and trust

The Dutch news landscape has a number of strong news brands. The major national news brands such as De Telegraaf, RTL Nieuws, NU.nl or NOS are at least known by name to three quarters of young people. Familiarity rates are not much higher among the older generation. The differences between young people and the older generation are also not very large when it comes to encountering news brands, but they do vary greatly by brand: 35 percent of young people encounter the newspaper brand de Telegraaf, for example, and 72 percent encounter public broadcaster NOS. The differences between young people and the older generation are greater when it comes to regular use: on average, the proportion following or regularly using a news brand is more than a third higher in the older generation. Only NOS manages to narrow the gap. And that has to do with the NOS' solid presence on social media with brands specifically aimed at young people, such as NOS Stories and NOS on 3.

More than half of young people are also familiar with the offerings of BOOS (a YouTube show by the public broadcasters aimed at young people), De Avondshow (a late night satire tv show with an online presence) and PowNed (a Dutch broadcaster with a daily news show with a provocative character). De Avondshow is followed or regularly used by 24 percent, and thanks to their engagement on social media, 33 and 23 percent of young people encounter BOOS and PowNed at least occasionally, respectively.

In addition to these new sources, there are services that have become big on social media alone and that do not make news themselves but do disseminate and sometimes supplement it with opinions. @Cestmocro and @RapNewsTV are notable initiatives with the highest brand awareness of 34 and 32 percent among young people. Young people come across them mostly on Instagram and 15 and 11 percent follow or use the services

¹ For employees up to 21 years old, the minimum youth wage applies in The Netherlands. The hourly minimum wage for employees aged 15 to 20 depends on their age. At 15, the rate is lower than at 20.

regularly. 92 percent of young people who use @Cestmocro, @RapnieuwsTV or @ParraTV also use at least one of the journalistic news brands.

Besides familiarity, trust in professional news brands is also high. 85 percent of young people who encounter or use NOS occasionally say they generally trust NOS. This share is also high for NU.nl and RTL News, with both at 71 percent. Especially bi-cultural young people do trust Dutch news brands less, but NOS is also trusted by 68 percent of these young people and also achieves the highest rates of trust in this group. @Cestmocro and @RapnieuwsTV are trusted more by bicultural young people (44 and 23 percent compared to 33 and 18 among all young people), but the shares are much lower than for the major news brands as mentioned above.

81 percent of young people follow or use at least one Dutch news organisation, but if we exclude public service NOS' offerings from this calculation, this percentage drops to 50 percent. Especially among young social media users, the NOS seems to be indispensable: without the NOS, the proportion of young people who follow or regularly use professionally made news from one of these organisations drops from 90 to 43 percent. This also applies to young people from migrant and/or bicultural backgrounds.

Presence of news brands on social media

An analysis of the presence of news brands and initiatives that spread news shows that news brands/organizations aimed at a broad audience (such as NOS, AD, NU.nl and De Telegraaf) have the most followers on Facebook. This is the platform that has been around the longest and serves the most Dutch people but is used to a much lesser extent by young people. Among young people, Instagram, YouTube and TikTok are more important.

NOS is active on all platforms with its offerings and, with NOS Stories, NOS on 3 and the NOS Jeugdjournaal, also manages to build a substantial follower base among young people on each of the platforms shown. With its specific goal of reaching everyone, NOS has been able to achieve 1.1 million followers on Instagram, of which about 630,000 are between 13 and 24 years old. But the non-journalistic @Cestmocro is even slightly bigger there in numbers of young followers.

Among private news brands, the numbers of young followers are much lower and this also varies greatly by platform. RTL News and NU.nl still have more than 120,000 young followers on Instagram, but the other brands lag behind. De Telegraaf is the biggest within YouTube with more than 300,000 young followers. With the exception of NOS and NU.nl's offering (which has 210,000 followers in total), engagement on TikTok seems to be in its infancy for many news brands.

While these numbers do not necessarily mean that only news followers are served with news, the likelihood of non-followers being shown messages is much lower. And if we relate the number of followers to the total number of young people in the Netherlands of around 2.5 million between 13 and 24, they are of course modest.

Revenue models

Interviews conducted with creators at private news organizations show that they are aware that young people make less use of television news, news sites and apps and newspapers. Young people expect news to find them and that means that if news does not appear on social media, young people are much less likely to use it. The fact that currently private news brands have not deployed a strong offensive to reach young people on social media with their content has everything to do with the dominant revenue models. With the daily newspapers, there is a focus on the paying subscriber, making them dependent for revenue on mainly the older news users who are still willing to pay for either a physical daily newspaper or a digital version on their tablet, mobile or computer (or a combination subscription). Commercial television broadcasters

finance themselves mainly through advertising, which comes mostly from television. And young people are watching less and less television. The current news products and the approach from these companies do not match what young people desire, but adjusting requires creativity, time and investment, and many editors have limited space to do so.

