THE TRUST OF TAIWANESE YOUTH
IN MAINSTREAM MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA

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Shifts in Media Dynamics and Their Influence on Trust Among Taiwanese Youth

Trust in institutions is a cornerstone of democratic societies, shaping how citizens engage with political bodies and media platforms. As Norris (2001) highlights, a strong link exists between trust in political institutions and social trust, where countries suffering from high levels of corruption and low social trust often struggle to build vibrant civil societies. Such civil societies are essential for promoting effective governance, which relies on citizens' confidence in both political and public institutions. When social and political trust are deficient, public confidence in these institutions naturally declines. Moreover, political trust is closely intertwined with media trust, which plays a vital role in shaping public perceptions of institutional integrity and honesty.

Hanitzsch, Van Dalen, and Steindl (2018) offer a nuanced perspective, suggesting that trust in political institutions is strongly correlated with trust in the press—a phenomenon known as the "trust nexus." In democratic systems, media function as key facilitators, ensuring that citizens access accurate and reliable information on public issues. Credible news sources are crucial in enabling citizens to make informed decisions, thereby supporting the health of democratic processes. The relationship between media and democracy is significantly shaped by trust in the credibility of news sources. The positive impact of news media on democracy—such as helping citizens evaluate political leaders—largely depends on the public's trust in media (Kalogeropoulos et al., 2019). Therefore, news media credibility emerges as a critical factor in maintaining effective democratic operations.

Trust has long been recognized as a crucial determinant of public engagement with political news. Media, through their roles in information dissemination and ideological formation, significantly influence political trust. In today's information-saturated environment, public political trust is molded not only by personal experiences but also by the narratives conveyed by various media. Currently, media are divided into traditional forms, such as newspapers, television, radio, and magazines, and new media, including platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Mainstream media have responded to digital advancements by launching websites and online platforms to expand their reach (Emeraldien et al., 2023).

Based on Hu and Pu's (2023) research findings, the type of media consumed plays a significant role in shaping political trust. Traditional media, often regulated and subject to editorial oversight, generally fosters higher political trust by presenting more balanced

or state-endorsed perspectives. In contrast, new media, particularly unofficial or alternative outlets, tends to undermine political trust due to its less regulated nature and emphasis on sensational or negative news. Hu and Pu's study highlights that in China, unofficial media have a "crowding-out effect" on official media, reducing the public's reliance on state-run sources and increasing exposure to negative political news, which can erode trust in government institutions. They further argue that this relationship is mediated by subjective well-being—individuals who frequently consume unofficial media may experience a decline in subjective well-being, which in turn reduces political trust, particularly in central government and law enforcement (Hu & Pu, 2023)

Additionally, the rapid rise of social media as a key component of new media has intensified these challenges for mainstream journalism. As more users turn to social media platforms for news, where anyone can publish content without rigorous fact-checking, the prevalence of misinformation increases, often leading to ethical dilemmas and the erosion of trust in journalism field. Social media's unchecked environment allows for the proliferation of unverified information, which can incite public distrust and conflict, particularly among younger audiences (Emeraldien et al., 2021; Rani & Padmalosani, 2019). Rani and Padmalosani (2019) note that youth, in particular, are susceptible to the influence of such content, which can affect their political perceptions and social behavior, sometimes fostering divisive attitudes.

Taiwanese researchers have employed diverse methods to study misinformation, especially in the context of Taiwan's elections and public discourse. Rauchfleisch et al. (2022) analyze the influence of disinformation in Taiwan, highlighting the challenges posed by both domestic actors and external political entities. They discuss how some Taiwanese media outlets have been criticized for uncritically sharing content from foreign state-controlled media, potentially amplifying misinformation through social media channels. The spread of such misinformation has raised concerns about media reliability in Taiwan. The Reuters Institute Digital News Report (2023) discusses Taiwan's complex media environment and highlights the ongoing battle against misinformation through fact-checking and media literacy efforts (Newman et al., 2023).

Despite these challenges, Taiwan ranks highly on the press freedom index, placing 35th out of 180 countries with a score of 73.83 (Reporters Without Borders, 2023). This ranking reflects the considerable freedom enjoyed by journalists, news organizations, and netizens in Taiwan, as evidenced by diverse viewpoints and aggressive coverage of

government policies, despite some media outlets having strong political affiliations. Press freedom is closely linked to democratic progress, where media serve as the fourth estate alongside the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. In democracies, governance quality depends on citizens having access to credible and independent information, while the press supports accountability, transparency, participation, and inclusiveness in democratic processes (Ramadlan, 2021). Press freedom represents democratic resilience, reflecting a country's capacity to prevent declines in the quality of democratic institutions and practices (Boese et al., 2021). Trustworthy media are essential in promoting sound journalistic practices that educate the public and strengthen democracy through the coverage of political issues (Ngurah Putra, 2013).

