

Reporters of the future: news consumption among journalism students in Portugal

Reporteros del futuro: consumo de noticias entre estudiantes de periodismo en Portugal



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Abstract:

Understanding journalism students' perceptions of their news consumption is fundamental for defining media strategy and new professional profiles. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to analyse the relationship between Portuguese journalism students and news. To achieve this goal, an online survey was conducted. The analysed database comprises 449 responses from students representing all regions of the country. This dataset constitutes the largest and most diverse national sample to date for analysing

Resumen:

Comprender la percepción que tienen los estudiantes de periodismo sobre su consumo de noticias es fundamental para definir la estrategia de los medios de comunicación y los nuevos perfiles profesionales. Así, el propósito de esta investigación es analizar la relación de los estudiantes portugueses de periodismo con las noticias. Para alcanzar este objetivo, se llevó a cabo una encuesta por cuestionario en línea. La base de datos analizada comprende 449 respuestas de estudiantes de todas las regiones del país. Estos datos constituyen la muestra nacional más grande y diver-

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this research topic in Portugal. The findings indicate that most respondents do not read printed newspapers and magazines, instead preferring to obtain information via traditional media websites, digital platforms, and social media. While the frequency of reading starts off relatively low, there is an observed increase as students advance through their journalism courses. For these young people, the consumption of news is primarily centred on digital platforms, with television being the last traditional medium to have a significant impact.

Keywords:

Journalism education; news consumption; professional profiles; traditional media; university students.

sa hasta la fecha para analizar este tema de investigación en Portugal. Los resultados revelan que la mayoría de los encuestados no lee periódicos ni revistas impresos, prefiriendo informarse mediante páginas web de medios tradicionales, nativos digitales y redes sociales. Aunque la frecuencia de lectura sea muy baja, se observa un aumento a medida que los estudiantes avanzan en los años de su curso de periodismo. Para estos jóvenes, el consumo de información noticiosa se basa principalmente en plataformas digitales, siendo la televisión el último medio tradicional que aún tiene un impacto significativo en su dieta mediática.

Palabras clave:

Enseñanza del periodismo; consumo de noticias; perfiles profesionales; medios tradicionales; estudiantado universitario.

1. Introduction

The internet and mobile devices have revolutionized news consumption with the most significant shift occurring among young people, particularly Generation Z (Artero et al., 2020). These young individuals primarily consume information through smartphones, enabling them to access content on the go, especially on social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter).

Comprehending student journalists' perspectives on their news consumption is crucial for formulating effective media strategies and identifying emerging professional roles. These students embody the generation that will soon join newsrooms to cover a diverse range of events shaping community life, viewing themselves as essential pillars of democratic societies (Berganza et al., 2017). Consequently, this research aims to investigate the relationship between these Portuguese students and news.

To achieve this objective, an online questionnaire survey was conducted. The questions were adapted from existing research, considering various international contexts (Avendaño Caneo et al., 2021; Vartanova et al., 2019; Hanusch et al., 2015). The analysed sample comprises 449 student responses from the 18 mainland districts and the 2 autonomous regions of Portugal. This represents the largest and most diverse sample to date studying the relationship between journalism students and news in the country.

1.1. Journalism students, news and professional profiles

The massification of Internet access and networked mobile devices has completely transformed the way in which news is consumed. Over the years, reports published by the Reuters Institute (2023, 2022, 2021), in conjunction with older studies (Pew Research Center, 2015, 2012), have shown that all age groups have changed their media consumption patterns. There is now a trend towards accessing more information online, either through digital versions of traditional media or on the websites of digital native media (Canavilhas, 2023).

The most notable shift in information consumption has occurred among young people, particularly Generation Z, born between 2005 and 2015. This generation has changed their preference away from traditional media (Artero et al., 2020; Boczkowski et al., 2018) and towards what is known as ‘new media’ (Levinson, 2014). To this end, they combine screens in their media diet and have a high consumption on mobile devices. Therefore, they can be considered hyper-connected due to the prolonged time they spend online (Casas-Mas and Homont, 2024).

For these young people, information consumption is mostly done through smartphones, devices that merge old and new media in one device (Antunovic, 2018; Cardoso, 2013). This allows them to access information while on the move (Zerba, 2011) and in a variety of contexts (Peters, 2012), especially on social media (Canavilhas, 2023), which are one of the preferred spaces for this age group (Yanarda o lu, 2021; Espinar-Ruiz et al., 2020; Tandoc Jr., 2014).

