Executive Summary



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News Consumption and Preferences Among Young Adults in Switzerland

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- **Objective:** This study examines how young adults aged 18 to 25 in Switzerland consume news, the everyday situations in which they encounter news, and their preferences regarding topics, presentation styles, and journalistic formats. In particular, the findings are intended to provide an empirical basis for developing news offerings tailored to the needs and preferences of young adults.
- **Methodology and Data:** The study combines three methodological approaches. First, a standardized online survey was conducted with 873 young adults from German-speaking, French-speaking, and Italian-speaking Switzerland, with the sample differentiated by linguistic region. Second, 136 participants took part in a seven-day media diary study, likewise designed to account for differences between linguistic regions (a total of 701 daily questionnaires were analyzed). Third, the news items documented in the diary study that could be identified and retrieved (n = 348) were examined using content analysis.

Key Findings on News Consumption

- **General Interest in News and Self-Reported Consumption:** The standardized survey shows that young adults have not fundamentally turned away from news. Their average interest in news is above the midpoint of the scale. Moreover, 71.5% of respondents reported consuming news at least several times a week, while 40.0% reported doing so at least daily. Their primary motivations are to stay informed about world events and to form their own opinions. The survey primarily captures general attitudes, routines, and self-assessments regarding news consumption.
- **Specific News Encounters in Everyday Life:** The media diary study complements these general findings by providing an everyday-life perspective on news encounters that participants could actually recall. On the majority of documented days, participants were able to identify a specific news item that had remained in their memory. On the remaining days, they either had not consumed any news or could not recall a particular news item. Comparing the two methodological approaches thus reveals that regularly reported news consumption does not automatically translate into conscious and memorable encounters with news on a daily basis.
- **Digital, Mobile, and Hybrid News Consumption:** Social media are the most important general source of news, used by 84.8% of respondents. Journalistic websites and apps also play a significant role, at 46.0%. Television, radio, and podcasts are used as well, although to a considerably lesser extent. The smartphone is by far the most important device for consuming news, at 95.3%. Rather than relying on a single channel, young adults use both social media platforms and online journalistic news services.
- **Temporal and Situational Contexts:** News is consumed throughout the day, but particularly frequently in the evening. Among the everyday situations examined, news consumption is most pronounced when travelling on public transport or by car. News encounters therefore frequently occur on mobile devices, while people are on the move, and within limited time windows.

Findings on Perceptions and Preferences in News Consumption

- **Perceptions of News:** Overall, news is considered important and largely perceived as personally interesting. At the same time, its frequently negative tone is viewed critically. The entertainment value of news receives only an average rating. Young adults therefore do not fundamentally reject news but see room for improvement in its tone, relevance to their interests, and presentation.
- **Topic Preferences:** According to the survey findings, the highest levels of interest are found in health, medicine and nutrition; education and science; culture; and university studies and vocational training. Swiss and international politics also attract above-average interest. Gaming, finance, and lifestyle and celebrity news receive lower ratings. These findings indicate considerable interest in topics related to young adults' everyday lives and education.

- In contrast, the news items recalled in the media diary study were dominated by crime and legal violations, sports, accidents, and politics. Health, education, science, and culture were considerably less prominent among recalled news items than might have been expected based on the topic preferences expressed in the standardized survey. Moreover, the majority of coded news items had little or no direct relevance to young adults' everyday lives. This reveals a discernible gap between the desire for personally relevant content connected to everyday life and the news items that participants actually recalled during the study period.
- **News Outlets:** The news items recalled in the diary study originated predominantly from Swiss media outlets and were mostly freely accessible. The most frequently recalled outlets included 20 Minuten (or 20 minutes), SRF, Blick, and RTS. At the level of media types, public service media and tabloid news outlets were therefore represented in almost equal proportions. Visibility, ease of access, and low barriers to access, particularly the absence of paywalls, thus emerge as key conditions for news recall.
- **Presentation and Quality Requirements:** The most important requirements for news are comprehensibility, transparency regarding sources and journalistic practices, and critical analysis. Multimedia news offerings are also clearly favored. By contrast, emotional presentation, personalization, and dramatic storytelling are considered less important. Young adults prefer short, visual, and easily digestible introductions that provide access to background information, sources, and more detailed explanations when they wish to explore a topic further.
- **Solutions Orientation and Tone:** Solutions are rarely presented in the recalled news items, even though respondents generally express a preference for solutions-oriented reporting. The tone of news coverage is predominantly neutral or somewhat negative. News items dealing with politics, crime, and accidents are particularly likely to have a negative tone. Nevertheless, coverage of problem-oriented topics is evaluated positively when it is comprehensible, complete, transparent, and placed in context.
- **Perceived Quality:** Overall, the recalled news items receive positive evaluations. Approximately seven out of ten items are rated as being of high quality. In their open-ended diary responses, participants particularly emphasize comprehensibility, clear structure, factual contextualization, completeness, and personal or local relevance as indicators of quality.

