

20
March
2025

University of Luxembourg
Conference
Democracy and Youth in the Digital Age

Youth Opinion Formation in the Post-Digital Society: Initial Findings from the Youth Report 2025

Dr. Hannes Käckmeister: hannes.kaeckmeister@uni.lu

Dr. Sandra Biewers-Grimm: sandra.biewers@uni.lu

Laurent Langehegermann M.A.: laurent.langehegermann@uni.lu

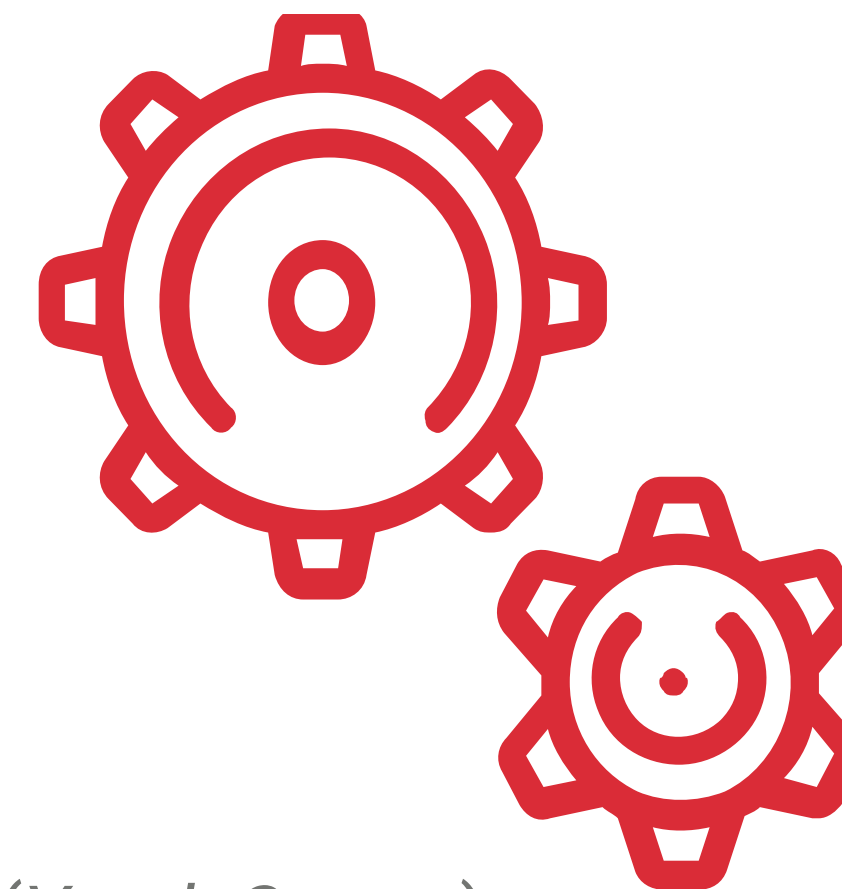


FACULTY OF HUMANITIES,
EDUCATION AND
SOCIAL SCIENCES



Setting the Context

- A Brief Portrait of the National Youth Report (NYR)



Legal Framework and Goals

- Legal Framework: Loi modifiée du 4 juillet 2008 sur la jeunesse (2016)
- The NYR is published every 5 years
- Goal: Providing a scientific analysis of the situation of young people in Luxembourg, informing Youth Policy

Thematic Priorities & Target Group

- Transitions, well-being & health, digitality
- Focus on young people between 12 and 29 years

Structure and Key Research Questions of the Current Youth Report

- What are young people's attitudes, social environments, well-being, and behaviors? (Monitoring)
- How does the rapid digital development influence the lifeworlds of young people (Digitality)

