

# Shifting news authorities and democratic resilience: opportunities and risks associated with newsfluencers in Europe



**Steering Committee on Media  
and Information Society (CDMSI)**  
CDMSI/Inf(2026)2

**Authors:**  
Marijana Grbeša  
Iva Nenadić

The opinions expressed in the document are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the Council of Europe.

The reproduction of extracts (up to 500 words) is authorised, except for commercial purposes, as long as the integrity of the text is preserved, the excerpt is not used out of context, does not provide incomplete information or does not otherwise mislead the reader as to the nature, scope or content of the text. The source text must always be acknowledged as follows:

“© Council of Europe, year of the publication”. All other requests concerning the reproduction/translation of all or part of the document, as well as all other correspondence concerning this document, should be addressed to the Directorate General of Democracy and Human Rights  
Dignity of the Council of Europe,  
F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex,  
E-mail: [cdmsi@coe.int](mailto:cdmsi@coe.int)

This document has not been copy-edited by the DPIV Editorial Unit to correct typographical and grammatical errors.

© Council of Europe, August 2026

## ABOUT AUTHORS

**Dr. Iva Nenadić** is an Assistant Professor in journalism, digital and media policy at the University of Dubrovnik and the European University Institute, where she holds the position of Scientific Coordinator of the Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom. Previously, she taught at the University of Zagreb's Faculty of Political Science, and was a Fulbright Visiting Scholar at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill (USA), affiliated with the Centre for Information, Technology, and Public Life (CITAP). Her work bridges academia and policy, contributing to European and global initiatives on platform governance, media regulation, and information integrity. In 2024-2025 she served as co-rapporteur of the Council of Europe's Committee of Experts on the Implications of Generative AI for Freedom of Expression (MSI-AI), and is one of the authors of the Policy Manual on Safeguarding media freedom in the age of Big Tech platforms and AI (2025), produced under the OSCE Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media, in collaboration with the Forum on Information and Democracy. She regularly collaborates with international and intergovernmental organisations on issues related to freedom of expression and the impact of AI on media and journalism. She also holds coordination roles in major European projects, including the Media Pluralism Monitor and the European Digital Media Observatory.

**Dr. Marijana Grbeša** is a full professor at the University of Zagreb, Faculty of Political Science where she teaches courses in media, research methods and strategic communication. She was the Vice-Chair of the Committee of Experts on Online Safety and Empowerment of Content Creators and Users (MSI-eSEC) of the Council of Europe. She is a researcher in illiberalism and pop culture at Illiberalism Studies Program, George Washington's Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies, USA. She held the position of Fulbright Visiting Scholar at George Mason University, USA and served as a visiting professor at the Penn State University, USA. Additionally, she held positions as the Head of the School of Journalism and as Vice-Dean for International Relations at the Faculty of Political Science in Zagreb. She also served as a member of the negotiating team for Croatia's Accession to the European Union and represented Croatia in the European Science Foundation. She has authored numerous books, chapters and scientific articles on media, political communication, celebrity politics and populism. She is a researcher in the Adria Digital Media Observatory and works as an expert on several media policy projects. She is the editor-in-chief of a distinguished peer-reviewed Media Studies (Medijske studije) journal. She has been honoured with several academic and professional grants and awards for her contributions to the field.

## Executive Summary

### Shifting news authorities and democratic resilience: opportunities and risks of newsfluencers in Europe

This study examines the rise of *newsfluencers*<sup>1</sup> - hybrid actors operating at the intersection of journalism, influencer culture and platform-based creator economies - and their growing role as emerging news authorities within Europe's transforming information ecosystem.

The transformation of the media landscape is driven by platformisation, economic instability of traditional journalism, declining trust in institutions, audience migration toward social and video platforms, and the rapid development of artificial intelligence. Younger audiences in particular increasingly rely on social media, especially on short videos, as their primary source of news. In this environment, newsfluencers have gained visibility and authority by combining news-related content with the aesthetics, relational dynamics, and monetisation models of influencer culture.

#### Key opportunities

Newsfluencers present several opportunities for democracy:

- **Mobilising disengaged citizens:** They make political information more accessible and relatable, particularly for younger audiences, prone to news avoidance.
- **Fostering participation:** Research suggests exposure to online newsfluencers can correlate with higher engagement and participation, notably in the field of politics.
- **Diversifying voices:** Newsfluencers may broaden representation in the public sphere, especially in contexts where media pluralism is weak.
- **Innovative formats:** They experiment with new storytelling approaches and community-based models that traditional journalism can learn from.
- **Critical roles in illiberal contexts:** In restrictive media environments, they may serve as alternative or critical voices.

#### Key risks

At the same time, their rise introduces significant vulnerabilities:

- **Disinformation and polarisation:** Strong parasocial relationships can amplify misleading narratives, conspiracy beliefs, and extremist views.
- **Weak accountability:** Unlike professional journalism, newsfluencers are typically not bound by institutional editorial oversight or established quality and ethical safeguards.

---

<sup>1</sup> The term was coined by Edward Hurcombe (2025) and is useful for identifying influencers who operate in the news sphere, broadly understood to encompass topics of public interest and current debate. These topics play an important role in informing and shaping public opinion and behavior, including in the context of elections, but also beyond.

- **Platform dependency:** Algorithmic visibility and monetisation pressures incentivise sensationalism and conflict-driven content, which tends to perform better across platform business models.
- **Precarity and inequality:** Entrepreneurial business models create unstable labour conditions and sharp inequalities.
- **Gender imbalance and structural bias:** The influencer ecosystem remains male-dominated, with broader implications for representation<sup>2</sup>.
- **Erosion of journalistic authority:** Their growth may further weaken the impact of already fragile institutional journalism.

### Policy and regulatory context

The study situates newsfluencers within the evolving EU regulatory framework, including the Digital Services Act (DSA), the Transparency and Targeting of Political Advertising Regulation (TTPA), the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA), and relevant national media laws. While political advertising transparency is increasingly addressed, conceptual fragmentation and inconsistent national approaches remain. Regulatory challenges include defining newsfluencers, balancing accountability with freedom of expression, and avoiding regulatory double standards that disadvantage professional journalism while leaving other (more) influential actors insufficiently accountable.

### Conclusion

Newsfluencers are neither inherently beneficial nor inherently harmful. They represent ambivalent actors whose power derives from authenticity, direct audience relationships, and independence from institutional gatekeeping. These same characteristics position them simultaneously as a source of democratic opportunity and democratic vulnerability.

Strengthening democratic resilience requires moving beyond simplistic opposition between journalism and influencers/newsfluencers. Instead, policy and practice should seek to combine journalism's professional safeguards with newsfluencers' capacity to reach and mobilise contemporary audiences.

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2024/11/18/a-profile-of-news-influencers-gender-politics-and-more/>

## Introduction

Over the past decades, the European media ecosystem - as well as the international media landscape - has been reshaped by the combined effects of platformisation, changing audience habits, rapid developments in artificial intelligence, especially generative AI, and the erosion of trust in democratic institutions, including the media. These dynamics are compounded by increasing commercialisation and ongoing attempts in the media sector to establish viable business models for the digital age, while not always responding to declining trust and relevance. The situation varies across European countries in terms of both trust and relationship with traditional media, expressed also through willingness of individuals to pay for professional journalism delivered online. However, the structural shifts are largely shared, in particular the shift to social media, online search, and video platforms as the primary access points to news, current affairs, and information more broadly. This is especially visible with younger audiences, indicating their departure from journalism in traditional sense.

This digital information infrastructure, architected by a handful of large technology companies, is, on one side, weakening the role of traditional media and disrupting their business model, while enabling an entire new ecosystem of voices with influence. Powerful online personalities are becoming increasingly important intermediaries in how news and current affairs are accessed, interpreted and debated. Moreover, they are reshaping and challenging how journalism and news media are conceptually understood and even legally defined, while also raising questions about what constitutes a viable business model for quality journalism in an attention-driven market, crowded with competing actors.

This study examines this shift in influence and authority in the specific sphere of online news, political information and current affairs. While influencers are a broad term encompassing a wide range of actors across commercial and lifestyle dimensions, their growing relevance in the sphere of news and current affairs represents a new frontier in considering both opportunities and risks of such shift from professional and institutionalised journalism to informal, personalised influence. The analysis builds on several established studies of contemporary information environment, such as the *Reuters Institute Digital News Report*<sup>3</sup>, *Flash Eurobarometer Social Media Survey (2025)*<sup>4</sup>, *Standard Eurobarometer (Spring, 2025)*<sup>5</sup>, *Pew Institute Research*<sup>6</sup> and others.

First, it is necessary to unpack the concept of influencers in relation to the democratic informational needs of citizens. Here the study largely builds on the work of Edward Hurcombe, who conceptualised the term “newsfluencers” as a useful notion for capturing emerging news authorities at the intersection of journalism, influencer culture and the platformised creator economy. Although content creators whose main area of interest is news and current affairs are referred to by a range of terms, such as *news influencers*, *news creators* or *creator journalism*, this paper mainly adopts the term *newsfluencers*. This portmanteau is considered to adequately capture the hybrid position these actors occupy between journalistic practice and platform-based content creation.

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2025> (and earlier reports, available through the same source)

<sup>4</sup> <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3592>

<sup>5</sup> <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3372>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/topic/news-habits-media/news-media-trends/news-platforms-sources/digital-news-landscape-1/social-media-news/news-influencers/>

In the second part, the study provides a contextual overview of the conditions and trends under which newsfluencers have emerged and expanded, and examine how they can represent opportunities, that, however, do not come without risks in light of individual and societal vulnerabilities, as well as democratic needs.

The study situates newsfluencers within the current European and national regulatory contexts. It reviews how instruments such as the Digital Services Act (DSA)<sup>7</sup>, the Regulation on the Transparency and Targeting of Political Advertising (TTPA)<sup>8</sup>, the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA)<sup>9</sup> and selected national frameworks address influencers as actors in the information space, and where important gaps or ambiguities remain. In doing so, the study aims to connect communication trends, conceptual developments and regulatory debates to better understand how the rise of newsfluencers is reshaping the understanding of who counts as a news authority today.

Legal definitions of journalists and media tend to be inclusive, since fundamental rights are at stake.<sup>10</sup> Policy guidelines usually follow the same logic. The Council of Europe's 2011 Recommendation on a new notion of media<sup>11</sup> advised member states to adopt a broad definition of media, one that encompasses the wide range of actors involved in producing and disseminating content, while simultaneously calling for a graduated and differentiated approach to policymaking. Almost 15 years ago, and well before the rise of *newsfluencers*, the Council argued for a policy framework that applies to all actors, takes their specific characteristics into account, provides an appropriate level of protection, and clearly delineates their duties and responsibilities.

The power of newsfluencers lies in the same qualities that make them risky: authenticity, parasocial connection with audiences, and independence from institutional editorial oversight. This ambivalence underscores the urgency of researching and addressing their role as emerging news authorities in contemporary democracy. The analysis presented in the study synthesizes the potential opportunities and risks associated with the growing role of newsfluencers, which are increasingly shaping the information ecosystem worldwide.

## Conceptualisation of newsfluencers

There is no shared definition of news influencers, and existing research employs diverse terminology, resulting in varying conceptualizations. A more widely used term in the academic literature and one that partially overlaps in meaning is “political influencers” (also “online political influencers (OPIs)” or “digital opinion leaders”). Martin J. Riedl, Josephine Lukito and Samuel C. Woolley (2023), editors of a special issue of *Social Media + Society* on political

---

<sup>7</sup> Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market For Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC

<sup>8</sup> Regulation (EU) 2024/900 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 March 2024 on the transparency and targeting of political advertising

<sup>9</sup> Regulation (EU) 2024/1083 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 April 2024 establishing a common framework for media services in the internal market and amending Directive 2010/13/EU

<sup>10</sup> Ugland, E. and Henderson, J., [Who is a journalist and why does it matter? Disentangling the legal and ethical arguments](#). Journal of Mass Media Ethics 22.4: 241-261, 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Recommendation CM/Rec(2011)7 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States. On a New Notion of Media. Council of Europe. 21 September 2011.

influencers, define political influencers as “content creators who endorse a political position, social cause, or candidate through media that they produce and/or share on a given social media platform” (p. 2).

They argue that this umbrella term encompasses a broad range of actors:

- Politicians who act as influencers on social media
- Political influencers who operate as opinion leaders
- Influencers who become politicians
- Journalists who act as political influencers

Similarly, De Gregori and Goanta (2022) distinguish between:

- Politicians as social media influencers
- Social media influencers as political opinion leaders
- Social media influencers turned politicians

Shmargad (2022) likewise bases his categorization on the realm of origin of the actor, separating “influential politicians” from “politicised influencers”. Politicians embracing the format of online platform influencers would include figures such as Matteo Salvini (Italy) and Pablo Iglesias (Spain) (Gandini et al., 2022), while Fidias Panayiotou, a Cypriot YouTube prankster elected to the European Parliament in 2024, represents a cross-over between *politician-influencer* and *influencer-politician*, illustrating that existing categories are not clear-cut (Grbeša et al., 2026, upcoming). With over 2.6 million YouTube subscribers and no prior political experience, Fidias won 19.4% of the national vote. Voter turnout in Cyprus rose from 45% in 2019 to just under 59%, with analysts partially attributing this increase to what the BBC termed the “Fidias factor”<sup>12</sup>.

Political influencers also include content creators whom political actors and institutions have officially incorporated into their communication strategies. High-profile examples of administrations who have engaged social media influencers to promote their policies include Joe Biden and Donald Trump in the United States; Emmanuel Macron in France; Anthony Albanese in Australia; Claudia Sheinbaum in Mexico; and Keir Starmer in the United Kingdom (Newman et al., 2025, p. 5). The increasing inclusion of influencers in the European Commission's information and communication activities appears to reflect a broader diversification of institutional communication practices.<sup>13</sup> This subgroup of political influencers who are contracted by politicians and governments for public relations purposes is sometimes referred to as “political relational influencers” (Goodwin et al., 2023).

Von Sikorski et al. (2025) propose a categorization of social media influencers (SMIs) who produce political and socially relevant content, based on three dimensions: the density of political content, the presentation style, and the proximity of their content to political actors, institutions, and ideologies. Their typology is presented in Image 1.