When it comes to the consumption of journalistic information, studies focusing on Generation Z often present divergent conclusions. While some researchers argue that young people maintain a genuine interest in and value journalistic information (Casero-Ripollés, 2012), others argue that their consumption is occasional (Boczkowski et al., 2018) or impulsive (Silveira and Amaral, 2018), suggesting that it does not stem from an interest that motivates an active search for information.

However, it is crucial to bear in mind that young people, even those who are journalism students, are not a uniform social group. Their reactions to news consumption may differ depending on the socio-demographic environment in which they are embedded (Casas-Mas and Homont, 2024; Santos-Sainz, 2013).

Most studies on the profile of future journalists and their competences focus on technological and digital change, the modification of newsroom structures and the adaptation of training to emerging profiles (Sánchez-García et al., 2019). Meanwhile, the relationship between journalism students and news can reveal important clues for defining media strategy and new professional profiles. These students represent the generation that in the coming years will be integrated into newsrooms to report on a broad spectrum of events that shape community life, perceiving themselves as a pillar of democratic states (Berganza et al., 2017).

1.2. News consumption, mobile devices and social media

In a study conducted with 252 journalism students in Spain, Tejedor et al. (2021) found that 90.0% consume news through social media platforms to access information: Facebook and Instagram were the most popular. On the other hand, 67.0% of participants also indicated a preference for traditional and digital media news websites.

The Covid-19 pandemic has also had an undeniable impact on information consumption, especially among young people, who experienced a marked increase in online information seeking (Casero-Ripollés, 2020). During the most difficult period of confinement, social media played a crucial role as platforms for obtaining information (Di Fátima et al., 2024; Tejedor et al., 2021). According to the Reuters Institute (2020), surveys conducted before and during the pandemic reveal a ‘significant increase’ in news viewing, with more people identifying television as their primary source. This behaviour aligns with previous studies showing increased interest in information during times of uncertainty (Chadwick, 2013).

In other research conducted in Spain, with the participation of 168 university students in the areas of social sciences and communication, Espinar-Ruiz et al. (2020) concluded that this group primarily accesses information through mobile devices

and considers the Internet as their main source of news. Once again, young people highlighted the significant use of social media. Another interesting fact is that television continues to be a preference among students, demonstrating that there is currently a consumption that combines content from different media.

Journalism students in Chile also show a preference for obtaining information through social media (69.6%). This is followed by a preference for digital media with 64.4%, television with 41.8%, radio with 20.9% and, in last place, printed newspapers with 19.1% (Avendaño Caneo et al., 2021). An additional study carried out in the same country corroborates this trend, pointing to the prominence of social media (47.7%) and online press (46.9%) against the residual values of television, radio and printed newspapers (Sibrian Díaz et al., 2020).

An older study, involving 400 journalism students in Brazil, already anticipated a trend that has been consolidated today (Schwingel et al., 2005). In that period, although television led daily news consumption, with 81.0% preference, the Internet was already a solid second place (68.0%). Subsequently, young people showed a preference for radio (64.0%), printed newspapers (41.0%) and magazines (20.0%).

In a more recent study in the same Latin American country, which involved only 44 journalism students, the trend was further confirmed (Viana et al., 2017). Although in this case there was no subdivision of the content consumed, the Internet is positioned as the most used medium, with 81.8%, followed by television (13.6%), the press (9.1%) and radio (6.8%).

Both journalism students and other young people of their generation find the Internet and its networks to be the main source of information (Avendaño Caneo et al., 2021; Tejedor et al., 2021). Therefore, the choice to study journalism does not seem to have a significant influence on their information consumption habits or their media diet. Consequently, studies on both young people in general and journalism students show very similar findings in different countries (Yanarda o lu, 2021; Artero et al., 2020; Vartanova et al., 2019; Viana et al., 2017; Hanusch et al., 2015; Rosengard et al., 2014).

2. Methods and data

The aim of this study is to analyse the relationship of Portuguese journalism students with news. To meet this objective, an online questionnaire survey was conducted using the Google Forms platform. The questions were developed from previous studies, considering contexts as diverse as Russia and Australia (Vartanova et al., 2019; Hanusch et al., 2015), Chile and the United States (Avendaño Caneo et al., 2021; Tandoc Jr., 2014) or Spain and Brazil (Tejedor et al., 2021; Schwingel et al., 2005). This approach ensures the scientific reproducibility of the study, allowing it to be used by other researchers in similar contexts (Morse, 2010).

