

“You live in media. Who you are, what you do, and what all of this means to you does not exist outside of media. Media are to us as water is to fish. This does not mean life is determined by media—it just suggests that whether we like it or not, every aspect of our lives takes place in media.”

Quote by Mark Deuze
Media Life, Polity Press 2012

In today's internet-driven world, there are countless ways to stay updated—from quick social media scrolls to leisurely newspaper reads over breakfast. We asked students at our university about their media habits and what makes them trust certain sources. What are their daily go-to's for news and information? And how do they decide which media to rely on? Join us as we explore their responses and gain insights into how today's young adults interact with media. In the next article, we explore the rapid and sweeping changes shaping the media landscape that these young people navigate daily in their...

MEDIA LIVES

Interviews by Linda von Velsen, student editor Witten Lab Magazine

LENA JAKOBI, 23, Management

With podcasts, language is an important factor in distinguishing trustworthy from untrustworthy sources. If the tone is too slangy or casual, I become suspicious and take a closer look at who is behind it. However, a look at the description usually reveals a lot, too: Does it have technical terms in it? Does the podcaster state their sources? If the podcast leaves me with a positive first impression in this regard, I am also more willing to trust the knowledge that is being disseminated. There are a few ways to protect yourself from false information. I don't think I've ever really fallen for fake news. I think what happens more often is that in the flood of information available to you, you no longer get certain points completely right and then perhaps have to do more research. For example, I listen to a few podcasts that are not related to my field of studies, so this has definitely happened to me before. But I also generally like to read through one or two more articles when I come across a topic that interests me through podcasts or Instagram. I also like to use Instagram for short updates, although I realize that the content displayed in the feed is somewhat filtered. Sometimes I don't get everything, or only with some delay, unless I go directly to the accounts.



VIKTORIA HOFFMANN, 21, Psychology

A few years ago, I took a complete break from Instagram, only returning to it a year or two ago. During my hiatus, I realized the emotional toll social media can take, so I meticulously curated the pages I follow. Now, I use Instagram sparingly for information, preferring sources like the Tagesschau app or podcasts. My sister also has various magazine subscriptions, which I also like to check out from time to time. I think these formats influence my opinion even more than Instagram—I particularly like podcasts where informed people are given the space to share their knowledge and views.

When I do scroll through Instagram and am confronted with news, pictures and videos, I often realize that it brings me down—not to mention the comment section, which can be rife with extreme and even threatening remarks—especially because a healthy exchange of opinions can be really enriching and important.

Algorithms tend to encourage people to stay in their political bubble. I think it would be great to have a platform that allows people to respectfully exchange views with others outside their usual environment.



LARA WERDEHAUSEN, 22, Politics, Philosophy and Economics (PPE)

As part of my morning routine, I like to put on the “Apokalypse & Filterkaffee” news podcast to catch up on recent events. While I am waiting for new episodes to come out, however, I listen to something else, check Instagram, or read selected articles on the Tagesschau website. What makes podcasts particularly convenient for me is that I can listen to them while I am driving, working out, or cooking, for example. I think that if this format did not exist, my news consumption would be considerably lower. However, I feel like a lot of news appear on my radar thanks to my circle of friends—especially since I am politically active in my free time. When it comes to news in general, transparency is also super important to me. I think that media professionals who produce podcasts or commentaries should make it clear that they are throwing in their own opinion. When I listen to “Apokalypse & Filterkaffee”, for example, I want to find out where topics that I am only vaguely familiar with fit in, whereas I expect neutral reporting from the Tagesschau. With podcasts, it can be quite refreshing to consciously listen to the opinions of people who have a completely different view on topics in order to develop a more comprehensive picture for oneself. I would consider cutting down on my podcast hours a little if publishers were to provide the option to buy individual online articles instead of having to take out a full subscription. It really bugs me that I cannot do that.



RAMONA SZYMCZAK, 31, Human Medicine

I almost feel uncomfortable admitting this, but Instagram is one of my sources of information. I follow various news portals, and my feed summarizes news updates, thanks to the algorithm. I also enjoy listening to podcasts from time to time or watching the news. When I want to delve deeper into a subject, though, I prefer reading detailed articles or conducting direct research online.