In the context of youth development, several critical challenges persist, such as the need for building strong character and social resilience. Mass media play a crucial role in addressing these challenges by promoting values and norms that can help shape positive youth character. This is important because youth character reflects the overall character of a nation (Muttaqin, 2015). Therefore, enhancing the media's role in influencing youth positively will significantly improve the quality of the younger generation and reinforce the foundation of the nation's character.

This study examines the trust that Taiwanese youth place in two distinct categories of media: mainstream (traditional) media, which includes newspapers, radio, and television, and social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Twitter (X), Facebook, and TikTok. Both types of media play a critical role in youth character development. If the media fail to provide accurate and credible information, the quality of youth development could be adversely affected. Media can exert both positive and negative influences (Patawat & Balamurugan, 2018). While media offer numerous benefits, they also have the potential to cause harm, depending on how individuals and societies engage with them. Therefore, the credibility of media profoundly influences public trust, particularly among youth. As media serve as the primary information source, any lack of credibility can easily lead the public astray through incorrect or fake news.

This research involves a survey completed by 139 Taiwanese youth, all belonging to Generation Z, followed by targeted interviews with 10 informants who participated in the survey. The results highlight the significant influence that media accessibility—whether through mainstream platforms or social media—has on the level of trust these youth place in the information they encounter. This connection underscores the

importance of understanding how the ease of access to different media shapes trust perceptions among younger generations. Further analysis will delve deeper into how these accessibility factors correlate with broader patterns of media trust.

Profile of Respondents

This chapter provides an overview of the demographic characteristics of the 139 Taiwanese respondents who participated in this study. The focus is on key demographic factors such as gender, age, and occupation, which help to contextualize their engagement with both mainstream and social media. By outlining these profiles, this chapter aims to provide a basis for exploring the potential factors that may influence their trust in various media sources.
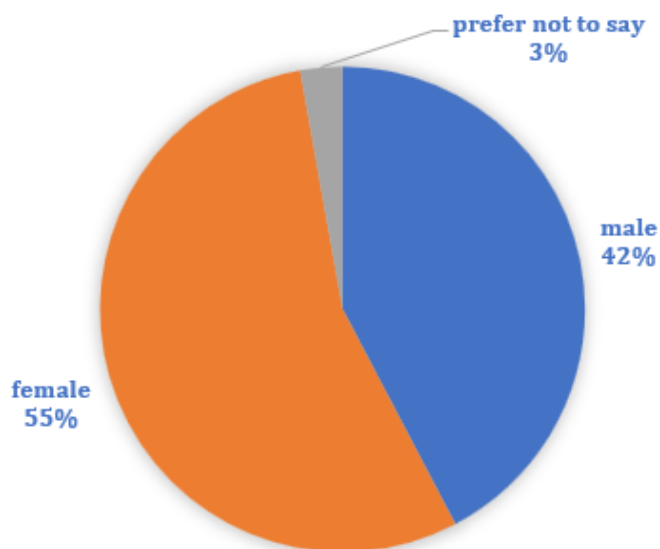

Figure 1 Gender Distribution

Figure 1 shows the gender distribution of the respondents in this study, with 55% being female, 42% male, and 3% preferring not to disclose their gender. The proportions of male and female respondents are fairly balanced, providing a broad representation of perspectives that could help in understanding gender-related differences in media trust. While a small percentage of respondents chose not to disclose their gender, this distribution still allows for the exploration of potential variations in media trust across different gender groups.
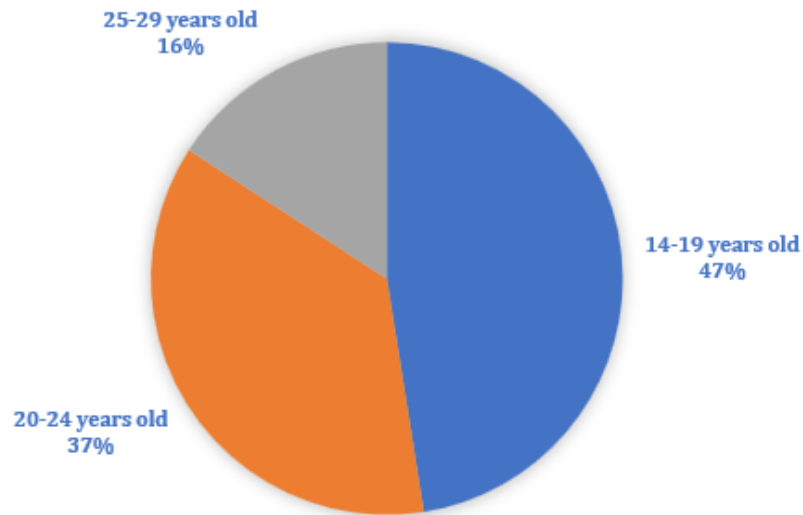
Figure 2 Age Distribution