---

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4nnrwr72dgo>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/newsletter/politico-eu-influence/influencing-the-influencers/>



**Table 1.** Key Dimensions and Influencer Types.

| SMI-Type                                           | Density of Political Content                            | Presentation Style of Political Content                                                                      | Proximity of Political Content to Political Actors, Institutions, and Ideologies                    |
|----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The Non-political Influencer                       | Not applicable, as no political content is disseminated | Not applicable                                                                                               | No proximity                                                                                        |
| The Lifestyle-Based Sporadic Political Influencer  | Low density of political information                    | Ostensibly fact-based and opinion-based presentation style                                                   | No proximity or low proximity                                                                       |
| The Lifestyle-Based Politically Engaged Influencer | Moderate density of political information               | Ostensibly fact-based and opinion-based presentation style                                                   | Low to moderate proximity                                                                           |
| The Political Mediator and Educational Influencer  | High density of political information                   | Primarily (ostensibly) fact-based                                                                            | No proximity or low proximity                                                                       |
| The Ideological Political Influencer               | Moderate-to-high density of political information       | Primarily opinion-based with the presentation of ostensibly fact-based, ideologically consistent information | Moderate to close proximity, but primarily no direct funding from political actors and institutions |
| The Political AstroTurf Influencer                 | Moderate-to-high density of political information       | Primarily opinion-based with the presentation of ostensibly fact-based, ideologically consistent information | Undisclosed close proximity to full organizational and financial dependence                         |

**Image 1:** Social media influencer types according to von Sikorski et al, 2025, p. 7.

These attempts to classify influencers who engage with political content help clarify the role of these emerging actors and their potential implications for democratic processes. However, although the category of political influencers may overlap with that of news influencers or *newsfluencers*, the two are not synonymous. For example, politicians who act as social media influencers would not be considered news influencers. Newsfluencers instead occupy a hybrid position between journalism and content creation: they represent an evolution of journalistic practice toward a more personalised form of communication, structured by platform logic and characterised by perceived authenticity and direct audience engagement. This model is shaped primarily by the logic of social media rather than by the traditional media logic that historically sought detachment and objectivity in news production and dissemination.

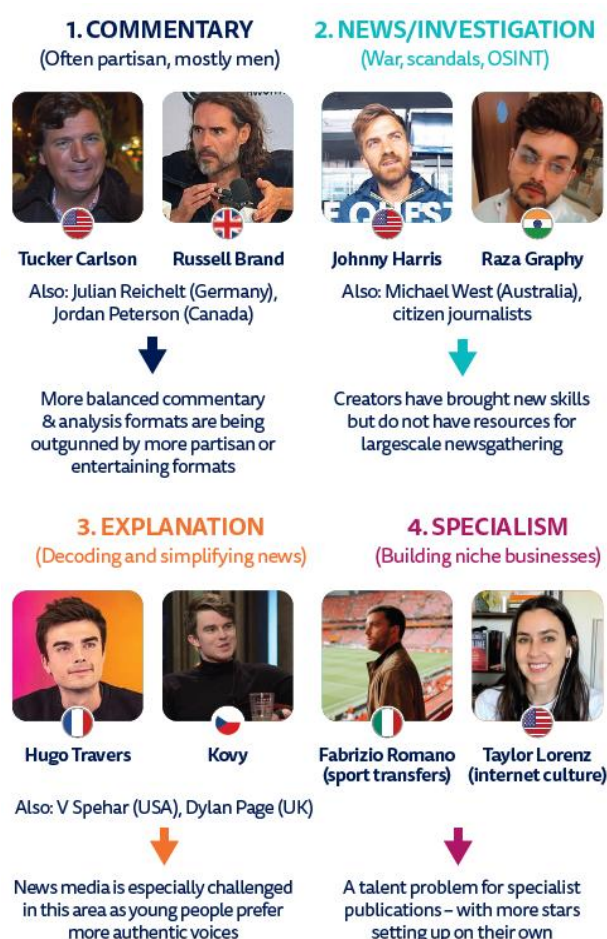
Although scholarly attention to this highly diverse group of influencers involved in the online dissemination and framing of news and current affairs has grown, terminology and definitions remain unsettled, including across surveys and research reports that seek to study this phenomenon.

Newman et al. (2025), in their study *Mapping News Creators and Influencers in Social and Video Networks*, use the term “news creators” and offer the following definition: “Individuals (or sometimes small groups of individuals) who create and distribute content primarily through social and video networks and have some impact on public debates around news and current affairs. News creators are independent from wider news institutions for at least some of their news output”.

Newman and Cherubini (2025, p. 5), in their *Journalism and Technology Trends and Predictions* report, define influencer more broadly as: “A person who is able to influence consumption, lifestyle or political preferences of online audiences by creating engaging content on social media. Often used disparagingly by journalists in the context of news”. They also introduce a novel concept: the “creator-fication” of news.

The Pew Research Center (2024, p. 5) defines news influencers as people who “regularly post about current events and civic issues on social media and have at least 100,000 followers on any of Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X (formerly Twitter) or YouTube. News influencers can be journalists who are or were affiliated with a news organization or independent content creators, but they must be people and not organizations”.

What these definitions have in common is a focus on current affairs, the ability of these actors to influence public debates, and the positioning of newsfluencers in relation to traditional journalistic institutions and professionals, albeit in different ways. Newman and Cherubini (2025) also propose a typology of news creators based on content and audiences. First, they distinguish between conventional “news”, in the sense of ‘hard news’, and what they call “news-adjacent content”, a broader definition of news often used by younger audiences, which “includes both a wider range of subjects (entertainment, religion, gaming) as well as more diverse presentation formats including comedy, memes, and the like” (p. 9). Second, they offer an audience-centric classification of news creators on social media, accompanied by examples of each group, which is shown in Image 2.



**Image 2:** Audience-centric typology of news creators on social media by Newman and Cherubini, 2025, p. 9.

Although this represents a valuable attempt at categorising news creators, the conceptualisation of the term still partially overlaps with the concept of political influencers and

offers limited insight into the structural determinants of their practices - a dimension largely absent from studies that attempt to capture this emerging phenomenon.

Edward Hurcombe introduces the term *newsfluencer* as an intentional portmanteau of “news” and “influencer” to suggest hybridity, because, in his words, newsfluencers “are not simply influencers who do news content (...) And journalists, by engaging in self-branding and using subscription platforms, are not all necessarily becoming influencers, either. Rather, we can see a convergence across four key dimensions - platforms, business models, labour practices, and cultures - which is reshaping both fields” (p. 8). **Newsfluencers are platform-based creators who produce news-related content while adopting the economic, aesthetic, and cultural practices of online influencers.** These individuals may operate across platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Substack, Twitch, or Instagram, and include both independent creators and traditional journalists who engage audiences using influencer strategies.

**Platformatisation**, as the first dimension according to Hurcombe, refers to the fact that **newsfluencers depend on digital platforms not only for content distribution but also for monetisation.** Their visibility is shaped by algorithms, trends, and the technical affordances of the platforms they use. Aesthetic choices such as thumbnails or video titles become as important as content accuracy.

The second dimension, **the business models adopted by newsfluencers, are largely entrepreneurial and audience driven.** Rather than relying on salaries from media institutions, they generate income through a mix of subscriptions, advertising revenue, brand sponsorships, donations, and merchandise. This financial model introduces significant precarity and sharp inequality, with a few high-earning creators contrasted by many who struggle to sustain their work.

Third, the labour of newsfluencing centres on relational work and self-branding. **Newsfluencers invest heavily in cultivating personal brands and establishing emotionally resonant connections with followers.** They frequently blur the boundaries between the personal and the professional, performing what Hurcombe refers to as “relational labour” (Baym, 2015) - fostering a sense of intimacy with audiences to build trust and loyalty.

Fourth dimension, according to Hurcombe, the culture surrounding newsfluencers, is heavily shaped by fandom and parasocial relationships. Unlike traditional journalists who are often expected to remain distant and objective, **newsfluencers develop communities of followers who see them as relatable figures.**

Hurcombe concludes that, when compared to traditional journalists, newsfluencers differ in several key areas. While journalists are typically embedded in institutional frameworks with editorial oversight and norms of objectivity, newsfluencers emphasize authenticity, opinion, and direct audience connection. Their content flows through decentralised, often informal channels, and their professional identity is shaped more by audience interaction than institutional authority. Despite their challenges, newsfluencers offer notable advantages: they reach younger and underserved audiences, introduce new formats for storytelling, and increase the diversity of voices in the news ecosystem. However, their reliance on platform algorithms, lack of editorial accountability, and susceptibility to misinformation and disinformation present significant concerns.

The rise of newsfluencers signals an important shift in the media environment - one that blurs the line between journalism, entertainment, and personal branding, and that calls for new ways of understanding credibility, trust, and public discourse in the digital age. The next section outlines the context and communication trends in which newsfluencers have emerged and grown to the status of news authorities.

### **The context: de-institutionalisation of journalism and platform power<sup>14</sup>**

The conversation around the future of the news media and informed citizenship is taking place between creative disruption and destruction. On one side, technology and innovation have democratised access to public discourse and lowered entry barriers for news businesses and individuals to engage in information and opinion exchange. On the other side, they have disrupted traditional media and journalism and facilitated creation and spread of misinformation and disinformation (Nenadić et al., 2024).

For much of the twentieth century, journalism in developed countries operated within stable business models and professional routines, with news media holding a privileged role as the “fourth estate” (Lewis, 2012). The rise of digital and social media has disrupted this position by introducing new actors and processes that reshape news production, distribution, consumption, and have a strong, adverse impact on the economic sustainability of professional journalism, especially of investigative reporting, which is fundamental for accountability in democratic systems. Online platforms make it easier for various individuals and organisations to actively contribute to the processes of information and opinion exchange and introduce more diversity that was often – and still is – lacking in traditional media organisations across Europe (e.g. Palmer & Urbanikova, 2024). While some of these new prominent voices contribute expert knowledge that enhances the quality and diversity of public debate, others may spread unverified information or engage in deliberate manipulation, thereby undermining and even polarising public discourse. This is especially challenging in an accelerated information process, which leaves little time and capacity to verify information in information-saturated space.

The very architecture of the news and information ecosystem has been fundamentally transformed, giving rise to a new constellation of actors whose interactions and mutual influence shape the health and integrity of information spaces. The quality and integrity of these spaces directly affect social cohesion, and the protection of individual rights and, ultimately, the sustainability of democracy. Structurally, technology companies have reshaped journalism and news media by altering how news is produced, distributed, and funded.

At the same time, digital platforms and services have enabled the emergence of a broader ecosystem of influential actors and opinion leaders, many of whom compete with traditional journalism in terms of both relevance and economic viability. This shift has not only redistributed news authority but also broader opinion-making power, which is increasingly concentrated in the hands of actors that have traditionally fallen outside established frameworks of transparency and accountability - online platforms and newsfluencers. While

---

<sup>14</sup> This section is in part adapted from Grbeša Zenzerović, M., & Nenadić, I. (2022). *Strengthening resilience to disinformation: the state of affairs and guidelines for action*. Agency for Electronic Media.

this imbalance is gradually being addressed, particularly in the European Union through the adoption of instruments such as the DSA, TTPA, EMFA, as well as in the 2018 Audiovisual Media Services Directive<sup>15</sup>, 2019 Copyright Directive<sup>16</sup> that introduced a publisher's right, and to some extent in the 2024 Artificial Intelligence Act<sup>17</sup>, significant asymmetries persist in the relationship between power and responsibility among media, newsfluencers, and online platforms.

The rapid diffusion of new communication technologies calls into question power relations, allowing more direct large-scale communication (many towards many) and denying traditional media organisations exclusivity in terms of deciding what to report as news, and how. Technology companies acting as digital intermediaries have increasingly positioned themselves as key actors in the distribution, discovery, and consumption of news (Reuters Institute Digital News Report [RIDNR], 2025), while also dominating digital advertising, which remains the primary source of revenue for media in the digital environment. This creates a highly challenging environment for media, as the actors that determine their visibility and ability to reach audiences in online platform ecosystems – an essential precondition for attracting advertisers – are simultaneously competing with them for advertising revenue. This situation is far from a level playing field, given the profound power asymmetry between the two groups. Furthermore, platforms have an incomparably larger reach than any traditional media outlet has ever had, and also possess detailed user data and insights that enable highly targeted advertising.<sup>18</sup> As a result, advertising revenues that once funded journalism have been significantly diverted to online platforms and, increasingly, to influencers, with the influencer marketing market size more than tripling between 2020 and 2025 (Statista, 2026).<sup>19</sup>

Media companies have traditionally acted as a two-sided market, combining revenue from advertisers and audiences (readers, viewers, listeners). However, this business model has not successfully transferred to online environment. The media are trying to offset losses and prevent advertising outflows by offering advertisers, among other things, so-called native advertising and promotional services that are opposed to the traditional principle of clearly separating news from ads (see Carlson, 2014; Laursen & Stone, 2016). They are also trying to compensate for disarranging of advertising revenues by focusing on subscription and membership models (Newman and Cherubini, 2025), which encounter structural challenges of generally low trust and a lack of perceived value of journalism in today's information saturated world.

In such a perceived abundance of choice, even if the quality and accuracy are largely questionable in much of the content online, a "culture of free" has consolidated as an expectation that the journalistic content offered online does not need to be paid for (e.g.,

---

<sup>15</sup> Directive (EU) 2018/1808 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 November 2018 amending Directive 2010/13/EU on the coordination of certain provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action in Member States concerning the provision of audiovisual media services (Audiovisual Media Services Directive)

<sup>16</sup> Directive (EU) 2019/790 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on copyright and related rights in the Digital Single Market and amending Directives 96/9/EC and 2001/29/EC

<sup>17</sup> Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 laying down harmonised rules on artificial intelligence and amending Regulations (EC) No 300/2008, (EU) No 167/2013, (EU) No 168/2013, (EU) 2018/858, (EU) 2018/1139 and (EU) 2019/2144 and Directives 2014/90/EU, (EU) 2016/797 and (EU) 2020/1828 (Artificial Intelligence Act)

<sup>18</sup> On platforms online advertising see also CM/Rec(2022)11 - Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on principles for media and communication governance (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 6 April 2022 at the 1431st meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1092819/global-influencer-market-size/>

Goyanes 2014; Hill & Lashmar 2013). The dynamics of paywalls are complex and vary across national contexts, shaped by factors such as political culture, levels of media literacy, and trust in journalism (Nenadić et al., 2026, forthcoming). Nevertheless, media and journalism face a clear structural economic challenge in sustaining traditional operations, particularly resource-intensive forms of investigative and analytical reporting that are essential to democracy and are typically neither compensated for nor developed by the growing ecosystem of newsfluencers. This economic instability within the media sector is closely linked to the precarisation of journalistic labour (Waisbord, 2019). Increasing numbers of journalists are losing their jobs due to newsroom restructuring and cost-cutting measures or are compelled to work as freelancers under insecure and volatile conditions.