Successful initiatives on social media tend to work with a specialized team of young people who are strongly in touch with their audience and give them the opportunity to react and think along with them. Such teams are given the space to respond to the conventions of the platform (short videos, fast edits) and are given the time to get to know and understand the target group and the platform well. And finally, the diversity of these successful teams is also an important factor. The diversity among young people themselves is high and young people also want to see more different perspectives and see their own issues reflected in the news. On this aspect of diversity in the newsrooms, there are still gains to be made. Editors are well aware of this.

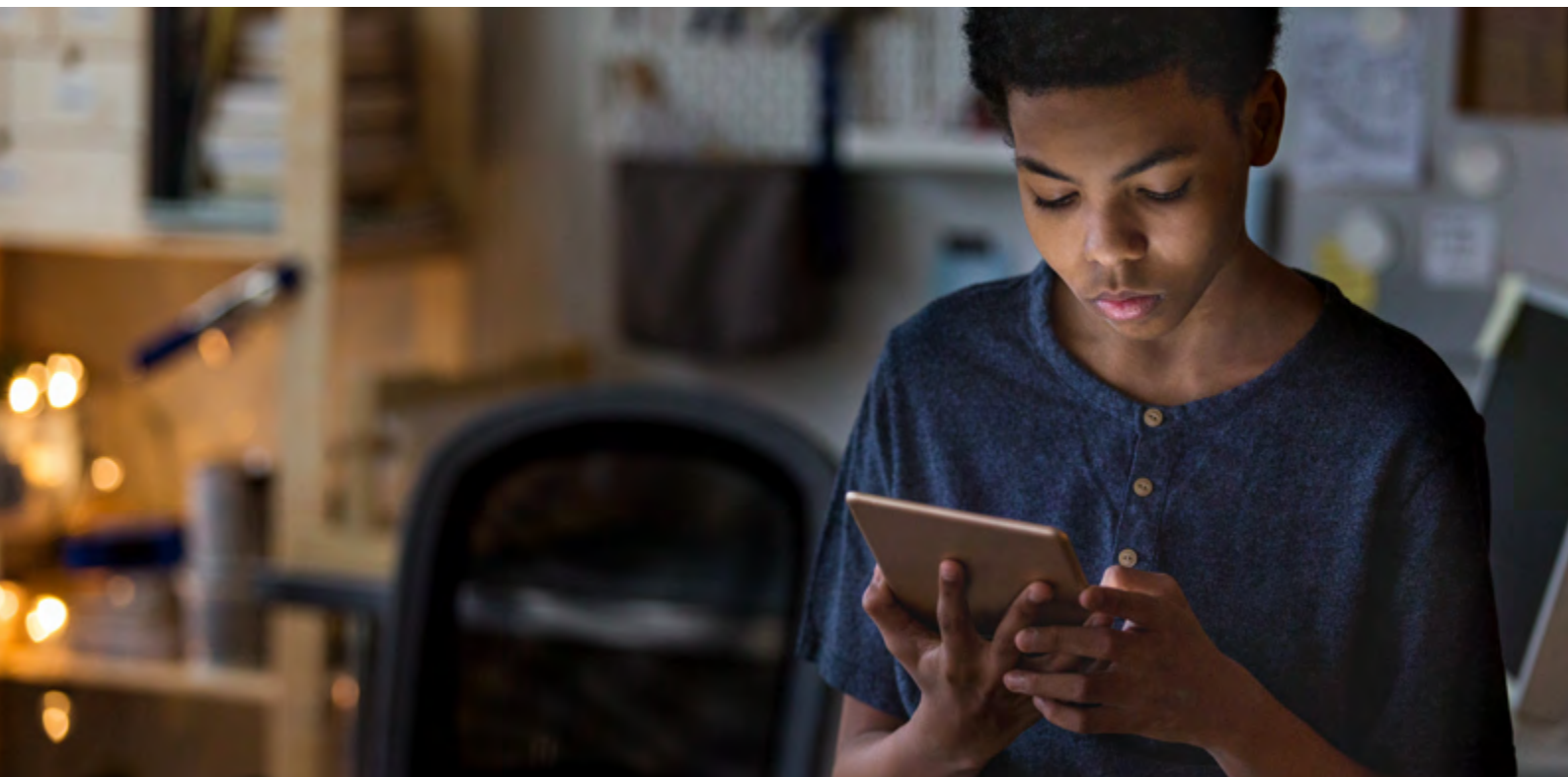
Conclusions

A pluralistic media landscape where multiple independent news editors do their work is indispensable for a well-functioning democracy. Based on the research, we conclude that this important condition for the vitality of our democracy is being compromised. Social media and search engines have become the primary gateway for many young people (and also many older people) to crucial information needed for healthy public debate and free formation of opinions. However, there is no control over the Big Tech players who determine with their algorithms who gets to see what news on social media and what information is offered first through the search engines.