Implications for the Swiss Media Industry

- **Harnessing Interest in News:** Young adults are not fundamentally disengaged from news. News organizations should therefore move away from assuming a general lack of interest and instead focus more closely on the conditions under which news attracts attention. Particularly promising are news offerings that help audiences make sense of world events and provide different perspectives to support independent opinion formation.
- **Promoting Conscious Recall of News**: The diary study demonstrates that regular news consumption does not automatically result in the recall of specific news items. News content should therefore offer clear practical value, recognizable relevance, and a concise core message. Comprehensible headlines, clear structures, compelling introductions, and easily understandable key messages can help ensure that content is not merely seen but also consciously noticed and remembered.
- **Treating Platforms as Gateways Rather Than Endpoints**: Social media are the most important gateways to news, but journalistic websites and apps remain relevant. A two-tier approach is recommended, combining a short, visually appealing, and comprehensible overview with optional access to more in-depth content offering context, sources, data, and different perspectives. Reach should not be achieved at the expense of journalistic substance through excessive emotionalization, dramatization, or oversimplification. Instead, the key priorities should be visible journalistic quality,

transparent sourcing, clear structures, critical contextualization, constructive perspectives, and a recognizable connection to young adults' everyday lives.

- **Consistently Implementing a Mobile-First Approach:** As smartphones are the primary devices for news consumption, content should be designed primarily for mobile use. This includes fast loading times, easily readable texts, vertical videos, concise summaries, clear navigation, and seamless access to more detailed information.
- **Adapting to Limited Time Windows:** News is frequently consumed while travelling and during brief periods of use. News organizations should therefore offer different levels of information depth: quickly accessible overviews for mobile consumption and more extensive background information for longer engagement.
- **Considering Time-of-Day-Based Distribution:** Higher levels of news consumption in the evening suggest that important news summaries, explanatory pieces, and in-depth formats could be strategically distributed during this period. Compact updates, audio formats, short videos, and clearly structured summaries are particularly suitable for commuting periods.
- **Giving Greater Prominence to Topics Relevant to Everyday Life:** Health, education, science, culture, and university studies and vocational training generate high levels of interest but are comparatively underrepresented among recalled news items. News organizations should make these topics more visible, cover them more consistently, and establish concrete connections to young adults' everyday lives.
- **Closing the Gap Between Interests and News Offerings:** Recalled news items are strongly dominated by crime, accidents, sports, and politics, while highly desired topics connected to everyday life are less prominent. This suggests a discrepancy between the visibility of existing news coverage and the interests of the target audience. Editorial planning and content placement should therefore focus more strongly on making educational, health-related, and everyday-life topics easier to find and more likely to attract attention.
- **Making Relevance Explicit:** Since many recalled news items have little direct relevance to young adults' everyday lives, these connections should be communicated more clearly. News coverage can more explicitly demonstrate why a topic matters for education, employment, finances, health, civic participation, or young people's daily lives.
- **Avoiding a Homogeneous View of the Target Audience:** The findings indicate differences in news consumption intensity, topic interests, and access routes. A single “youth-oriented news format” is therefore unlikely to meet the needs of all young adults. A modular approach offering different entry points, formats, and levels of detail would be more appropriate, addressing both occasional and frequent news consumers.