The next chart (figure 2) shows the age distribution of respondents in this study, focusing specifically on Taiwanese youth, defined here as members of Generation Z. According to Seemiller and Grace (2016), Generation Z includes individuals born between 1995 and 2010, meaning that the age range of respondents—14-19 years (47%), 20-24 years (37%), and 25-29 years (16%)—fits within this generational cohort as of the end of March 2024. The data indicates that nearly half of the respondents are in the 14-19 age range, suggesting a significant level of participation among younger Gen Z members, who are likely to be in school or university. This age distribution provides context for understanding the study's findings, as it reflects the experiences and perspectives of young Taiwanese who have grown up in a period marked by rapid digital and technological advancements.
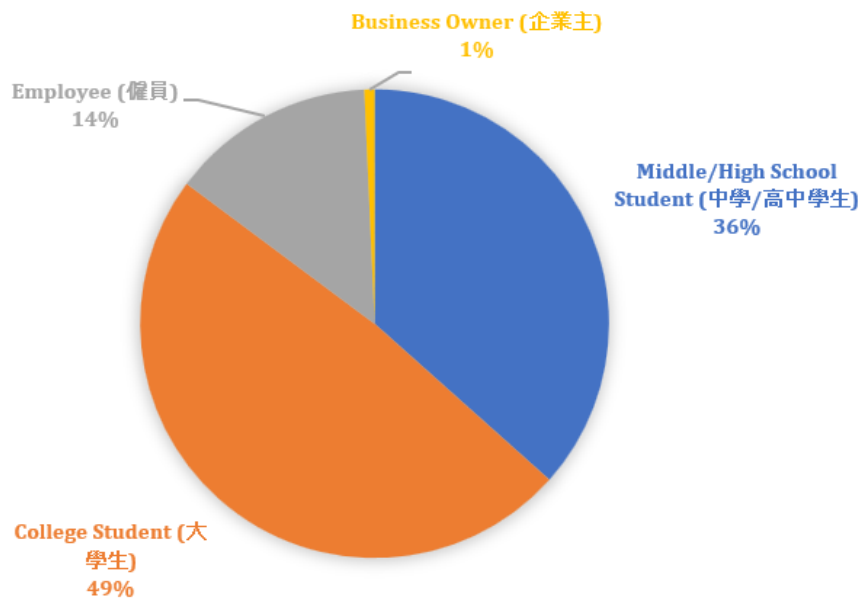
Figure 3 Respondent Occupation

Figure 3 illustrates the occupational distribution of respondents in this study. It shows that the majority of respondents are college students, accounting for 49%, followed by middle/high school students at 36%. Employees make up 14% of the respondents, while a small fraction, 1%, are business owners. This distribution suggests that most participants are young individuals still engaged in their education, either in secondary or higher education.

This chapter has outlined the demographic characteristics of the 139 Taiwanese respondents, highlighting a balanced gender distribution and a predominance of younger Generation Z participants, primarily students. These demographics provide a foundational context for analyzing the respondents' perspectives and behaviors regarding media use. With this understanding, the next chapter will explore how the accessibility of various media—ranging from traditional outlets like newspapers, radio, and television to digital platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Twitter (X), Facebook, and TikTok—plays a role in shaping their trust in these sources among Taiwanese youth.

The Role of Media Accessibility in Shaping Media Trust

This chapter examines how media accessibility influences trust in media among Taiwanese youth, focusing on both the availability and perceived reliability of information. According to McLuhan, media accessibility goes beyond the mere ability to access content; it encompasses how media shapes societal perceptions and culture. In this

context, media accessibility plays a critical role in shaping the social realities of individuals and communities. For Taiwanese youth, the accessibility of media significantly influences their trust in information sources and their perspectives on social, political, and cultural issues. As various media outlets compete to remain relevant across different demographics, accessibility becomes a determining factor in the platforms they trust and engage with (Udoudom et al., 2023).