Hereby it is also important to remind that the media themselves are not entirely exempt from responsibility for their current state of affairs. Due to often short-sightedness and short-term profits, commercialisation and sensationalism, insufficient investment in research and development, so far many of them failed to respond to the opportunities and challenges of emerging technologies and new habits of audiences (see, e.g., Compton & Benedetti, 2010). In addition, scientific research increasingly warns that the mainstream media may even risk playing a significant role in spreading inaccurate and misleading information online (Allen et al., 2020; Tsfati et al., 2020). This is associated with the decline of media and journalistic standards and practices. Mistakes and manipulations can get into the mainstream media due to the lack of verification, clickbait strategy, i.e., the imperative of “attention economy” (Lischka & Garz, 2021). In addition to this, many media organisations in Europe, including public service media, are under significant political influences through various means (Blagojev et al., 2025; Trevisan et al., 2024)

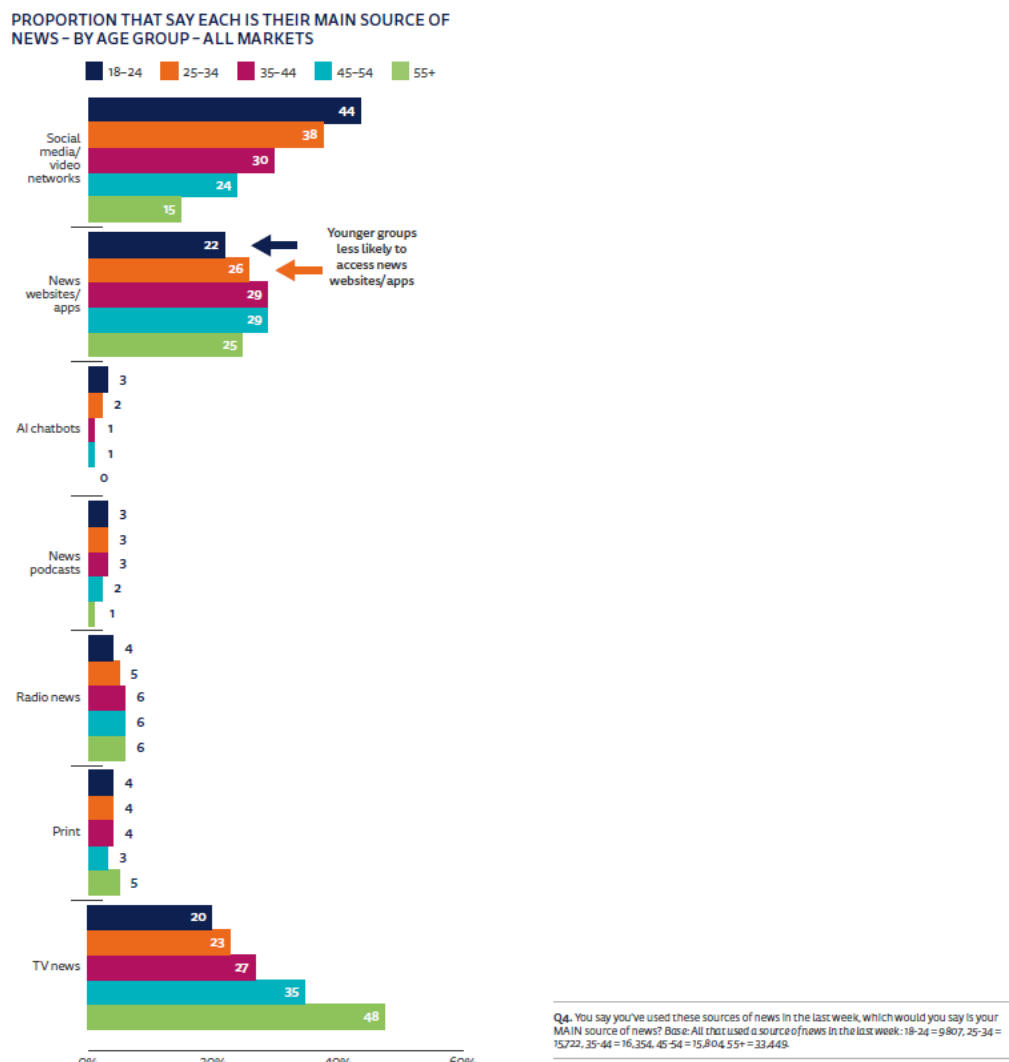
Accelerated and continuous news production cycles have also been reflected in the quality of media content. A series of studies have shown that, especially with digital media, journalists are rarely leaving the newsroom to report from the field, and are increasingly recycling, i.e., transmitting various press releases and translating texts from foreign media – the so-called “churnalism” or copy-paste journalism (e.g., Brück et al, 2025; Davies, 2008; Kovach & Rosenstiehl, 2001). This situation in converged and online newsrooms has raised concerns for decades about the “deprofessionalisation” of journalism (Bromley, 1997). In Wiiks (2019) words: “Exclusivity is broken, autonomy declines, and other actors are increasingly redefining the field. In this context, new methods and ideals arise”.

The combination of the developments outlined above has opened space for the emergence of new authorities within the information ecosystem. What methods, norms, and actors are now reshaping our understanding of ‘news’ and ‘journalism,’ and with what consequences? How are these profound transformations of the media ecosystem redefining the very notion of news authority? While addressing these questions fully would require research beyond the scope of this study, the following sections draw on evidence from several large-scale surveys and analyses to illustrate how newsfluencers are positioning themselves within changing news consumption patterns and gaps between demographics, and in a context of generally low trust in traditional media and journalism. The analysis also considers what this shift in news authority may mean for democracy, highlighting both its opportunities and risks.

## Access to news

According to relevant research that monitors trends in media consumption in Europe (*Reuters Institute Digital News Report* and *Eurobarometer*), online (including both social media and news web sites) remains the most important source of news when all age groups are considered together. Television is still, individually, the leading source of news for older audiences, while social media dominates among younger groups.

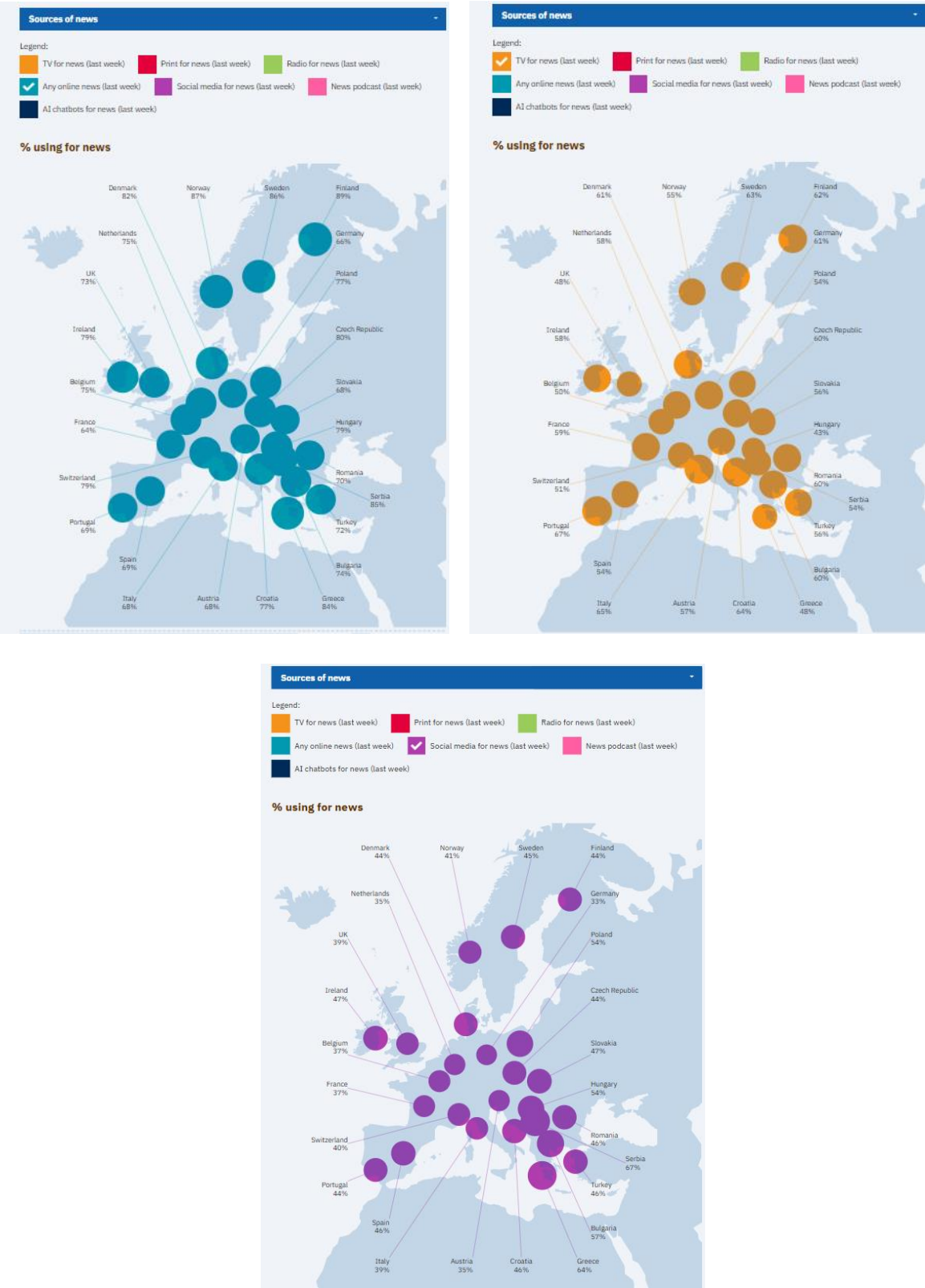
The 2025 *Reuters Institute Digital News Report* (RIDNR), based on a global survey of nearly 98,000 respondents across 48 countries, including 25 European countries and 20 EU member states, as well as the United States, seven Latin American countries, eleven Asia-Pacific countries and four African countries, finds that television continues to be the main source of news for those aged 45–54 and 55+, whereas social media are the primary source of news for audiences aged 18–24, 25–34 and 35–44 (Image 3).



**Image 3:** Sources of news; **Source:** Reuters Institute Digital News Report, 2025, p. 14



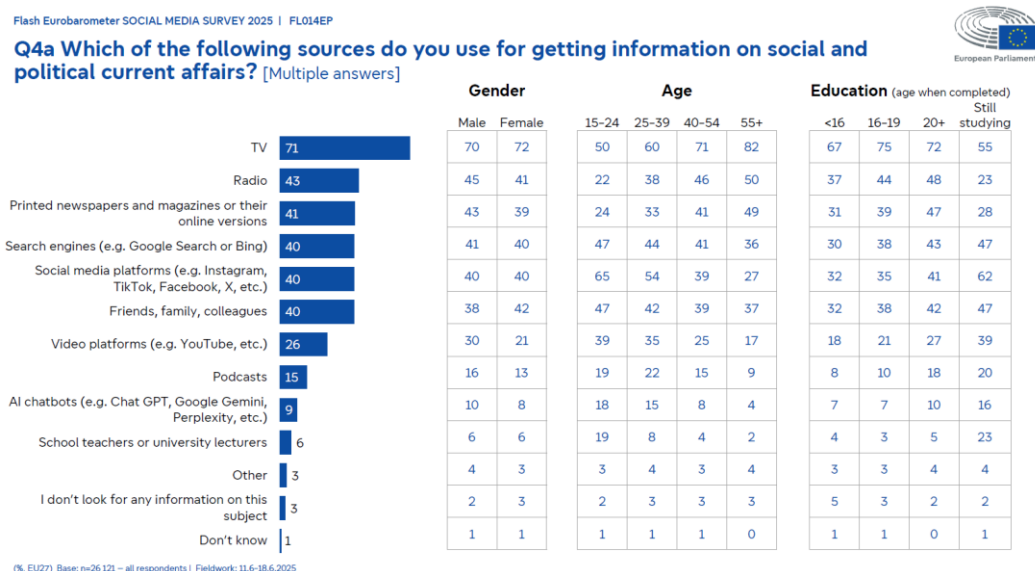
Image 4 demonstrates that in some European countries, social media rival television as a source of news (e.g., Poland) or even significantly surpass it (such as in Serbia and Greece).



**Image 4:** Sources of news in Europe: TV, any online source and social media; **Source:** RIDNR, 2025, interactive data

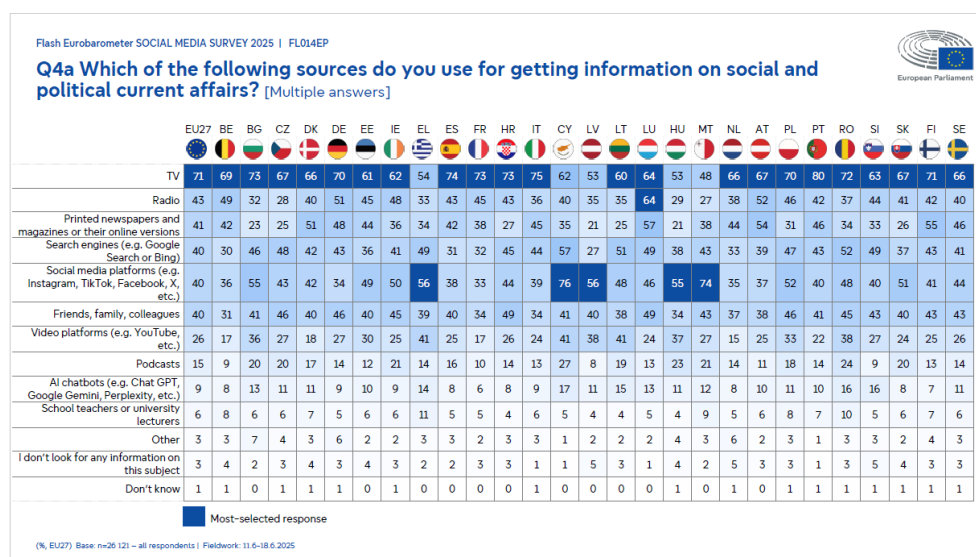


Research from the 2025 *Flash Eurobarometer Social Media Survey*, although based on a slightly differently framed survey question, also confirms the continued primacy of television as a news source in the European Union. At the same time, as indicated in **Image 5**, it reinforces the finding that social media are the leading source of news for the 15–24 age group.



**Image 5:** Source of information on social and political current affairs; **Source:** Flash Eurobarometer, 2025

A country-by-country breakdown confirms that trend. In some EU states, social media are increasingly taking over the role of the leading news source (Image 6).



**Image 6:** Source of information on social and political current affairs by countries; **Source:** Flash Eurobarometer, 2025

The well-established inclination of younger generations to use social media as a source of information is also confirmed by the 2024 *European Parliament Eurobarometer Youth Survey*.

According to this research, 42% of respondents aged 16 to 30 report getting information on social and political issues through social media (Image 7).

**Q7 From which of these sources do you get most of your information on political and social issues?** Please select up to three responses. [Multiple answers]



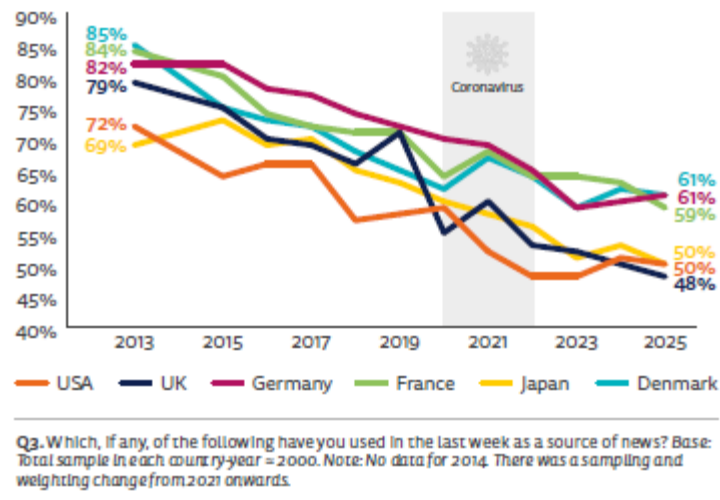
(%, EU27) Base: n=25 863 – all respondents

**Image 7:** Sources of news for young audiences in the European Union; **Source:** The European Parliament Eurobarometer Youth Survey, 2024

According to this survey, social media platforms are the most important source for information on political and social issues in 19 of the 27 EU Member States and they are the joint most-mentioned source in another four EU Member States. The share of young people relying on social media platform for most of their information on political and social issues ranges from 33% in Belgium and Romania to 49% in Spain and 51% in Denmark (EP Youth Survey, 2024, p. 27).