Yet, what sometimes really annoys me about Instagram reporting is that the slides or tiles are filled with headlines that are often taken out of context. I find that misleading. Clickbait headlines lure you in, only for the full story to unfold several slides later, sometimes altering your initial perception completely. I wouldn't accuse the publishers of spreading falsehoods outright, but I do believe there should be a more nuanced approach. Relying solely on these brief headlines poses significant risks. While, from the publisher's point of view, I can understand the need for relevant headlines to a certain extent—it's an easy way to gain attention, which is unfortunately how social media works nowadays—I feel like there should be more education about this in schools. Many students today have early access to mobile phones and social media.

LUKAS KNOBLOCH, 27, Politics, Philosophy and Economics (PPE)

Whenever I find the time, I consume media. As my classes and leisure activities keep me rather busy, developing a routine of catching up on information at the same time every day would be challenging. I usually get my information from YouTube, mostly through channels such as Arte or the Tagesschau. At the moment, I am particularly interested in the war in Ukraine; I follow a couple of military bloggers: a reservist from Estonia and a Ukrainian. I am aware that war situations are often very opaque and complex, and it can be difficult to recognize the true intention of a person who disseminates information via their own channel, which is why I decided to take a closer look at the two YouTubers to see what they are currently doing, what they have done in the past, and whether there are any specific collaborations. If there are reports about fairly recent or unsourced events, I remain skeptical at first and treat the coverage as more of a rumor than real news. I think that due to the use of artificial intelligence, we will have to deal with more media opacity in the future. Deepfakes, for example, will make it increasingly difficult for us humans to discern whether a piece of news is true or not. Any use of artificial intelligence should have to be mentioned, but unfortunately, any such rule would be difficult to implement and enforce.



PAAVO SCHIMRIGK 29, Philosophy, Culture and Cultural Practice

Every morning, I start my day by watching the previous day's news program. For me, these 15 minutes are the minimum amount of time I want to spend on staying informed. But sometimes, I like to delve deeper into topics, read scientific papers or do some online research. Major newspapers and public broadcasters are my primary sources, and while I generally trust them, I remain critical of their wording at times. There is also some radio content I find exciting, especially when journalism is presented in a less obdurate manner. Creative approaches to factual, dry topics can be highly effective, especially for younger audiences. Experimenting with new formats can be rewarding, and taking the risk that it might not be as well-received as one had hoped might pay off. Radio, for example, does a great job by keeping explanations relatable, youthful, and well-referenced. I appreciate their openness to criticism and view this as a strength, fostering a dialogue within their reporting.



JENNY ROSARIUS, 25, Dentistry

I often have a lot going on during term time: Besides working and studying, I also want to maintain my social life. In these stressful phases, I find less time to stay informed compared to the semester break. Engaging with major political issues can be particularly taxing, especially when it involves several hours of research. In-depth reports, often featuring personal stories, can be emotionally overwhelming, particularly when they cover matters beyond my control. Nevertheless, I make a conscious effort to stay informed. I don't think avoiding the debate completely is a viable solution. Ultimately, I think it's about finding a balance between your own desire to know about what's going on in the world and your own well-being. However, when it comes to complex topics, I often feel the need to delve even deeper into the subject. It's not enough for me to read a single article or a brief Instagram post to really form a well-rounded opinion. I want to inform myself as comprehensively as possible, so that I can develop an appropriate attitude or reflect on my political views if necessary.

Linda von Velsen, 24, is studying Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Witten/Herdecke University.



SABREN AL ADELI 22, Human Medicine

In today's digital age, the avenues for publishing information, especially through social media, are endless. We can publish a vast amount of information incredibly quickly; that calls for a healthy dose of skepticism. It can sometimes be difficult to discern the intentions behind a publication or to identify who is promoting it. When reading reports, I sometimes ask myself whether the reporter has a personal connection to the topic. This doesn't necessarily have to be bad or good—but it does help me better understand the context of the report.

I also appreciate transparency in journalism. I like it when journalists show a certain vulnerability, when they open up about the situations in which they have reached their limits, the moments that made them reflect or be self-critical. Talking to people who have been personally affected by something or dealing with relevant reports helps me to develop a different perspective, although I have to admit that dealing with all this information can sometimes take up quite a lot of time.

I think this is also a problem when it comes to combating fake news: Consumers have so much information available to them these days that it can be difficult to fulfil one's personal responsibility of verifying facts and assessments—it can feel annoying and exhausting.

