

Why this is *important*

*A qualitative study on Gen Z and journalism
in Austria, featuring perspectives from users,
media professionals, and international experts*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MEDIENGRUPPE WIENER ZEITUNG



A miss is as good as a mile

This study is important...

... for media professionals: The study analyses young adults' expectations of news media and the prevailing assumptions of Austrian media professionals about them in order to highlight differences and similarities. Additionally, it incorporates perspectives from international experts and research findings. On this basis, media organisations can tailor their content and working methods more effectively to this target group.

... for media companies:

The study provides a scientifically sound basis for decision-making for executives in Austrian media companies and beyond to further develop their own offerings in a targeted manner and engage young adults in a more sustainable way.

... for media researchers:

Until now, there has been little reliable Austria-specific knowledge about young adults' expectations of news media and media professionals. This study contributes to closing that research gap. Furthermore, it adds insights to an international body of knowledge that tends to rely on findings from larger markets.

This study is based on 58 qualitative interviews: 27 with young adults (aged 18–30), 18 with Austrian media professionals (various roles, genres, and hierarchical levels) and 13 with international experts from the media industry and media research for further insights. The evaluation was conducted using qualitative content analysis. The results are not representative, but they do reveal recurring patterns and strategically relevant areas of tension.

What we did

What young media users want (ROUGHLY)

Traditional quality journalism

Young adults in Austria have a clear and traditional understanding of quality journalism: they expect accurate content, thorough research, objectivity, independence, transparency, and a diversity of perspectives.

Focus on facts & objectivity

Young adults in Austria see the primary role of news media as reporting facts as objectively and neutrally as possible. In doing so, the media should enable users to form their own opinions. The media should curate content and fulfil their role as the 'fourth estate' by holding power to account. These findings are surprising in that they contradict the common assumption that young audiences are mainly interested in subjective reporting and opinion pieces.

Willingness to pay & subscription scepticism

About half of the young users we surveyed outright reject the idea of paying for news. They cite the availability of all relevant information free of charge as the main reason. The other half say they are willing in principle to pay for news, yet in practice they rarely take out subscriptions. The reasons they give most frequently are the availability of free alternatives, sharing models, lack of time, and the limited appeal of current subscription models. Several respondents explicitly point out that they already pay for news media through the ORF licence fee.

Trust in brands and individuals

The young adults we surveyed in Austria trust both established brands and individual actors. Established and well-known media companies are perceived as particularly trustworthy, with Austria's public service broadcaster ORF enjoying especially high levels of trust. However, young adults find it difficult to clearly distinguish between journalists and content creators. Internationally, content creators play a far more significant role, particularly where trust in legacy media is low.

Need for information and well-being

Many young adults are interested in politics and current events, but they feel burdened by the perceived abundance of negative news. This makes some of them consciously avoid the news. At the same time, young adults have a wide range of interests and want to stay informed. They expect a stress-free media experience. When they are interested in a topic, they are happy to engage with long-form journalism, for example podcasts.

What media managers report

Unclear audience definition

Media organizations consider young adults to be a key audience for the future, but many of them only vaguely define who belongs in this group from their perspective. Assumptions about young people's behaviour shape strategies more than systematic evidence.

Barriers to innovation

Media managers state that a lack of resources, dependence on platform logic, declining advertising revenues and industry inertia make innovation difficult. Experts state that a lack of career incentives might contribute to the slow pace of innovation.

Trial and error instead of *strategy*

Young users are primarily addressed via social media, especially Instagram and TikTok. However, many activities follow a trial-and-error approach instead of clear, long-term strategies, meticulous data-analysis and portfolio management.

Gathering that...

In many respects, the assessments of media managers coincide with the statements of young adults, for example with regard to user habits, the importance of relevance to their lives and willingness to pay. The study reveals that implementation barriers exceed the knowledge deficit about what young adults want.



Relevance

to young people's lives determines their attention, but newsrooms struggle to produce this systematically. Typically, their staff is older and lacks proximity to younger audiences. More diverse editorial teams and the consistent involvement of young adults could help – provided they are given the necessary leeway to put their ideas into practice.

Marketing & monetisation

need to be revised. Although the users we surveyed are familiar with legacy media brands as such, they are hardly familiar with what these brands offer. In addition, existing subscription models should be rethought and complemented with innovative approaches. Young people do not find the current subscription offers attractive enough to spend money on.

Innovation

and real change come from within. This requires leadership that is willing to experiment, tolerance for mistakes, motivated teams, the dismantling of rigid structures, and improved cross-departmental cooperation. At the same time, it is clear that innovation in the media industry take place in a complex interplay between traditionally trained media managers, media companies, third-party platform providers and society, and also require decisions that go beyond the familiar. For this reason alone, there can be no one-size-fits-all solution.

**What this means
in a nutshell: Young
users do not stay
away because news
is irrelevant to
them, but because
structures, products
and implementation
do not meet user
and market needs.**

You've finished the Executive Summary of *Knapp daneben ist auch vorbei – A qualitative study on Gen Z and journalism in Austria, featuring perspectives from users, media professionals, and international experts* – congratulations!

The study was conducted in collaboration between Jana Koch and Alexandra Borchardt. Jana Koch was responsible for the overall study design, the review of Austrian literature, the academic interviews (conducting, transcribing, and analyzing them), and the analysis. Alexandra Borchardt situated the work within the international research context, conducted additional interviews with international experts, and transcribed them. The key takeaways were developed jointly by both authors.

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