The argument that audiences are increasingly shifting from television to online and social media as the most important source of news is convincingly illustrated by data showing a systematic decline in television news consumption over the past decade. For example, as shown in Image 8, in France the proportion of people using television as a source of news has dropped from 84% in 2013 to 59% in 2025.

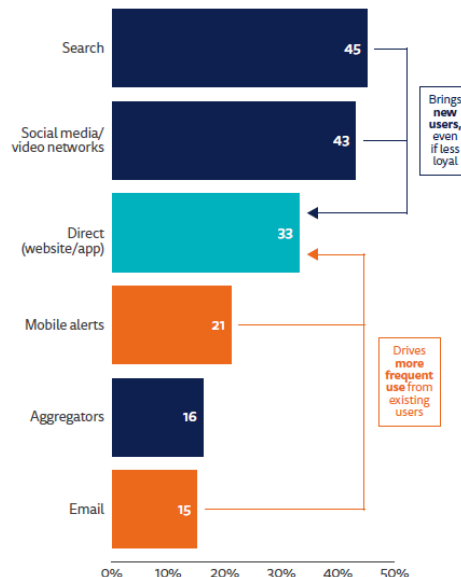
### PROPORTION THAT USED TELEVISION AS A SOURCE OF NEWS IN THE LAST WEEK (2013-2025) – SELECTED COUNTRIES



**Image 8:** Television as a source of news (2013-2015); **Source:** RIDNR, 2025, p. 13

Another relevant finding related to access to news is that the primary gateway to online news is now search engines and social media, rather than direct access to news websites (Image 9).

### PROPORTION THAT USED EACH NEWS GATEWAY IN THE LAST WEEK – ALL MARKETS



Q10. Thinking about how you got news online (via computer, mobile or any device) in the last week, which were the ways in which you came across news stories? Please select all that apply. Base: 97,055.

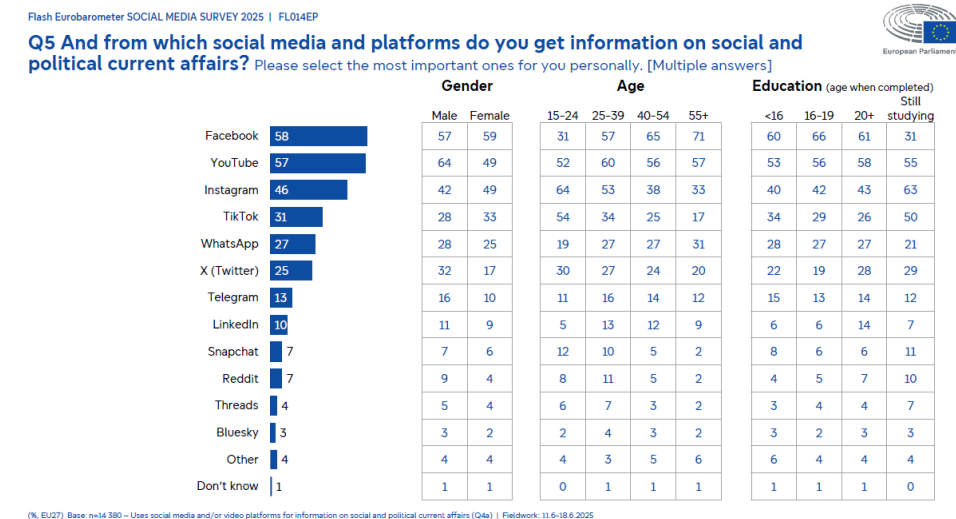
**Image 9:** Gateway to news; **Source:** RIDNR, 2025, p. 58

This raises important questions about news selection and audience exposure, since access to content is increasingly mediated by platform algorithms. Algorithmic curation, or the “personalisation” of content, can result in audiences being exposed to a narrower range of

viewpoints, potentially reinforcing existing beliefs and limiting encounters with diverse perspectives (e.g., Hartmann, 2025; Rice, 2020).

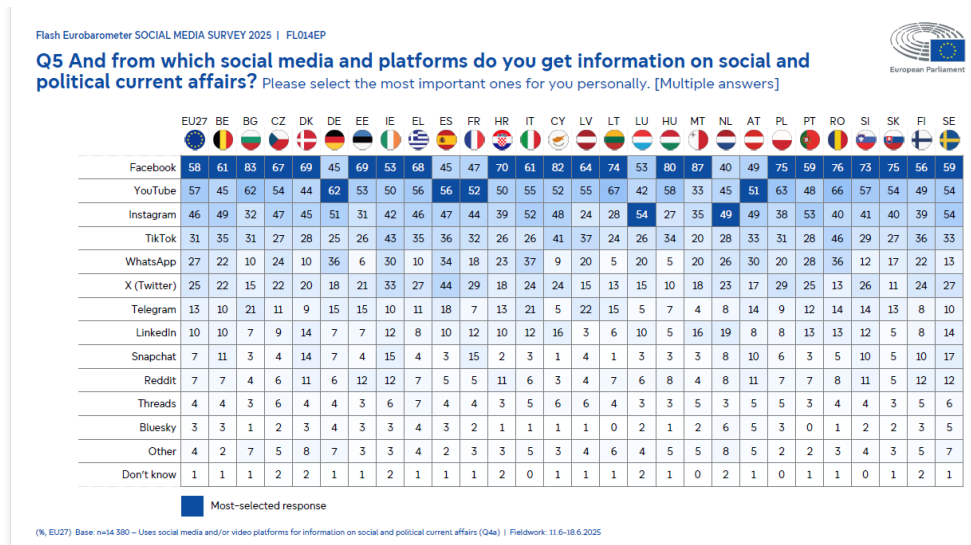
Furthermore, when looking more closely at news consumption on social media in the European Union countries, several pervasive trends become apparent. First, Facebook remains the number one social media platform for accessing information about social and political current affairs. Second, younger audiences clearly gravitate toward video-focused platforms. And third, audiences overwhelmingly prefer shorter formats over longer ones.

The 2025 *Flash Eurobarometer Social Media Survey* shows that audiences aged 15–24 primarily use Instagram, TikTok and YouTube for what is regarded as traditional news content, that is, all visual-first platforms. According to the same research, YouTube is also the most important online news channel for those aged 25–39 (Image 10).



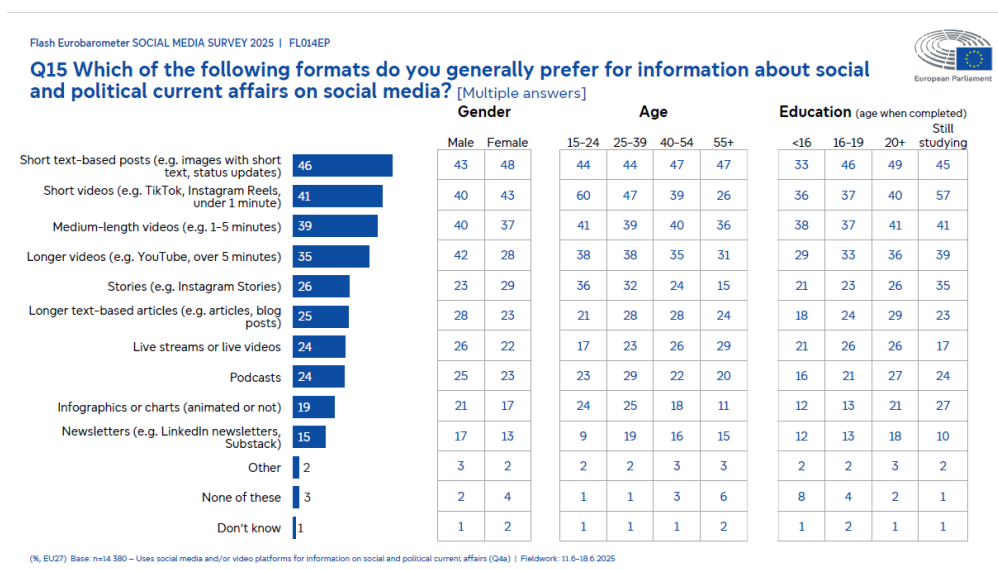
**Image 10:** Social media and platforms as source of news in the EU; **Source:** Flash Eurobarometer, 2025

Looking at the country-by-country breakdown in Image 11 for the general population in the European Union, it can be observed that Facebook largely dominates as the main platform for news consumption, with only a few exceptions where YouTube or Instagram take the lead.



**Image 11: Social media and platforms as source of news in the EU by countries; Source:** Flash Eurobarometer Social Media Survey, 2025

Video content, including news presented in video formats, is becoming increasingly important. TikTok is currently the fastest-growing social and video platform, according to the *Reuters Institute Digital News Report (2025)*. According to Statista, TikTok globally had 1.59 billion users at the beginning of 2025.<sup>20</sup> RIDNR further notes the rising importance of social video for news consumption: “Across all markets, the proportion consuming social video has grown from 52% in 2020 to 65% in 2025, and any video from 67% to 75%” (p. 10). These findings align with the results of the *Flash Eurobarometer Social Media Survey (2025)*. While the general population still shows a preference for short text posts when seeking information about social and political current affairs on social media, short videos are by far the preferred format among 15–24-year-olds. Short videos are also the most preferred format among the 25–39 age group, though the difference there is less pronounced (Image 12).

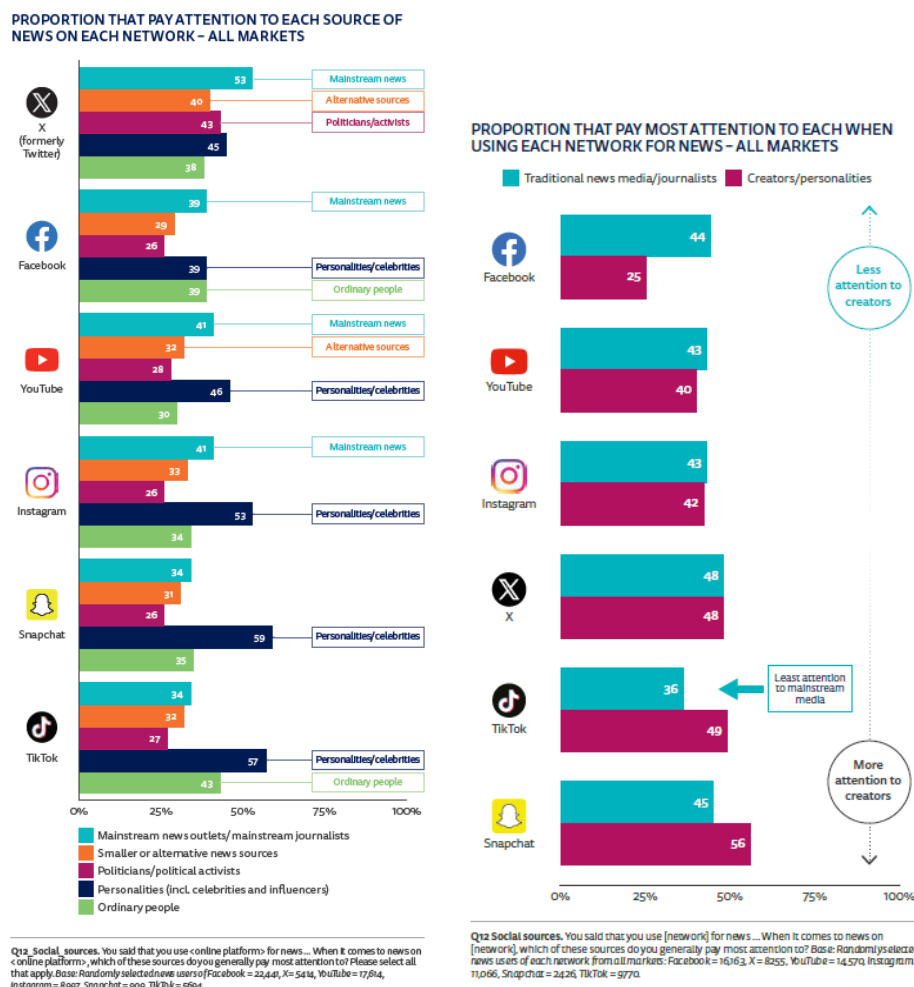


<sup>20</sup> <https://www.statista.com/forecasts/1142687/tiktok-users-worldwide>

**Image 12:** Preferred formats in the EU countries; **Source:** Flash Eurobarometer, 2025

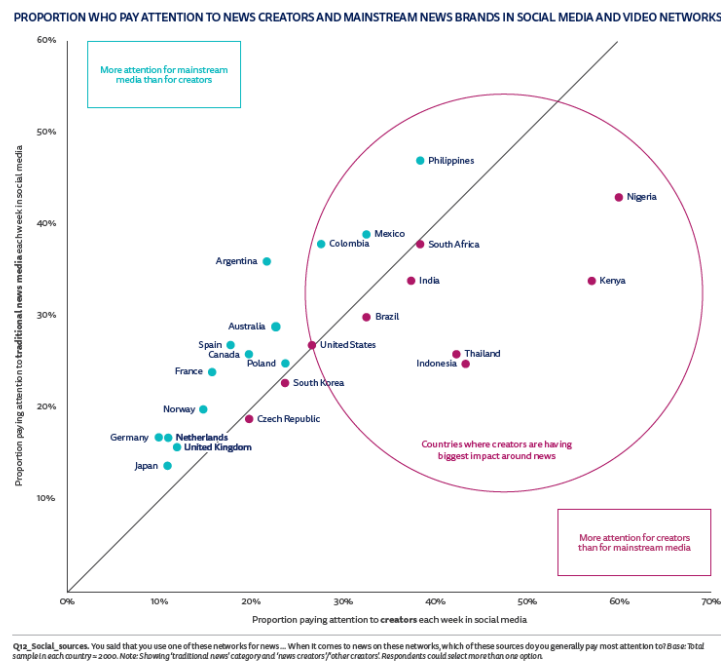
## The emergence of newsfluencers

According to Reuters, video networks such as YouTube and TikTok are driven by “creator-content and ‘must-see’ hits” (RIDNR, 2025, p. 17). On these and other social media platforms, distinct personalities have emerged who increasingly take on the role of news authorities, especially among younger users. As demonstrated earlier, all relevant research confirms that young audiences strongly gravitate toward visual social media for news: “For several years we have asked where people pay attention when using social networks and have found that mainstream media is at best challenged by – at worst losing out to – these online creators and personalities, even when it comes to news. This trend is evident again this time in data aggregated across all 48 markets” (RIDNR, 2025, p. 17). This trend was captured in 2024 Reuters Institute study and again in 2025. Both found that on platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and especially TikTok, the influence of influencers in the context of news has surpassed that of mainstream journalists and traditional news organizations (Image 13).



**Image 13:** News authorities on social media; **Source:** RIDNR, 2024, p. 53 (left) and 2025, p. 17 (right)

As multiple studies confirm, the newsfluencer shaped news landscape is particularly pronounced in the United States, where the political and media environments are deeply polarised (RIDNR, 2025), increasingly aligning with geographical areas where both widespread social media use and deep political polarisation have long shaped the information environment, as illustrated in Image 14.



