

# Young people's perspectives on the world around them and contexts of digital citizenship

## Perspetivas dos jovens sobre o mundo que os rodeia e contextos de cidadania digital

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If we look at history, we can see that this is not the first time that we have witnessed a metamorphosis in journalism. This time, however, and with the digital revolution, it's occasion for a major change, not only in the way news is made, but also in the way journalism (doesn't) relates to its audience. In this special issue on Young people's perspectives on the world around them and contexts of digital citizenship - which looks at prisms of how this generation looks at the world, in connection with news and contexts of digital citizenship - we can see theoretical and empirical reflections from different geographies, from Latin America to Europe, written in Spanish, English and Portuguese. They shed light on the contexts in which young people relate to news, its permanence and the changes associated with our times.

In this time of transition, there are still traces of the mass communication that began in the 19th century (Chalaby, 2003) and which at the turn of the 20th century began to move towards a fundamentally digital communication paradigm. This digital revolution that we are experiencing, which is already in the domestication phase (Silverstone & Haddon, 1996) comes precisely a century after the dawn of mass communications and, once again, in the transition to another century, which this time is also a millennium. Knowing that the turn from the 19th to the 20th century brought about changes that were difficult to accept in relation to the standards of non-professional journalism that had previously been practised (Chalaby, 2003) - and recognising that the history of the new media is built on previous layers and therefore has parameters of persistence (Armitage, 31 de Julho de 2006; Jenkins, June 2001) - in the current digital revolution, the dominance of mass journalism has been strongly

challenged. Non-professional journalists and multiple news formats have re-emerged in this news ecosystem, making it inevitable to (re)think what is news and what is counted as news (Swart et al., 2022). We don't know whether, once this transition process has stabilised, democracies will only lose out or whether there will also be gains from betting on preferences other than traditional news. In the literature, young people's disconnection from the news is a theme that runs through the late 20th century and into the 21st century. News avoidance seems to be taking on a new flavour, not always negative (Woodstock, 2014). Are we really facing an age of news avoidance? Are we facing a new ecology in which what is news has very different definitions from those proposed by mass communication and professional journalism (Bengtsson & Johansson, 2024)?

Research continually points to a shift away from traditional journalism environments, towards new opportunities for consumption and production (Clark & Marchi, 2017) fostering participatory processes. When proposing the concept of "connective journalism", Clark and Marchi (2017, p. 35) emphasise precisely the need to share, to have a personal vision of the news story and to create their own stories. They also note a rupture between the needs of young audiences and the formal news media.

In this news ecosystem that is in the process of being reconfigured, journalism is thus a guarantor of democratic quality, but also a source of challenges to democracy. The news ecosystem is facing greater democratic polarisation and there are no safe formats, especially when we consider the context of the younger generations. It's challenging how, why and where young people follow, understand and express what's happening in the world, in the context of digital citizenship and information disorders (Frau-Meigs, 2019; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). The context of the COVID-19 pandemic and recent wars (such as in Ukraine and Palestine) and their impact is a fertile ground for a profusion of fake news and other information disorders. This is why it is so urgent to consider different research approaches that identify where, how and why young people from different contexts and geographies propose different formats in which they construct their visions and expressions of what is happening in the world.

Given the changes, what are the social environments in which consumption processes take root? Even though the influence of the peer group has its impact, through the cultural and media industries and influencers (Contreras-Pulido et al., 2023), the family, and parents in particular, are at the centre of the socialisation process for seeking out news and different world views (Brites et al., 2017; Edgerly et al., 2018; Lemish, 2007), including social contexts in which digital devices operate (Castro & Ponte, 2021; Edgerly et al., 2018). Self-socialisation is also pointed out in other studies on information consumption by young people (Boczkowski et al., 2018; Brites et al., 2024).

These socio-cultural environments pose additional challenges for news brands in terms of young people's interests and expectations of traditional media. There is an urgent need to continue to think about these current issues, particularly how young people perceive and interact with algorithms (Brites et al., 2024; Swart, 2021).

As we have already said, this special issue, with nine articles, offers reflections from different geographies on these and other issues that are part of the debate on news ecologies, particularly as they relate to children and young people.