Twenty questions were formulated to identify students' relationship with information content, social media platforms and media in general (press, radio, television, Internet). The questions were closed-ended, open-ended, and semi-open-ended, with simple, scaled and multiple-choice answers (Bordens and Abbott, 2011). The primary data allow us to analyse a little-known universe in Portugal and with an observation tool created to respond to the stated objective.

The link to the questionnaire was sent by email to the coordinators of 10 journalism university courses and their respective teachers, with the request that they distribute it to their students. This online questionnaire was available from 22 September

2022 until 15 March 2023. The intention was that this extended period, which covered a total period of 174 days, could increase the number of responses from such a specific group of young people. The data collected is anonymous and aggregated, so the authors of the responses cannot be identified. The data were processed and analysed with the statistical software SPSS 27.0.

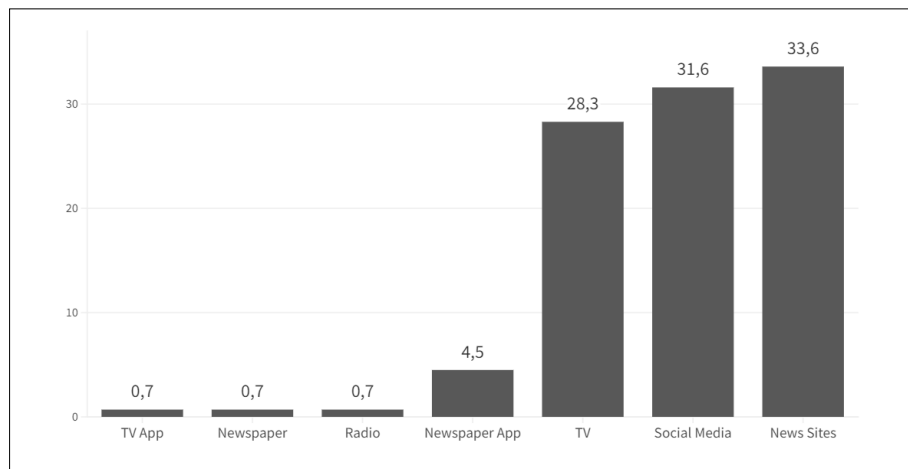
The sample has 449 responses from students from the 18 continental districts and the 2 autonomous regions of Portugal. The geographical distribution is as follows: Norte (37.0%), Centro (28.1%), Lisboa (16.9%), Alentejo (12.2%), Algarve (2.2%), Madeira (2.2%) and Açores (1.3%). To create a national portrait, the cities of Lisboa and Porto account for just over a third of the sample.

The majority of respondents were in the 18-24 age group and were enrolled in the various years of undergraduate (94.7%) and master's (5.3%) studies in 10 of the main educational institutions in the country: Escola Superior de Comunicação Social, Instituto Politécnico de Coimbra, Instituto Politécnico de Leiria, Instituto Politécnico de Portalegre, Instituto Politécnico de Viseu, Universidade da Beira Interior, Universidade de Coimbra, Universidade de Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro, Universidade do Minho and Universidade do Porto.

This data constitutes the largest and most diverse national sample so far to analyse the relationship between journalism students and news in Portugal. This does not allow a statistical generalisation of the results at a global level, but this plays an important role in pointing to empirical evidence in an area still little explored both nationally and internationally.

3. Results

A detailed analysis of an audience's media diet can consider both the content, and the platforms used for its consumption. Figure 1 presents the main news source of these Portuguese journalism students, based on a question with closed options. Thus, only one hypothesis could be chosen, reflecting the importance attributed by the sample.

Figure 1. Main news source of the sample (%)

Source: created by the authors

The sample is strongly influenced by the consumption of news through the Internet and its various platforms. However, many of these individuals still maintain traditional media. Respondents' favourite news sources are almost evenly matched in first place, with 33.6% preference for news websites and 31.6% for social media, such as Instagram, TikTok or X (ex-Twitter). TV stations are in third place with 28.3%, ahead of print newspaper Apps (4.5%). In last place, traditional radio stations, print newspapers and TV stations' Apps have 0.7% each. These results, mainly from radio, do not consider the consumption of podcasts - a growing format in the country.

The grouped results allow us to state that 70.4% of the news consumption of the sample is based on some online activity (platforms, websites, apps and social media). On the other hand, traditional media have 29.6% of the preferences as the main source of news, thanks to the good performance of television channels in Portugal. It does not seem that the periods of the day have a preponderant influence in this division either (Table 1). However, in some cases, traditional media are on a par with new media.