Most public broadcasters and private news brands are reluctant to use social media to reach a wide audience. Also, most do not specifically target young people on social media with their news products. The result is that many young people no longer come across or use the valuable and quality information that news brands have to offer, while unchecked, unedited news can circulate freely on social media.

Currently there is no crisis when it comes to trusting the news among young people. Many young people know and trust the major Dutch news brands, which also have a good reputation among young people. But the use of most journalism brands lags behind because they have little or no presence on social media with a youth-oriented approach. In this way, many news brands do not keep in touch with future news users and vice versa.

There is also no news interest crisis among young people, according to our research. Although they are less interested in general conventional news (politics, economics, domestic and foreign news), interest increases as soon as conventional news has an angle that is relevant to young people. News can become more interesting if there are more angles and perspectives that are relevant to young people. And if young people themselves can give input with additional information, for instance on topics they know more about.



Digitization and social media have led to emancipation of the news user. The user wants more value for his or her money, data or attention. Moreover, the news user wants his or her personal news needs to be met and does not just want to get the news made because journalism or the news organization thinks it is important. This is a lasting change.

As a consequence, there is a challenge for news organizations to reach young people with journalistic offerings that match and appeal to young people's perceptions. This requires a different approach than is common with many news media.

That it can be done, while being urgent and valuable to young people through social media, is shown by the NOS. With specialized news offerings such as NOS Stories and NOS op 3, it has gained a solid position among young people. With this approach, just like @Cestmoco, NOS shows that it is necessary to break with established news conventions to be successful with young people and on social media. With the use of visual language and communication possibilities that are unusual in conventional journalism and a young team with a nose for what is going on in the target group, they are meaningful to large groups of young people.

A major bottleneck to achieve the necessary renewal lies in the revenue models of the private news sector. At the moment, reaching and engaging with young people cannot be done without the use of social media. But on social media, it is mainly the Big Tech itself that generate the earnings. The private news sector makes money by charging users for access to their own channels or with ads on websites, apps and in newspapers or around television broadcasts. The question is not if these revenue streams will bog down in the longer term, but when. After all, the use of traditional media has been declining for some time already and with it the revenue for traditional media organizations. Four out of every five euros earned from ads on traditional media now fall into the hands of Big Tech online.

Following this logic, a pluralistic independent news offer from Dutch news media on social media with a youth-oriented approach seems unthinkable and problematic both now and in the near future. This gives a rather bleak outlook on the future of news.

Recommendations

Studying young people's news routines creates a window into future news consumption.

The research report's conclusions are clear. Journalism is still trusted by young people and, under certain conditions, interesting to them. The challenge for the future, however, is that young people inform themselves mainly through social media and search engines, and they are expected to continue to do so. If news organizations do not have a clearer presence on social media in the near future, young people will be deprived of a pluralistic offer from multiple independent news outlets. This is crucial for free forming of opinions. And news organizations risk losing touch with future users.

Here are our four main recommendations to turn the tide:

- 1. News organizations should develop approaches to provide news that is (also) relevant and urgent for young people and also visible, findable and recognizable to them. Breaking with journalistic conventions and use of social media are necessary in this respect.**

Making reliable, independent and pluralistic news more accessible to young people is essential. In the absence of alternatives, this currently requires the presence of professional news brands with a youth-focused approach on social media, as this is the main way for young people to stay informed.

The presence of more diverse news organizations with in-depth information on social media offers young people a more varied offer with more room for different perspectives, where they themselves encounter and use the news. Something they themselves ask for. Well-known and trusted news brands with an approach tailored to young people let young people experience the value of journalism in their own lives and as socially engaged citizens. And these news brands can thus also keep in touch with future news users themselves, something that is necessary to be future-proof.

- 2. The possibility of (temporary) news industry incentives for initiatives specifically aimed at young people should be explored**

It is imperative that news organizations develop targeted initiatives that reach young people and cater to news interests of young people to provide them with crucial information needed for free opinion formation. At the moment, this cannot be done without using social media, but that lacks a revenue model.

It may therefore be necessary to temporarily support the sector, giving it the opportunity to develop future-proof revenue models. Examples include tax incentives or a targeted subsidy approach for the private sector. This approach should be accompanied by clear conditions, monitoring of compliance and research into effectiveness. Ultimately, the private news sector must remain an economically healthy sector and structural dependence on subsidies must be avoided.