Methods

- Three-part study:
 - 1 Quantitative survey (*Youth Survey*)
 - 2 Qualitative studies (Interviews with young people and their parents)
- Focus of the presented results: Based on the qualitative study with young people
- Data collection:
 - 37 semi-structured interviews with young people
 - Digital diary method: Participants documented and reflected on their internet use during a typical day
- Research approach:
 - Theoretical and contrasting sampling to ensure diverse perspectives
 - Exploratory, semi-structured interviews to remain open to young people's meaning-making processes



A Short Introduction

Luxembourg, a post-digital society

- **Post (after) digital:** What has been overcome is not the digital itself, but the clear distinction between digital and analog
- Digital technology is deeply **entangled** with the daily lives of young people
- The omnipresence of digital media **shapes** how young people access information, communicate, and form opinions

‘Face it—the digital revolution is over....Like air and drinking water, being digital will be noticed only by its absence, not its presence’.

Negroponte N (1998) Beyond digital. Wired, 12 January. Available at: <https://web.media.mit.edu/~nicholas/Wired/WIRED6-12.html>. (accessed 13 March 2025).

Opinion formation in the post-digital society

In the social sciences, opinion formation is understood as the **process** through which individuals or groups develop their **attitudes, beliefs, and evaluations** toward specific objects, events, or topics. This process is significantly shaped by information, personal experiences, as well as social and media **influences**.

Schweiger, W. (2017). *Der (des)informierte Bürger im Netz: Wie soziale Medien die Meinungsbildung verändern*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.

Research question

How do young people **experience** and **engage** with mechanisms of opinion formation in the post-digital society? With regard to

- **Access** and sources of information
- **Dynamics** of opinion formation
- **Influencing factors** on opinion formation



A Dialogue between Empirical Findings and Theoretical Framing

**Initial trends from
qualitative research**

Access and Information Sources

Low-threshold and diverse access to information

- e.g., in schools, youth centers, families
- No **costs** of basic apps, subscriptions matter → paid news platforms are barriers
- **Ease of use**

*"I have a best friend, and when we want to make plans, we communicate via Snapchat [...] because it's just easy, and you don't have to pay for it." (Noah, 20 y)**

Digital platforms (YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, X) dominate news consumption

- Importance of **content creators** and online communities
- **Alternative** information sources and interactive formats gain significance
- **AI** used mostly for practical tasks (e.g., e-mails, school-work), less for news research

"For example, there is a podcast called Overdue and it is about the books I should have read, and it is really good." (Anastasia, 29 y)

Traditional media (TV, newspapers, radio) have overall lost significance

- Less meaningful for young people
- For parents, traditional media remain key
- Emergence of youth subcultures and differentiations (e.g., Facebook, Snapchat)

„Old-school newspaper“ (Clara, 19 y).*

*"And you don't use Snapchat at all?" "No, not Snapchat. It's a bit too young for me." (Lucas, 21 y)**

- Access reduces barriers to information and opinion formation. **First-level digital divide** (Van Dijk, 2012) almost irrelevant in Luxembourg.
- Relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement as a key element of **participatory culture**. (Jenkins, 2006)
- Opinion formation is increasingly shaped by **individualised, curated content** rather than traditional mass media. (Reckwitz, 2017; Van Dijck et al, 2018)
- The **fragmentation** of the public sphere weakens rational, deliberative discourse. Risk of echo chambers. (Habermas, 2022)

Dynamics of Opinion Formation

Political news consumption: a rather marginal usage pattern

- Interest in political content linked to political engagement; **uninterested youth rarely reached**
- Political news consumption occurs both **actively** as passively
- Opinion formation extends **beyond traditional news**: societal trends, gaming, pop culture
- **Reflection**: Some recognise algorithm control, others consume content **uncritically**

*"On TikTok, when I keep scrolling, after the 1000th scroll, something will [...] pop up." (Elias, 13 y)**

*"I try to change my bubble all the time because I know, ... all these apps always watch what you like to watch the most..." (Beatriz, 20 y)**

Blurring of space and time: political news consumption "in-between"