Table 1. Frequency of news consumption (%)

	Morning	Afternoon	Night
Always	8,9	5,6	6,2
Often	25,8	29,8	41,9
Sometimes	33,0	38,8	29,0
Rarely	22,3	18,0	1,1
Never	7,1	3,6	18,9
NR	2,9	4,2	2,9

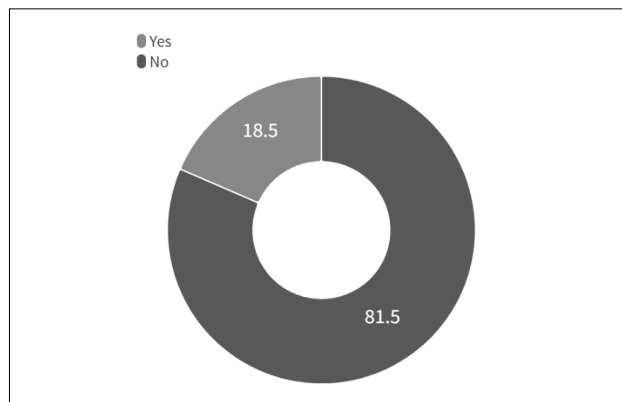
Source: created by the authors

There does not seem to be a favoured period for all respondents, which reinforces the argument that Portuguese journalism students are not a very homogeneous social group. For example, in the category ‘always’, none of the hours of the day received more than 9.0% of the preferences. On average, the categories ‘often’ and ‘sometimes’ obtained the highest ratings, with about one third each.

The most divergent data are recorded in the evening. At this period, 41.9% say that they consume news ‘often’. This consumption is characterised by a diet that combines different platforms and screens. Social media are the main source of news (32.4%), followed by television (31.4%) and the online press (30.8%).

In this scenario, it is feasible that consumption occurs concurrently or simultaneously, with activities on one platform influencing the others. Other information channels account for less than 6.0% in total, with print newspapers in the last position of evening preferences (1.1%). Figure 2 reflects this decline of the print press, with data on its regular consumption among future reporters.

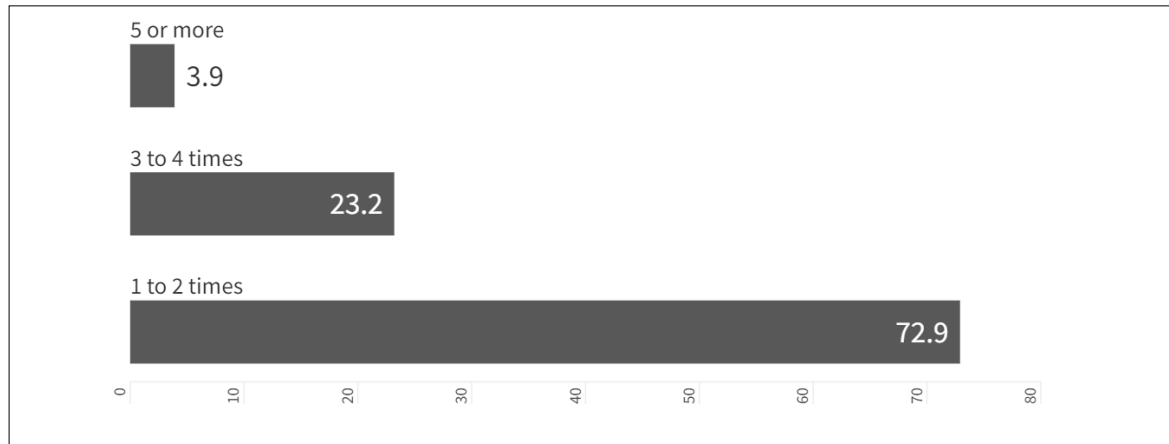
Figure 2. Students who read print media (%)



Source: created by the authors

Portuguese journalism students do not read printed newspapers: only a very small part does it regularly (18.5%). This lack of dedication to print news confirms previous studies and is transversal to the different periods of analysis. In other words, 8 out of 10 young people who will become reporters in the coming years do not read printed newspapers. Among those who do read, the diet consists mainly of national reference media. The newspapers Público (24.0%), Expresso (18.7%), Jornal de Notícias (13.8%), Diário de Notícias (10.2%) and Correio da Manhã (6.9%) lead the preferences.