According to the findings of this study, Taiwanese youth tend to prefer media platforms that offer ease of access and convenience. Media, including television, newspapers, magazines, online platforms, and social media, serve as primary sources of information for many individuals (Leaning, 2019). The advent of television in the mid-20th century, followed by the proliferation of the internet and social media in recent decades, has revolutionized how people access and consume information (Udoudom et al., 2023). However, according to survey and interview results from this study, many Taiwanese youth perceive mainstream media as slow, outdated, and traditional, making them less inclined to consume news through these platforms. Instead, they gravitate toward social media, which they find more interactive and aligned with their needs.

Mainstream media has traditionally held significant influence due to its broad audience reach and its role in delivering news, information, and entertainment to the public (Salaudeen & Onyechi, 2020). In the digital era, some traditional media companies have successfully adapted by embracing new trends, such as digital platforms and online content, while others have struggled. Companies that fail to conduct proper research on trending content and audience preferences often fall behind in the competitive media landscape (Jiang, 2022).

Survey findings indicate a noticeable shift among Taiwanese youth away from mainstream media as a primary source of news. The data presented in table 1 demonstrate that a significant 37.8% of respondents no longer access traditional media when seeking information. This decline underscores the growing disinterest among younger audiences in conventional news outlets, reflecting a broader trend in media consumption. This trend is consistent with findings from previous studies, which suggest that the rise of digital and social media has transformed media consumption patterns, with traditional media perceived as slow and less engaging by younger audiences (Jiang, 2022). Similarly, the dynamic and participatory nature of digital media environments and

the rapid dissemination of information through unofficial channels have reshaped how young people in Taiwan engage with news content (Rauchfleisch et al., 2023).

Table 1

Mainstream Media Access for News and Information

Newspapers/Magazines	Television	Radio	I do not access
18,2%	61,5%	11,2%	37,8%

In the rapidly evolving digital landscape, mainstream media faces significant challenges in capturing the attention of younger audiences. According to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2023, while public media brands continue to enjoy high levels of trust in many Northern European countries, their reach among younger audiences has been declining. This decline is notable because younger users who engage more frequently with public service media are likely to see them as important both personally and for society, suggesting that maintaining reach is critical for future legitimacy (Newman et al., 2023).

Reflecting these global trends, an interview with Ling, a participant in this study, highlights a similar shift among Taiwanese youth away from traditional media consumption habits. Ling's experience underscores the broader challenge faced by traditional media in staying relevant to younger audiences who prefer digital options:

> "I used to watch the news on TV. I often read newspapers as a child. I would read them daily. During elementary and middle school, I read them every day, but now, it's not something I do anymore." (Ling, interview, 2024)

Despite the observed decline in the use of traditional media among younger audiences, the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2023 highlights that across various countries, a significant proportion of online users still prefer to read news rather than watch or listen to it. This preference for text-based formats is attributed to the speed and control they provide, suggesting that there remains a substantial audience that values accessible and reliable text news (Newman et al., 2023). For traditional media, this highlights the importance of maintaining relevance and reach by considering these user preferences, especially as the digital landscape continues to evolve and diversify.

The emergence of Industry 4.0 has reshaped social connectivity, driven by advancements in artificial intelligence and digital communication technologies. These developments have shifted human interaction from face-to-face communication to virtual and wireless connections, significantly altering social dynamics and communication behaviors, especially among millennials and Generation Z (Zis et al., 2021). Despite this trend toward digital communication among younger generations, generational differences in media preferences persist. As shown in table 2, 39.2% of Taiwanese youth continue to access mainstream media due to family habits, highlighting the influence of familial traditions on media consumption patterns.

Table 2

Reasons for Continued Use of Mainstream Media

Reason	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Family Habit	31	39.2%
Personal Habit	15	19.0%
Convenience & Accessibility	13	16.5%
Up-to-date	9	11.4%
Trust in Mainstream Media Sources	3	3.8%
Others (Don't know, No response, etc.)	8	10.1%

As noted by Flamingo and the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (2019), the media consumption habits and attitudes of young people diverge significantly from those of older generations. Driven by a pursuit of progress and entertainment, today's youth seek information that not only informs but also aligns with their social and personal experiences. The report, based on qualitative interviews and digital tracking, highlights that while young people still need news to connect their world to broader contexts, they do not necessarily regard mainstream media as the most relevant or preferred source for such content. This viewpoint is illustrated by another interviewee, Jessie, who acknowledges that while television remains part of her family routine, her personal news consumption gravitates toward digital platforms like Facebook.

