

Shaping the future of journalism: How to engage young people with news through short form content – Young People and the media assignment.

The purpose of my book chapter is to encourage young people to engage with the world of journalism and news through social media use. I will implement the strategy of 'short form content' to tackle the issue that young people find the political conversation disinteresting and unrelatable. There will also be a focus on the formation of the relationships between social media, the news, and young people. From here, news organisations will create short form content through Instagram reels, TikTok and YouTube shorts to appeal to a younger audience. The strategy will also focus on how young people interact with this short form content; they must be willing to actively seek these videos by engaging with certain accounts.

Young people's disengagement in news is a topic of interest within the world of journalism as it arguably contributes to generation Z's lack of knowledge. While the issues surrounding young people's disengagement is an important factor to explore throughout this essay, it is also important to recognise that young people **are** engaging with news, just in a different way. Unlike the older generation, who still consume traditional news, a recent study published by Flamingo (2019, p.28) found that young people are more likely to 'spend much of their time online with social media and entertainment services' and 'it has proved hard to attract attention to traditional news content'. Young people's main gateway into the world of journalism is therefore through 'connective journalism' which is a term coined by Marchi and Clark (2017, as cited in Marchi and Clark, 2018). They used connective journalism to describe the ways that news and information are shared through 'social media formats' (Marchi and Clark, 2018, p.289). By engaging with social media platforms and connecting with friends on certain stories, 'this can motivate them to address those concerns collectively' (2018, p.289). Therefore, the direction of this essay explores how short form content can integrate political news into the lives of young people.

Key terms

The terms most relevant to this essay are: 'young people', 'news', 'politics and 'media'. Firstly, defining young people can be problematic as there 'is no universally agreed definition of the term' Slavtcheva-Petkova (2024, p.22). The United Nations (2013) attempt to define youth as those aged 15-24, which offers a broad range when studying young people. However, other scholars have concluded differently: Boulianne and Theocaris (2020, p. 115) found that 'many studies aggregated 18- to 29-year-olds' even though majority of studies end at 24 years old. This broad definition therefore proves the complexity of defining young people to a specific age range.

From my research into previous literature, most studies focused on those aged 15-25. However, similarly to Boulianne and Theocaris' (2020) findings, some began at 18+. For the purpose of my essay, I will be providing a definition of young people aged 13-24 as my strategy concentrates on those who have access to social media. This age limit is suggested

by the apps themselves: 'In the US, we offer a curated, view-only experience for those under age 13 that includes additional safeguards and privacy protections' (TikTok, 2021).

In simple terms, politics is 'the activity through which people make, preserve and amend the general rules under which they live' (Heywood, 2013, p.2). Habermas (1989, as cited in Holt et al., 2013, p.19) believes we should all be interested in it: 'a core assumption is that in a democracy, people should follow news and current affairs, be politically interested, and participate in political processes.' Regarding political news, there is a concern that young people are not accessing traditional news media, which in turn exaggerates political 'generational inequalities' (Lenhart et al., 2010; Wattenberg, 2004, as cited in Holt et al., 2013, p.20). A more up to date study conducted by Boulianne and Shehata (2021) confirms that generational gaps are present within political news consumption, as they concluded that 'online news consumption is more positively related to online political expression for younger respondents compared to older respondents' (2021, p.777).

Finally, the term 'media' is one that is of great importance within this essay as it serves young people their daily news intake (Flamingo 2019). Its singular 'medium' is 'a communicative form ... a channel or conduit through which information is passed' (Davies, 2010, p.14). Therefore, the use of media is an ideal way to spread information and educate young people.

The media I am focusing on in this chapter will be accessible to young people and produce short form content. Although this will be discussed in detail later, I will address that I will be using TikTok, Instagram Reels and YouTube shorts as my strategy. However, my focus is on the first of these as they produce spontaneous content as opposed to YouTube where their main content is longer videos.

Why do Young People disengage with news?

The news industry is a vital product of society as it provides consumers with current affairs, ensuring they have knowledge about their surroundings. However, in recent years scholars have found a generational gap across news consumers which addresses their disinterest for traditional news. Buckingham (2003, p.1) summarises this gradual disengagement with news, stating that 'young people's turn away from news journalism dates back at least 20 years.' Therefore, this is a significant issue that must be tackled before young people completely become detached from the world of journalism.