**Image 14:** News creators and mainstream news brands on social media, **Source:** Newman et al, 2025, p. 12

Comprehensive research of the Pew Research Center (2024) on News Influencers in the USA has established that:

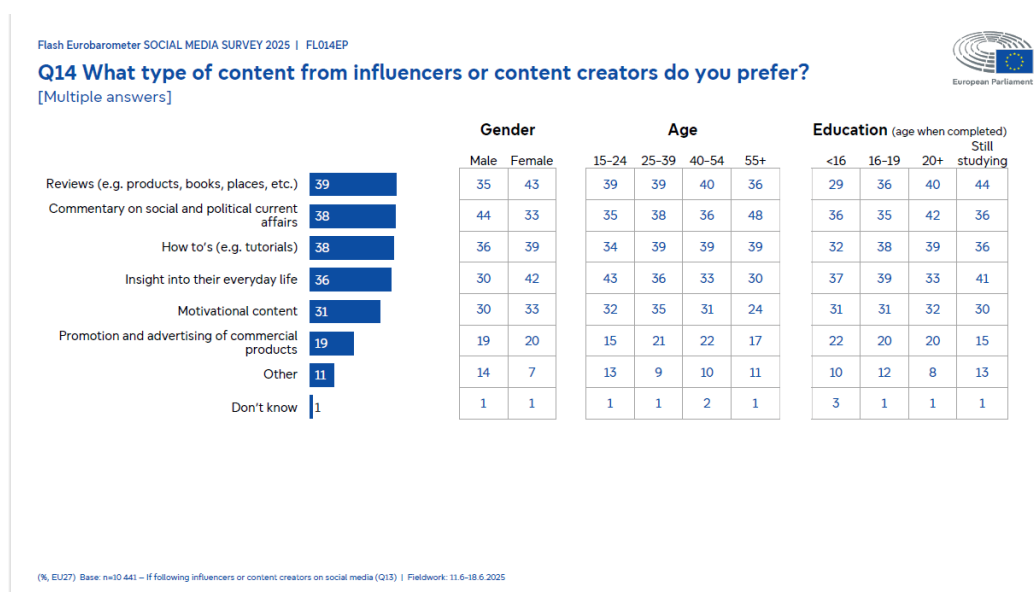
- Around one-fifth of U.S. adults report that they regularly obtain news from social media influencers, with the number rising to 37% for those under 30.
- News influencers are most heavily concentrated on X (formerly Twitter), but many also operate on additional platforms, including Instagram and YouTube.
- Slightly more influencers aligned themselves with Republican or conservative positions and pro-Donald Trump sentiments than with Democratic or liberal views and pro-Kamala Harris positions.
- Men constitute a clear majority of news influencers, representing 63% of the group.
- Most influencers report having no formal ties to, or previous experience within, professional news organizations.

This inclination towards news influencers and especially podcasters might have played a role in shaping the outcome of the 2024 U.S. presidential election (Fu, 2024).

Although in Europe the overall influence of newsfluencers, including podcasters, remains lower compared with traditional media, multiple strong online figures are also emerging in

Europe. Their reach and potentially, power to shape public opinion, increasingly match and, in some cases, even surpass those of established mainstream outlets. For instance, prominent YouTubers in Europe include Julian Reichelt, former editor of *Bild* in Germany; the young French creator Hugo Travers, known by his pseudonym *HugoDécrypte* and Dylan Page, aka *News Daddy*, from the UK. Reichelt runs a collective of right-wing YouTube commentators, similar to the Daily Wire in the United States, while Travers has built a widely popular media brand on YouTube and TikTok by explaining the news to younger audiences. The data suggest that his reach among audiences under 35 is now comparable to, or even greater than, that of many mainstream French news outlets (RIDNR, 2025, p. 13–14). The national RIDNR report for France notes that “the impressive success of explainers and formats like HugoDécrypte’s YouTube videos, reflects the strong desire, particularly among younger audiences, to be informed, but in a more relatable way” (Antheaume, 2025, p. 82). He has 7.7 million followers on TikTok as of December 2025. Dylan Page, aka *News Daddy*, has 17.9 million TikTok followers and one of the largest news accounts on the platform. Page, a young content creator with no formal background in journalism, has gained worldwide popularity among Gen Z by distilling news into fast-paced, relatable short-form videos.

According to the Flash Eurobarometer, reviews<sup>21</sup> are the preferred type of influencer content in the European Union countries, while commentary on current social and political issues ranks immediately after (Image 15). Among adults aged 55 and older, this type of content is the top preference, whereas for the 15–24 age group, it ranks third, following insights into influencers’ everyday lives and reviews.



**Image 15:** Interest in types of contents; **Source:** Flash Eurobarometer Social Media Survey, 2025

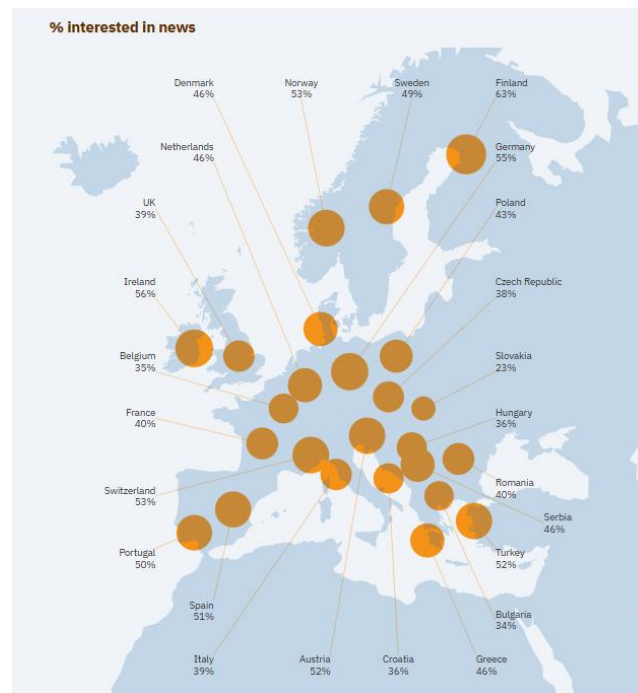
This finding is significant, as it highlights the importance of *authenticity* and *relatability* in news influencing, themes that will be examined in more detail in the following section.

<sup>21</sup> Content in which influencers share opinions, assessments, or experiences with products, books, places etc.



## News authorities, trust and influence

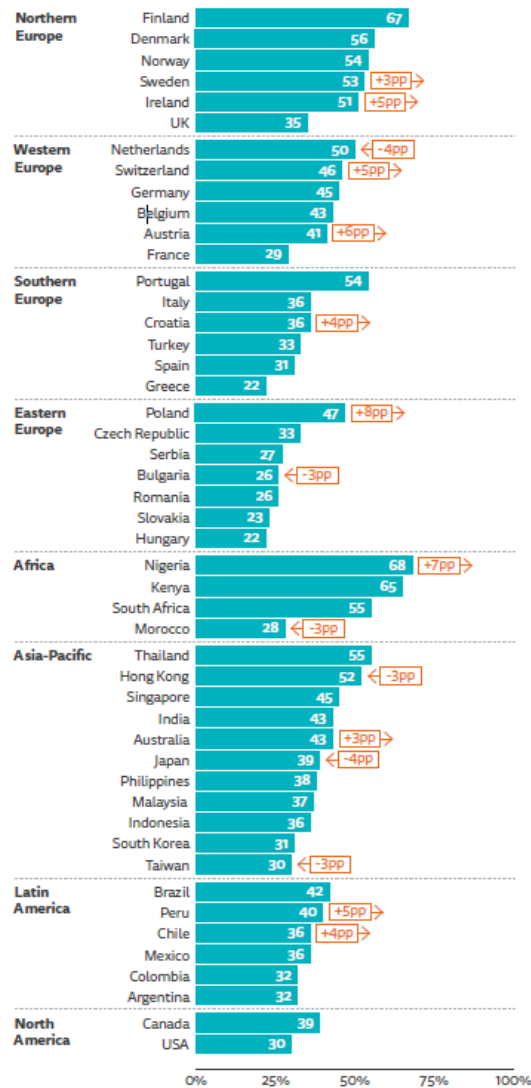
According to the *Reuters Institute Digital News Report*, interest in news is generally declining. In its 2024 report, RIDNR states the following: “For several years we have pointed to a number of measures that suggest growing ambivalence about the news, despite – or perhaps because of – the uncertain and chaotic times in which we live. (...) The long-term trend (...) is down in every country apart from Finland, with high interest halving in some countries over the last decade (UK 70% in 2015; 38% in 2024). Women and young people make up a significant proportion of that decline” (2024, p. 26). **Image 16** shows the level of interest in news in Europe in 2025 (RIDNR).



**Image 16:** Interest in News in Europe, **Source:** RIDNR, 2025, interactive data

Another variable indicating a growing distance between audiences and traditional media is *trust*. However, despite a clear decline over the last decade, the levels of trust in news across markets are currently stable at 40% (RIDNR, 2025, p. 25). However, looking at the European countries, there are significant differences at a national level. Finland reports one of the highest levels of trust in news (67%), while Hungary (22%), Greece (22%), and several other Eastern European countries show some of the lowest figures (Image 17).

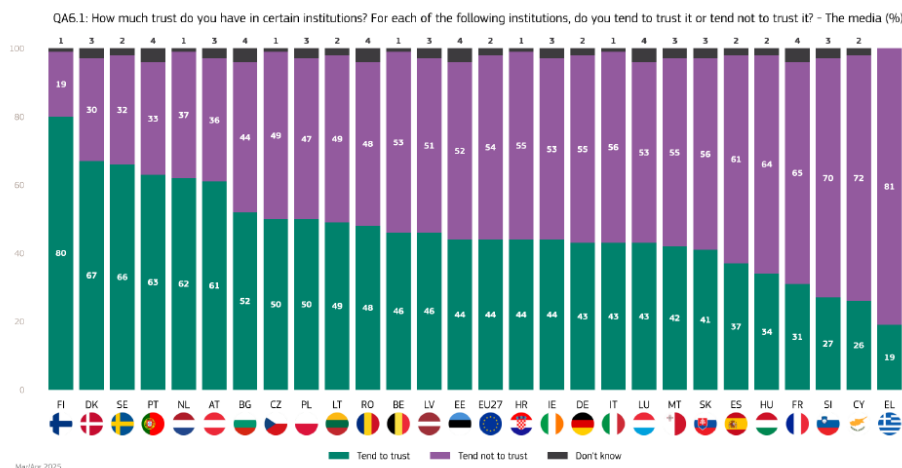
PROPORTION THAT TRUST MOST NEWS MOST OF THE TIME – ALL MARKETS



Q6\_2016\_1. Thinking about news in general, do you agree or disagree with the following statements?  
- I think you can trust most news most of the time. Base: Total sample in each market = 2000.

**Image 17: Trust in news; Source: RIDNR, 2025, p. 25**

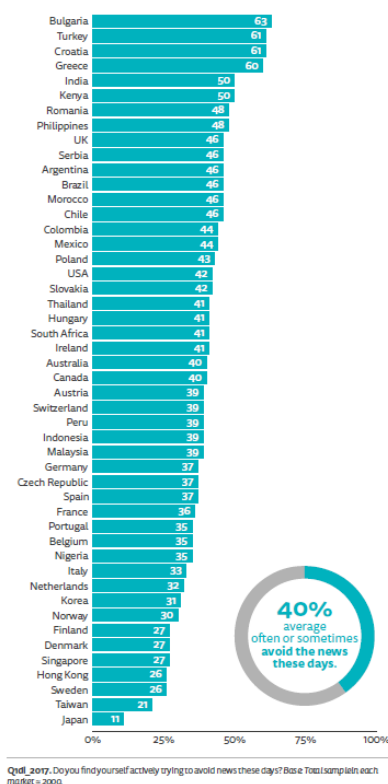
Similar variations and trends across European countries and EU member states are also captured by *Standard Eurobarometer*. Its Spring 2025 edition shows that trust in the media is by far the highest in Finland (80%) and the lowest in Greece (19%) (Image 18).



**Image 18:** Trust in media in EU; Source: Standard Eurobarometer Spring 2025, p. 78

It is important to note that the questions related to trust in these two instruments are framed differently. While RIDNR measures trust in “*most news most of the time*,” Eurobarometer assesses institutional trust in the media. Nevertheless, the broader trends emerging from these studies are largely consistent. The news avoidance variable, consistently measured by RIDNR, is closely linked to low engagement and low trust in the news. According to the 2025 report, four in ten respondents (40%) across the 48 markets analysed, confirm that they *sometimes* or *often* avoid the news, up from 29% in 2017, and matching the highest level ever recorded by the report, alongside 2024 (p. 27).

PROPORTION THAT SAY THEY SOMETIMES OR OFTEN AVOID THE NEWS – ALL MARKETS



**Image 19:** News avoidance; **Source:** RIDNR, 2025, p. 27

Here as well, a stark difference can be observed between Scandinavian countries where the rate of news avoidance is relatively low and several South and Eastern European countries, such as Bulgaria, Croatia and Greece, where news avoidance is exceptionally high. According to RIDNR, the main reasons why audiences avoid news include: the negative impact news has on their mood; feeling worn out by the sheer volume of information; excessive coverage of war and politics; a sense that they cannot do anything with the information; perceiving the arguments as irrelevant to their lives; and, particularly among younger audiences, that news is too difficult to understand (2025, p. 27).

The decline in interest in news, the erosion of trust in traditional media, the shift toward social media as a primary news source and the dominance of short visual formats among younger audiences, coupled with the growing influence of powerful online personalities, as summarised in the current document, should not be ignored. The Reuters Institute Digital News Report (2025) highlights these trends with a clear warning: “An accelerating shift towards consumption via social media and video platforms is further diminishing the influence of ‘institutional journalism’ and supercharging a fragmented alternative media environment containing an array of podcasters, YouTubers, and TikTokers. Populist politicians around the world are increasingly able to bypass traditional journalism in favour of friendly partisan media, ‘personalities’, and ‘influencers’ who often get special access but rarely ask difficult questions, with many implicated in spreading false narratives or worse” (RIDNR, 2025, p. 10).

For example, the country reports warn that, where trust in news and media is low, news avoidance is high, and social media are the main source of news, particularly among younger audiences, these trends create space for extremist content to gain visibility and influence” (see the case for Greece, in Kalogeropoulos, 2025, p. 86).

Moreover, audiences in multiple markets identify online influencers and personalities as one of the most significant potential sources of mis- and disinformation: “When it comes to underlying sources of false or misleading information, online influencers and personalities are seen as the biggest threat worldwide (47%), along with national politicians (47%). Concern about influencers is highest in African countries such as Nigeria (58%) and Kenya (59%), while politicians are considered the biggest threat in the United States (57%), Spain (57%), and much of Eastern Europe” (RIDNR, 2025, p.11).

