



GRASPING THE DIGITAL WORLD  
THROUGH ITS USERS. THE EXAMPLE  
OF ONLINE NEWS PRACTICES

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# INTRODUCTION

Anchoring in information and communication sciences with a multidisciplinary perspective

Work at the crossroads of distinct theoretical fields: study of journalists' professional practices, study of informational practices (audiences) and digital informational devices (sociology of uses and innovation)

A perspective that is both critical and comprehensive of the digital world and its appropriations

Fundamental and applied approach of research

# DEFINING DIGITAL NEWS PRACTICES

- At the crossroads of work on media reception and digital uses
  - In digital news practices, the channel or vector (digital devices) is distinct from the source of the information
- Refers to individual news practices but also to their collective and social dimension, through the practices of sharing and commenting and the sociabilities in which they take shape
- News practices in the participatory (Jenkins, 2006) and expressive (Allard, 2007) culture

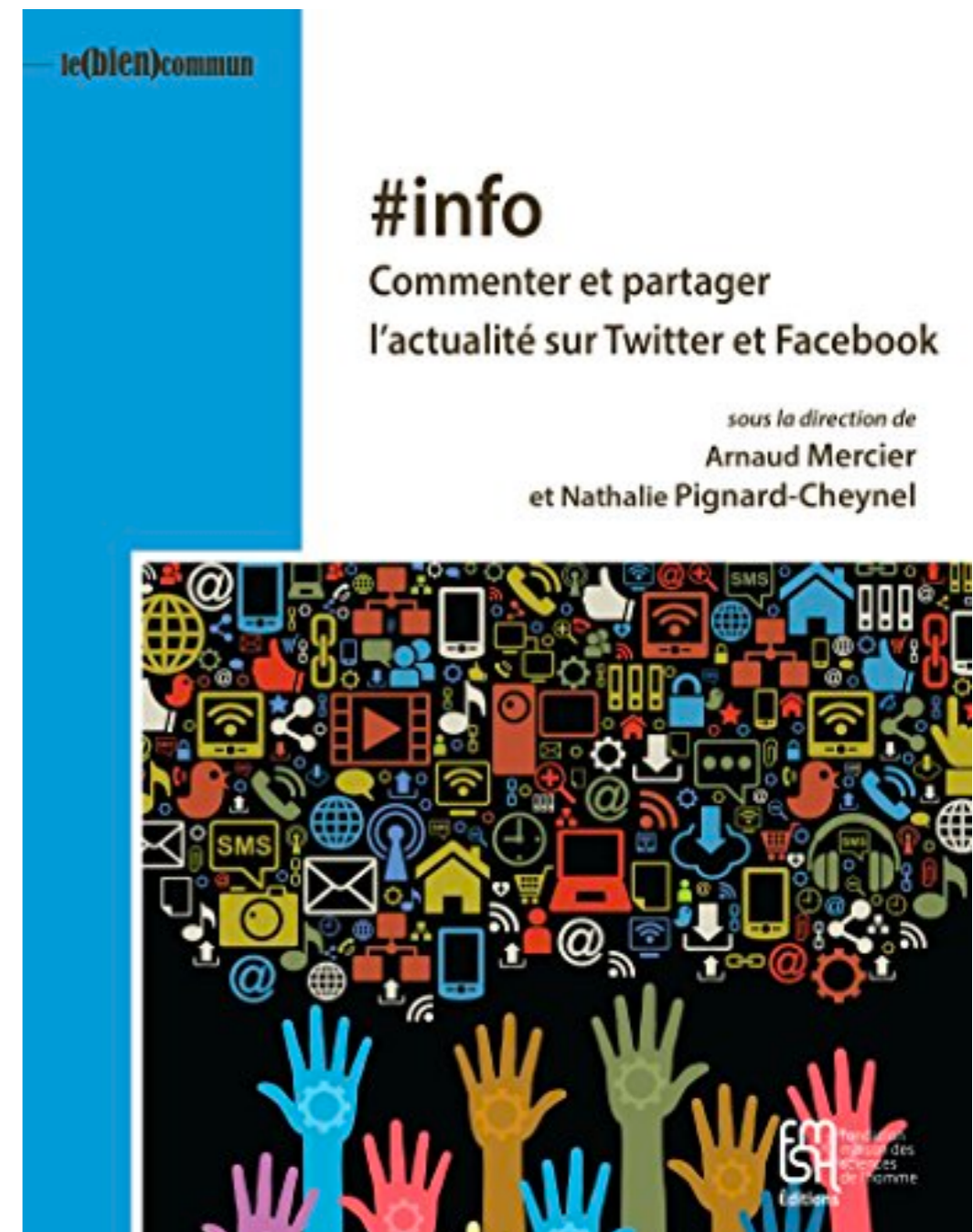
# 3 RESEARCHES ON THE RELATIONSHIP OF INDIVIDUALS TO DIGITAL NEWS

- Crossed presentations of three researches focused on young audiences, their results and their complementarities and the questionings they open
- Research whose starting point is the media and the news -> how digital technology changes the logic of reception, echoing journalistic practices media activities on digital
- Willingness to also question the "margins" and the a priori disqualified practices (misinformation, entertainment, etc.) in order to grasp how they fit into the digital information ecosystem and into social practices
- Complementary qualitative, quantitative and experimental methodologies



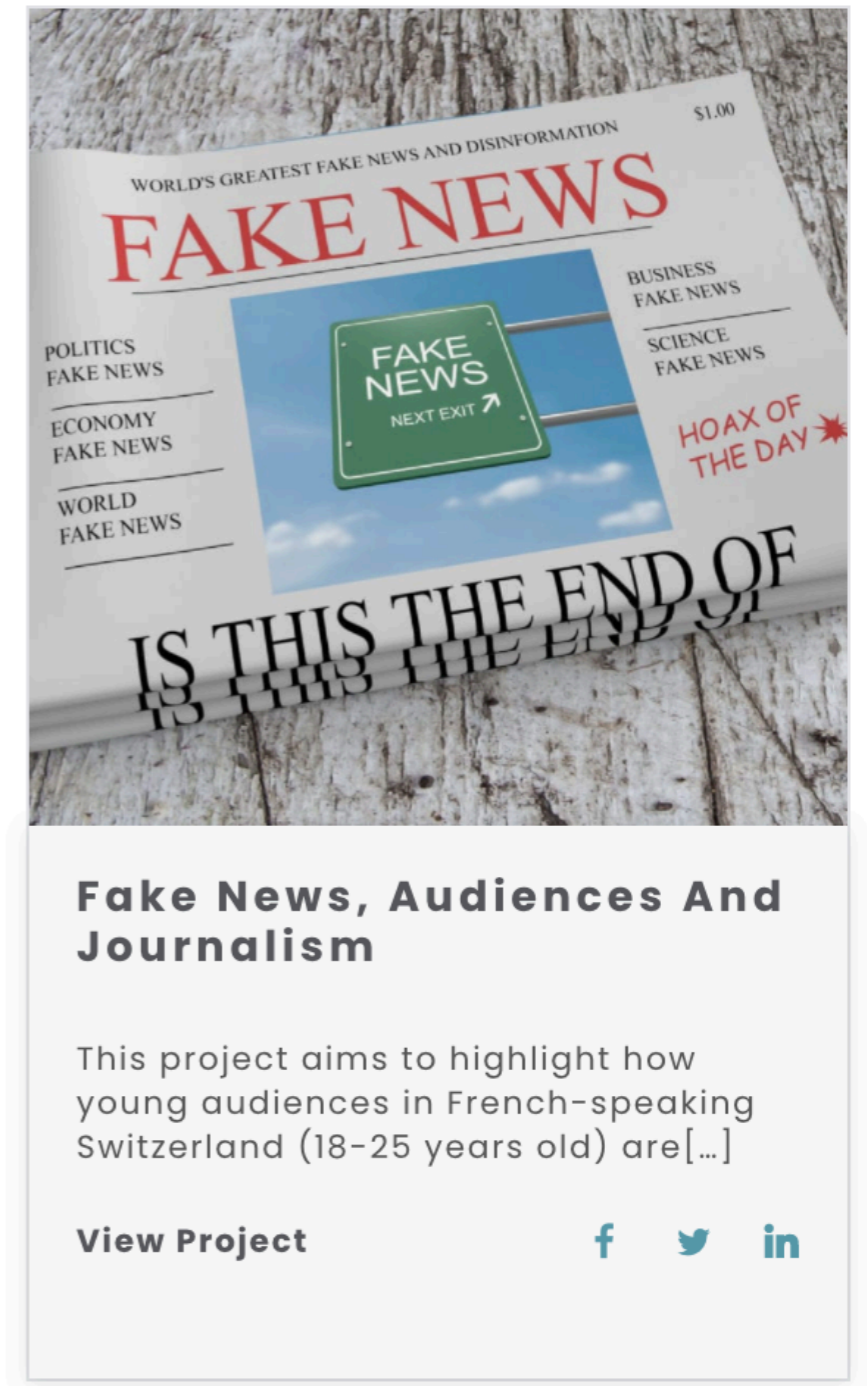
# CIRCULATION AND SHARING OF NEWS ON SNS

- One main study: database of 17 million tweets containing links to articles from 31 French news sites (May-Oct 2014)
- 3 sub-studies :
  - The place of newsbots in the circulation of information content
  - The news practices of students via SNS
  - The tactics of the media in the diffusion of their contents on the SNS