Following this, a reoccurring issue seen in scholarly debates is that news disinterests young people due to its unappealing nature, complex language, and overwhelming stories that young people can not relate to. One study revealed that '14% of 16–24-year-olds feel there is too much news' (Hargreaves and Thomas, 2002, as cited in Costera Meijer, 2007, p.96). This overwhelming amount of news emphasises its complexity and conveys how young people can not gather everything all at once, especially when a hint of disinterest is already there. Costera Meijer (2007) expanded upon political news being of disinterest to young people, revealing that 'many topics in standard news programmes are hardly appealing,

especially domestic politics, international politics, culture and the economy which are seen as the least interesting' (2007, p.98). Although this study was conducted during the advent of social media and news reporting has arguably changed over the past decades, more recent studies confirm these findings. Slavtcheva-Petkova's (2024, p. 107) research on young people (aged 9-10), raised several issues regarding why young people are disengaged with the political conversation: '(1) news is for adults, not for children. (2) News is boring/not fun or simply not interesting. (3) News is too negative, and it makes them feel bad'. These findings highlight the issues children raised themselves; news being 'simply not interesting' links to the reoccurring issue of young people being disinterested.

In a recent report conducted by UNICEF, they revealed how news is irrelevant to young as respondents expressed their need for journalists to "write on topics that we are interested in" (Madonsela, & Delany, 2023, p.20). This personal account indicates how young people are currently disinterested in the political conversation; if they are directly asking for more interesting topics then the current state is not appealing. This report also covers how young people's overall disengagement is growing as their daily consumption is low with '20-30%' reporting that they did not engage with news at all (2023, p.16). This idea follows the 'generational gap' issue as Banaji and Buckingham (2013, p.5) argued that most young people were interested in 'the 'micropolitics' of everyday life' which includes 'DIY (do-it-yourself) politics' rather than 'the 'macropolitics' of politicians and political parties, which are seen to be dominated by older generations and outdated cultural modes.' These findings emphasise young people's disinterest with political related news and highlight this divide.

Although older conclusions have been used as evidence here, the use of newer sources to support them highlights the ongoing disinterest across young people. The time is now to address these issues before the disinterest passes to another generation. Regarding my strategy, these issues will be addressed by the implementation of short form content. The reason I have decided to focus on tackling these specific issues is because they were the most reoccurring across studies. From a personal standpoint, the news can be boring to watch as it is reliant on daily matters that are ever changing. Furthermore, the news channels often use complex language that my younger self could not comprehend. Ultimately, the advent of 24/7 news can be overwhelming.

Strategy: Short Form Content

My strategy introduces short form content via social media platforms to overcome the previous issues. This strategy will be implemented through news organisations simplifying their daily news stories into short clips and uploading them to platforms that thrive under short form content such as TikTok, Instagram Reels and Youtube Shorts. However, this essay discusses TikTok in greater detail.

What is Short Form Content?

This strategy is self explanatory in the sense it offers online content (through TikTok, Reels and Shorts), that is shorter than traditional news media such as TV programmes. Short form content often reaches around a one-minute capacity.

Why Short Form content?

The approach of short form content directly addresses the complexity of news as it will allow information to be simplified and therefore more understandable to young people.

Furthermore, short form content opens a gateway into many other strategies due its relationship with social media. For example, short form content can be accessed spontaneously through 'for you pages'. Short form content is also easy to consume; its snappy and efficient for young people on the move which targets the older people in my age range. Personally, as a university student I will open TikTok and Instagram as I am commuting to university, between lectures or often just before bed so long-winded stories will often get skipped. There is extensive research into young people, with majority of findings correlating educational learning to short form content in some way.