In the context of concerns about newsfluencers as creators and spreaders of disinformation narratives, it is worth noting that numerous international organisations have raised alarms about the shift toward social media as a primary news source. For example, the World Economic Forum (WEF), in its *Global Risks Report 2025*, states that “misinformation and disinformation” remain the foremost short-to-medium-term global threat, for the second consecutive year. The report highlights risks such as artificially generated false content and a growing erosion of public trust in institutions.<sup>22</sup>

The trends outlined above illustrate a significant reconfiguration of the news and information ecosystem, characterised by evolving dynamics among traditional journalism, digital platforms, and newsfluencers. Audiences, and particularly younger demographics, are

---

<sup>22</sup> [https://reports.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_Global\\_Risks\\_Report\\_2025.pdf](https://reports.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Global_Risks_Report_2025.pdf)

increasingly shifting their attention away from traditional journalism toward the latter two, favouring formats that are direct, personal, and highly engaging. These new actors, however, largely operate without the transparency and accountability standards that underpin professional journalism, creating an asymmetry between their influence and their responsibilities.

Experts typically highlight professional standards and ethical principles as the defining characteristics of journalism. While anyone can now produce occasional journalistic content, professional journalism remains a systematic process grounded in accumulated expertise, and should be driven by rigorous verification, and ethical norms. At the same time, journalism is an open profession, and restricting access would conflict with democratic principles that protect freedom of expression. Yet, when a wide range of actors contributing to public discourse are conflated with journalism, while operating under different standards and incentives, the implications for both journalism and democracy may be profound and long-lasting (Nenadić, 2025).

This reconfiguration of the public sphere raises pressing questions about authority, trust, and responsibility in democratic communication. If journalism no longer occupies a central position in the information order but instead competes with commercially driven global technology companies and unregulated influencers, the conditions for informed democratic deliberation may be fundamentally transformed. This is further complicated with the rapid developments in artificial intelligence (AI) and especially in the field of generative AI that is transforming content creation, online search, information gathering and opinion forming. Furthermore, it is endangering already disrupted economics of traditional media and the wider integrity of the information space (Nenadić, 2025, p. 6).

As noted and carefully analysed in the Council of Europe's Guidance Note on the Implications of Generative Artificial Intelligence for Freedom of Expression, Generative AI accelerates these dynamics by further fragmenting the information environment. Personalised outputs, hyper-targeted recommendations, and conversational chatbots create "audiences of one," isolating users and undermining the democratic need for a shared information space.<sup>23</sup> The economic dynamic between the large technology companies and the media has been damaging for the media, leading to what Nechushtai (2018) and Simon (2022) describe as "platform capture", where media outlets depend on large tech oligopolies for their audiences, advertising revenue, distribution and infrastructure. The OSCE Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media and the Forum on Information and Democracy, in their Policy Manual on Safeguarding Media Freedom in the Age of Big Tech Platforms and AI (2025) highlight that big technology companies, through their infrastructures and content management, shape opinion power and capture economic value from journalism, including to train and refine AI models without consent or compensation.

The evolving ecosystem highlights a fundamental tension: audiences are drawn to innovative, accessible, and personalised forms of news, while the institutional and ethical underpinnings of professional journalism are essential for ensuring accuracy, accountability, and public value.

---

<sup>23</sup> For more see the Council of Europe's Guidance Note on the Implications of Generative Artificial Intelligence for Freedom of Expression, Adopted by the Council of Europe Steering Committee on Media and Information Society (CDMSI) at its 28th Plenary meeting, 3-5 December 2025, <https://rm.coe.int/cdmsi-2025-15rev-guidance-note-on-the-implications-of-generative-artif/488029df80>

Addressing this tension and evolving dynamics requires not only media and information literacy initiatives but also regulatory and economic strategies to balance power, responsibility, sustainability and trust across the information landscape. The formats favoured by platforms and newsfluencers, short, engaging, and personalised, can be more effective at influencing opinions than traditional journalistic approaches. Yet, these dynamics are particularly risky in contexts where media and information literacy is uneven and where generative AI makes it increasingly difficult for individuals to assess the credibility and value of information.

This ambivalent status of newsfluencers, as well as their ambivalent relationship with journalism, has been highlighted in a recent survey by the European Federation of Journalists<sup>24</sup>. The survey reveals that journalists' organisations in European countries are divided over whether to recognise "news creators" as part of the journalistic profession. Among 26 affiliates from 22 countries, one-third have not yet adopted a formal position, one-third accept news creators if they meet professional and ethical criteria, and one-third reject them outright. Barriers to inclusion are largely statutory, including requirements related to press cards, income sources, bans on commercial activity, and adherence to professional codes. Several organisations, however, are experimenting with more flexible approaches. The Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia prioritises public-interest reporting over formal registration, while the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine and the Dutch journalists' union admit bloggers and influencers who follow ethical standards. The Danish journalists' union has gone further, integrating influencers into a dedicated structure with its own board and an independently enforced ethical code. Overall, the findings highlight both tensions and opportunities, as journalists and their professional associations and unions adapt to a shifting digital information landscape.

Publishers of traditional news outlets are also divided in their views on newsfluencers. *Reuters Institute and Oxford University study on Journalism and Technology Trends and Predictions* (Newman & Cherubini, 2025) based on a strategic sample of 326 digital leaders from 51 countries and territories, established that publishers are "in two minds about whether the trends towards influencers and creators is good or bad for journalism. Around a quarter (27%) take a negative view, worrying that institutional news reporting could get squeezed out, but others (28%) are more positive, feeling that there is much that news organisations can learn in terms of storytelling creativity and building communities".

### **The influence of political influencers and newsfluencers**

Measuring media effects, including the effects on public opinion, represents one of the most important segments of media and communication studies, but at the same time, one of the most demanding. Research approaches and empirical evidence regarding the actual intensity and nature of media influence are so ambiguous that one of the field's iconic scholars, Larry Bartels, described the state of research on media effects as "one of the most notable embarrassments of modern social science" (1993, p. 267). In light of the complexity of such research and the diversity of social media influence in different contexts, it is not surprising that empirical evidence on the nature of the impact exerted by political influencers and newsfluencers significantly lags behind the pervasiveness of the phenomenon itself. This

---

<sup>24</sup> <https://europeanjournalists.org/blog/2026/02/11/journalists-organisations-are-increasingly-engaging-with-news-creators-though-ethical-concerns-remain-high-new-efj-survey-finds/>

pervasiveness is most visibly reflected in the structural transformations of information ecosystems, including the previously described shift in news sources and news authorities.

The impact of social media influencers (SMIs) on brands has been extensively researched; however, whether this influence also extends to politics, has not yet been sufficiently examined (Naderer, 2023). Available research on the influence of SMIs and OPIs on different aspects of public opinion suggests that their effects may operate in multiple directions: a) SMI news content may contribute to overall trust in news (Wasike, 2026); b) influencers may shape opinions on various issues, particularly among young audiences (Peter & Muth, 2023); c) they may influence voting decisions (Rasheed, 2025; Schwemmer, 2025); d) they may foster political socialization (Venus et al., 2025); e) they may encourage political participation (Naderer, 2023); and f) influencers may embolden political polarisation (Betts et al., 2026). Despite some of the evidence of the influencers' political impact, research on the role of social media influencers, online political influencers – and especially newsfluencers – in shaping public opinion remains extremely limited and very context-dependent.

### **Opportunities and risks of newsfluencers as emerging news authorities**

News influencers, whether conceptualised as *newsfluencers* or a subgroup of *political influencers*, have become increasingly central actors in today's information ecosystem. Their rise offers important democratic opportunities, but also introduces significant risks tied to disinformation, radicalisation, polarisation, democratic backsliding and structural pressures of platform capitalism in which dynamic and provocative formats and content usually performs better in terms of reach and monetisation.

Scholarship on social media influencers (SMIs), political influencers, online political influencers (OPIs), digital opinion leaders, and newsfluencers, as well as the comprehensive reports on which this analysis draws, all point to several key opportunities and risks.

### **Key opportunities**

#### *Mobilising disengaged: fostering participation and civic engagement*

One of the most referenced opportunities is the ability of influencers to mobilize disengaged citizens, especially younger people who are increasingly distancing themselves from traditional journalism. Research shows that exposure to online political influencers correlates with higher levels of participation, including voting: followers of online political influencers are “more likely to engage via existing channels of political influence” (Gibson et al., 2023, p. 183). Schmuck et al. (2023) argue that influencers simplify political content, making politics more appealing and easier to understand for young voters. The previously mentioned *Fidias factor* (p. 26) is an illustrative example of this effect. Influencers' content is attractive because it is relatable, participatory, and rooted in perceived authenticity.<sup>25</sup> As Hurcombe (2024, p.1) notes, newsfluencers build parasocial intimacy and “make journalism more accessible to young audiences” by operating through influencer culture and platform-native formats. Similarly, Wasike (2025, p.1) demonstrates that influencers can increase trust in the news media rather than diminish it, because authenticity and parasocial interaction drive credibility: “consuming

---

<sup>25</sup> For detailed accounts of *authenticity* as one of the central discourses of the contemporary communication ecosystem and political communication, see Luebke (2021) and Enli (2025).

SMI-based news and information increased news media trust among followers, suggesting that SMIs play a complimentary rather than a disruptive role regarding news media trust". This supports the argument that influencers offer a new entry point into civic engagement, vital at a time of widespread news avoidance and declining institutional trust.

### *Enabling plurality of views and democratisation of public sphere*

Potential opportunities also include the democratisation of the public sphere, by incorporating a broader range of voices and enabling new forms of representation. In this context, it is particularly important to emphasize the role of newsfluencers in non-democratic or illiberal systems, where they often represent one of the few, or even the only critical voice. Finally, newsfluencers' entrepreneurial practices (platform economy, subscriptions, fandom-based followship) may provide model for independent and freelance journalism.

## **Major risks**

### *Facilitating and amplifying disinformation, conspiracy beliefs and extremist narratives*

However, these same traits also constitute major risks. Strong parasocial bonds may amplify disinformation and extremist narratives when influencers share false or misleading content. Gibson et al. study on democratic deconsolidation warns that higher exposure to OPIs correlates with "views that run counter to mainstream public opinion", including conspiracy beliefs (2023, p. 183).

### *Undermining the influence and sustainability of traditional journalists*

Influencers are not bound by journalism's ethical obligations, like accuracy and balance, making credibility highly personalised and fragile. These double standards contribute to increasing precariousness among professional journalists working in traditional media (Wasike, 2025).

### *Platform-based news ecosystem driven by sensationalism, not public interest*

There are also structural risks tied to platformisation. Hurcombe (2024) emphasises how newsfluencers are embedded in platform logics and insecure entrepreneurial monetisation models. This may encourage sensationalism, trending topics, and conflict-driven engagement. The influencer ecosystem is shaped by monetisation and self-branding logic rather than public interest journalism.

### *Gender-related risks*

Finally, it is important to highlight gender-related risks: two comprehensive studies of influencers, one from the *Pew Research Center* pertaining to the USA and the global report from the *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism*, found that the vast majority of influencers are men. This is particularly important in the context of discussions on the rise of the so-called *manosphere* and its destructive effects on liberal values (e.g., Van Valkenburgh, 2021).

## **Ambivalent power**



Taken together, the literature shows that social media influencers in general and newsinfluencers in particular, are not inherently harmful or beneficial; they are ambivalent democratic actors. They broaden access to news/current affairs and political information and may revitalise participation among groups underserved by traditional media. On the other hand, they also challenge existing professional journalistic safeguards, risk accelerating disinformation spread, and may weaken trust in journalism if they become the arbiters of truth in a platform-driven news environment.

In short, the power of newsfluencers lies in the same qualities that make them risky: authenticity, para-social connection with audiences, and independence from institutional editorial oversight. This ambivalence underscores the urgency of researching and addressing their role as emerging news authorities in contemporary democracy. Table 1 summarises these potential opportunities and risks.

**Table 1:** Opportunities and risks of newsfluencers

|                                | <b>Opportunities</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <b>Risks</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Audience-level effects</b>  | <p>Increase political engagement and turnout, especially among disengaged and younger citizens.</p> <p>Improve accessibility and relatability of news content for youth.</p> <p>Parasocial interaction and self-congruence increase trust in news via influencers.</p> <p>Stronger connection with information source – stronger motivation for engagement.</p> | <p>Audience judgment based on parasocial relations and personal relatability rather than journalistic standards.</p> <p>Vulnerability to biased cognitive shortcuts in political judgment.</p> <p>Encourage low-effort participation and superficial understanding.</p> <p>Exposure to social media influencers (SMIs) linked to belief in conspiracy theories and radical views.</p> |
| <b>Media ecosystem effects</b> | <p>Diversify public sphere by introducing alternative voices and perspectives.</p> <p>Newsfluencers may represent unique critical voices in illiberal and non-democratic regimes where media pluralism and journalistic freedoms are under threat.</p>                                                                                                          | <p>Platform logic may incentivize sensationalism, hate speech and polarization.</p> <p>Weak institutional and professional safeguards may result in accelerated spread of disinformation narratives.</p> <p>Potential to accelerate political polarisation and democratic backsliding.</p>                                                                                            |

|  |                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|--|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | Expanded reach for independent and freelance journalism, including new revenue models. | <p>Contribution to debasement of traditional media and institutional journalism.</p> <p>The structural precarity surrounding newsfluencers complicates assessments of professional credibility.</p> <p>Gender-related risks.</p> |
|--|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

### Regulation in comparison: developments and challenges

Policymakers are increasingly aware of the significance and potentially great impact of newsfluencers. However, versatility of these actors, who range from ordinary individuals with no professional background to established businesses, and who operate across domains from lifestyle promotion to news and political marketing, makes them a challenging development to regulate. The phenomenon is not easy to compartmentalise for policy purpose as it cuts across various policy areas, and the activities of influencers can evolve and change over time. Various instruments are, therefore, being developed to make this activity more transparent and accountable. They range from self-regulation to regulation and include various policy areas such as consumer protection and competition law, data protection, intellectual property, financial law and taxation, media law, and regulation of political advertising and electoral communication.

There are a considerable regulatory fragmentation and lack of conceptual clarity for policy purposes. Most rules are being introduced at the national level, with countries taking diverse approaches. Some focus on influencers primarily as actors within the commercial marketing system, while others view them as important contributors to public opinion and address them in the context of media and communication laws. In general, regulation and self-regulation is more readily focusing on content creators engaged in marketing and product promotion than on newsfluencers (European Audiovisual Observatory, 2024). Recently, however, as demonstrated in previous sections, attention has been shifting toward political influencers and newsfluencers, who operate at the intersection of digital opinion-making and contemporary political campaigning. This regulatory pathway is not surprising as it follows the evolution of influencers from lifestyle and entertainment to news and political sphere (Riedl et al. 2021).

Regulating activity of political influencers and newsfluencers is way more complex than regulating their engagement in commercial marketing. Extending media regulation to newsfluencers may increase their accountability, but it requires a careful balance and thorough consideration of proportionality and freedom-of-expression rights. Any such regulation should also take into account the specific differences between influencers and traditional media or journalism, so as not to worsen the existing risks to the visibility and viability of journalistic content in the digital sphere (Kerševan, 2025). This concern is particularly relevant when journalistic work relies on costly investigations and in-depth analysis, while influencer content is often based primarily on less costly commentary, although such a simplified distinction is not always applicable.

### *Defining newsfluencers for policy and legislation*

The main policy challenge remains determining who qualifies as an influencer under various policy frameworks, in order to clearly establish their corresponding rights and responsibilities. Neves (2025) suggests an approach where an overarching definition is broad enough as to encompass the full scope of influence, from commercial to political and micro-influence, while obligations should follow a tiered model: for instance, considering the influence through reach, but also the area of activity (e.g. political) and the moment in which it takes place (e.g. elections).