The relationship between citizens and the news is inevitably shaped by debates about the implications of (good) citizenship and how this reveals the way citizens re-

late to democracy, particularly voting. This is one of the themes that has dominated journalism studies for decades, especially with the emergence and mainstreaming of television (Putnam, 2000). In this special issue, Karolína Šimková and Lydie Kárníková (2024), based on research carried out in Czechia, explore the dimensions and ambiguities associated with the use of digital media in young people's civic engagement, highlighting ambivalences and, at the same time, considering the value of digital media in citizenship contexts. From Latin America, specifically Chile, come the reflections of Rayén Condeza Dall'Orso, Tabita Moreno Becerra and Constanza Gajardo León (2024) which reflect on the compulsory vote of young adults in the plebiscite on the draft new constitution in 2022. The results pointed to a positive link between informed knowledge and voting, even though more than half of the young people said that the news did not respond to their specific generational interests. One of the key elements in thinking about these information environments is weighing up traditional media against digital media. Research carried out in Spain by Anita Feridouni Solimani and Karim Ahmed-Mohamed (2024) points to the fact that young people who express significantly lower levels of information consume less information through traditional media (television, press and radio) and more through social networks. In this sense, the authors of this article consider: "Faced with the huge amount of audiovisual information available today, it is more urgent than ever for a citizenry that is not only informed, but also capable of critically evaluating this information" (2024, p. 15). These articles emphasise the difference between being informed and having critical thinking skills, pointing to an agenda that is more supported by digital media and that needs to be more closely linked between the interests of the news and the interests of young people.

Three other articles in this special issue focus on the challenges of media education in the age of platforms and artificial intelligence. Paulo Couraceiro and Miguel Paisana (2024) produced a longitudinal analysis of the Digital News Report, zooming in on the data for Portugal, looking at the relationship between young people and algorithmic mediation, highlighting that algorithmic access to news increased and diversified between 2016 and 2023. In this context, the authors consider that "the dynamic between the convenience provided by algorithmic personalisation and the appreciation of journalistic curation reflects a complex tension between technological 'affordances' and the democratic values associated with informed and diversified news consumption" (Couraceiro & Paisana, 2024, p. 14). Also in Portugal, Cleisyane Lopes Quintino and Rita Basílio de Simões (2024) carried out exploratory research with journalism students. Contrary to what might have been expected, given that they were studying in the field of journalism, the data shows that work is required to improve skills, since although the participants have media literacy skills, they face challenges in applying them in their daily lives. Still considering the diverse contexts of media education, the article by Carla Sousa, Ana Oliveira, Cátia Casimiro, João Léste and Havva Yaman (2024) explores the urgency of promoting critical literacy, full digital citizenship and engagement with news, through a systematic literature review that explores game-based learning in understanding and engaging young people with news consumption and digital citizenship, particularly in the context of societal and cultural diversity. These proposals consider the present and future challenges of news consumption in relation to media education, considering affordances and the

power of algorithms, questioning contexts involving people especially those linked to journalism, and also looking at new media such as games.

Despite the fact that we are increasingly living in a digital context, empirical research also points to a subsistence of traditional media that should not be neglected, especially if we want to understand social and media dynamics in depth, without neglecting past and present history, particularly in the case of television, as pointed out in the article by Mariana S. Müller (2024). In her analysis of an online questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, she identifies the persistence of the relevance of the family context in television news consumption, while there is already a marked shift towards digital platforms. In the same vein, Catarina Feio and Lídia Oliveira (2024) propose, through a qualitative study with focus groups, that watching the news at mealtimes (mainly at dinner) continues to be a practice of Portuguese families, in line with similar research in recent decades, showing historical persistence. They identify the importance of socialisation to the news within families while young people are still living at home. This habit, as the article also points out, declines when young people leave their parents' home. These two articles point to the advantage of research focusing not only on the digital context but also on other aspects of the socialisation space within families, not least because the forms of socialisation are also multiple and evolving, as we pointed out at the beginning of our presentation.

Finally, this special issue features a participatory approach by Ana Cátia Ferreira and Juliana Doretto (2024) with child "reporters" through Visão Júnior. The results point to a prevalence of the female gender in these actions, particularly in the urban areas of Lisbon and Porto, pointing to a gender shift in terms of children's close connection with news. This article also attests to the need for research in these areas to be strengthened through the participation of children and young people in the processes of connecting with journalism and also in research processes.

Before we end this introduction, we would like to mention the partners who helped to make the special issue possible. We would like to highlight the partnership with the projects YouNDigital - Young people, news and digital citizenship (PTDC/COM-OUT/0243/2021; <https://youndigital.com>) and "i-Tech Families: empowering parents and children for a digital future" (PTDC/COM-2022.00105.CEECIND/CP1760/CT0001). At the same time, it is important to work with ECREA's Audiences and Reception Studies and Children, Youth and Media sections, as well as with SOPCOM's Audiences and Publics working group. These partnerships have enabled us to bring reflections and proposals that point to the way young people see and feel the news (and its absence), and the way journalism sees these audiences.

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## Conflict of interest | Conflicto de intereses

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