Firstly, research conducted by Ding et al., (2022) revealed that in the context of educational learning, young people were more engaged with short instructional videos. Additionally, the short instructional videos helped them to grasp concepts of mathematic studies. These outcomes prove short form content is useful in educating young minds and enabling them to retain information better. Peacock and Leavitt (2016) also indirectly conclude that short form content is beneficial for young people. Their study focuses on how young people in America think and engage with political discussions, and they indicate from their research that young people prefer 'calm and flexible' discussions about politics. Although this does not directly link to short form content, it could be useful to convey this notion that young people engage better with this lack of chaos, that can often be presented surrounding debates on politics and in traditional news when two politicians are communicating. Fundamentally, a short Instagram Reel or TikTok is simple and gets to the point I believe most young people are looking for. Following this, Szymkowiak et al., (2021) investigated how technology and the internet affected generation Z's ability to obtain information and which forms of collecting such information is preferable to them. The results of the questionnaire concluded that young people prefer new technologies as a mode of learning, and they prefer to obtain information 'fast due to impatience' (p.6). They also made reference to the low average attention span of generation Z, explaining this is 'because young people today want to read less than 20% of a text, wanting to get to the point as fast as possible' (p.3).

Finally, this idea of short form content being useful for young people's learning has been explicitly acknowledged by young people themselves. Madonsela, & Delany's (2023) report concluded two major findings, one being that news articles should be short. Similarly, the young people stated that the news should be limited "only to important points" and another suggested "keep[ing] it short and sweet but still us[ing] words to explain things" (p.20).

The implementation of a strategy involving social media is also imperative for engaging young people into the world of journalism as they are classed as the 'internet generation' (Hao et al., 2014). Defining young people as the 'internet generation' highlights the opportunities the internet/ social media access has brought to them. Robb et al., (2020) expands upon this in regard to news content, explaining that social media is highly accessible to young people, with '77% of teens g[etting] their news and headlines from social media'

(p.3). Ultimately, publishing content on social media is a strategic approach, as opposed to expecting young people to approach news traditionally which studies have concluded is rare.

My strategy will reach young people through social media apps such as TikTok, Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts. Although there are other social media sites that news organisations could use to form an engaging relationship with young people, such as X and Facebook, these platforms offer less spontaneous content. Furthermore, X is not officially designed for producing video content, so it does not fit as well with my strategy of short form content.

The advent of TikTok has changed the way young people engage with content as it is the hub of short form content (TikTok, 2024). Furthermore, it has been reported that 'users are 1.8x more likely to agree that TikTok introduces them to new topics they didn't even know they liked' (TikTok Marketing Science Global, 2024). Thus, revealing that TikTok can be a positive actor in influencing young people to engage with news. Conclusively, short form content thrives here with many videos going viral, making them easily accessible to young people.

As mentioned, these platforms are ideal for spontaneous content, even if young people don't play their part in this relationship by following news accounts and therefore producing these algorithms, the chances of the content still appearing is high. Finally, Toff et al's., (2018 as cited in Swart, 2021, p.510) interviews on young people found that their heavy use of apps such as 'YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp provoked a strong "news finds me" attitude' which is in favour of my strategy hoping to offer spontaneous content, seeking young people's attention that way.

Relationship between young people and journalism

The chapter will now shift to focus on the necessary relationship between the actors involved: Young people and news. It is imperative that these actors work together to make the most out of my proposed strategy.

So, how can this relationship form? Firstly, young people need to have access to social media, which I have uncovered most do. As the apps I have introduced produce spontaneous content there is not as much pressure on young people to follow journalists/politicians, however it will help strengthen this relationship if they did. The social media platforms and politicians/journalists will play a part through collaborating with each other and creating the content. Reaching further afield, perhaps TikTok, Reels and Shorts could create a subsection on their apps titled 'news' or 'headlines' to drive young people to specific channels. Combining spontaneous content with an entire 'for you page' dedicated to news could be useful in highlighting to young people where the news can be accessed.