There is no Council of Europe-wide definition of influencers, and within the European Union the term varies across regulatory instruments and national frameworks. A study for the European Parliament's Committee on Internal Market and Consumer Protection (Michaelsen, F., Collini, L. et al., 2022) derived the following definition: "a content creator with a commercial intent, who builds trust- and authenticity-based relationships with their audience (mainly on social media platforms) and engages online with commercial actors through different business models for monetisation purposes". For the purposes of its conclusions on supporting influencers as content creators, the EU Council defined influencers as "online content creators who post content on social media or video-sharing platforms through which they impact society, public opinion and the personal views of their audience, often showcased through their authenticity-based relationship with their audience" (OJ C/2024/3807). These two definitions illustrate how the concept changes depending on the policy context and specific focus, potentially omitting important aspects of the phenomenon.

As shown below, in both European Union and national-level regulations, the definition of an influencer is often tied to the number of followers they have. Within the framework of media law or comparable regulations, the thresholds for followers vary significantly. For example, under Slovenia's new Media Act, a person must have at least 10,000 followers (subscribers, or similar) to qualify as an influencer, whereas in the Netherlands and Italy this threshold rises to 500,000 (AGCOM, 2025; The Dutch Media Authority, 2022). It is not clear which criteria are used to establish these thresholds. For example, in the case of these three countries, the populations vary significantly - from 2 million in Slovenia to 18 million in the Netherlands, and 58 million in Italy.

UNESCO's first global study on the practices and challenges of content creators (Ha, 2024) used a threshold of 1,000 followers, which they defined as the minimum for "nano-influencers." Their survey of 500 content creators from 45 countries found that a majority (59%) were either unfamiliar with or had only heard of regulatory frameworks and international standards related to digital communications. Almost half reported having partial knowledge of laws concerning freedom of expression, defamation, and copyright, but did not consider themselves fully informed. UNESCO has highlighted this low level of knowledge and understanding of relevant rights and regulations as a concern, especially given the role influencers play in contemporary information spaces.

In relation to the definition of influencers - and consequently the scope of evolving policy and regulatory initiatives - it is important to note that current legal and policy definitions largely exclude AI-generated 'virtual influencers' and other non-human personas (Neves, 2025). Furthermore, newsfluencers are increasingly difficult to distinguish from journalists who

successfully use online platforms, especially as traditional approaches in defining journalists through affiliation with established media outlets no longer hold. Some journalists are even leaving their organisations to work as one-person operations (essentially becoming newsfluencers), while some media outlets are integrating newsfluencers into their programmes<sup>26</sup>.

The European Court of Human Rights has consistently held in its case-law that online content creators who engage in public-interest communication may be treated as “public watchdogs,” enjoying Article 10 protection as long as they fulfil the duties and responsibilities traditionally associated with journalism.<sup>27</sup>

Building on this *acquis*, Recommendation CM/Rec(2026)4 on online safety and the empowerment of users and content creators is the first attempt to define the category of “content creators” and to set out general principles regarding both their protection and responsibilities. The definition of “content creator” is intentionally broad, encompassing any user who creates and disseminates content on platforms regularly or professionally, with the intention of reaching an audience beyond their private circle (para. 11, 2nd indent).

The Recommendation makes clear that, while all content creators have responsibilities towards their audience and other users, the nature and extent of these responsibilities may vary according to factors such as the nature and purpose of the content, the size and composition of the audience, and the professional standing of the content creator (para. 30). In particular, the Recommendation seeks to address the accountability gap that “newsfluencers” may face or exploit. It specifically identifies “content creators who exercise editorial responsibility over the content they produce and disseminate, and whose main purpose is to inform the public or influence opinion on current events and matters of public interest” as a distinct category: this is the definition that most closely aligned with the concept “newsfluencers” under Council of Europe standards.

On this basis, the Recommendation spells out a set of specific responsibilities, including “upholding the principles of journalism, regardless of reach, legal form, or characterisation as a journalist under domestic law,” as well as ensuring transparency about ownership, financing, and monetisation mechanisms (para. 31). Without prejudice to existing professional duties and any legal obligations that certain categories of content creators may already have, the Recommendation calls on states to encourage the development and promotion of transparent, inclusive, and human rights-based self-regulatory frameworks for those content creators for whom such mechanisms do not yet exist. These frameworks should support content creators in upholding ethical and professional standards, improving the quality and trustworthiness of content, and fostering their empowerment and accountability (para. 53).

In policy and legal frameworks, definitions have critical importance, as they determine inclusion or exclusion from specific rights and privileges, as well as corresponding obligations, responsibilities, and potential liabilities. An overly broad definition, in which various actors are labelled as media or journalism, risks diluting the core notion of media and journalism (Nenadić, 2025).

---

<sup>26</sup> <https://cnnpressroom.blogs.cnn.com/2025/10/13/cnn-international-announces-all-new-multiplatform-show-cnn-creators/>

<sup>27</sup> See: *Magyar Helsinki Bizottság v. Hungary* [GC], 2016; *Bielau v. Austria* (no. 20007/22, 27 August 2024)

## **Political influencers and newsfluencers in European Union law and policy**

When focusing on the commercial dimension of influencers' activities, the EU has considerable competencies in consumer protection and has in place a range of instruments that provide a framework for regulating influencer advertising. As elaborated by Michaelsen et al. (2022), the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive, for instance, provides the overall framework on practices infringing consumer protection rules, and can be applied to address misleading advertising in influencer practices. However, influencers are not merely market actors. They increasingly play a significant role in the informational and news environment. As such, they have become a focus of policy instruments and regulations that aim to ensure greater transparency and accountability among the various actors in the digital information space. EU regulation in the area of digital services and activities is evolving in an interconnected manner, with different instruments building on one another. Many of these regulations may apply to influencers, but only the 2024 Regulation on the Transparency and Targeting of Political Advertising (TTPA) refers to influencers explicitly, and even then, only in a recital. The very first recital highlights the increasing fluidity and diversification of political advertising, which now takes many forms, techniques, and involves a growing number of actors, including influencers.

As a regulation, TTPA is directly applicable across the EU member states. It expands the notion of political advertising to include also issue based advertising that may not be explicit in promoting a candidate or a party or undermining them but is designed to influence the voting behaviour through a more subtle issue-based campaigns. TTPA also expands the legal definition of political actors in that context, as well as of political advertising publisher. Further to a political party, a candidate, or a campaign organisation, the Regulation (Art. 3(4)(g)) "considers as a political actor in the context of political advertising any natural or legal person representing or acting on behalf of typical political actors, and promoting the political objectives of any of those persons or organisations".

The TTPA applies to influencers when they provide political advertising as defined by the Regulation. It imposes obligations on influencers to include specific labels and other required information in their political advertisements, and online platform providers must enable these disclosures. The Regulation also affects how influencers can disseminate such content. More specifically, online platforms must align their political advertising policies with the TTPA, thereby shaping the conditions under which influencers may engage in political advertising.

If platforms choose to ban political advertising, as many already have, and others have announced in response to the Regulation, influencers will be unable to carry out such activities on those platforms (at least not in compliance with platform policies). Where political advertising is permitted, influencers acting as political advertising publishers must comply with labelling requirements: clearly indicating political ads, identifying their sponsor and any controlling entity, specifying any related electoral or policymaking process, disclosing any targeting or ad-delivery techniques used, and providing (or linking to) the required transparency notice, which includes additional details and financial information. If there will be a wide ban of paid political advertising on online platforms in the EU, as a response to this regulation, the role of political or newsfluencers who engage in electoral speech without direct in kind or monetary remuneration, or any compensation to that end, will become even more

relevant. And it will be important to observe if other, more covert or indirect forms of online political influencing emerge.

The European Media Freedom Act (Regulation (EU) 2024/1083) and the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (Directive (EU) 2018/1808) both can apply to influencers when their activities qualify as audiovisual media services or when they themselves meet the definition of media service providers. While these are different legal instruments of the EU, both allow for national approaches and definitions of audiovisual media services and media service providers. When influencers fall under those definitions, they are required to meet the criteria of ownership transparency, transparency and fairness in audiovisual commercial communications and the protection of minors and other vulnerable groups against potentially harmful content. The EMFA also provides special treatment for media service providers in content moderation by Very Large Online Platforms<sup>28</sup> (Art. 18), while the AVMSD, by imposing specific rules for audiovisual content on video-sharing platforms, shapes how influencers operate on those platforms.

Although many EU member states' laws allow influencers to be classified as (audiovisual) media service providers under certain conditions, there is currently no consistent regulation of influencers across the EU-27. National regulatory authorities either assess influencers on a case-by-case basis or apply specific thresholds, meaning not all influencers automatically fall under obligations for (audiovisual) media (European Audiovisual Observatory, 2024).

The Digital Services Act (DSA) is another EU regulation that introduces harmonised rules and obligations, primarily for Very Large Online Platforms (VLOPs) and Very Large Online Search Engines (VLOSEs), which are the key distribution and engagement channels for influencers. It requires these providers to regularly assess how the design and use of their services may contribute to systemic risks, including the spread of illegal content, disinformation, and distortions of public discourse (particularly ahead of elections), as well as content harmful to minors and other vulnerable groups, and it also sets rules on advertising transparency. These provisions shape how influencers operate within online platforms.

The Artificial Intelligence Act, as noted by the Council of the EU (C/2024/3807), requires influencers who use AI in their production processes to refrain from certain prohibited AI practices, to inform their audiences when they are interacting with an AI system, and to clearly label any deepfakes. If they process personal data in their work, they must also comply with the General Data Protection Regulation. In addition, the EU has announced the Digital Fairness Act, which aims to address unethical techniques and commercial practices, including manipulative interface design (dark patterns), misleading marketing by influencers, addictive design features in digital products, and online profiling, particularly where such practices exploit consumer vulnerabilities.

## **National regulation of influencers**

Influencers are increasingly regulated for their commercial activities and are beginning to be recognised as a form of media, or at least as relevant actors within media law, particularly those who reach a significant audience. The approaches differ across the EU (European

---

<sup>28</sup> The concept is established under the Digital Services Act and applies to online platforms that reach 10% of the EU population as monthly users, or 45 million monthly users or above.

Audiovisual Observatory, 2024), as governments are searching for solutions that can balance the right to freedom of expression with the need to ensure “accountability in a post-media environment” (Kerševan, 2025).

France was among the first countries to adopt a specific law (France’s Influencer Law, Loi n° 2023-451, 2023<sup>29</sup>) addressing the negative impact of influencer marketing on consumers, following a series of high-profile scandals and an analysis by the French consumer protection authority, which found that 60% of investigated influencers failed to comply with advertising disclosure rules (Aade & Goanta, 2025). The law (Art. 1) defines influencers as “[n]atural or legal persons who, in exchange for payment, use their reputation with their audience to communicate to the public, by electronic means, content intended to promote, directly or indirectly, goods, services, or any kind of cause are considered to be engaged in commercial influence activity by electronic means”. It mandates transparency and advertising disclosures, introduces special safeguards for minors, and prohibits promotion of certain products and services, such as financial services and aesthetic surgery. While the law is often cited as a pioneering attempt to regulate commercial influencer activity, it is also criticized for duplicating existing norms. Aade and Goanta (2025) caution that it may increase legal complexity without improving enforcement, as it relies on the “incorrect assumption that simply because a law does not explicitly refer to influencers, there is no law covering influencers”.

A 2024 study published by the European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe)<sup>30</sup>, at the request of the European Commission, provides a comprehensive overview of rules applicable to influencers in the EU-27, Norway, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. As the study notes, whether the concept is explicitly defined and established in law or not, influencers are regulated as audiovisual media service (AVMS) providers in most countries, in addition to being regulated under consumer protection laws.

There are two countries that include influencers explicitly in their media laws – Spain and Slovenia. In transposing the Audiovisual Media Services Directive, Spain’s General Audiovisual Communication Law (Law No. 13/2022 of 7 July 2022) introduced a definition of “users of special relevance” (usuarios de especial relevancia – USR, Art. 94), which corresponds to influencers meeting specific criteria, including gross yearly income (EUR 300,000 or more), audience size (at least 1 million followers on a single video-sharing platform, or at least 2 million followers cumulatively across multiple platforms), and posting frequency (24 videos per year or more). Influencers classified as USRs are treated as audiovisual media service providers and must register with the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Digital Transformation, which supervises the register in cooperation with Spain’s media regulator, the CNMC (European Audiovisual Observatory, 2024).

Slovenia included influencers in the new Media Act<sup>31</sup>, adopted in September 2025, within the framework of compliance with the European Media Freedom Act. Influencers are not equated with the media but rather introduced within the media law as a new regulatory category (Kerševan, 2025), and defined as content creators on large platforms with at least 10,000

---

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000047663185>

<sup>30</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/national-rules-applicable-to-influencers/1680b5540c>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.uradni-list.si/glasilo-uradni-list-rs/vsebina/2025-01-2460>

followers who regularly publish and monetise content with the explicit aim of shaping public or individual opinion.

In Italy and the Netherlands, the definitions and operation conditions have been developed and overseen by the media regulatory authorities. The Authority for Communications AGCOM is regulating influencers in Italy through Resolution 197/2025<sup>32</sup>, which introduces a mandatory professional register for “relevant influencers” (those with 500,000 followers or 1 million monthly views). Further to imposing obligations of transparency, clear labelling of advertising, a ban on covert advertising, protections for minors, and financial penalties for violations, it also treats them as audiovisual media service providers in terms of editorial responsibility and requires their registration in a public list on the AGCOM website.

In the Netherlands, the media authority (Commissariaat voor de Media – CvdM) developed specific Policy Rule on the Qualification of On-Demand Media Services (2022)<sup>33</sup>, which defines the criteria for when influencers may be considered media service providers. The authority focuses on YouTube, Instagram and TikTok, as “the most socially relevant players on the market”, and considers influencers who have 500,000 or more followers or subscribers (mass media nature and impact), earn income from their activity, and have posted at least 24 videos in the past 12 months. If all criteria are met, the video uploader must register their media service with the CvdM.

## **Codes of conduct for newsfluencers**

### *Self-regulation*

As noted by the European Audiovisual Observatory (2024), advertising self-regulatory organisations have been highly active in producing guidelines for influencers to promote integrity in their commercial activities. The analysis showed availability of guidelines on influencer marketing in 22 countries in Europe, largely being produced by (or with the involvement of) associations in digital marketing and advertising.

Far less attention has been given to political and newsfluencers, with only a few guidelines developed to enhance their accountability. One example is the Aspen Institute in Germany, which developed an Ethical Code of Conduct for Social Media Influencers and Content Creators.<sup>34</sup> The Code outlines practices and commitments aimed at raising awareness of influencers’ roles in information manipulation and empowering them to support and strengthen the integrity of the information sphere. It was developed by a group of 15 politically engaged micro-influencers and content creators from the Czech Republic, Germany, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Ukraine, as noted by the initiative.