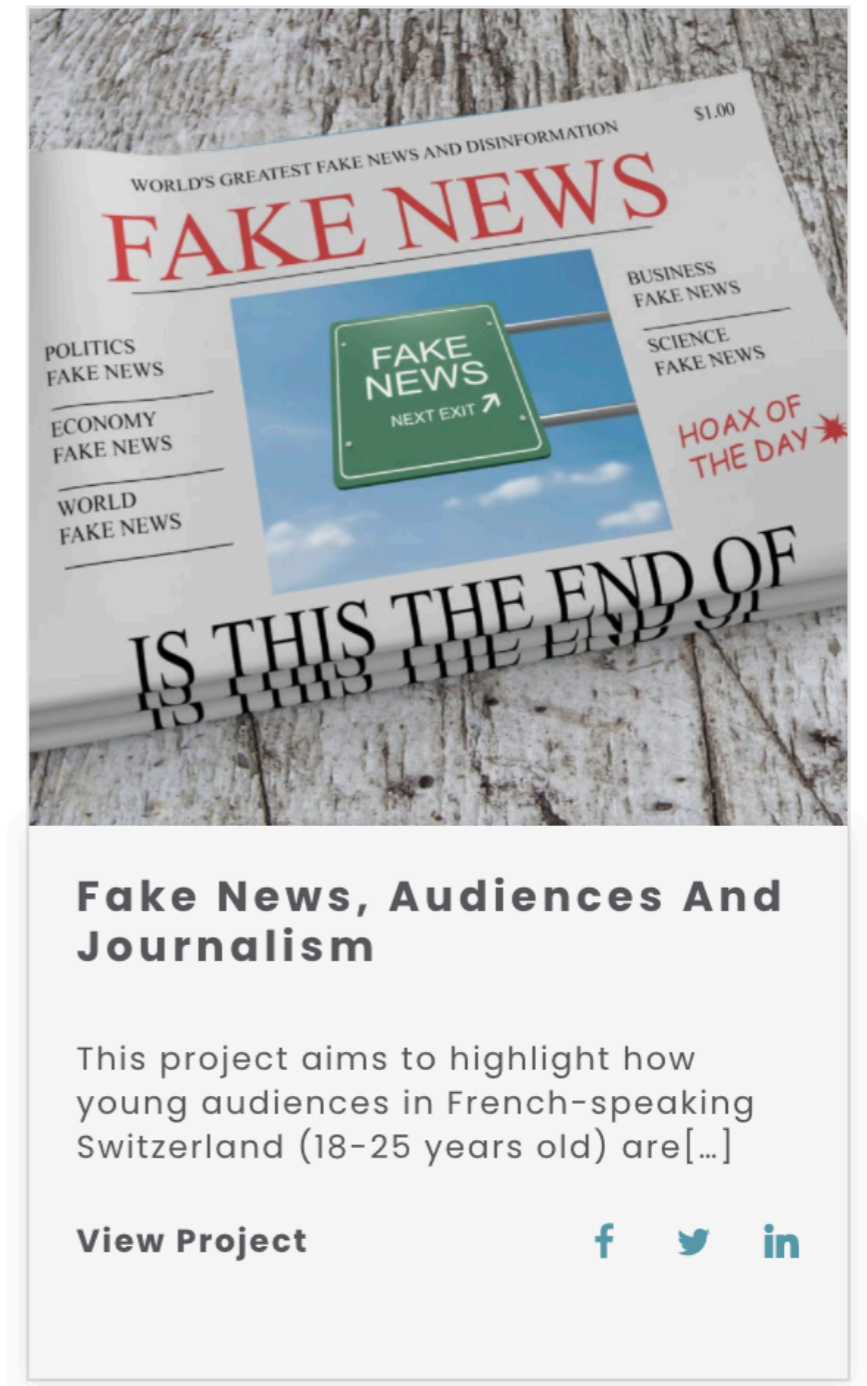
# NEWS AND MISINFORMATION PRACTICES OF YOUTH

- Applied research project (IMI funding), co-directed with Sébastien Salerno (UNIGE), in partnership with Le Temps (Oct 2019-Oct 2020)
- Objectives: Understand the relationship of young audiences to news, media and misinformation (in terms of practices and trust) and experiment (in collaboration with Le Temps) with formats adapted to these audiences



# NEWS AND MISINFORMATION PRACTICES OF YOUTH

- Several sub-studies including:
  - Qualitative survey (6 focus groups, 12 interviews) with 44 young Swiss (18-25 years old), with different socio-demographic profiles (Nov 2019-Apr 2020)
  - Survey by questionnaire among the French-Speaking Swiss population on the relationship to news, misinformation and the media in times of crisis Covid-19 (Apr-May 2020; 3845 exploited answers including 539 for the 18-25 years old)
  - Experimental phase with journalism students (creation of editorial formats), in partnership with Le Temps



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## S'informer en période de crise sanitaire

Pratiques d'information et exposition aux *fake news* en Suisse romande pendant la première vague de Covid-19 (mars-avril 2020)

Nathalie Pignard-Cheynel  
Sébastien Salerno  
Vincent Carlino

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Rapport pour l'Office fédéral de la communication

30 novembre 2020

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Projet *Fake news, publics et journalisme*

## Quelles offres éditoriales et pratiques journalistiques à destination des jeunes publics ?

Rapport de recommandations au Temps et aux médias partenaires de l'IMI

Nathalie Pignard-Cheynel, Sébastien Salerno et Vincent Carlino

Décembre 2020

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### Fake News, Audiences And Journalism

This project aims to highlight how young audiences in French-speaking Switzerland (18-25 years old) are [...]

[View Project](#)



**Reports available  
on the IMI website**

<https://www.media-initiative.ch/imi-projects>

# RESEARCH AND EDUCATIONAL EXPERIMENTAL PROJECT ON ALGORITHMS

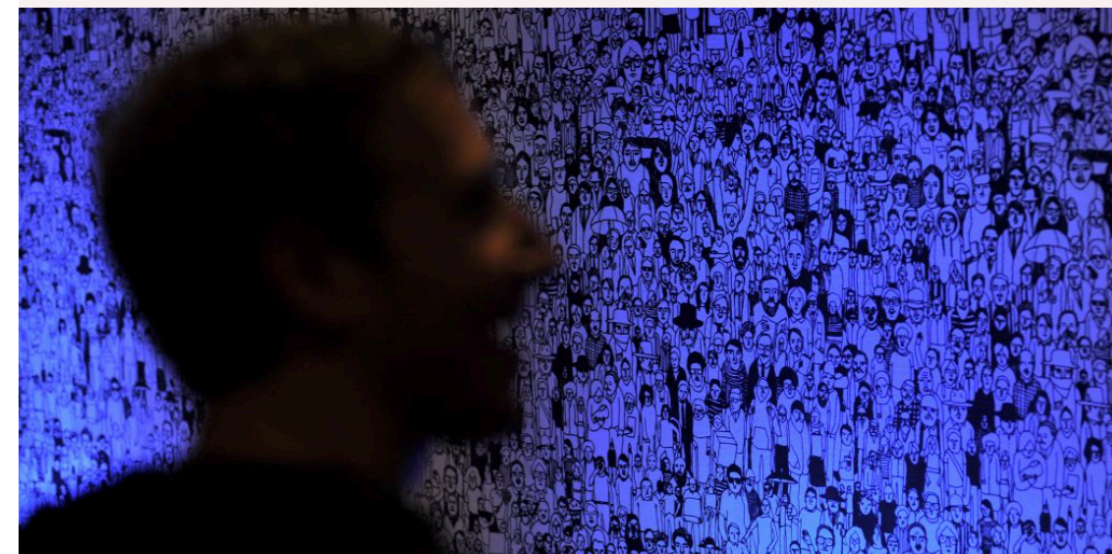
- Pedagogical and research project based on an experimentation of the role of Facebook's algorithm in accessing news content
- Conducted in 2017, 2018 and 2019 with students from the AJM and partner universities (BE and FR)
- Objective: to promote awareness of the mechanisms of diffusion of social networks and the biases induced by their algorithms in news practices

## **Voici comment l'algorithme de Facebook a trié nos contenus pendant des mois**

Temps de lecture : 8 min

Nathalie Pignard-Cheynel , Jessica Richard et Marie Rumignani — 28 septembre 2017 à 16h50

Comment Facebook opère sa sélection parmi des milliards de contenus pour nourrir le News Feed? Récit d'une expérimentation.

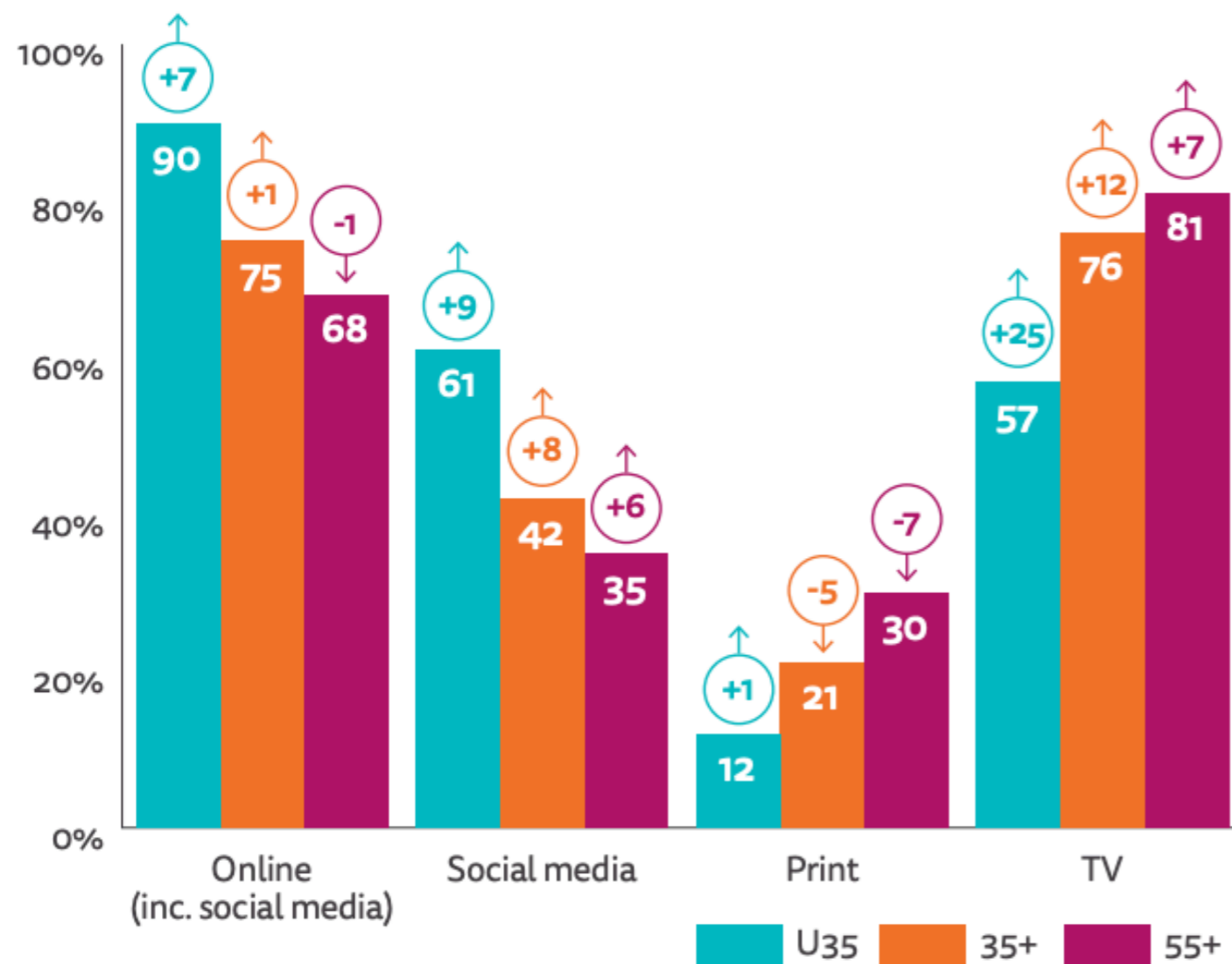


# THE CONSTITUTION OF A DIGITAL NEWS ECOSYSTEM

- Transformation of the logics of production, diffusion and consumption of digital news
- Digital news ecosystem (Anderson, 2016) superimposed on the classic media system
- New modes of circulation, based on individuals, sometimes via groups or communities, and mediated by algorithms
- SNS or platforms have progressively become « infomédiaires » (Smyrnaio, Rebillard, 2010) with a central role in this ecosystem, notably by ensuring a gate-keeping function

# SOCIAL NETWORKS, GATEWAY TO THE NEWS

PROPORTION THAT USED EACH AS A SOURCE OF NEWS  
IN THE LAST WEEK (APRIL 2020) – UK

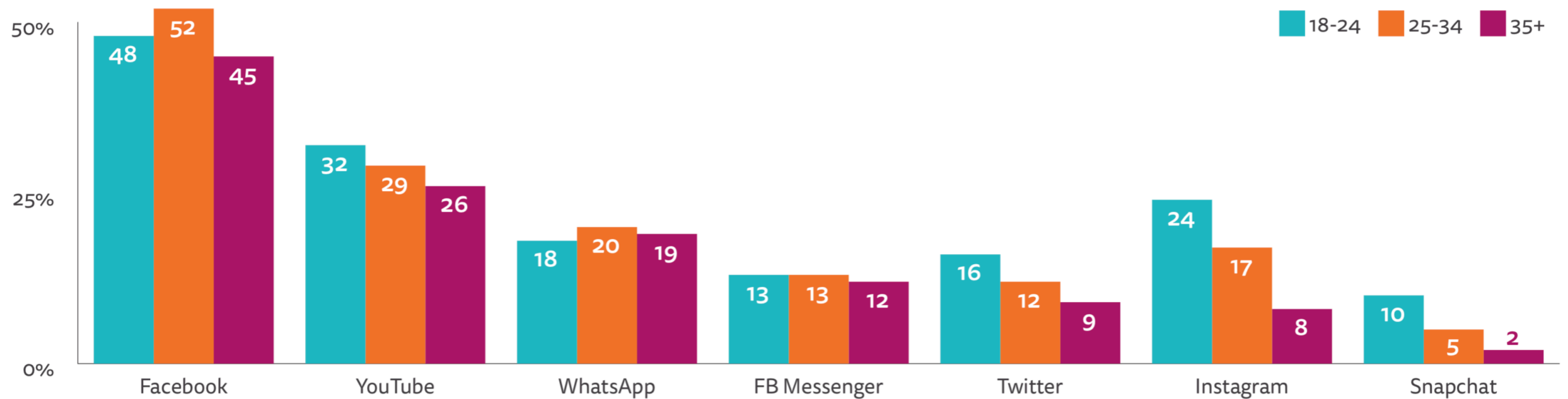


Q4. (Apr. 2020). Which of the following have you used in the last week as a source of news?  
Base: U35/35+/55+: UK = 548/1643/923. Note. Showing change from Jan. 2020. Figures adjusted to exclude non-news users for comparability.

Source : Reuters Institute, 2020

# SOCIAL NETWORKS, GATEWAY TO THE NEWS

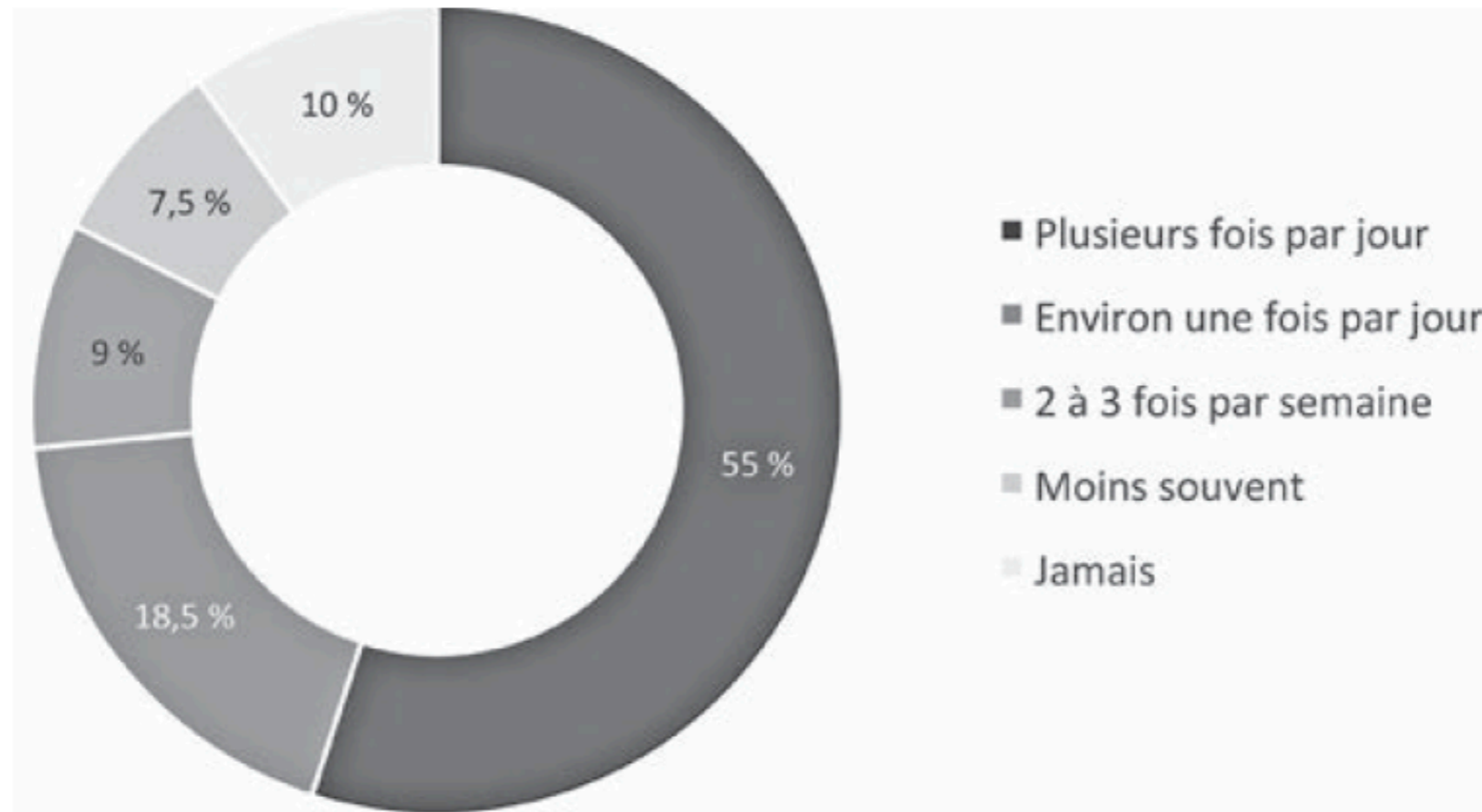
PROPORTION THAT USED EACH SOCIAL NETWORK FOR NEWS IN THE LAST WEEK - ALL MARKETS



Q12B. Which, if any, of the following have you used for finding, reading, watching, sharing, or discussing news in the last week? Base: 18-24/25-34/35+: All markets = 8272/13361/54116.

Source : Reuters Institute, 2020

# ESPECIALLY AMONG YOUNG AUDIENCES

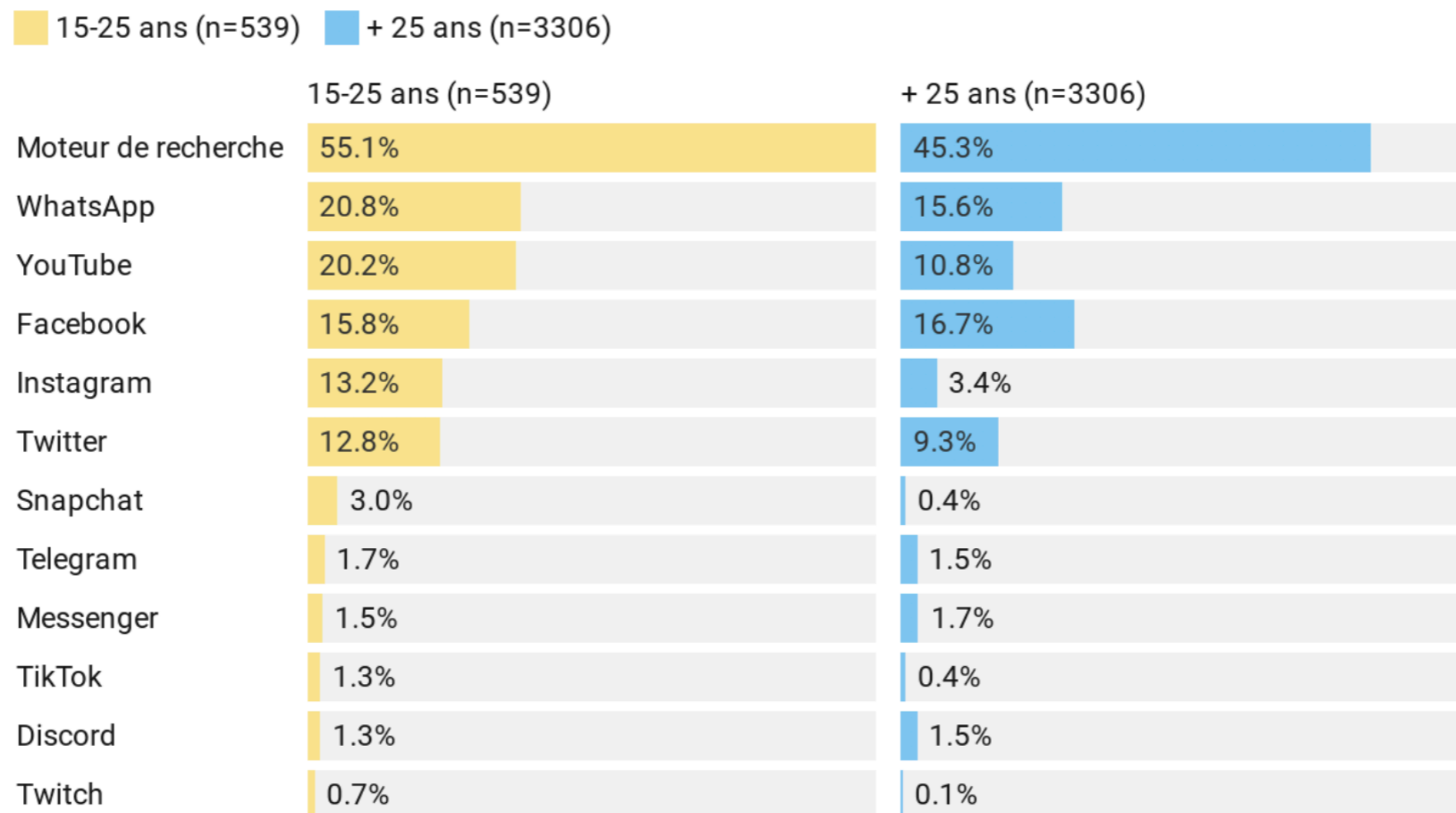


**Figure 5. Fréquence de suivi de l'actualité sur les réseaux sociaux numériques par les 18-24 ans (total = 1 820)**

Source : Ouakrat, Mercier, Pignard-Cheynel, 2017

# ESPECIALLY AMONG YOUNG AUDIENCES

Lesquelles de ces plateformes avez-vous utilisées pour vous informer sur le Coronavirus (Covid-19) ? [Très souvent / souvent]



Source : Pignard-Cheynel, Salerno et Carlino, 2020

# DISTINGUISH THE CHANNEL FROM THE SOURCE

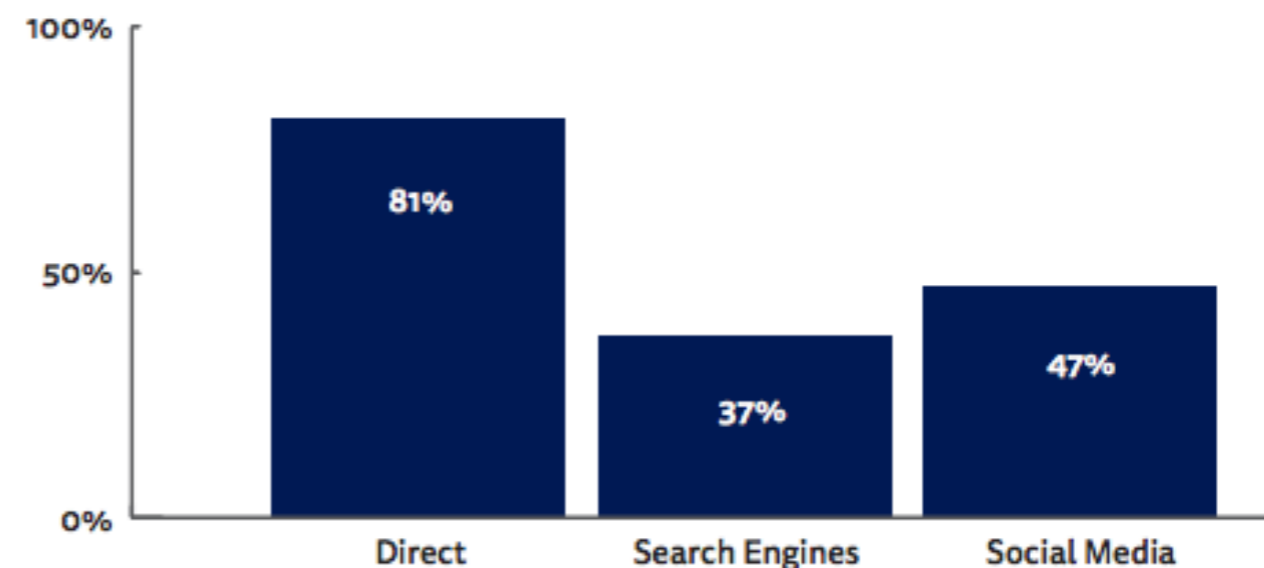
- SNS cannot be considered as "media" or "sources" but as channels. However, for traditional media, channel and source largely overlap
- Is it relevant to put Facebook or other social network on the same level as a radio or a print media ?
- A recurring problem with quantitative studies and the risk of misinterpretation

# DISTINGUISH THE CHANNEL FROM THE SOURCE

- "I saw it on Facebook" syndrome (Kalogeropoulos & Newman 2017)



Figure 2.1 Correct brand attributions by path



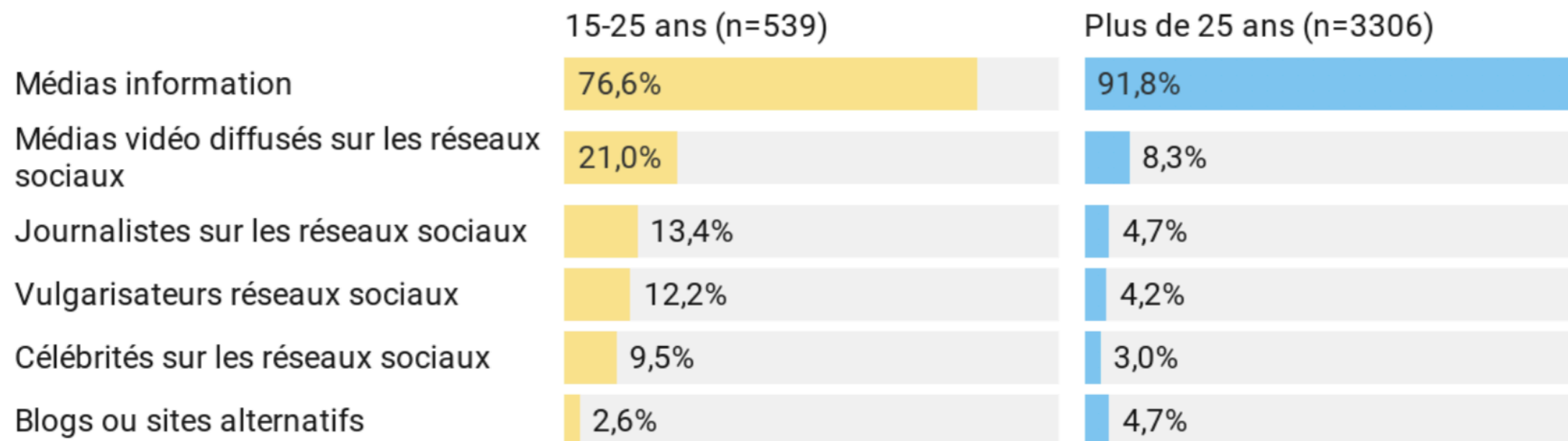
<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/our-research/i-saw-news-facebook-brand-attribution-when-accessing-news-distributed-environments>

# DISTINGUISH THE CHANNEL FROM THE SOURCE

- Interest in crossing the question of the source or nature of the content creator (media / journalists / others) and that of the channel

À quelle fréquence consultez-vous les sources d'information suivantes pour vous informer sur le Coronavirus (Covid-19) ? [Souvent / Très souvent]

■ 15-25 ans (n=539) ■ Plus de 25 ans (n=3306)



# THE INCLUSION IN A BROADER MEDIA DIET

SNS are only one brick in news practices; they are not a substitution but rather a superimposition -> concept of media diet that shows the pluralism and diversity of media consumption

Studies focused on digital news practices sometimes tend to overestimate their weight, compared to other types of media content (e.g. entertainment)

Particularly true for misinformation content: fake news only represent 1% of news consumption and 0.15% of the media diet of Americans (Allen et al., 2020)

# THE INCLUSION IN A BROADER MEDIA DIET

- The study on the news practices of students via Facebook shows that the sub-population of "informed via FB" has the most diversified news practices and consumes the most traditional media
- Facebook is part of a range of news supports, but does not replace them
- Facebook even appears to be a complement, with several respondents stating that they follow media on Facebook that they do not otherwise consult

# TRUST IN SNS

- In most surveys, SNS are considered untrustworthy or providing unreliable news

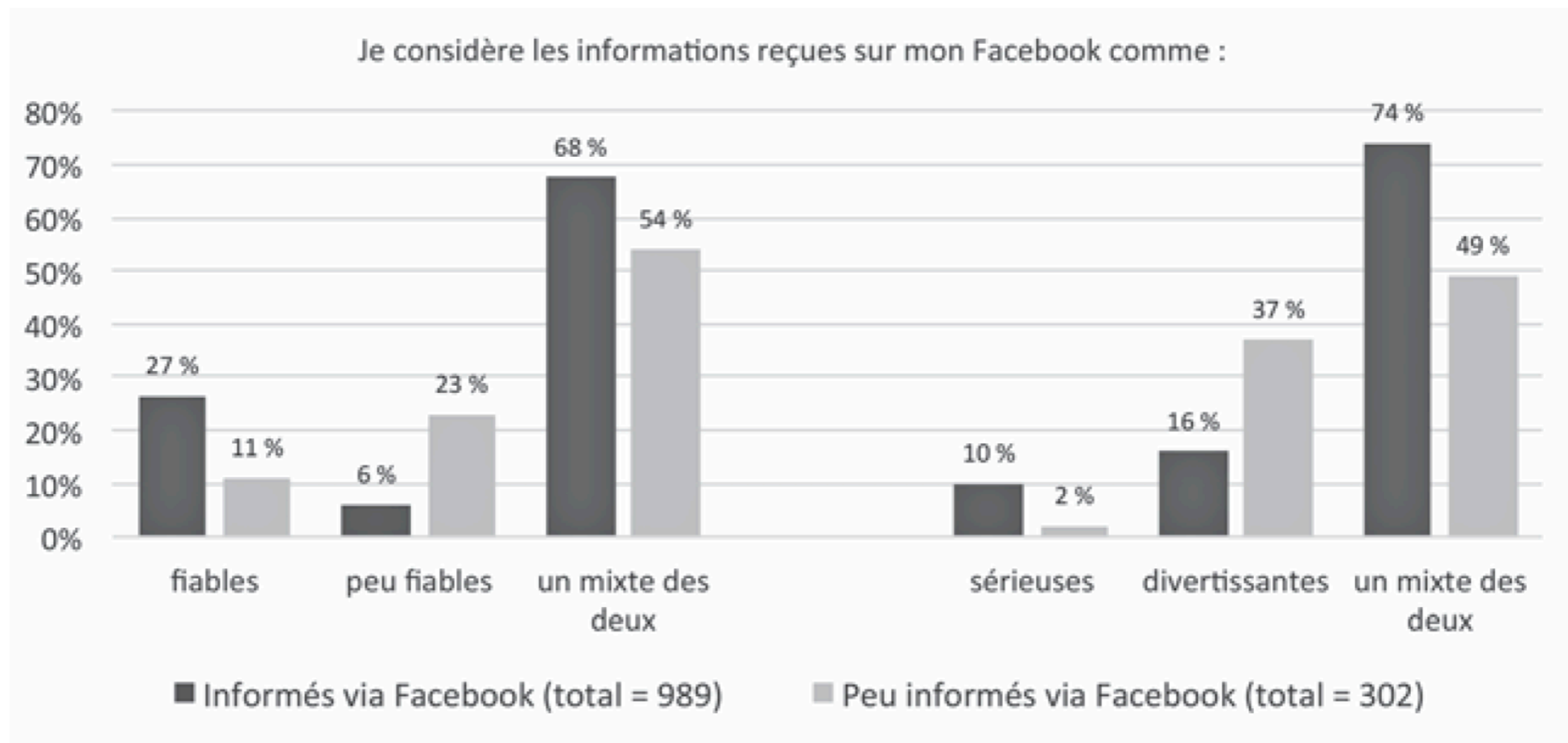
## Confiance dans les canaux d'information

À quel point faites-vous confiance à ces moyens d'accès à l'information, dans le cadre de la crise du Coronavirus (Covid-19) ? [Très / plutôt confiance]



# TRUST IN SNS

- Trust linked to use (the higher it is, the higher the trust is) and to the understanding of its logic



# TRUST IN SNS

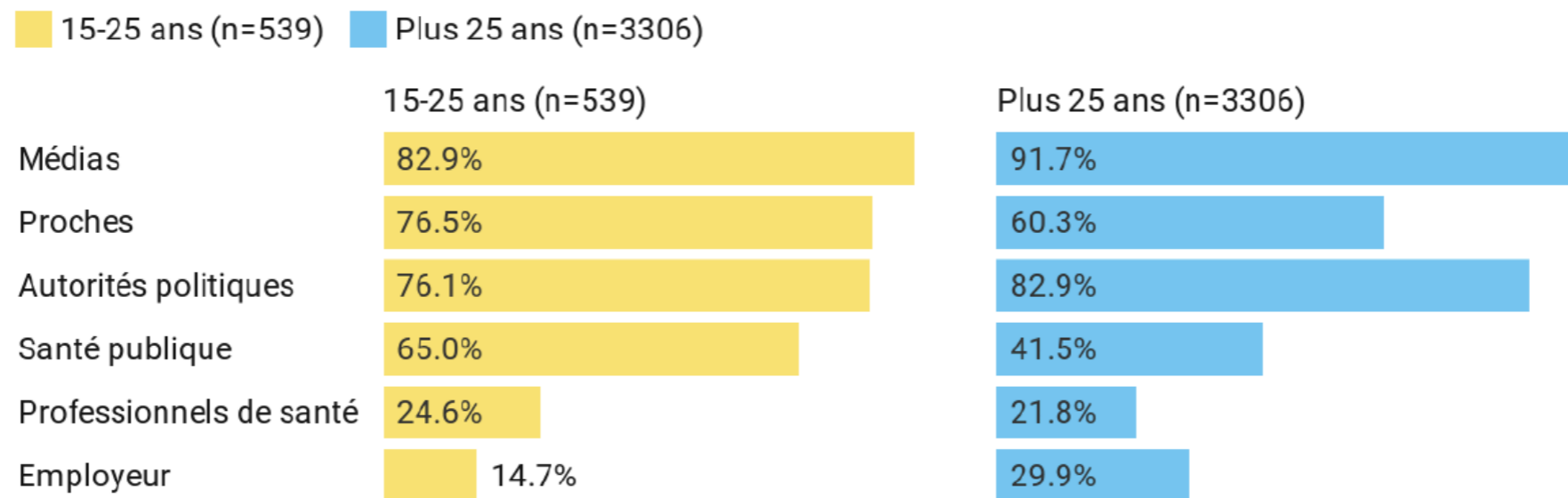
- The interviews and focus groups showed that the young people have a good overall knowledge of the SNS, of their distribution logic and of their biases
- Their speeches reveal bypass tactics to take advantage of the socio-technical device without totally submitting to it (e.g. mentioning in comments rather than sharing)
- However, there are differences according to the level of education and social position

# THE MEDIA REMAINS A "SURE THING"

- Traditional media are less present in the media diets of young people than their elders

## Sources d'information régulières

Comment vous tenez-vous informé·e à propos du Coronavirus (Covid-19) ? [Souvent / Très souvent]



# THE MEDIA REMAINS A "SURE THING"

- Traditional media are less present in the media diets of young people than their elders
- But they are still perceived as "safe places"
  - Particularly in times of crisis or in voluntary acts of verification, deepening, targeted research
  - Also in their traditional productions such as « téléjournal »

# NEWS AS A SOURCE OF INTEREST FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

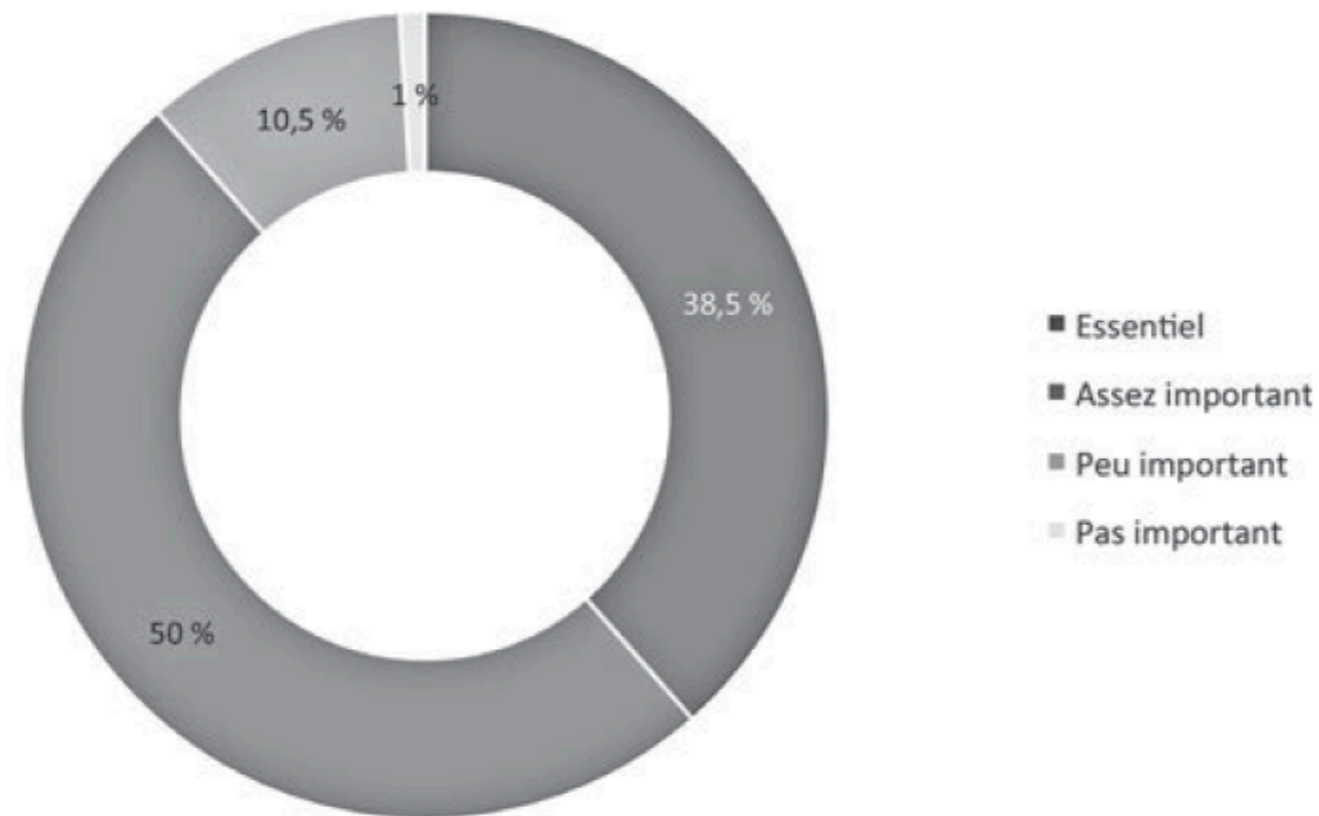


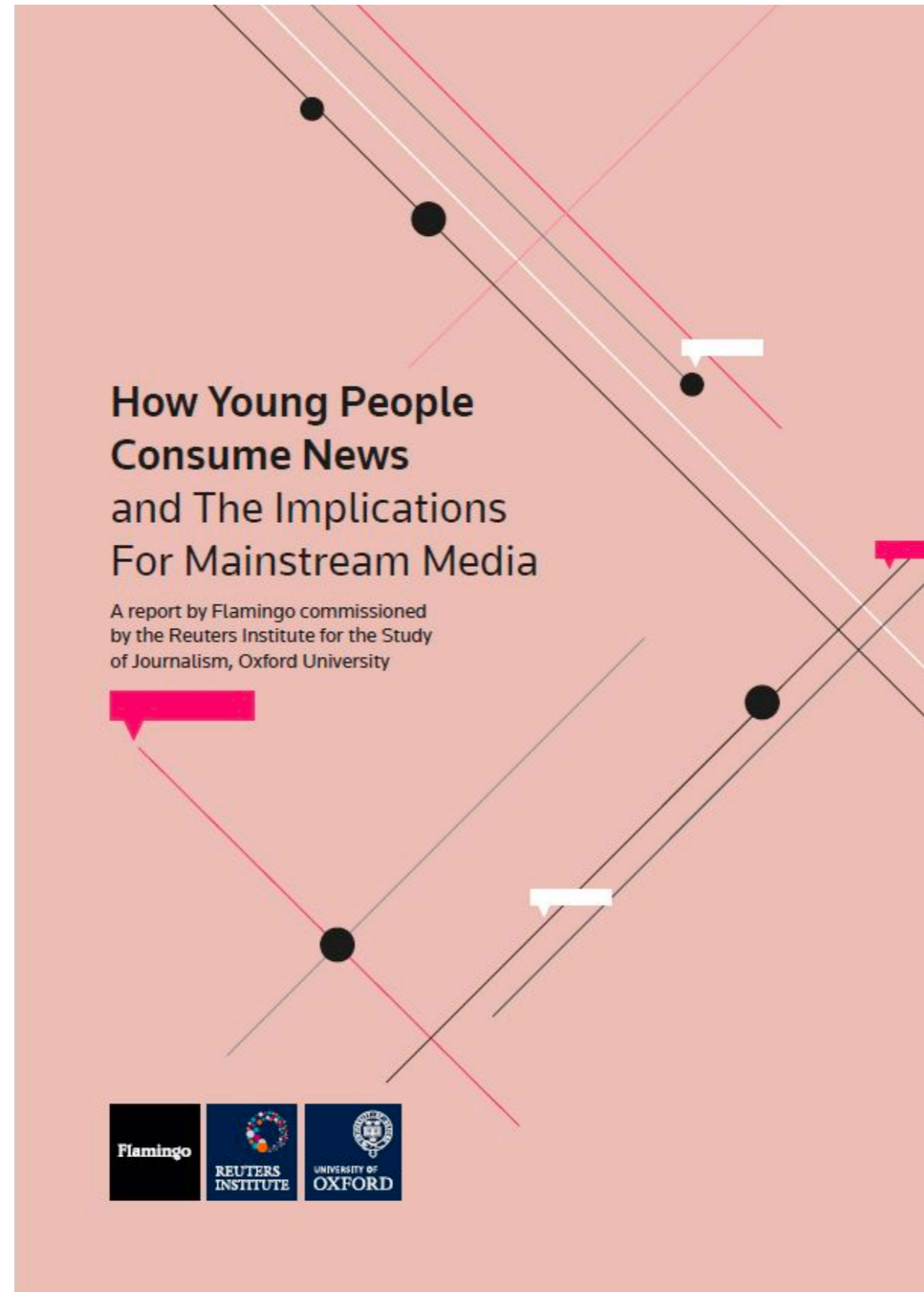
Figure 1. Importance du suivi de l'actualité chez les 18-24 ans (total = 1 820)

Source : Ouakrat, Mercier, Pignard-Cheynel, 2017

# NEWS AS A SOURCE OF INTEREST FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

- **!!** Declarative Bias.
- Young people are not "under-informed" but they are differently informed
- Need to reconsider the definition of "news"
  - Niche and specialized news rather than general news
  - Weight of infotainment and entertainment
- Interest in targeted and "useful" news for the individual ("I") or, conversely, news that promotes a relationship with the community, with living together (more generational and engagement-based subjects) ("WE")

# NEWS AS A SOURCE OF INTEREST FOR YOUNG PEOPLE



# ACCIDENTAL EXPOSURE AND VOLUNTARY RESEARCH

- News practices are structured around two opposing but not exclusive ways of accessing content:
  - Accidental or even involuntary and fortuitous exposure to news, through algorithmic game or recommendations, but also through the sharing of news by « friends »
  - Often from the least informed people
  - Broader reflection of traditional media reception (flipping through the newspaper, zapping, distracted listening, etc.; cf. Granjon & Le Foulgoc, 2011; Bastard, 2015)
  - Difficulty in documenting, through discourse, these unaware practices. Interest of tracing or logbook methods

# ACCIDENTAL EXPOSURE AND VOLUNTARY RESEARCH

Christine, about Facebook :

*« I'm on there a lot, every day. I go there all the time, I look at the articles quite a bit. It's more like articles that come in. You can get to know a lot of things pretty quickly, right away, if you don't have time to turn on the TV. In the end, it allows people to be informed in spite of themselves ».*

# ACCIDENTAL EXPOSURE AND VOLUNTARY RESEARCH

- News practices are structured around two opposing but not exclusive ways of accessing content:
  - Voluntary and organized access, often through search engine, which can complement the first modality
  - An individual and sometimes utilitarian approach (deepening of a subject; verification of information, research related to studies, etc.)
- These two uses reflect the duality of infomediaries (specialized search engine on the one hand, digital social network on the other)

# NEWS PRACTICES THAT MOVE AWAY FROM GATE-KEEPING

- Practices show a "destructured" and fragmented consumption, "snacked" (Boczkowski et al., 2017; Molyneux, 2018), whether accidental or voluntary -> consumption less oriented by gatekeeping and media hierarchization
- Prioritization is operated by self, algorithms and recommendation systems, and friends

# THE INTEGRATION OF NEWS PRACTICES INTO PARTICIPATORY CULTURE

- The consumption of news on digital media is part of expressive and participative practices (Allard, 2007; Jenkins, 2006) and online sociability...
- ... while remaining minority activities, especially for the most involving ones (such as commenting, sharing content or participating in online debates). Results in the continuity of studies on web 2.0 and online practices (Rebillard, 2007; Le Caroff, 2015; Bastard, 2016)

# THE INTEGRATION OF NEWS PRACTICES INTO PARTICIPATORY CULTURE

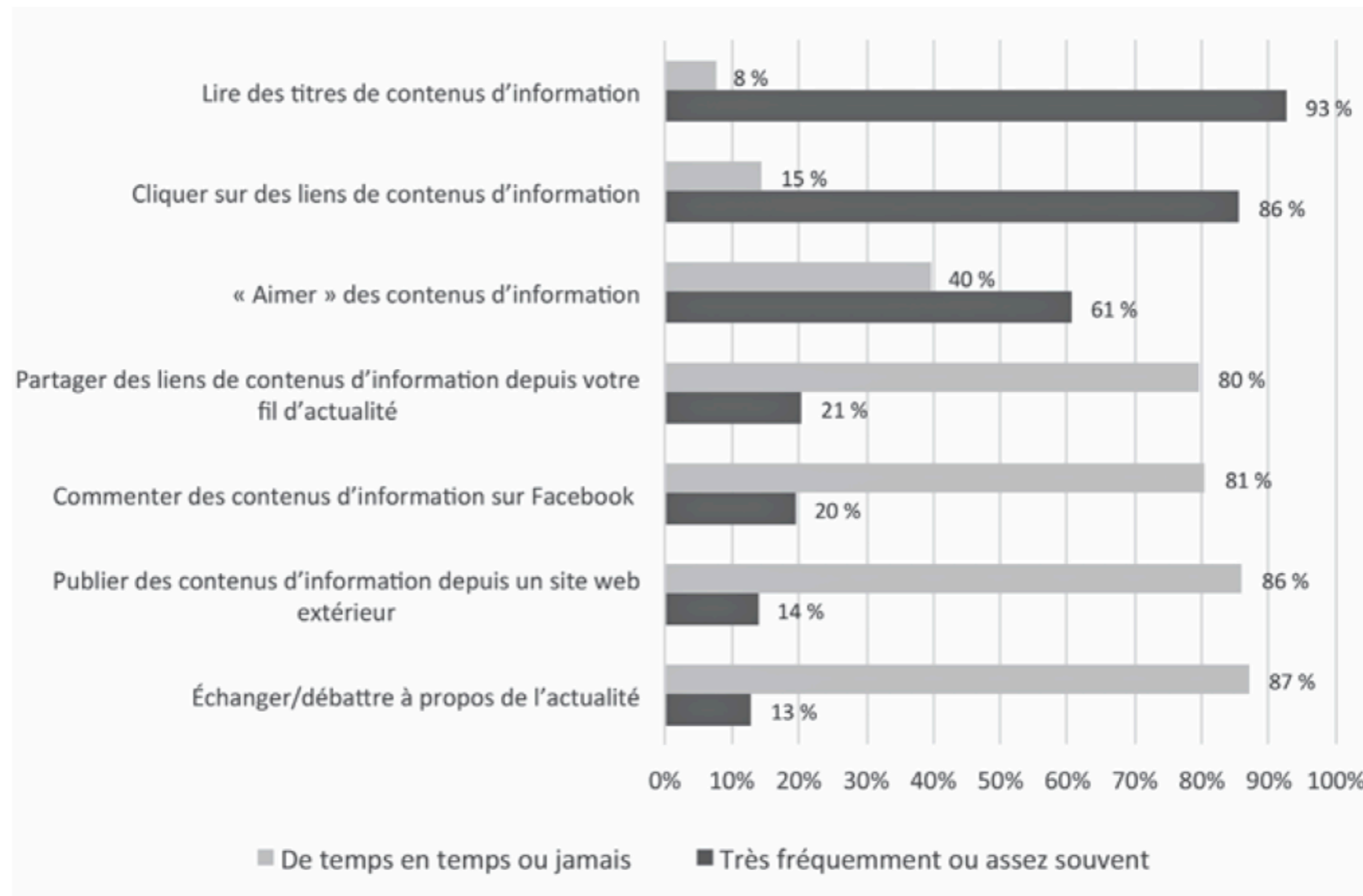


Figure 11. Actions du dispositif Facebook exercées sur les contenus d'information par les « informés *via* Facebook » (total = 989)

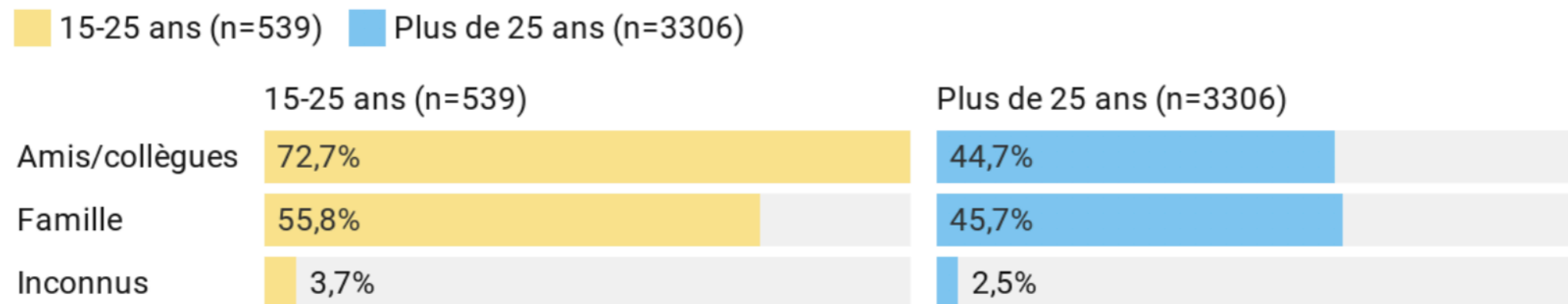
Source : Ouakrat, Mercier, Pignard-Cheynel, 2017

# SNS, SUPPORT OF DISCUSSION ABOUT NEWS

- The exchange of opinions and discussion on current events (but not necessarily in reaction to an article or information content) is, however, an important marker of the practices of young audiences, who are more confronted than their elders with opinions that differ from their own

## Activités de discussion sur les réseaux sociaux

Dans le cadre de la crise du Coronavirus (Covid-19), à quelle fréquence avez-vous discuté sur les réseaux sociaux avec : [Souvent / Très souvent]



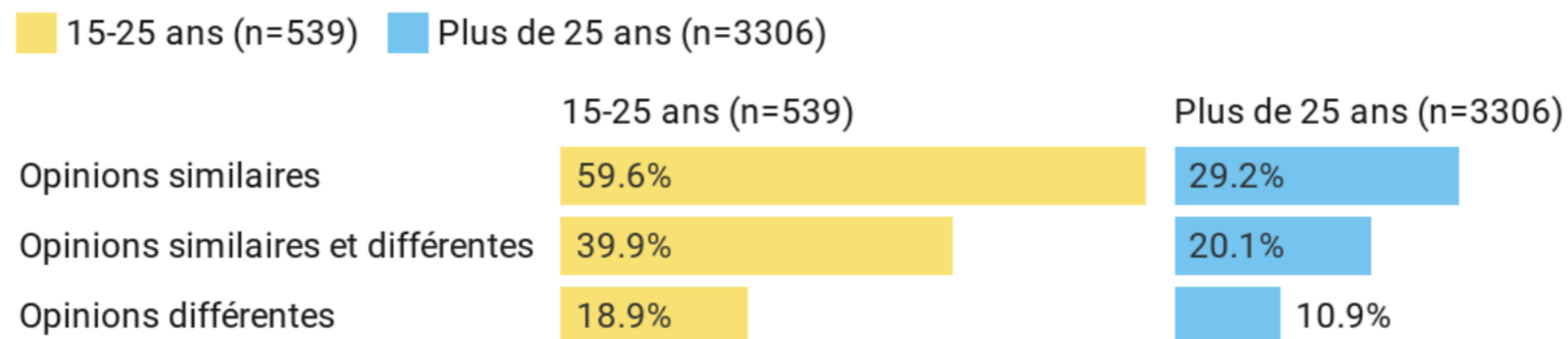
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## Discussions et opinions sur les réseaux sociaux

Dans le cadre de la crise du Coronavirus (Covid-19), avez-vous discuté sur les réseaux sociaux avec des personnes ayant : [Souvent / Très souvent]



Created with Datawrapper

Source : Pignard-Cheynel, Salerno et Carlino, 2020

# COMMENT SPACES

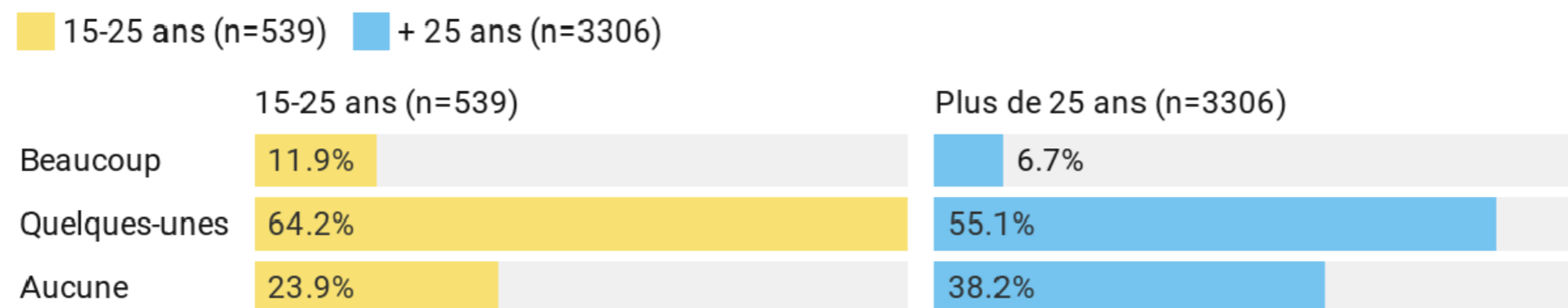
- If young people declare that they do not comment much, they attach great importance to navigating the comment spaces associated with the dissemination of informational content, for the benefit of a more "social" and collective reception
- The comment spaces on SNS appear as places of (re)coding and interpretation of the contents (additional information, indication of its authenticity/credibility, etc.)
- Spaces that would undoubtedly deserve to be more invested by journalists and media

# YOUNG PEOPLE FACED WITH MISINFORMATION

- Greater exposure of young audiences to misinformation content (or better identification of its nature?)

## Réception fake news sur messagerie

Avez-vous reçu des fake news à propos du Coronavirus (Covid-19) sur une messagerie instantanée (WhatsApp, Messenger, Discord, Telegram, etc.) ?



Created with Datawrapper

Source : Pignard-Cheynel, Salerno et Carlino, 2020

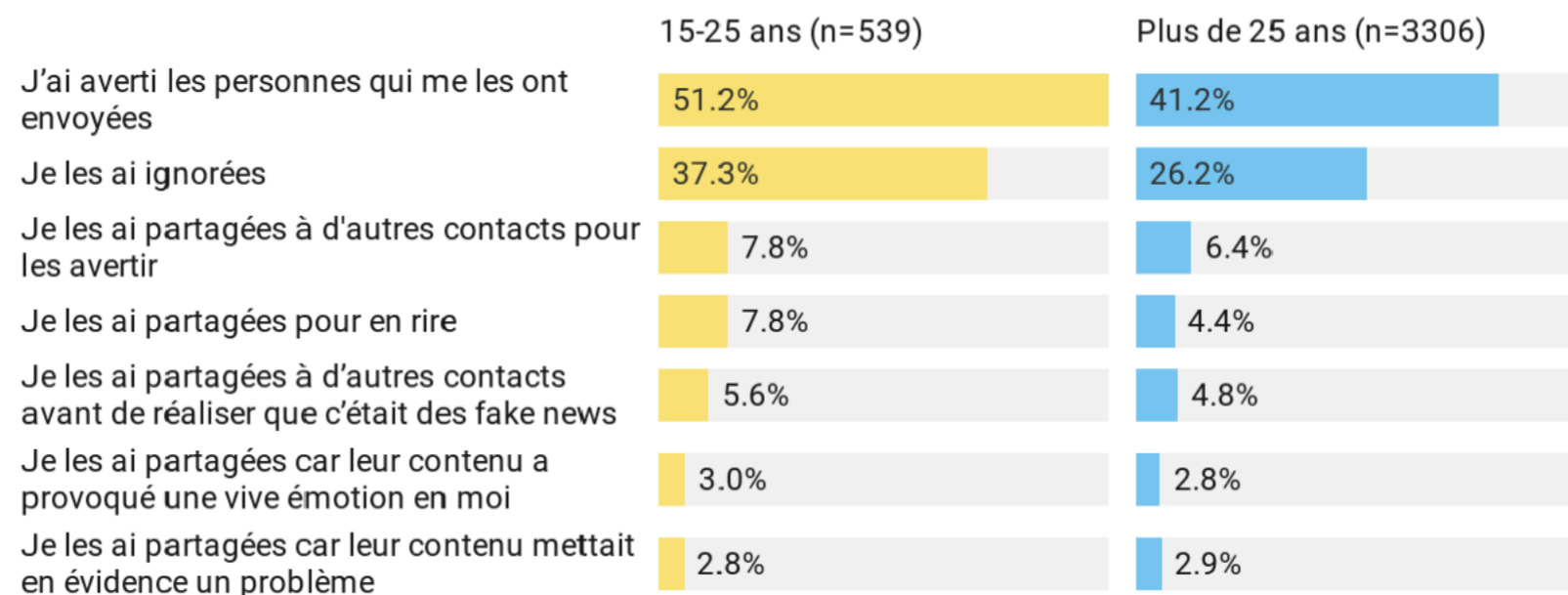
# YOUNG PEOPLE FACED WITH MISINFORMATION

- Young people are more proactive about misinformation, e.g., to warn people who have shared it. They are also more likely to ignore it

## Réaction à réception fake news

Quelles ont été votre ou vos réactions face à cette ou ces fake news reçues via messagerie ?  
(plusieurs réponses possibles)

■ 15-25 ans (n=539) ■ + 25 ans (n=3306)



Source : Pignard-Cheynel, Salerno et Carlino, 2020

# YOUNG PEOPLE FACED WITH MISINFORMATION

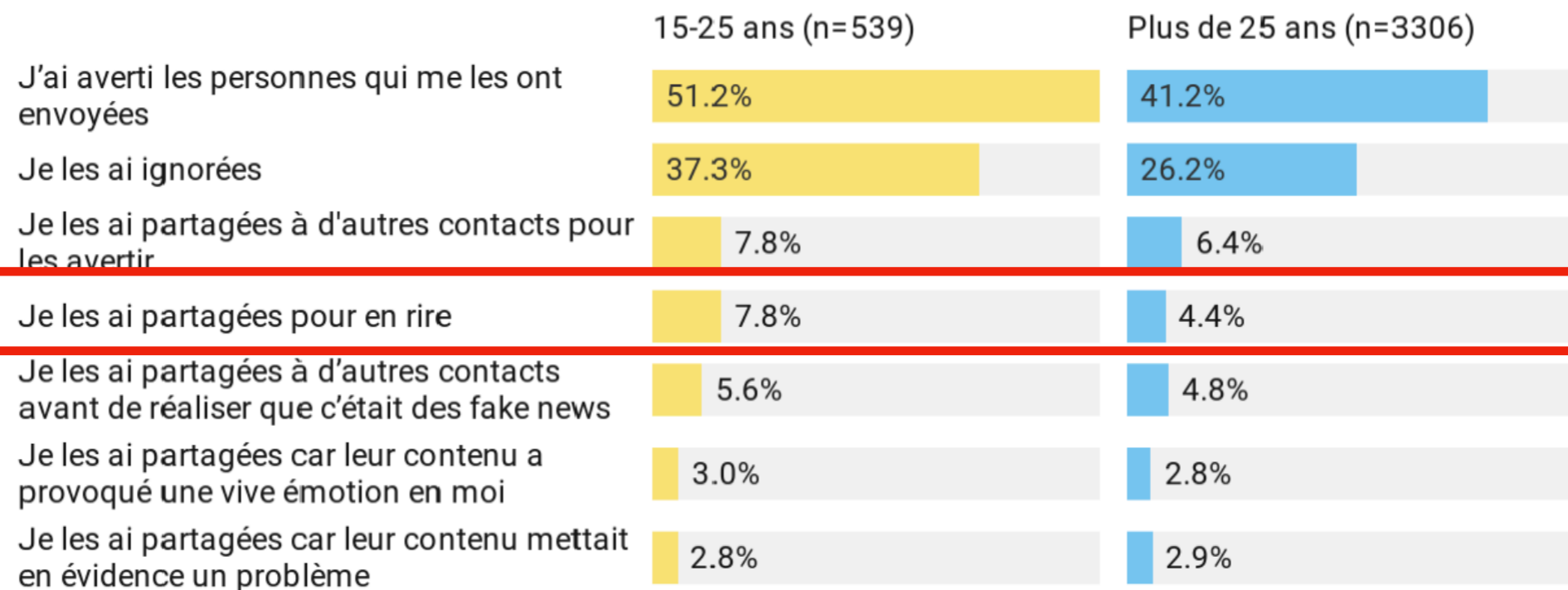
- The interviews reveal a distancing from disinformation content and the highlighting of techniques for deciphering information and the biases linked to the circulation of fake news on the SNS (clickbait type tactics)
- Handling of the second degree, of the digital culture (memes, satire), in particular among the "game players"
- For young people, the voluntary sharing of fake news is explained less by a commitment (political or civic) than by a distancing and a derision otherwise associated with satire sites

# YOUNG PEOPLE FACED WITH MISINFORMATION

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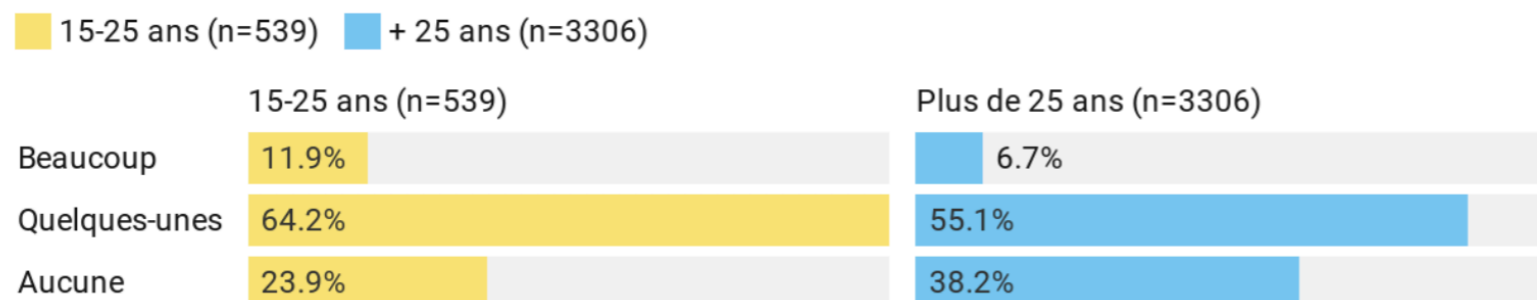
Source : Pignard-Cheynel, Salerno et Carlino, 2020

# THE NEW PLACES FOR THE CIRCULATION OF DISINFORMATION

- Migration of disinformation to more closed and private spaces (messaging systems)
- Propagation via friends and family
- Activity difficult to observe and quantify

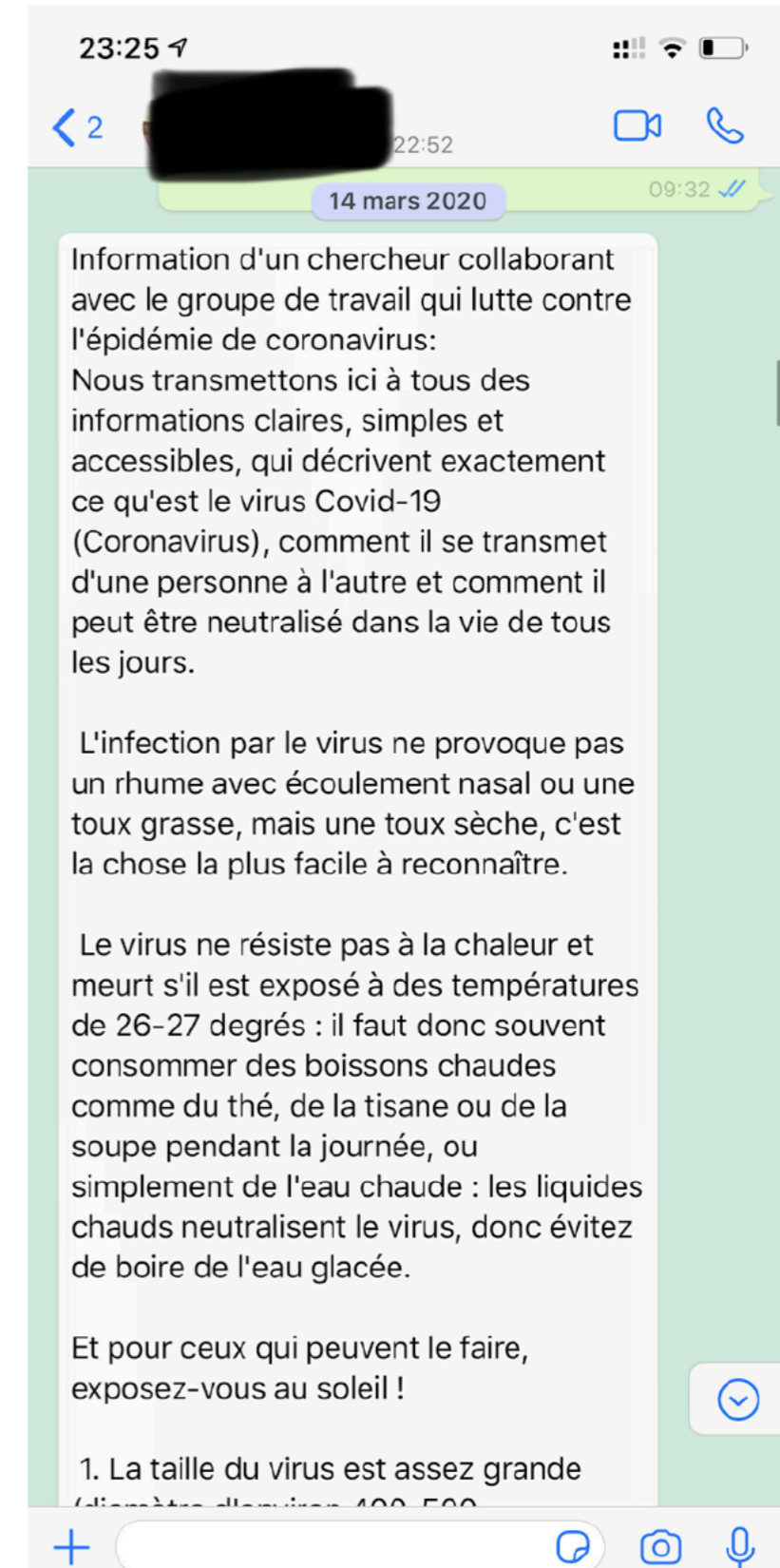
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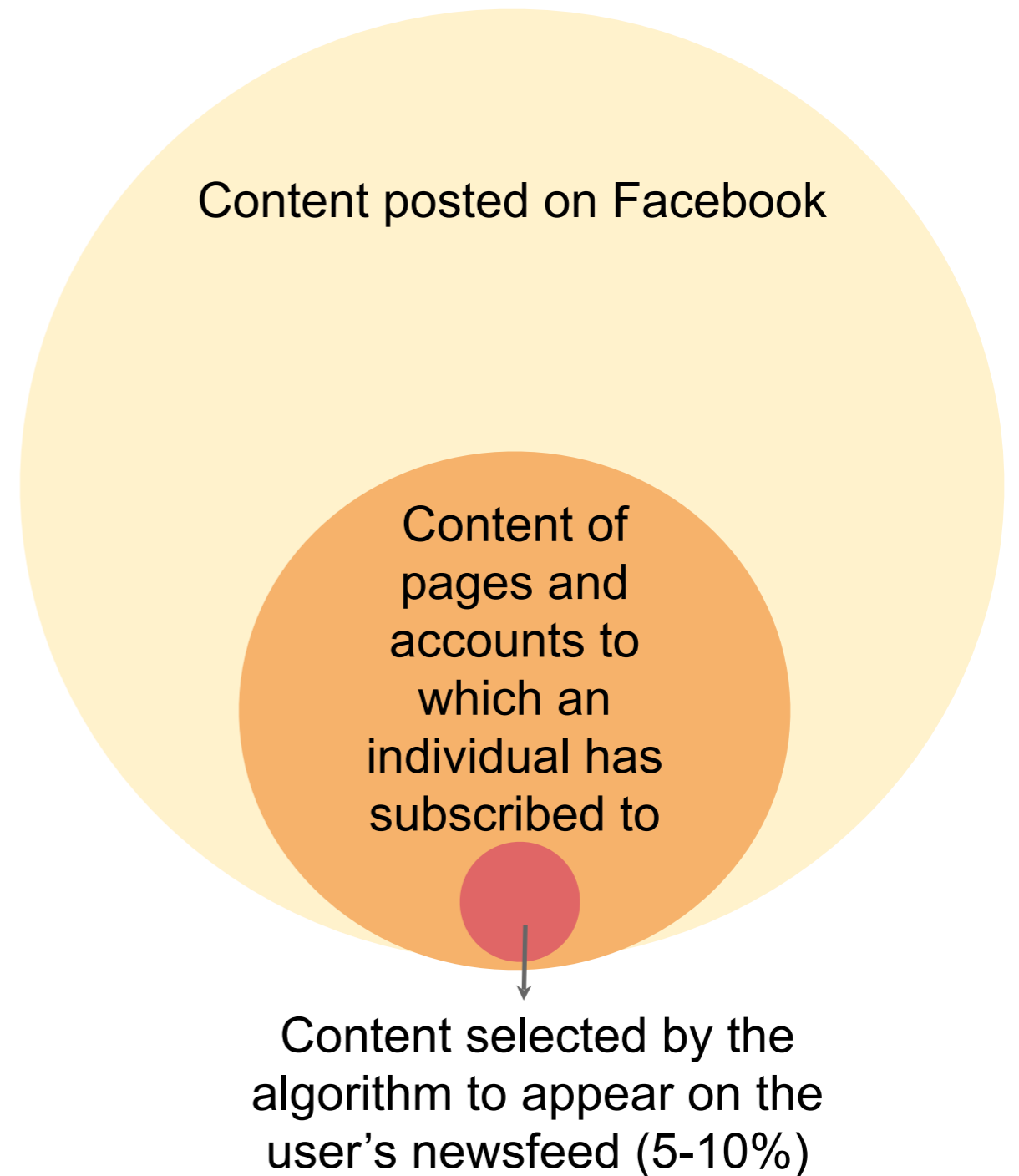


# EXPERIMENTING WITH HOW SNS ALGORITHM WORKS

- Pedagogical and research project, conducted in 2017, 2018 and 2019, initially within the AJM Journalism master's program and then in collaboration with universities of Metz (FR) and Louvain (BE)
- Objective: to let students experiment with the mechanics of recommending information content by algorithms, while trying to control certain variables, and to get them to think about the concepts of the filter bubble, their information practices and the impacts on their future profession of journalist.

# EXPERIMENTING WITH HOW SNS ALGORITHM WORKS

Testing hypotheses  
about the way  
Facebook's algorithm  
sorts, selects, and  
displays news media  
content for its users



# EXPERIMENTING WITH HOW SNS ALGORITHM WORKS

- Individually or in groups, students create accounts on the chosen platform, specifically for experimentation purposes
- Each account has a pre-defined "profile" associated with it
- All the accounts subscribe to a list of about 50 media pages



# EXPERIMENTING WITH HOW SNS ALGORITHM WORKS

- Duration : 4 to 6 weeks
- Students perform actions on a daily basis : likes, shares, comments, status, etc.
- Consistency with predefined ideal-type profiles
- Actions are recorded in a notebook as well as screenshots, discussions, and personal thoughts

## *Notebook structure*

- Hypothesis tested on the functioning of the algorithm
- Daily actions performed on the account in relation to the profile and hypothesis tested
- Results observed on the basis of the first dozens of contents appearing on the newsfeed
- Conclusions about the algorithm functioning

# EXPERIMENTING WITH HOW SNS ALGORITHM WORKS

- The objective was not so much to "reveal" knowledge about the mechanisms of the algorithm, but rather to allow students to experiment, by themselves and according to their intuitions / hypotheses, some logic of how algorithms work
- The 2017 edition was very conclusive, the following ones more complicated, especially the last one in 2019, due to an increased security of Facebook and Instagram limiting the activities planned by the experimentation
- It highlighted the interest of experiential methods to complement more theoretical teachings in order to grasp the issues related to digital technology and the way in which news practices are reconfigured

# EN GUISE DE CONCLUSION

- Ne pas discréditer a priori les pratiques des jeunes publics; accepter leur définition endogène de l'information (approche compréhensive plus que normative) : les jeunes ne s'informent pas nécessairement « moins bien »; ils s'informent « différemment »
- L'analyse de leurs pratiques informationnelles numériques doit être intégrée aux régimes médiatiques plus globalement
- La recherche dans le domaine pourrait davantage imaginer des dispositifs collaboratifs et co-construits (par ex entre chercheurs, journalistes et publics)
- L'approche expérimentale permet de dépasser certains écueils des méthodologies fondées sur le déclaratif, en complément de *digital methods*

**THANK YOU !**