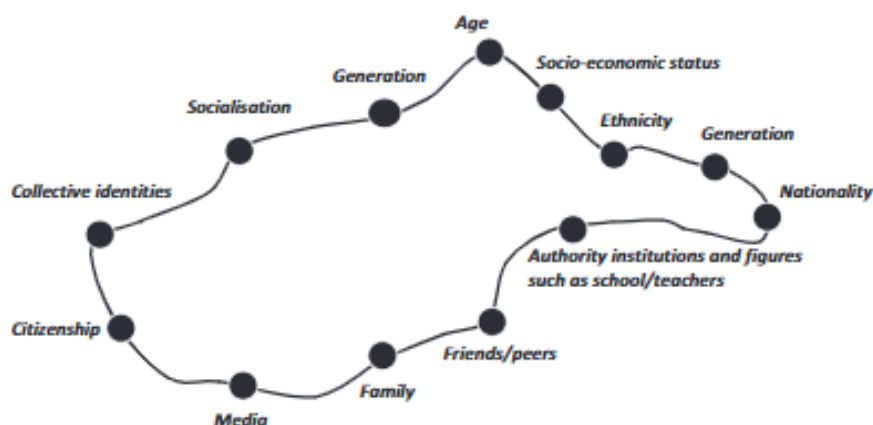
Limitations

While short form content through online platforms is beneficial in engaging young people as it is accessible to them and has proven to positively impact their education, there are limitations with employing an internet-based strategy.

One concern is the rise of citizen journalism and its impact on the spread of misinformation. Örnebring (2013, p.36) states how the term 'citizen journalism/journalist' reached popularity in the early 2000s. He explains how there is much debate surrounding the definition however he summarises that it refers 'to news produced by amateurs as opposed to professionals' (p36). Ultimately, in contemporary society anyone can produce content, even those who are not professionals and as result of this, false information can be published online. Furthermore, Kuklinski et al., (2000, p. 792) explains that misinformation 'occurs when people hold incorrect factual beliefs and do so confidently'. A common issue that could expand from this are 'moral panics' as young people are impressionable. This concept was coined by Cohen (1972, p.1) to define 'a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests.' How can this issue be addressed? It would be beneficial to encourage young people to follow established journalists who are verified by the platforms. Additionally, platforms could make it more visible, through disclaimers, that political news from influencers and citizens can be subjective.

When targeting the issue of complexity, short form content may stray too far the other way. Although short form content is accessible and addresses the issue that lots of young people find the language in traditional news complex, some may argue that quick flashes of headlines on their 'for you page' is not substantial enough for them to understand news. Nevertheless, researchers have supported that young people are more engaged with shorter content. As seen in my strategy subsection, young people find short content is better suited to their attention span and an efficient way at obtaining information.

Overall, it is important to address that solely focusing on social media as a strategy for engagement will not solve the original issue. This is because there are several other agents that allow children to integrate into society and therefore insert themselves into the world of journalism. This is illustrated in the circle line media model which explains that these factors 'are the building blocks for the relationship between young people and society.'



(Slavtcheva-Petkova, 2024, p.28)

Conclusion

To conclude, society has witnessed a disengagement of news across generation Z as they have little interest in the topic and often deem stories unrelatable. However, it is imperative that they involve themselves within the world of journalism so they can be present in debates about their future. This essay had a dedicated purpose to propose a strategy that could be implemented into young people's lives that consequently encourage them to engage with news. The strategy best suited to young people through extensive research was short form content published on TikTok, Reels and Shorts. I focused on short form content as it addressed several factors that young people are concerned with. Firstly, young people are members of the 'internet generation', meaning they have a close relationship with social media. I knew by creating a solution that involved social media, this would be accessible to them. Various studies have supported this relationship, proving my strategy to be one of relevance. Secondly, young people had a disinterest into certain aspects of news and journalism due to their complexity, by making content that is snappy and unavoidable is ideal to keep young people engaged in the conversation, which in turn enables them to gain knowledge. Furthermore, majority of generation Z that I was addressing are on the move, indulging in short form content such as Tik Tok and Instagram Reels when they had spare time. Ultimately, having a strategy that meant they could quickly consume news meant they could be engaged without dedicating much time.

Finally, I addressed the relationship between my strategy and the actors involved, my focus was on apps such as Tik Tok, Instagram and YouTube. From this they could collaborate with politicians and established journalists to have a wide reach across these apps. The relationship established from the young people's side was concerned with spontaneity. However, encouraging young people to watch short form content through social media engagement would benefit this strategy.

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