Sports daily newspapers continue to occupy an important place for this social group (11.0%), while the consumption of local or regional media is practically non-existent (5.7%). The same can be said of weekly reference magazines, such as Visão (3.7%) or Sábado (0.8%). The only international print media cited are Vogue and National Geographic magazines, with 0.4% each. In any case, Figure 3 indicates that the weekly reading frequency of these young people is very low but tends to improve over time.

Figure 3. Weekly frequency of press reading (%)

Source: created by the authors

The data show that only 3.9% of journalism students read five or more times a week, i.e. almost every day. At the other extreme, 72.9% say they read once or twice a week, while 23.2% read three to four times a week. What is really encouraging about these data is that the length of time spent at university and the level of education in progress generate significant changes in the reading habits of these students (Table 2).

Table 2. Readership by year of journalism course (%)

	Total	Readers	%
Undergraduate - 1st year	154	23	14,9
Undergraduate - 2nd year	136	25	18,4
Undergraduate - 3rd year	135	29	21,5
Master - 1st year	14	4	28,6
Master - 2nd year	1	0	0,0

Source: created by the authors

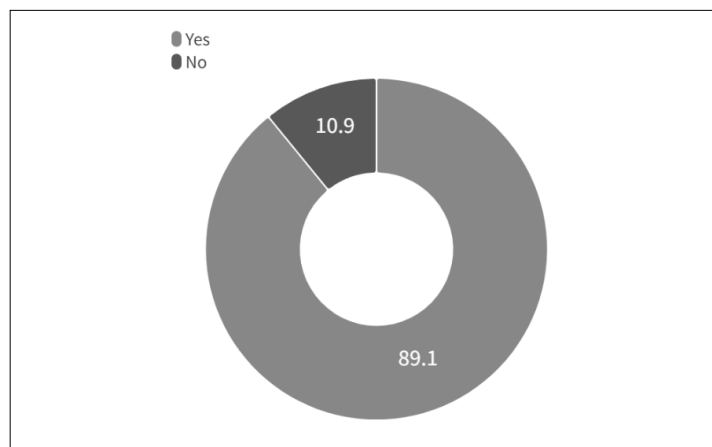
The results reveal a progressive increase in the number of readers and in the frequency of reading as the students surveyed progress through their courses. In the first year of the degree course, 14.9% say that they regularly read the printed press. This

percentage rises to 18.4% in the second year and 21.5% in the third year - when they finish their degree and enter the labour market, beginning to face the dilemmas associated with new professional profiles.

The third year of undergraduate also accounts for 50.0% of individuals who report reading the printed press five or more times a week, followed by second year students (33.3%) and first year students (16.7%), respectively. In the case of the master's degree in journalism, where comparable data are available, the first year has almost twice as many readers as the first year of the degree: 14.9% *versus* 28.6%.

These figures do not indicate that journalism students do not read news in general, or that they read below the Portuguese average. When compared to online platforms, traditional media are outperformed by a very considerable difference in some of the categories of analysis. Figure 4 presents, for example, the response of respondents to the question 'Do you regularly read the online press?'

Figure 4. Students who read news online (%)



Source: created by the authors

The data indicates a significant change in students' interest. Some 89.1% of respondents claim to read news on the websites of traditional and digital native media. This trend is also in line with findings from other studies and reflects the socio-demographic composition of the sample. Respondents are young, aged 18-24, where consumption of information and entertainment is strongly linked to the Internet and mobile devices.

Consumption practices on the Internet are also more diverse compared to the print press. In total, 64 online media are cited, while the print press has no more than 20 options. Although the media diet consists mainly of national reference media, the spectrum of international vehicles cited is much broader: 2 *versus* 23.

At the national level, there is no significant difference between the vehicles. What is read in print is read on the Internet. Thus, Público (30.8%), Expresso (9.0%), Observador (6.5%), Diário de Notícias (3.5%) and Jornal de Notícias (3.3%) are the top preferences. The only difference with respect to the list of print newspapers is Observador - a digital native news portal.

On the other hand, at the international level, the preferences of the sample are more diverse, including media originating from many countries and published in several languages. The most cited websites are CNN (2.5%), G1 (1.3%), The New York Times (1.3%), El País (0.8%) and The Guardian (0.8%). Interestingly, Google News does not reach one per cent of the preferences. Social media platforms also play an important role in this media diet (Table 3).