### *Regulation by public authorities*

Media regulatory authorities are also increasingly engaging in producing and promoting guidelines for influential content creators on the protection of minors and against spread of

---

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.agcom.it/provvedimenti/delibera-197-25-cons>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.cvdM.nl/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/2022-Classification-of-On-Demand-Commercial-Media-Services-Policy-Rule.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> [https://www.aspeninstitute.de/wp-content/uploads/2024EthicalCodeofConduct\\_InfluencersAgainstDisinfo.pdf](https://www.aspeninstitute.de/wp-content/uploads/2024EthicalCodeofConduct_InfluencersAgainstDisinfo.pdf)



harmful content. Examples of such guidelines exist in Norway<sup>35</sup>, in Belgium where the Flemish Regulatory Authority for the Media developed the Content Creator Protocol<sup>36</sup>, and in Estonia where the Consumer Protection and Technical Regulatory Authority and the Estonian Marketing Association issued the Guide for advertisers on social media (European Audiovisual Observatory, 2024).

## Final remarks

The contemporary media environment is undergoing a structural transformation that is reshaping the foundations of democratic information ecosystems. Traditional journalism, long positioned as the primary producer and gatekeeper of verified and accountable news, is losing its privileged role due to several intersecting developments: the collapse of the pre-digitalisation business model, the precarity of journalistic labour, the journalists' deprofessionalisation, the growing dominance of attention-driven, platform-controlled news logics, and new AI-powered infrastructures and tools. These structural shifts coincide with changes in audience behaviour: social networks now serve as the main gateway to news, especially for younger cohorts who overwhelmingly gravitate toward visual and short-form content. At the same time, trust in both the media and public institutions remains uneven. It is high in some Northern European countries and critically low in parts of Southern and Eastern Europe, while news avoidance continues to rise. Together, these trends destabilise the epistemic authority on which journalism historically relied.

Against this backdrop, newsfluencers have emerged as new and increasingly visible actors in shaping how the audience access and interpret news. Their rise is directly linked to these structural transformations: they fill gaps created by the declining reach of traditional media and operate within the economic and cultural logics of platforms. They do not simply redistribute journalistic content; they produce it and adapt it to the aesthetics, relational logic, and business models typical of influencer culture. Their authority is not grounded in professional norms but in perceived authenticity, parasocial relations with their followers, and personal credibility and trust, in contrast to the institutional legitimacy of professional journalists. For many younger users, this makes them more relevant and more trusted than institutional media.

The democratic implications of this development are profoundly ambivalent. On the positive side, newsfluencers can lower barriers to political information, engage audiences who otherwise avoid news, diversify who gets to speak in public discourse, and offer visibility to issues and communities marginalised by traditional media. They demonstrate that civic communication can thrive in spaces not traditionally associated with news. In contexts where media freedom is restricted or journalists face violence and censorship, social media influencers can even represent one of the few remaining critical voices.

Yet the risks are not marginal. The same affordances that make newsfluencers appealing, can also amplify disinformation, polarisation, hate speech and ideological radicalisation. Strong parasocial bonds may intensify persuasion based on personal attraction rather than evidence; algorithmic amplification may prioritise provocation over information, while commercial incentives may reward sensationalism and oversimplification. Moreover, the visibility and authority within these ecosystems are not evenly distributed: gendered imbalances and

---

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.medietilsynet.no/tv-film-radio/reklame-sponsing-og-produktplassing/produktplassing-pa-tv-youtube-og-andre-bestillingstjenester/reklame-produktplassing-youtube/>

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.vlaamseregulatormedia.be/en/content-creator-protocol>

algorithmic gatekeeping may reproduce and deepen social inequalities. In other words, while the crisis of journalism may have opened the door for newsfluencers, their rise points to new vulnerabilities, capable of further undermining informed citizenship and ultimately, democracy.

Understanding newsfluencers therefore requires moving beyond celebratory narratives of engagement, but also beyond moral panics about unprofessionalism and disinformation. What is at stake is the question of how to shape a media environment in which newsfluencers actively support democratic resilience. Achieving this entails preventing the emergence of regulatory double standards that simultaneously weaken professional journalism and allow unaccountable influence to flourish. Rather than setting journalism and newsfluencers in opposition, the goal should be to leverage the complementary advantages of each: journalism's professional safeguards and democratic mandate on the one hand, and newsfluencers' capacity to reach and mobilise younger and disengaged publics on the other.

### **Key takeaway and steps forward**

The key takeaway of this analysis is that the rise of newsfluencers marks an increasing trend towards a redistribution of epistemic power: from institutions to individuals, from professional norms to platform incentives, from collective editorial responsibility to personalised influence. Whether this shift strengthens or weakens democratic communication is not predetermined.

To address this evolving landscape, at least three strategic directions are proposed:

#### **1. Invest in conceptual clarity and research**

Researchers and policymakers must adopt clearer definitions that distinguish newsfluencers from broader influencer categories, political influencers in particular. Robust and comparative data are needed to evaluate their real impact on news creation, exposure, trust and civic and/or political behaviour across different contexts, including illiberal regimes where their role may be protective rather than disruptive.

#### **2. Strengthen regulatory coherence without suppressing new voices**

Existing European frameworks (DSA, EMFA, political advertising regulation, AVMSD) already partially apply to influencer practices, particularly regarding transparency of political advertising, accountability in monetised communication, and safeguards against manipulation. However, due analysis and a better understanding is needed of both the applicability and effectiveness of these rules, as well as the potential need for tailored regulations that respect freedom of expression. This effort depends on achieving greater conceptual clarity regarding the relevant categories of influencers and their activities.

#### **3. Reinforce journalism and media and information literacy efforts, while recognising new news authorities**

Supporting public interest journalism remains essential. At the same time, media and information literacy and collaborative strategies that thoroughly and critically consider emerging news actors can help maintain a shared information space grounded in accuracy and democratic norms.

## References

- Aade, L., & Goanta, C. (2025). *Ban-It-Harderism in European consumer law: The case of the French influencer law*. *Journal of Consumer Policy*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10603-025-09600-6>
- AGCOM. (2025). *Delibera 197/25/CONS. Modifiche alle linee guida di cui alla delibera n. 7/24/CONS e approvazione del codice di condotta rivolto agli influencer*. [https://www.agcom.it/sites/default/files/provvedimenti/delibera/2025/197\\_25\\_cons\\_delibera.pdf](https://www.agcom.it/sites/default/files/provvedimenti/delibera/2025/197_25_cons_delibera.pdf)
- Allen, J., Howland, B., Mobius, M., Rothschild, D., & Watts, D. J. (2020). Evaluating the fake news problem at the scale of the information ecosystem. *Science Advances*, 6(14), eaay3539.
- Antheaume, A. (2025). France. In *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2025*. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2025>
- Bartels, L. M. (1993). Messages Received: The Political Impact of Media Exposure. *The American Political Science Review*, 87(2), 267–285. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2939040>
- Baym, N. K. (2015). Connect with your audience! The relational labor of connection. *The Communication Review*, 18(1), 14–22.
- Betts, J.M., Bliuc, A., Courtney, D.S. (2026) The effect of charismatic influencers on polarization online: An agent-based modeling approach. *Technology in Society*, 85, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techsoc.2025.103179>.
- Brück, J., Knorr, C., & Guenther, L. (2025). Copy, paste, and publish: A systematic review of churnalism as a journalistic practice. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 49(4), 257–270.
- Bromley, M. (1997). The end of journalism? Changes in workplace practices in the press and broadcasting in the 1990s. In M. Bromley & T. O'Malley (Eds.), *A journalism reader* (pp. 330–350). Routledge.
- Carlson, M. (2014). When news sites go native: Redefining the advertising–editorial divide in response to native advertising. *Journalism*, 16(7), 849–865.
- Christensen, C. M. (2015). *The innovator's dilemma: when new technologies cause great firms to fail*. Harvard Business Review Press.
- Compton, J. R., & Benedetti, P. (2010). Labour, new media and the institutional restructuring of journalism. *Journalism Studies*, 11(4), 487–499.
- Davis, M. (2010). Why journalism is a profession. In C. Meyers (Ed.), *Journalism ethics* (pp. 91–102). Oxford University Press.
- De Gregorio, G., & Goanta, C. (2022). The influencer republic: Monetizing political speech on social media. *German Law Journal*, 23(2), 204–225.
- European Audiovisual Observatory. (2024). *National rules applicable to influencers*. <https://rm.coe.int/national-rules-applicable-to-influencers/1680b5540c>
- European Parliament. (2024). *European Parliament Eurobarometer Youth Survey*. Youth Outreach Unit – Directorate-General for Communication.
- Flash Eurobarometer. (2025). *Social Media Survey* (FL014EP).
- Fischer, T. S., Kolo, C., & Mothes, C. (2022). Political influencers on YouTube: Business strategies and content characteristics. *Media and Communication*, 10(1), 259–271. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v10i1.4767>
- Fu, A. (2024). After the first 'podcast election,' the medium is likely to continue playing a role in future campaign cycles. Poynter. <https://www.poynter.org/reporting-editing/2024/podcast-role-presidential-election-results-trump-rogan/>
- Gandini, A., Ceron, A., & Lodetti, P. (2022). Populists or influencers? The use of Facebook videos by populist leaders. *International Journal of Communication*, 16, 21.
- Gibson, R., Bon, E., Darius, P., & Smyth, P. (2023). Are online political influencers accelerating democratic deconsolidation? *Media and Communication*, 11(3), 175–186.
- Grbeša, M., Vuković, S. & Šalaj, B. (2026, upcoming). *Celebrity Politics and How It Shapes Contemporary Politics*. Palgrave.
- Goodwin, A., Joseff, K., Riedl, M. J., Lukito, J., & Woolley, S. (2023). Political relational influencers: The mobilization of social media influencers in the political arena. *International Journal of Communication*, 17, 21.
- Goyanes, M. (2014). An Empirical Studies of Factors that Influence the Willingness to Pay for Online News. *Journalism Practice*, 8(6), 742–757.
- Hartmann, D., Wang, S. M., Pohlmann, L., et al. (2025). A systematic review of echo chamber research: Comparative analysis of conceptualizations, operationalizations, and varying outcomes. *Journal of Computational Social Science*, 8, 52.
- Hill, S. & Lashmar, P. (2013). *Online journalism: The essential guide*. Sage.
- Hurcombe, E. (2024). Conceptualising the “newsfluencer”: Intersecting trajectories in online content creation and platformised journalism. *Digital Journalism*, 1–12.
- Kalogeropoulos, A. (2025). Greece. In *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2025*. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.
- Kerševan, T. (2025). Influencers as news creators: Implications for media regulation. Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom — Discussion Series.
- Kovach, B., & Rosenstiel, T. (2001). *The elements of journalism*. Crown Publishers.
- Laursen, J. & Stone, M. (2016). *Native Advertising Trends 2016: The News Media Industry*. Native Advertising Institute (NAI) and the International News Media Association (INMA).
- Lewis, S. C. (2012). The Tension Between Professional Control and Open Participation. *Information. Communication & Society*, 15(6), 836–866.

Lischka, J. A., & Garz, M. (2021). Clickbait news and algorithmic curation: A game theory framework of the relation between journalism, users and platforms. *New Media & Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211027174>

Naderer, B. (2023). Influencers as political agents? The potential of an unlikely source to motivate political action. *Communications*, 48(1), 93–111. <https://doi.org/10.1515/commun-2021-0006>

Nechushtai, E. (2018). Could digital platforms capture the media through infrastructure? *Journalism*, 19(8), 1043–1058.

Nenadić, I. (2025). Chapter I - Digital developments and evolution of key concepts related to the news media sector. In: Cappello M. (Ed.). *News media, pluralism and journalism in the digital age*. IRIS. European Audiovisual Observatory.

Neves, I. (2025). Who regulates influence? A rights-based case for EU action. *European Law Blog*. <https://www.europeanlawblog.eu/pub/uc6ugkw7/release/2>

Newman, N., Ross Arguedas, A., Mukherjee, M., & Fletcher, R. (2025). *Mapping news creators and influencers in social and video networks*. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.

Newman, N., & Cherubini, F. (2025). *Journalism and technology trends and predictions 2025*. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.

Peter, C., & Muth, L. (2023). *Social Media Influencers' Role in Shaping Political Opinions and Actions of Young Audiences*. *Media and Communication*, 11 (3), 164–174.

Pew Research Center. (2024). *America's news influencers*. Pew Research Center.

Rasheed, H, et al. (2025). From Punchlines to Politics: The Joe Rogan Experience as a Case Study of the Politicization of Apolitical Spaces in the U.S. APSA Preprints. doi: 10.33774/apsa-2025-v05hb.

Rice, J. (2020). Algorithmic outrage. *Computers and Composition*, 57, 102582.

Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. (2025). *Digital News Report 2025*. University of Oxford. <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2025>

Riedl, M., Schwemmer, C., Ziewiecki, S., & Ross, L. M. (2021). The rise of political influencers: Perspectives on a trend towards meaningful content. *Frontiers in Communication*, 6, 752656.

Riedl, M. J., Lukito, J., & Woolley, S. C. (2023). Political influencers on social media: An introduction. *Social Media + Society*, 9(2).

Schwemmer C, Riedl M (2025) From hashtags to ballots: Conceptualizing political influencers and evaluating their impact on election outcomes. *PLoS One* 20(5): e0321592. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0321592>

Shmargad, Y. (2022). Twitter influencers in the 2016 US congressional races. *Journal of Political Marketing*, 21(1), 23–40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15377857.2018.1513385>

Simon, F. M. (2022). Uneasy Bedfellows: AI in the News, Platform Companies and the Issue of Journalistic Autonomy. *Digital Journalism*, 10(10), 1832–1854. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2022.2063150>

Standard Eurobarometer. (2025). *Standard Eurobarometer* 103. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3372>

The Dutch Media Authority. (2022). *Policy rule on the qualification of on-demand media services*. <https://www.cvdn.nl/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/2022-Classification-of-On-Demand-Commercial-Media-Services-Policy-Rule.pdf>

Tsfati, Y., Boomgaarden, H. G., Strömbäck, J., Vliegenthart, R., Damstra, A., & Lindgren, E. (2020). Causes and consequences of mainstream media dissemination of fake news: Literature review and synthesis. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 44(2), 157–173.

Van Valkenburgh, S. P. (2021). Digesting the red pill: Masculinity and neoliberalism in the manosphere. *Men and Masculinities*, 24(1), 84–103.

Venus, A., Intyaswati, D., Ayuningtyas, F., & Lestari, P. (2025). Political participation in the digital age: Impact of influencers and advertising on Generation Z. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2025.2520063>

von Sikorski, C., Merz, P., Heiss, R., Karsay, K., Naderer, B., & Schmuck, D. (2025). The Political Role of Social Media Influencers: Strategies, Types, and Implications for Democracy—An Introduction. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 00027642251344208.

Waisbord, S. (2019). The vulnerabilities of journalism. *Journalism*, 20(1), 210–213.

Wasike, B. (2025). Me, myself, and the influencer: Examining how parasocial interaction and self-congruence with social media influencers affects news media trust. *New Media & Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448251373020>

Wasike, B. (2026). Influencing the news: how social media influencers affect news media trust. *Information, Communication & Society*, 29(1), 77–94. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2025.2496907>

Wiik, J. (2019). Professionalism, professionalization, and deprofessionalization in journalism. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.863>

This initiative is a contribution towards the

## **New Democratic Pact for Europe**

**[www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int)**

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE