

Facebook: an information platform for young people and an audience vector for the media

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A growing number of different media have stated that they consider (based on official metrics) Facebook to be a central platform for the publication and circulation of information and a key vector for its consumption. The popularity of this socio-technical device (*dispositif*) has made the diversity of profiles and user practices concerning information a relevant subject for study (Bastard, 2015; Le Caroff, 2015). This is what we also decided to do by making a quantitative and qualitative empirical survey to study the heterogeneity of perceptions of the platform regarding information as well as the varied ways people consider and practice the digital social network as an informational and communicational resource in this vein.

We chose to focus on young (18-24 year old) Facebook users including both students and those coming on to the jobs market. This population group is particularly interesting because its members are online a great deal and are the most present on digital social networks: 94% of 18-24 year olds had actively used one of these platforms according to a November 2016 survey by the Credoc¹ and they are much more active than those in all the other age ranges.

A second reason to focus on this age group is that young people are constructing digital native informational practices which are rolled out, sometimes exclusively, in the spaces and temporalities of digital social networks. It therefore seems essential to ask questions about these practices. What meaning(s) do young people give to information they access via Facebook, how do they perceive it and how do they integrate these practices into broader informational practices? One of the hypotheses underpinning this study is the blurring of borders between information and entertainment on the platform. We shall also discuss the integration of Facebook into the informative action repertoire of young people wanting to find out about news. We will use the notion of *informational practice* in the sense of "the way in which a set of systems (*dispositifs*), sources, tools and cognitive skills are effectively drawn upon in the different situations of information production, searches and processing " (Chaudiron, Ihadjadene, 2010: 16).

¹ Crédoc 2016, *Le Baromètre du numérique 2016*, a report for the Conseil Général de l'Économie, Arcep and L'Agence du Numérique.

https://www.economie.gouv.fr/files/files/directions_services/cge/Actualites/barometre-numerique-edition-2016.pdf
(Translator's note: Crédoc = French Research Centre for the Study and Monitoring of Living Standards; Conseil Général de l'Économie = French General Council for the Economy; Arcep = Authority for Regulation of the Electronic Communications and Postal Sectors; L'Agence du Numérique = French Digital Agency)

Facebook - the main supplier of audiences for news sites

In just a few years, Facebook has become the main supplier of audiences for news sites particularly among mobile phone internet users. According to the web analytics company Parse.ly which surveyed a panel of 400 English-speaking media in autumn 2015, for the main English-speaking media the largest audience share on news sites comes from digital social networks rather than search engines with Facebook near to overtaking Google at the time (and having done so a few months later). Similar metrics on sites' overall audiences give similar findings such as the survey carried out by the Pew Research Center in March 2016 on internet users, 35% of whom said they had gone to a news site via a social network as compared with 20% who had found the site using a search engine. The news media have noticed that a growing proportion of their audience was coming from these platforms and have tried to adapt to this and to increase their content offer on such sites.

In academic literature, studies of digital social networks have mainly focused on finding out about their usage by journalists (Hedman & Djerf-Pierre, 2013; Hedman 2015; Hermida, 2013; Holton & al., 2015; Mercier, 2014; Newman & al., 2012) and less on observing the way in which the media use social networks and make them part of their editorial strategy. Nonetheless we may cite some studies which highlighted the burgeoning (and still contrasting) usages of social networks and particularly Facebook by the media as early as 2012 for France (Pignard-Cheynel & Sebbah, 2012) and 2013 for Holland (Hille & al., 2013). These studies also highlight the absence of a clear working strategy for implementing usage and the difficulty in integrating them into professional cultures and approaches. We extended this approach in the framework of the Info-RSN² programme by running a statistical study of the activity of 25 French news media outlets³ on the two main social platforms, Facebook and Twitter, from November 7th to 10th 2016 (Amigo, 2017).

The survey clearly showed that the average number of tweets published daily by the media outlets is much higher than the number of Facebook posts (76 compared to 36, 17 media outlets out of 25 being around the average or below). The media outlets were found to be very active on Twitter where they systematically publish their articles (even several times) but are much more selective in using Facebook to adapt their news offer to usage logics and above all to the whims of the

² The Info-RSN research programme studied the mechanisms for the sharing and circulation of news and information on social platforms like Twitter and Facebook by studying a corpus of 31 French news sites twice with a two-year interval while questioning journalists on their editorial strategies regarding digital social networks.

³ *20Minutes, BFMTV, Courrier International, France 24, France Inter, Huffington Post, JDD, L'Équipe, L'Express, L'Obs, La Croix, La Tribune, LCI, Le Figaro, Le Monde, Le Parisien, Le Point, Les Échos, Libération, L'Opinion, Mediapart, Melty, Paris Match, Rue 89, Slate.*

algorithm which flags up and filters stories. These observations confirm Jennifer Cox's findings from her study at the end of 2013 surveying 6 American media outlets (Cox, 2016).

We compared activity on Facebook in May 2014 with that in November 2016 (each time over a period of 4 days per week) to get an idea of the increase over a period of years. In terms of the number of posts, all the media outlets studied were found to increase their activity. The majority of the media outlets (14 from 19) more than doubled their activity with Paris Match actually posting 17 times more publications. Others like *La Croix* or *Libération* posted 5 times more in 18 months, France Inter and *Le Monde* nearly 4 times and even the Huffington Post which was in the lead in May 2014 managed to increase its posts by 2.3 times and thus stay far ahead of its competitors.

Ranking	Media outlet	Posts 7 th to 10 th November 2016		Posts May 19 th to 22 nd 2014	Coefficient of increase in the number of posts
1 st	Huffington Post	352		150	x 2.3
2 nd	Libération	304		44	x 6.9
3 rd	La Croix	285		48	x 5.9
4 th	Le Monde	246		64	x 3.8
5 th	BFMTV	226		87	x 2.6
6 th	Paris Match	225		13	x 17
7 th	L'Express	223		75	x 3.1
8 th	L'Obs	194		88	x 2.2
9 th	Le Figaro	192		57	x 3.4
10 th	20 Minutes	147		112	x 1.3
11 th	Les Echos	135		54	x 2.5
12 th	Le Parisien	111		56	x 2.0
13 th	L'Équipe	109		52	x 2.1
14 th	Le Point	106		41	x 2.6
15 th	Slate.fr	97		73	x 1.3
16 th	France 24	90		63	x 1.4
17 th	France Inter	84		25	x 3.4
17 th	La Tribune	84		54	x 1.6
19 th	Mediapart	60		44	x 1.4

The number of fans of media pages also generally increased in the same proportions with the majority doubling their fan communities.

This rising activity over recent years can be explained by the increased use of these platforms, and particularly Facebook, to get news and information, especially among younger people.

Changing informational practices

Our survey⁴ of the student population was carried out at the end of 2015 and the start of 2016. It consisted of an online questionnaire sent to students at the University of Lorraine and Pantheon-Assas Paris 2 University completed with a series of 15 semi-directive interviews⁵. The questionnaire was made up of forty questions about usages of digital social networks and respondents' relationships with news with particular focus on Facebook. 1820 replies were retained which corresponded to the total number of respondents to the questionnaire in the 18-24 age group. Women were in the majority with 69% as compared with 31% of men. From the starting point of this overall sample group, we then composed two antagonist sub-groups according to their informational practices on digital social networks. The group of respondents who regularly used Facebook to get news (total = 989) was obtained by successively sifting through respondents to find those who regularly used digital social networks to follow the news (total = 1335) and those who favoured Facebook to get news (total = 1212) and then only retaining the intersection group of these two sub-sets. Conversely, those who declared they did not use Facebook much to get news made up the other sub-group which was useful to compare usage.

Total population aged 18-24 years	1820	100%
People getting news regularly on social media and on Facebook in particular	989	54.3%
People not getting news via the social networks	302	16.6%

Table 1. Sub-groups of the total group surveyed

The specific informational practices of 18-24 year olds

Our survey's first finding was that the young students we asked were interested in the news. 38.5% said they thought monitoring the news was "essential" and 50% found it "rather important" (figure 1). The recruitment mode meant that the survey respondents were in higher education at a university which of course represents a bias likely to favour a more frequent and in-depth relationship with the news than in other types of population groups (at least in their replies).

⁴ Run in the framework of the Info-RSN research programme with the participation of Alan Ouakrat.

⁵ The interviews were carried out with respondents to the questionnaire who accepted to give us their contact details to reply to other questions. There were 15 interviews run by Alan Ouakrat in Metz then in Nancy in University of Lorraine premises on April 21st and 22nd 2016 (8 interviews) and then in Paris at Panthéon-Assas University on May 31st and June 1st 2016 (7 interviews). They lasted an average of 45 minutes. The average age of respondents was 21 and the survey group was made up of 4 men and 11 women.

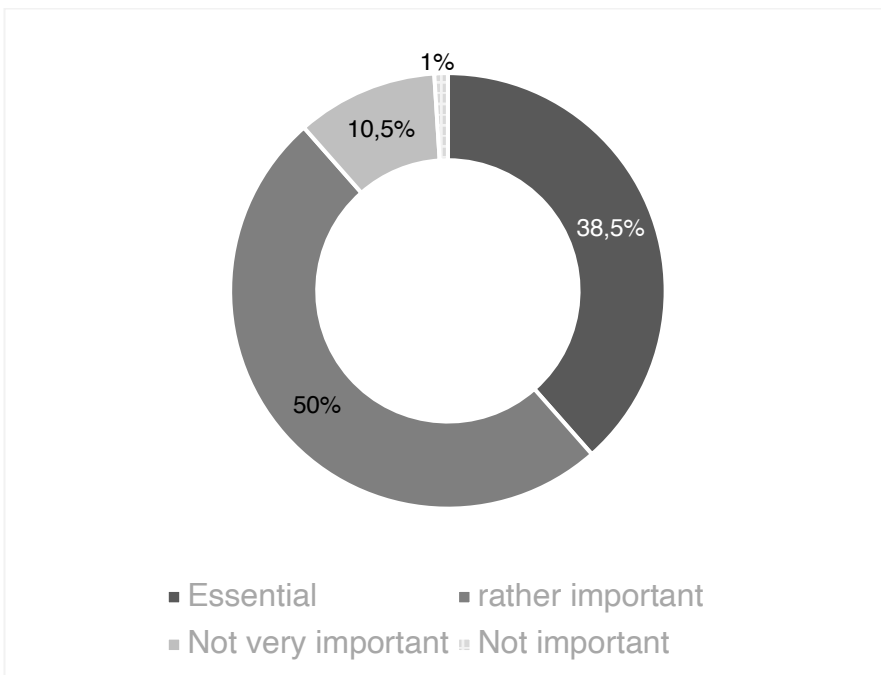


Figure 1. Importance of monitoring of news among 18-24 year olds (total = 1820)

When we asked the 18-24 year olds which channels they used to access online news, social networks were well ahead with over 73% of respondents declaring they accessed news via social networks at least once a day thus beating news sites, mobile applications and even their push notification systems. Figure 2 shows that the consumption of online news increasingly resembles daily 'cherry-picking'-style browsing with plural modalities. The modalities for access to online news media outlets highlighted by our survey confirm the great increase and diversification of *infomediaries* in access to news for the general public (Rebillard & Smyrnaiois 2010). However, whereas search engines and portals were still viewed only a few years ago as vital and durable access points for news (see for example Fogel & Patino 2005), our data shows that they are now far behind the digital social networks which are heavily consulted on mobile devices representing a very clear evolution in informational practices. Of course this generation massively frequents digital social networks on a daily basis which has led to the creation of a new ecosystem of news and information consumption.

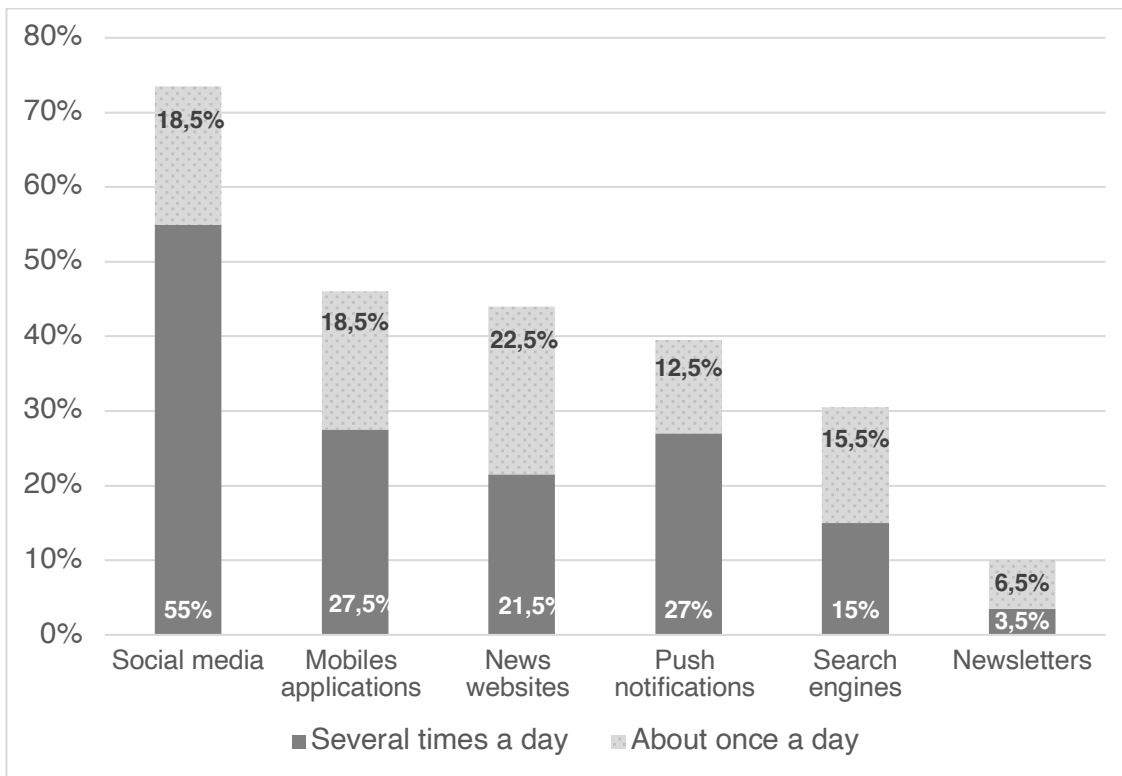


Figure 2. Modalities of daily access to online information among 18-24 year-olds (total = 1820)

The frequency of consultation of the social network sometimes leads to "accidental exposure" to information (Tewksbury *et al.* 2001) as one of our respondents, Christine⁶, told us:

"I go on there often, every day. I go on there all the time and I look at quite a lot of the articles. It's more like articles that appear at random. You can find out about a lot of things pretty quickly, live and straight away if you don't have the time to switch on the television. At the end of the day, it enables people to get informed involuntarily".

There are also more voluntaristic forms of behaviour regarding receiving information on users' accounts. Thus when we asked our 18-24 year olds about their usage of the different social platforms to get informed (figure 3), Facebook came far ahead with 69.5% of respondents saying they "often" found information there as compared with Twitter (37%), YouTube (14.5%) or Instagram (9.5%) and Snapchat (9%); GooglePlus, LinkedIn and Dailymotion were a long way behind.

⁶ The respondents to our semi-directive interviews have been given pseudonyms to preserve their anonymity.

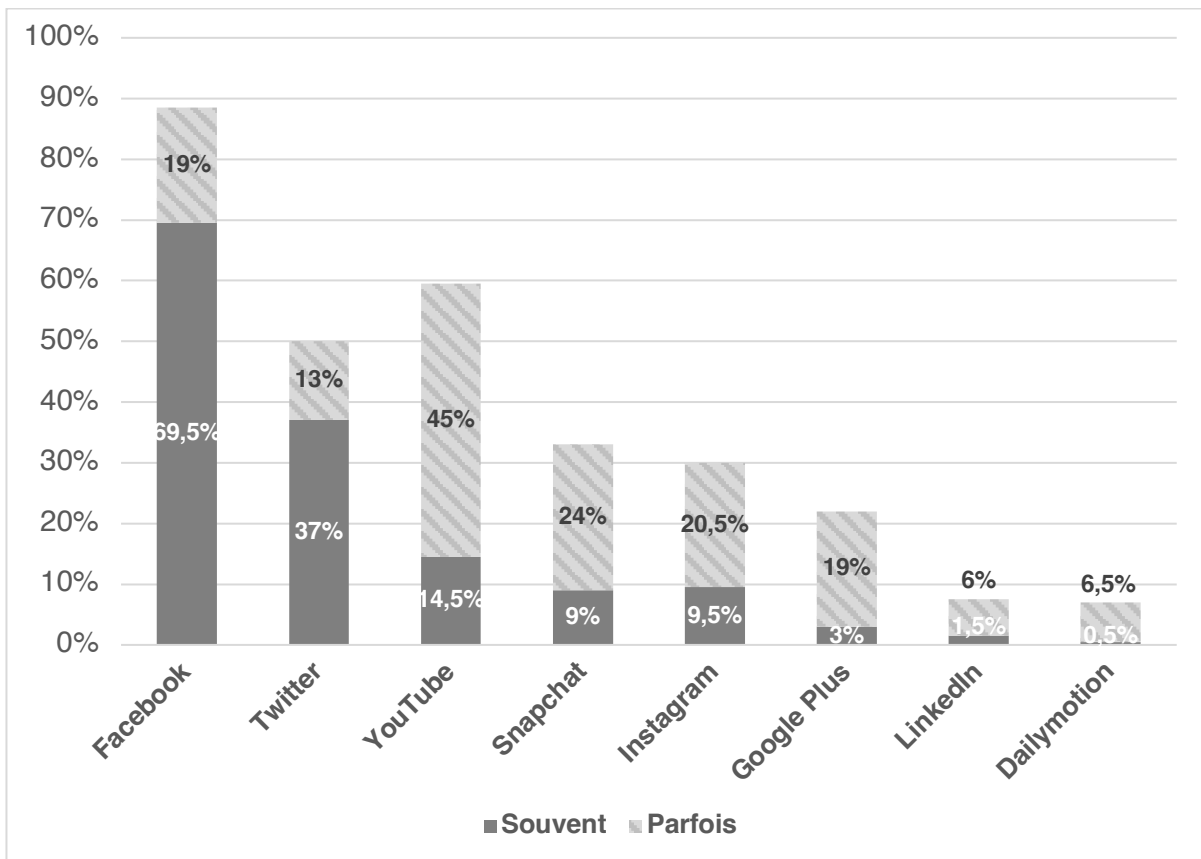


Figure 3. Access to news via social platforms by 18-24 year-olds (total = 1820)

Usages of Facebook and 18-24 year olds' relationship to news

There is a high frequency usage of Facebook with fragmented visits to the site all day long facilitated by the predominance of mobile phones as the main access device for this platform.

Facebook consultation frequency	Number	%	Number	%	Access using a smartphone
Very frequently	1368	82.2	1184	73.8	Very frequently
Quite often	181	11	176	11	Quite often
From time to time	54	3.2	125	7.8	From time to time
Less often or never	61	3.6	119	7.4	Never

Table 2. Facebook consultation frequency and access using a smartphone⁷

And consulting news is a dominant activity even though it occurs on different levels according to the people concerned.

⁷. Information on the variable frequency of Facebook consultation was only available for 90% of our survey group.

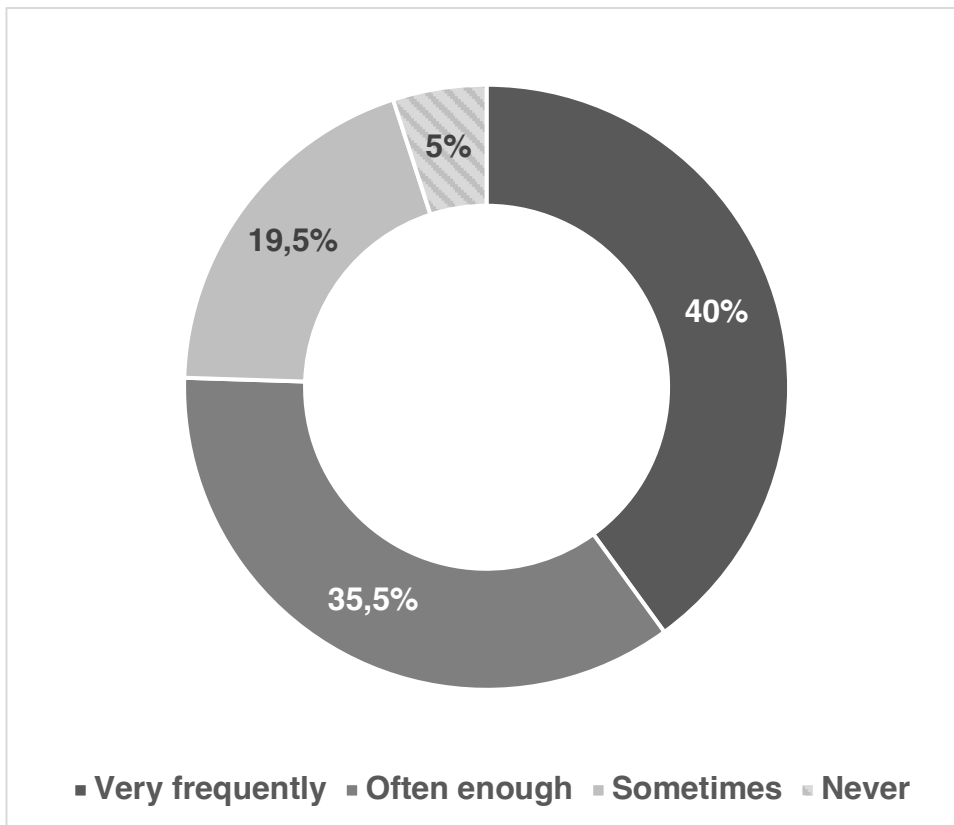


Figure 4. Uses of Facebook to get news by 18-24 year-olds (total = 1603⁸)

Despite the predominance of Facebook as the main vector for access to the news, not all respondents give it the same importance in their informational practices. 55% consider that it is "an important means of following news but not the most important" but only 13.5% called it the "main means" while 20% consider it is "not very useful for following the news".

Among our respondents (1603 responses from 1820), 70% (1119) said they followed at least one media page on Facebook with this percentage logically increasing in the sub-group of those "informed by Facebook" up to 81% (800 from 989). When respondents followed media pages on Facebook, the percentage of those who consider Facebook to be their main means of getting news rose from 13.5% to 17.5% and the percentage of those who consider it an important means of finding news rose from 55% to 68% which shows that getting information from Facebook involves voluntaristic searching. Among those who followed at least one news media Facebook page, it is interesting to note that the majority of respondents (645 from 1119 or 58%) only follow these media outlets on Facebook while 42% (474 from 1119) prefer media pages that they also follow elsewhere.

⁸. Information on the variable usage of Facebook to get information was only available for 88% of our survey group.

When looking more closely at the choices of specialization of these media outlets which people follow on Facebook, there is not an apparent divergent distribution between the two logics. What *does* show up much more clearly is the tendency to use Facebook to follow entertainment news ("humour and satirical info", "buzz and bizarre (*insolite*) stories, celebrity info, etc.) (figure 5).

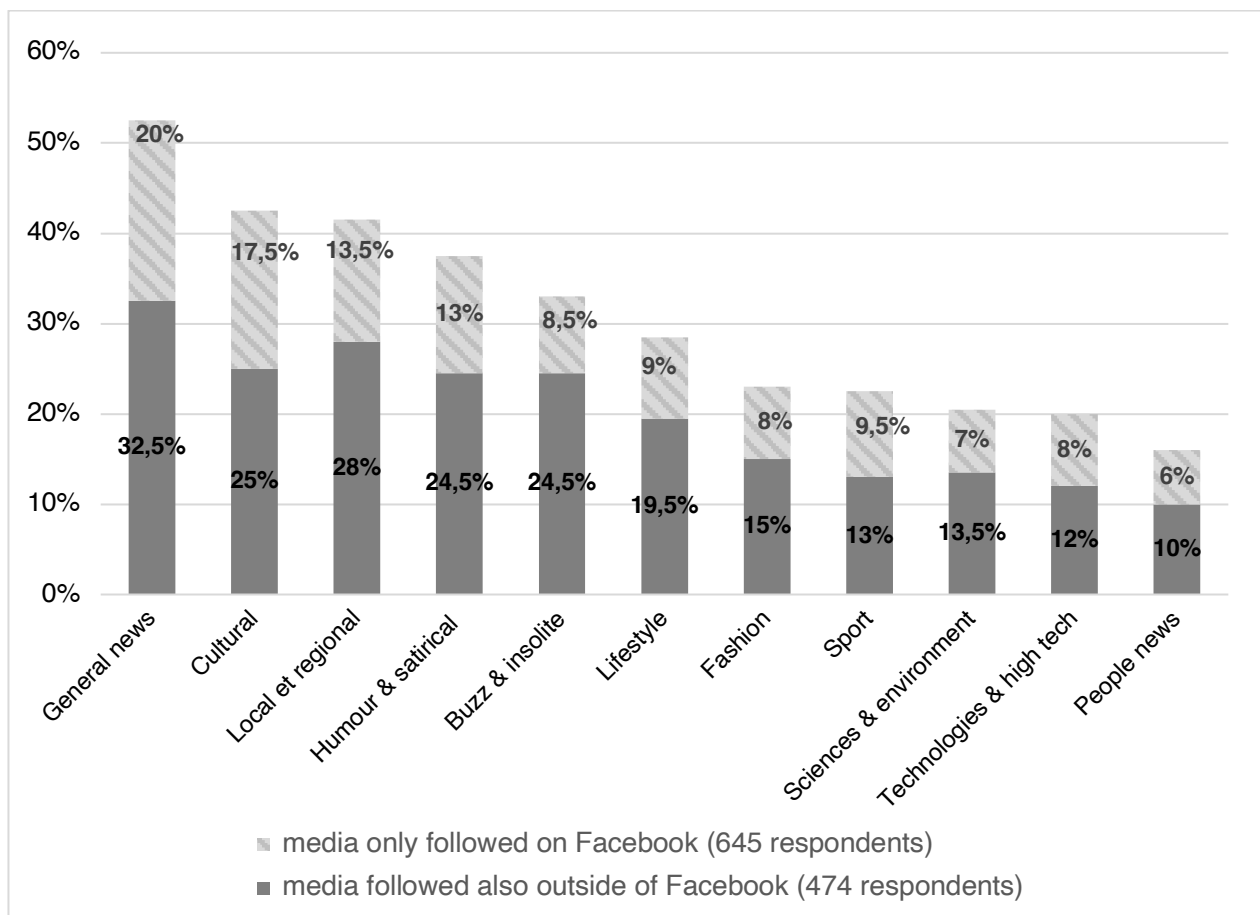


Figure 5. Distribution, by categories, of media followed on Facebook by 18-24 year-olds* (total = 1119)

* This distribution of media pages according to their themes should be viewed while bearing the characteristics of our sample group in mind. They are young (18-24) and 69% women.

It should be noted that national or regional generalist media outlets and cultural information sites are well ranked. The ranking of humorous or satirical pages (like the parody site Le Gorafi) is of more singular interest as, to a lesser extent, is that of sites with buzz-style and bizarre (*insolite*) information. This finding backs up one of the hypotheses of this study whereby Facebook is a place for entertainment rather than information in the practices of young users. Facebook is thus seen as a repository for weird information which is less serious than is customary but makes users want to share it because of the emotions it provokes - laughter, amazement, fascination, etc. This phenomenon is increased by the explosion of visual and video formats greatly encouraged by

Facebook's algorithm. The respondents we met very often explained this attraction for lighter, more entertaining content:

It's for having a good time, not finding out straight away about all the catastrophes that happen. (Christine)

I've started to follow pure entertainment players a lot like Topito, Minutebuzz, Konbini, stuff like that. It's funny. Especially Topito which is very funny, they have news items but not just and they do it in a less journalistic and more entertaining way. (Élise)

The "new actors of online news" (media outlets which started online), media buzz and bizarre news sites have created themselves a place on Facebook by learning to play on the platform's attentional mechanisms to go further than the codes of more classical media (impact photos, a clever phrase, a catchy headline) and adapt these to the digital universe in which quick visits to the news feed are the rule. They have managed to adapt the format and layout of their contents to the Facebook environment's visibility criteria and this is backed up by meticulous monitoring and in-depth analysis of their contents' circulation metrics ("likes", shares and comments). This has led to innovation in information formats (subtitled videos, photos, intriguing headlines, lists) which are particularly effective with young users. This is the case of international actors who have managed to roll out and adapt an international strategy and methods locally. BuzzFeed is the emblematic example of this kind of site followed by French emulators like Topito. More generalist media outlets also use these kinds of formats and writing styles like the Huffington Post which generates many of its contents through unpaid opinion pieces or Vice which develops particularly offbeat, transgressive angles which the young audience is very partial to. The exploration of the whole of our survey population found a strong, specific usage of Facebook as an information platform. Now we shall look in more detail at the characteristics of those who say they go on Facebook very frequently and use it as an important source of information.

Informational usages of Facebook

The profile of the public group which gets a lot of information via Facebook

Within our survey, we retained those respondents who said Facebook is their main means of getting news (217) or an important means (772). We shall refer to this sub-group as "those informed by Facebook" (total = 989).

As regards the consumption of information in general, we should first note that they do not represent a separate category from our total survey group which would make them unwilling to use other types of media to get news. On the contrary. Those who say they are very interested in finding

news on Facebook represent a fairly significant proportion of those who are wider consumers of other formats of information sources. They make up two thirds of those who say they read the press one or several times a day and also get information from the television (62%) or radio (59%). In this sub-group, Facebook is therefore seen as belonging to the repertoire of information source formats in a leading position but without totally replacing other media. Moreover Facebook's judgement on the value of news is seen as irrevocable with nearly half (47%) judging this essential and the other half (49%) rather important. For regular searches for information on traditional media sources, those informed by Facebook are therefore more assiduous whatever the media concerned:

"For me, news isn't on FB, it's more like "this has happened, we've given you the main information" and afterwards you still have to get informed on the subject. Some people are contented with just the basic information, it's a bit of a shame." (Solenne)

It is therefore not surprising that a great many respondents said they followed media pages on Facebook (79%) and received a great deal of news content on their Facebook walls: 70% said they see news appear very frequently, 27.5% often enough. Within our overall group of respondents, if we compare those are informed by Facebook with those whose responses are the furthest away to the extent that they are "little or not informed by Facebook" (total = 302), the contrast is striking (table 3).

	Informed by Facebook (as a %)	Little or not informed by Facebook (as a %)
News contents appear on my Facebook very frequently	70.2	20.2
News contents appear on my Facebook often enough	27.5	40.4
I subscribe to media pages on Facebook	79.3	39.1

Table 3. Comparison between those informed by Facebook and those Little or not informed by Facebook

However do those informed by Facebook interact differently with news contents than with other types of contents which circulate on their walls?

Interaction with and around news contents on Facebook

Figure 6 shows that activity on Facebook is weaker with news contents than with other sorts of contents apart from users having enough curiosity to click on these links which is coherent with the will to make Facebook an entry point towards information produced by the media.

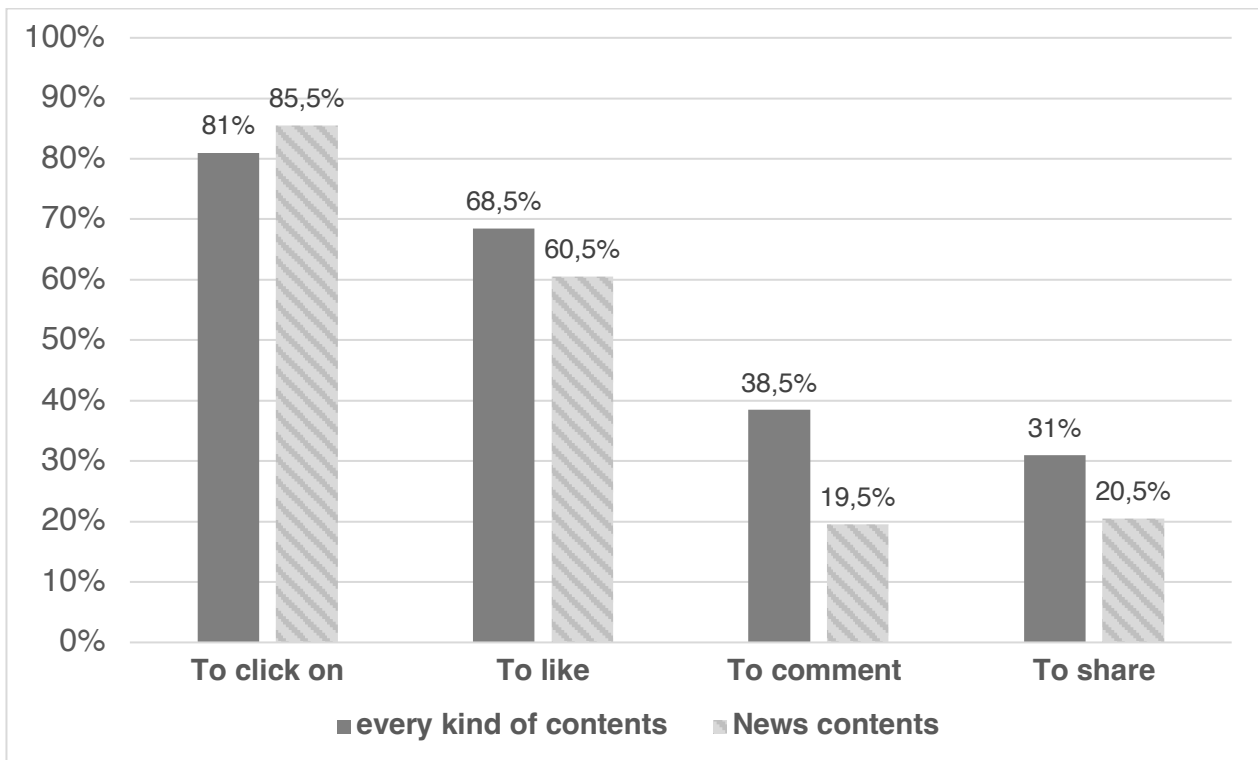


Figure 6. Actions carried out very frequently or quite often by those who are "informed by Facebook" (total = 989)

If we look at the frequency of these practices in detail (figure 7), we can see that reading headlines of informational contents is omnipresent and that clicking on these links is frequent (85%) which shows that just reading a headline is not judged sufficient to feel informed or that headlines make people want to go further in reading the contents. Of course, even if some only read the headlines (as is also the case on Twitter) - *"Social networks are habit-forming. I rarely click on the articles, generally the headline is enough"* (Elise). Additionally, 60% "like" these news contents very frequently or quite often. On the other hand, all the other possible actions for users of the Facebook device (*dispositif*) are not regularly and systematically appropriated. Just a fifth of those informed by Facebook share or comment news articles and only 13.5% actually post them on their walls.

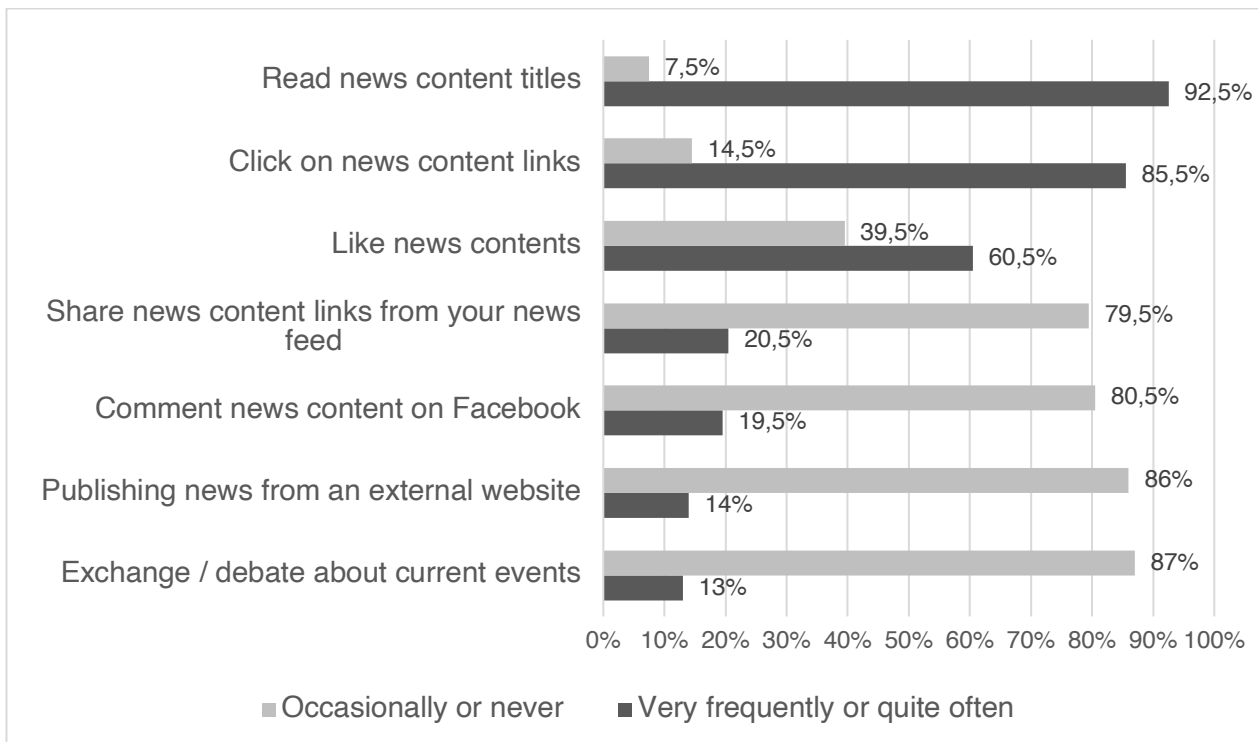


Figure 7. Actions offered by Facebook exercised by "those informed by Facebook" (N = 989)

When those informed by Facebook were asked what led them to share news information on their accounts, the value they attribute to information came first as the reason with 58.5% referring to its importance and 42.5% to its originality (table 4). However in the latter case, the responses obtained about the importance of bizarre and entertaining information led us to presume that the originality referred to applies more to absurd, superficial and anecdotal information than to serious and original points of view. Only just over a third of our respondents said that they displayed their own opinions on Facebook and only a very small minority said they engaged in debate. It should be noted that a third of them said they never shared news contents on their Facebook walls. We know this is also the case on Twitter where a considerable proportion of users follow media pages to keep up with the news but never themselves post tweets and in any case not about the news.

To disseminate information that you think is important	To let someone know an original content	To declare something or take a position	You do not share news content on your Facebook wall	To stimulate a discussion with your friends about a question or an event
58.50%	42.50%	37.80%	33.50%	13.30%

Table 4. Motivation to act on the news contents among "those informed by Facebook" (N=989)

The Facebook platform is used to receive news contents but this does not mean that the exchange devices (*dispositifs*) it offers are used for such information. In Irene Bastard's typology of "profiles of practices on Facebook" carried out in the framework of the Algopol survey, she identified 29%

of "spectators" whose accounts appear almost totally inactive with regard to making their activities visible on the platform. Only 29% are "sharers" who do not publish directly but put *likes* on contents and share them: "This group of *Sharers* therefore has a different sort of profile using Facebook as a tool to follow the activity of others in a spectatorial manner while distributing Likes and sharing links ".⁹

Sharing is a gesture in its own right. It involves adopting a position with regard to news and to what is worthy of interest (the proof - I share it) and is not conceived of as a pretext for dialogue or an introduction to a subject. It is enough on its own.

"I do not comment but I share a lot of articles. I share regularly, at least every two days. It's often one or two at a time. I think it's important, some stories are really very interesting and if you don't come across them you could easily miss them so I think it's important to share. I know it will only affect a limited number of my friends, it'll interest 5 friends on average. I don't share anything which has already been commented on or covered in the media a lot. It's a lot about wanting to act, inform, to try and arouse interest. Not a negative reaction, a lot of indifference. It's really a circle of people who are a little more interested in the news and who also share stories. It's a real exchange and generally more likely to involve women." (Stéphanie)

"When I share something it's generally to attract people's attention to the story but not to debate it. I've had "likes" from people who thought more or less the same as me, the others refrain from commenting and to be honest, I prefer that. I have sometimes deleted comments which annoyed me because I like to have control over my page." (Nicolas)

Similarly, if we take a detailed look at the value attributed to the *Like* button, we often find types of behaviour described by the respondents as being in the mode of automatic reflexes which evokes Marcel Mauss's theory of gift exchange involving showing interest in or even encouraging another person:

"With my close friends on FB, it's a bit like an automatic reflex, I like what they do." (Carine)

"I tend to like a lot of things, it's almost automatic, if I think something is good, I don't think too much about it. It's more to give support, when I like, it's often because there's a cause behind it which I want to support or also because it made me laugh." (Solenne)

⁹ <http://algotopol.huma-num.fr/appresults/six-profil-de-pratiques-sur-facebook>, page consulted on October 7th 2017.

The same occurs on Twitter. Since the "favourite" button has been replaced by a heart icon, internet users have got used to clicking on this button to, amongst other things, send a conniving nod to the tweet's author along the lines of: "I saw your message, I liked it and don't be surprised or annoyed if I don't reply". The essential element of this social relationship is conveyed through this minimal gesture of complicity which can be appreciated at the "other end of the tweet" as recognition. These tacit rules of socialization generated by these technical platforms are the object of shared learning by internet users.

The users we met were not naïve about the way Facebook functions. They sometimes adopt a strategic attitude using tactics dear to Michel de Certeau to anticipate the filtering produced by their reactions to their friends' publications:

"When I like an article, I know people will see I've liked it. It's another way of sharing it." (Daphné)

"People also publish content because of the response we're going to get. We know which content interests people or makes them react. We create strategies, it'll be polemical in any case, I might share an article or something like that with a comment like "yeah, it's nonsense" and the whole thing is built around a polemic." (Mike)

The majority of respondents said they only commented posts episodically with those making "very frequent" comments being in the minority (6.5%). In her doctoral thesis, Coralie Le Caroff (2015) actually identified a tendency to preserve two distinct spaces on the platform for political conversations on Facebook - comments were reserved for media pages while personal and/or friend's pages were apparently relatively spared these (Jouët & Le Caroff, 2013).

Source and types of information received on Facebook

We shall now return to the distribution of the sources of those informed by Facebook. The shares of news *posts* received from media pages or from "friends" are fairly similar - for 65% news comes from media pages a lot while 54.5% said a lot of it came from friends. Nearly a third (29.3%) even said they received a lot of news from "friends" and a lot from media pages.

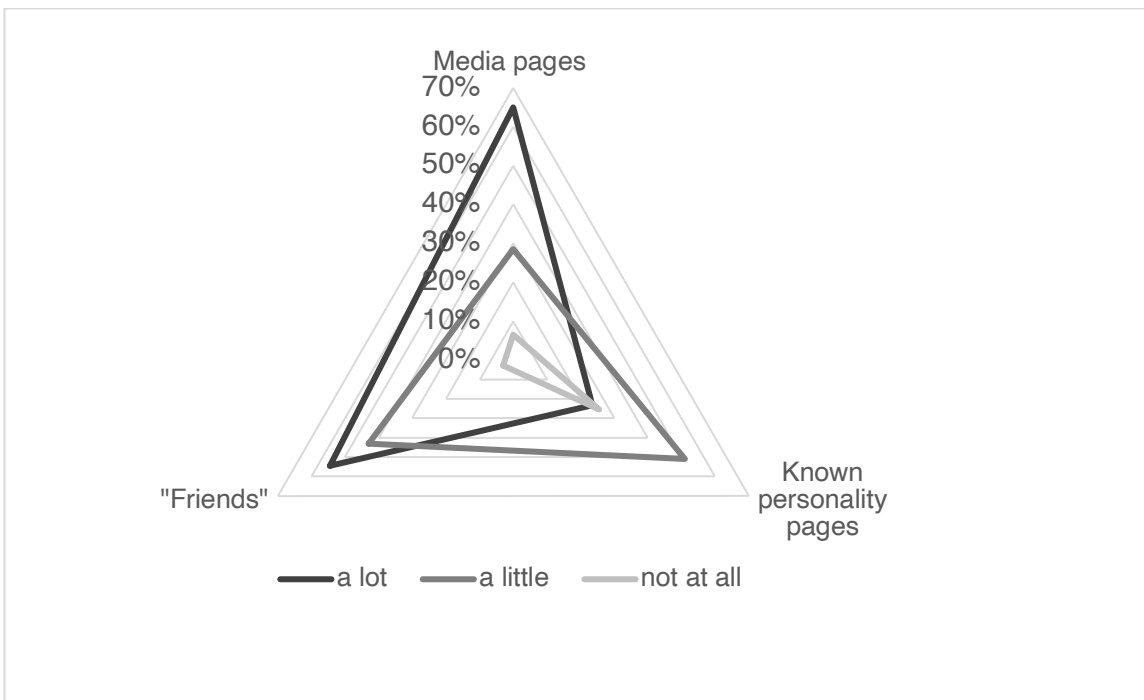


Figure 8. Source of the information received on their wall by the "informed by Facebook" (N = 989)

These respondents who are informed by Facebook have quite rich social lives on the platform. 10% said they had over 600 "friends" while 35.5% had between 300 and 600 "friends". They are more active overall, specifically with news contents, and also have more relations than the average figure of those surveyed. They thus represented 70% of the whole sample group in having 300 friends or more.

In our survey group, it clearly appears that getting informed by the digital social networks in general, and Facebook in particular, is done by people who do not consider these networks to be a competing practice which totally cancels out any other information media. It is a social practice which is integrated into a range of different formats used to get informed. The strategy linking physical news formats and the media pages which are followed shows Facebook is seen as a complementary media because just over half of our respondents said they followed media on Facebook which they did not refer to elsewhere. This openness to other formats also came up when the respondents were asked about their use of other digital social networks. Twitter was said to be used several times a day (42%) including often looking for news (46%) while YouTube (6%) and Snapchat (2.5%) also provide an active minority with a means of accessing news.

To better understand the question of the links between news media pages followed on Facebook or elsewhere, we can highlight the compared ranking of types of information.

Both the whole of our sample group of 18-24 year olds and just those informed by Facebook said the same six subject areas (from the 12 suggested) were the most frequent on their walls. There

were three so-called "serious" subject areas (general / political, culture, local / regional news) and three others seen as less worthy in the journalistic hierarchy (public interest and bizarre stories) or which have relatively dubious informative value (humour and satire). It is more interesting to look at the differing replies when the respondents were asked to rank the type of pages they follow or the types of contents they see appear on their walls most. Clearly in this pyramid of subject areas, the media categories which respondents said they followed were firstly legitimate in nature - general news and politics, culture (its second place is probably the illustration of a well known reporting bias involving the consumption of cultural goods although we also need to bear in mind that the term culture can also be understood in various different ways ranging from the most legitimate to the most popular in style) and local news. However, respondents also stated that the type of information which arrives on their Facebook walls overturns this hierarchy because humour, buzz and bizarre news are higher than culture which comes last from this standpoint (which backs up the hypothesis of reporting bias seeking legitimation through culture).

Ranking	Media pages followed on Facebook	Type of news contents which arrive on Facebook
1 st	Generalist media Political news	Generalist media Political news
2 nd	Culture	Local and regional information
3 rd	Local and regional information	Humour and satirical information
4 th	Humour and satirical information	Buzz and bizarre news
5 th	Medias and practical areas (television, cooking, interior decoration)	Medias and practical areas (television, cooking, interior decoration)
6 th	Buzz and bizarre news	Culture

Table 5. Pyramid of subject areas among those informed by Facebook (N=989)

It should be noted that those who do not use digital social networks much to follow the news (the "little or not informed by Facebook" group), and therefore do not have monitoring strategies for media pages, said they mostly received news information with little legitimacy. In their responses, this is linked to a rather derogatory image of the information which circulates on this platform.

The credibility and diversity of information received on Facebook

The information received on Facebook is frequently denigrated. Leaving aside the "post-Trump election" controversy about the influence of fake news (manipulative rumours or downright lies presented as reliable information), posts by accepted mainstream media are mixed with jokes, comments and humorous allusions, news pastiches (such as those from journalistic parody sites like Le Gorafi or Nordpresse) or information judged to be less serious such as practical tips or celebrity news, etc. How do our respondents judge this situation? What kind of information do they receive? Are they aware of this mixture of genres? If so, what value do they attribute to this daily flow of news on their walls?

The information received on Facebook was not really considered reliable by any of the sub-groups. 18% of the whole group thought it reliable with just 10% of those who get little or no information from digital social networks saying the same. Even for those who said they were informed by Facebook, the level of trust in the reliability of the information was only 27%. In each category, the majority of respondents acknowledged that the best was mixed with the worst and that they could not sort the information and thus receive a mixed cocktail of reliable and unreliable information. This view goes hand in hand with their judgement of the seriousness of the information received on Facebook. A tiny minority said they accepted this information as serious (6.5% of all respondents and 2% for the "poorly informed by Facebook" category) and even among the most ardent partisans of these networks' usefulness for getting informed, the figure only managed to scrape to 10%. All respondents agreed to qualify this information as a mix of serious and entertaining but the percentage of those who only considered it entertaining is quite large, wavering between 15% and 36%. The mistrust of those who get little or no information by Facebook seemed systematically greater than that of those informed by Facebook as the data in figure 9 shows.

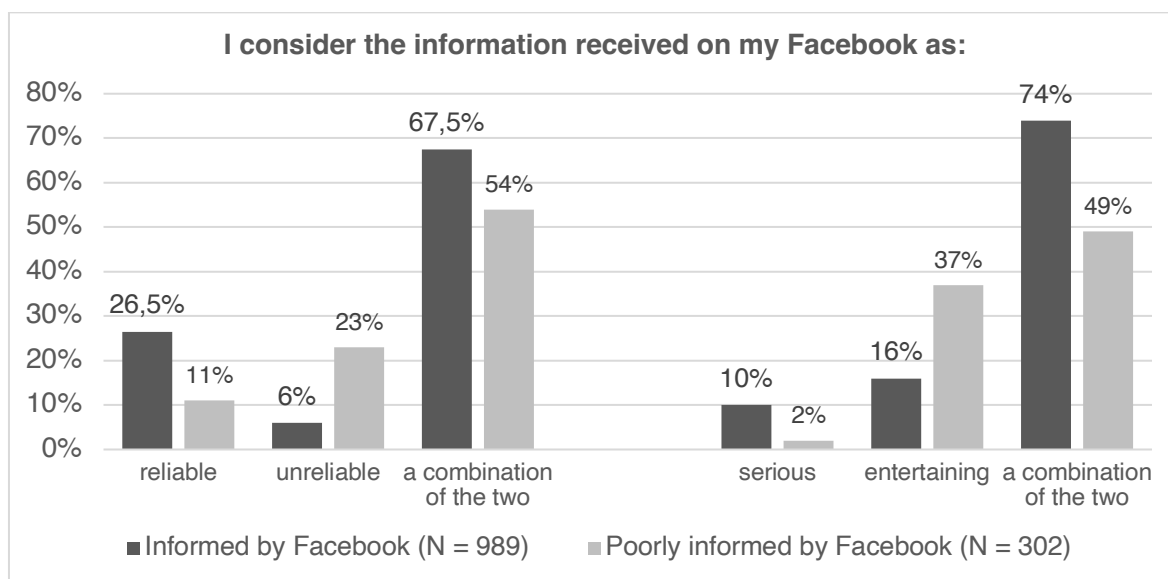


Figure 9. Judgments about the value of information received on Facebook

These two results from our survey show that internet users with Facebook pages recognized that the access to news *via* their accounts is not exactly identical to a more conventional information search. They agreed that "information" with highly different registers and even dubious credibility is mixed on their walls or that the prime goal is less to get news and more to be entertained or made to laugh. Moreover 662 respondents (67%) said that the "amusing or entertaining" nature of the content received was a "major reason" to click on a link. This was thus the 4th ranked motivation for clicking among a choice of seven, coming after interest in the subject, interest in an event and the title or picture of a link but ahead of a recommendation by a friend (figure 10).

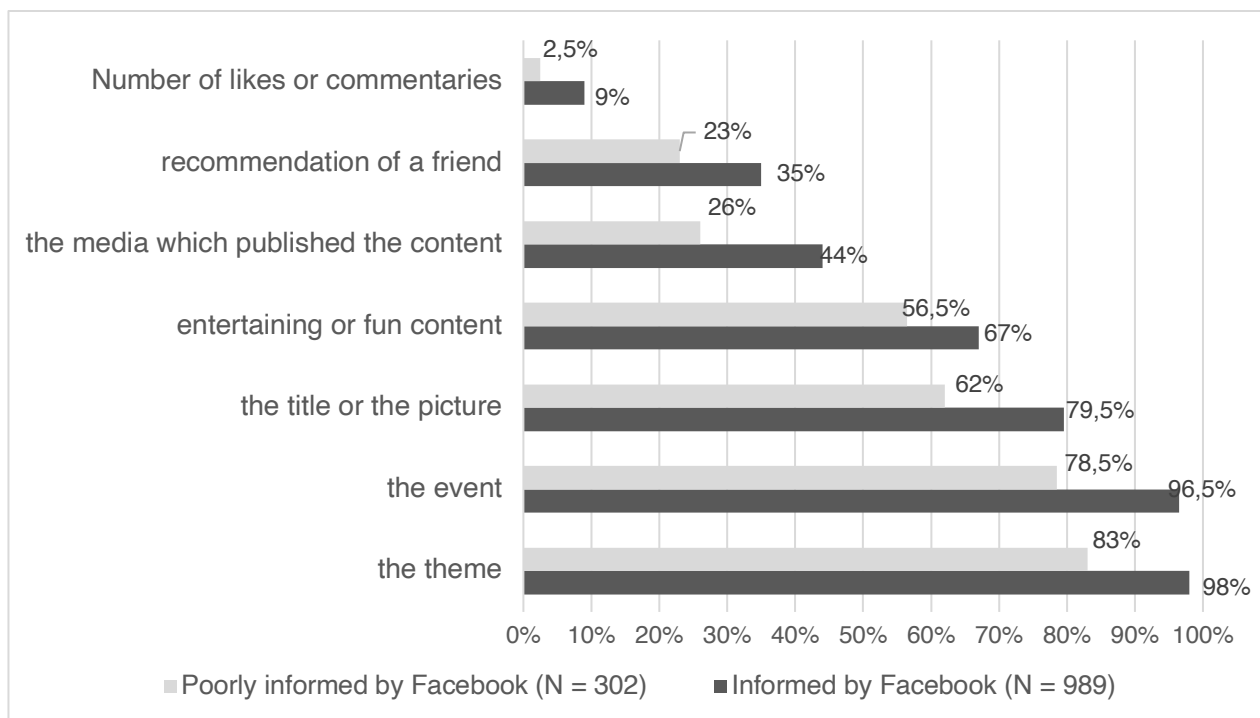


Figure 10. Motivations to click on information links received on the Facebook wall

Recommendations by friends only came fifth which may seem surprising given the influence of pre-existent sociabilities on online interactions highlighted by numerous studies. "The integrated links between online practices and sociabilities" (Beuscart *et al.* 2016: 74,) should in theory lead to people trusting "friends" who recommend content. However the reporting bias inherent to this kind of questionnaire-based survey also has to be taken into account. This was highlighted by the double study run by the Media Insight Project for the American Press Institute in 2016. The first

questionnaire-based survey study¹⁰ found that people who use social media to get news considered themselves very sceptical about the news they found there and said they trusted the reputation of the media source more than the person who had shared the information. Less than a year later, a second study based on an experimental protocol this time gave different and even contradictory results. The researchers used tangible case studies and found respondents' evaluation of the reliability of an article depended more on the "sharer" and their trust in that person than on knowledge of the media source the content came from¹¹.

Perhaps the accuracy of our own study on the precise question of the factors which respondents trusted enough to incite them to share content was also therefore negatively affected by the same reporting bias as the American survey. However, clearly the question cannot be answered in an overly simplistic way. Internet users decide whether to share or not on the basis of two factors which are complementary rather than opposing. For each article, they cobble together their own singular balance between the recognized credibility of the media source and their trust in the person who passed on the information.

Conclusion

It should first be noted at this point that before becoming a means of access to information or, on a more minority level, of exchanges about information, Facebook is an interpersonal means of communication (thus all exchanges are not directly visible and/or observable for researchers because the social network also has a private messages feature).

Nevertheless, this platform is playing a growing role in access to new. And yet, logically enough, this generates questioning and even controversy as was the case recently on the way in which Facebook influences the selection of contents presented to its users with its algorithm which ranks and creates a hierarchy of the information in their news feed. Facebook contributes to the dissemination of fake news produced to manipulate opinion. Without wishing to attempt to judge on this debate, we would like to underline the fact that the identical appearance of publications on the social network, whether advertising or news content, contributes to blurring users' points of

¹⁰ See the report "A new understanding: What makes people trust and rely on news" [online], April 2016, Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research/American Press Institute, available at <<https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/What-Makes-People-Trust-and-Rely-on-News-Media-Insight-Project.pdf>> [last consultation June 2017].

¹¹ "Who shared it?": How Americans decide what news to trust on social media" [on line], March 2017, Media Insight Project – American Press Institute/Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, available at <<https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/publications/reports/survey-research/trust-social-media/>> [last consultation June 2017].

reference regarding what is credible information from a reliable source and unverified information. Facebook's interface deliberately takes advantage of this confusion to be able to offer advertisers the opportunity to enter into internet users' conversation particularly through sponsored publications. To a certain extent, information is a collateral victim of the Californian company's business model which is exclusively based on advertising revenue.

When all is said and done, it is up to users to develop the right skills themselves to distinguish reliable, checked and serious information amongst the mass of bizarre or sensationalist stories without any help from Facebook. Our results prove that this question is not taken lightly by younger people who take a fairly critical view of the information they are exposed to on Facebook even if the afore-mentioned skills are unequally possessed by the members of this population group. One last point probably deserves more in-depth study, namely that of our respondents' craving for entertaining information. Clearly, above all Facebook appears to be a place for entertainment. The media have also contributed to this evolution by providing contents which they think correspond to the "expectations" of their Facebook audience thus increasing and strengthening the circulation of light, funny and even emotional contents. Facebook and other social platforms following on in its wake have undoubtedly led to the redefinition of the "classical" outlines of information through this over-promotion of a certain type of content for which there is an audience and therefore advertising revenue. This overexposure of such content can be explained by Facebook's algorithm which increasingly functions like media by providing its users with a way of reading news based on criteria which are anything but journalistic...

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