Table 3. Student profile in social media

	N =	%
Instagram	432	96,2
Facebook	386	86,0
Twitter	357	79,5
TikTok	327	72,8
Snapchat	232	51,7
LinkedIn	164	36,5
WhatsApp	14	3,1
BeReal	11	2,4
Pinterest	11	2,4
YouTube	9	2,0

Source: created by the authors

Students use a variety of social media, although there is a concentration on platforms that are popular among young people. In first place is Instagram, preferred by 96.2 per cent of the sample, followed by Facebook (86.0 per cent), X (79.5 per cent), TikTok (72.8 per cent), Snapchat (51.7 per cent) and LinkedIn (36.5 per cent). In the TOP 10, there are platforms that do not exceed five percent of preference, such as Pinterest or BeReal. In addition, there are cases, such as YouTube, where it is not necessary to have an account to consume content, and it is used more than the stated number. Only 1.0% of participants say they do not have a profile on any platform.

Social media drive the consumption of news information. 86.4% of students say that they read news through links found on the platforms. This result underlines the importance that networks have acquired in several aspects of journalism. Firstly,

for the media themselves in terms of audience cultivation. Secondly, they play an important role in the training of future journalists for new professional profiles. Finally, because of the various challenges they pose, both to business models, content production and the skills needed to manage online communities.

4. Discussion and conclusion

This study aims to investigate the relationship between Portuguese journalism students and news. These young individuals embody the generation that will soon join newsrooms to cover a diverse range of events shaping community life.

To accomplish the stated objective, an online questionnaire survey was conducted. The analysed dataset comprises 449 responses from students across all regions of the country. This is the most extensive and diverse research conducted with this in Portugal.

The findings align with research conducted in several countries, including Spain (Tejedor et al., 2021), the United States (Tandoc Jr., 2014), Chile (Avendaño Caneo et al., 2021), and Brazil (Viana et al., 2017). Approximately 81.5% of respondents did not read printed periodicals or magazines. Conversely, 89.1% obtained their information through traditional and digital-native media websites.

The most preferred news sources among respondents were nearly identical: press websites (33.6%) and social media (31.6%). The focus was primarily on nationally recognized media outlets, with a limited presence of international, regional media, and news agencies.

Despite a generally low reading frequency, a gradual increase is evident as the surveys progress over the years of the students' course, mirroring a similar finding in a study of Australian journalism students (Hanusch et al., 2015). In essence, the closer students are to entering the workforce, the greater their interest in reading news.

The data indicates that 70.4% of student news consumption is driven by online activities, highlighting the decline of print media. Conversely, social media platforms have gained substantial traction among young people, as evidenced by numerous studies (Avendaño Caneo et al., 2021; Tejedor et al., 2021), although empirical data specifically on Portuguese journalism students is lacking. Consequently, most students consume news via links discovered on Instagram, TikTok, or X (formerly Twitter).

These findings underscore the significance of print periodicals and magazines aligning their content, particularly their informative format, with the demographic profile of their target audience. Additionally, journalism programs should gradually expand their pedagogical offerings to incorporate the influence of social media platforms on public media consumption. While multimedia content production and data journalism remain highly sought-after skills in newsrooms (Sánchez-García et al., 2019), social media are increasingly becoming the primary access point for such content.

Television remains a stronghold of traditional media practices. In Portugal, it ranks third in the informational preferences of journalism students (28.3%). This enduring popularity amidst the decline of other traditional media is also evident in countries with diverse geographical contexts, such as Chile (Avendaño Caneo et al., 2021) and Spain (Espinár-Ruiz et al., 2020). In these instances, despite the significant role of social media, television remains a preferred source of information for young people.

One hypothesis explaining television's enduring popularity is its multimedia capabilities. Among all traditional media, television excels at combining various elements within a message, including sound, video, text, photos, graphic animation, and even social media publications. In this context, it is probable that television consumption occurs concurrently, and that activities on one platform can influence engagement with others. For instance, individuals might watch television while simultaneously browsing social media. Regardless, multimedia capabilities appear to sustain interest in television as an information source, although the duration of this influence is challenging to predict.

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6. Specific contributions of each author

	Name and surname
Conception and design of the work	João Canavilhas
Methodology	Branco Di Fátima
Data collection and analysis	João Canavilhas and Branco Di Fátima
Discussion and conclusions	João Canavilhas and Branco Di Fátima
Drafting, formatting, version review and approval	João Canavilhas and Branco Di Fátima

7. Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest contained in this article.

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