- **Intermittent** news consumption (e.g., bus, waiting rooms, breaks)
- Videos downloaded for **duration**
- Trend towards **short-form** content

"And in the bus [...] like current politics, world geopolitics, news and everything." (Aarav, 28 y)

*"25 RTL notifications – but I don't read them" (Emma, 22 y)**

Avoidance of political news for emotional reasons, disinterest, distrust

Emotional distress:

"I get really sad when I watch the news." (Anastasia, 29 y)

Disinterest in politics and news:

*"I don't feel like watching the news – I'd rather chat with friends." (Emma, 22 y)**

Distrust of traditional media:

"Yeah, okay, I mean... different types of news... not the traditional ones. I don't trust them anyway." (Aarav, 28 y)

- Global networks enable instant exchange of information across physical locations, along the idea of **space of flows**. (Castells, 2000)
- In the **post-digital society**, mobile phones are omnipresent, with notifications often interrupting offline activities and shaping information consumption. (Jandrić et al, 2019)
- **Empowerment**: Possibility to engage with a wide range of content (as consumers and producers)—or choose not to engage at all.

Influencing Factors on Opinion Formation

Personal
experiences
and interests

Searching for information
based on interests and
experiences

Emotional impact
matters

Experience can lead to
action

Peer
Dynamics

Peers are an
important source of
information

Peers provide a space
for discussion and
reflection

Media
socialisation

Traditional/
familial and/or
cultural
experiences

Education

Digital Literacy: Education
provides knowledge and
values

Schools raise awareness
about digital risks

Schools offer spaces for
discussion and reflection

Conclusions

How do young people experience and engage with mechanisms of opinion formation in the post-digital society?

- **Diversification of access and discourse:** Youth engage with a broader range of content, including local, global, and everyday topics (-> opinion formation beyond political topics).
- **Diversification of meaning:** Diversity in how young people find meaning in available content, based on their personal life situations and needs (Hepp, 2010), e.g., AI for homework.
- **High competence requirements:** The digital landscape brings great complexity and imposes high navigation requirements, especially for the youngest ones.
- **Fragmentation of public discourse:** Risk of fragmented public discourse by algorithm-driven information (especially through social media), echo-chambers and filter bubbles.
- **Speed of technological developments:** Difficulty in keeping up, also for sociological theories

Sources

Habermas, J. (2022). *Ein neuer Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit und die deliberative Politik*. Suhrkamp.

Hepp, A. (2010). *Cultural studies und Medienanalyse : Eine Einführung. Medien, Kultur, Kommunikation*. VS Verl. für Sozialwiss.

Jandrić, P., Ford, M., & Hayes, S. (2019). *Postdigital Science and Education*. Springer.

Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: NYU Press.

Livingstone, S. (2004). Media Literacy and the Challenge of New Information and Communication Technologies. *Communication Review*, 7(1), 3–14.

Negroponte N (1998). Beyond digital. *Wired*, 12 January. Available at: <https://web.media.mit.edu/~nicholas/Wired/WIRED6-12.html>. (accessed 13 March 2025).

Pariser, E. (2011). *The Filter Bubble: How the New Personalized Web Is Changing What We Read and How We Think*. Penguin Press.

Reckwitz, A. (2018). *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten : zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*. Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung.

Schweiger, W. (2017). *Der (des)informierte Bürger im Netz: Wie soziale Medien die Meinungsbildung verändern*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.

van Dijk, J. (2005). *The Deepening Divide: Inequality in the Information Society*. SAGE Publications, Inc.
<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452229812>

van Dijck, J., Poell, T., & Waal, M. de. (2018). *The platform society : Public values in a connective world* (Vol. 1). Oxford University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190889760.001.0001>

National Youth Report 2025

- Publication in January 2026
- Further information on the NYR2025:
<https://www.jugend-in-luxemburg.lu/projekt/jugendbericht-2025/>
- Further information on youth research at the University of Luxembourg:
<https://www.jugend-in-luxemburg.lu/>