3. Big Tech should be regulated as soon as possible so that news becomes more prominent on offer and new revenue models for the news sector can emerge

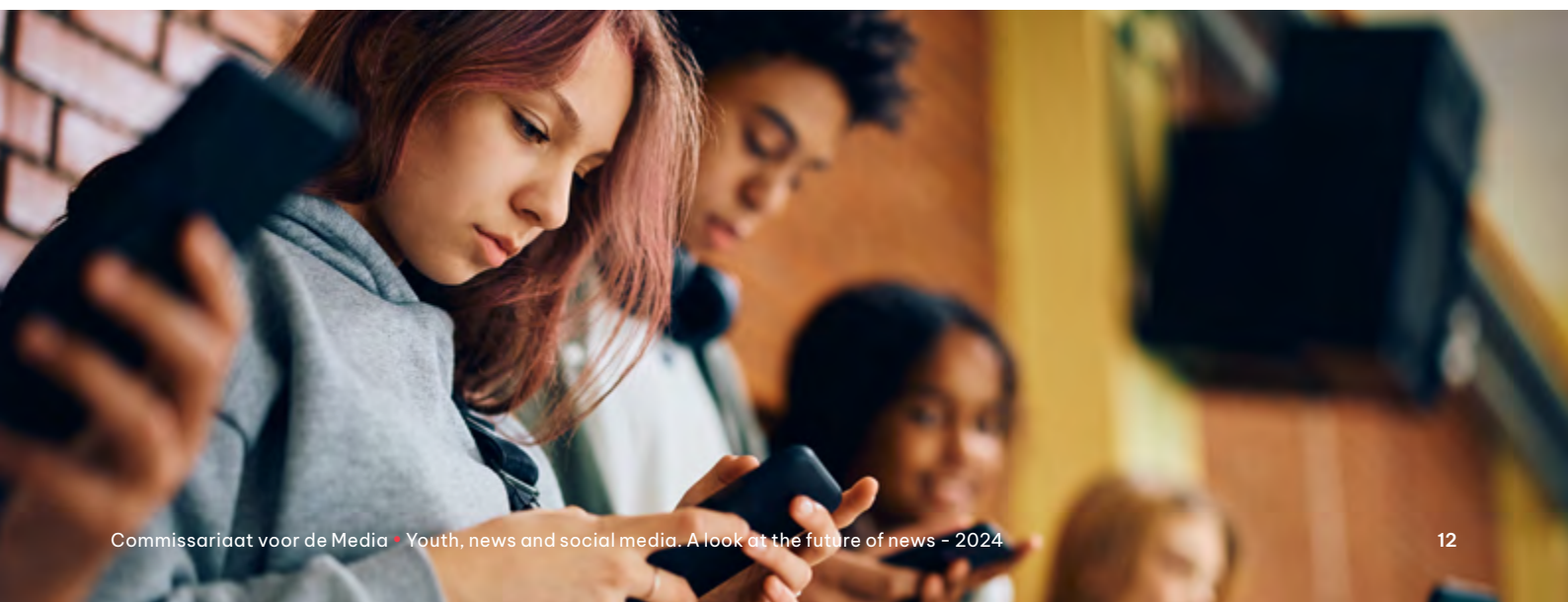
The increased importance of digital media in general and social media in particular calls for more grip on the Big Tech players. It is high time that we treat social media and search engines the same as television package providers such as Ziggo and KPN, which are already subject to so-called ‘must carry’ rules. Grip requires agreements between news organizations and public broadcasters with platforms on the one hand and laws, regulations and supervision on the other. Current (European) laws and regulations offer starting points but require more precise definitions and a broader scope to make this possible. In the short term a new legal framework is needed that guarantees that an independent high-quality news offer is also findable, recognizable and available to young people.

4. News literacy among young people should be promoted, with an extra focus on young people with practical oriented education.

It is important that young people are made news-wise from an early age, to show what conditions professionally made reliable news meets. This means that young people should learn to see how professionally made news can be distinguished from other forms of reporting in terms of reliability and truth-telling. In that way the emphasis shifts from the fear of disinformation to the important role of journalism in Dutch society. If the fear of disinformation prevails, it could lead to the undermining of trust in all news organizations. And precisely trust in journalism is important for a functioning democracy. Here, extra attention should be paid to young people with a practical oriented education.

Finally

The Dutch Media Authority continues to advocate a pluralistic and accessible news supply as an independent media authority and regulator. This means continuation of research into developments on the national and international media markets and identifying their impact and consequences for the pluralism and independence of the information supply and putting it on the agenda. From this research into news consumption by young people specifically, we will determine our follow-up steps in consultation with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and other important stakeholders. Of course, always taking into account our independent position.





Commissariaat
voor de Media

Commissariaat voor de Media

Youth, news and social media.

A look at the future of news – 2024

cvdm.nl