"I watch TV because my parents do. But when I look for news myself, I use Facebook. I find it more comfortable." (Jessie, interview, 2024)

News media now compete for attention amidst numerous distractions, with much of the news being encountered passively through social media, online conversations, documentaries, and TV shows. Rather than actively seeking out news, many young people come across it as it is readily available on various platforms they already use. This is true for both mainstream media, which may be accessed simply because it is present in their environment, and social media, which is even more accessible given the ubiquity of smartphones.

Consequently, while there is still engagement with traditional news sources, much of the younger generation's interest is drawn toward more dynamic and diverse content, such as infotainment, lifestyle, pop culture, and content from bloggers and vloggers. This trend reflects a shift in how news is consumed, blending entertainment and information. Despite this, mainstream media is still accessed, though often for short durations—30% of respondents reported spending only 10-30 minutes daily on traditional media (see figure 4), with a mere 1.0% spending over 180 minutes. This indicates that while conventional news sources remain in use, their influence is diminishing as younger demographics gravitate toward faster and more engaging content.
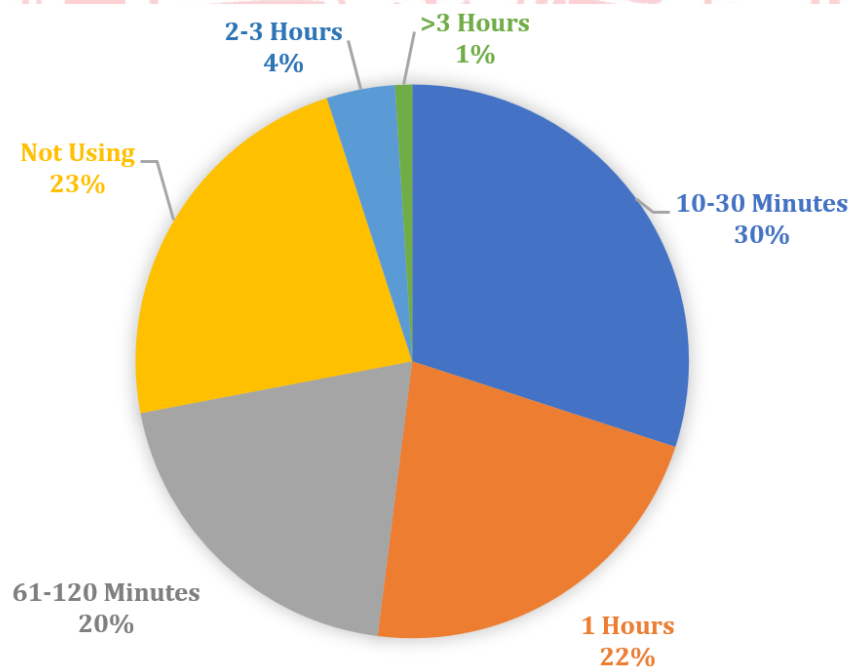

Figure 4 Daily Time Spent Accessing Mainstream Media

In contrast, social media offers numerous benefits that cater to the preferences of today's youth by enhancing social interaction, creativity, and personal empowerment. These platforms allow users to connect, share, and engage with diverse content in ways that traditional media cannot. Features such as instant messaging and content sharing on platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp enable dynamic and personalized interactions, making them more appealing for modern information consumption and fulfilling various social and individual needs (Tarigan et al., 2023).

Social media platforms are particularly appealing to Taiwanese youth due to their accessibility and adaptability in delivering real-time updates. As shown in table 3, a significant 86.7% of respondents prefer Instagram for accessing diverse entertainment content, underscoring the platform's dominant role in youth media consumption. Other popular platforms include YouTube (82.5%) and Facebook (61.5%), reflecting a clear preference for visually engaging and easily navigable sources of information.

Table 3

Social Media Platforms Accessed for News and Information

Social Media Platforms	Percentage (%)
Instagram	86.7%
YouTube	82.5%
Facebook	61.5%
TikTok	25.2%
Twitter	14.0%
Others	<1%

The preference among youth for platforms offering convenience is evident in their ability to access news at any time and place. Social media's persistent digital footprint ensures that content remains readily available, enabling users to revisit past events or information whenever needed. Survey results further highlight that ease of access is the primary driving force behind why Taiwanese youth increasingly rely on social media for their news and information needs. This aligns with findings that highlight the rapid and interactive design of social media platforms, which cater to the mobile lifestyles of younger generations (Tarigan et al., 2023).
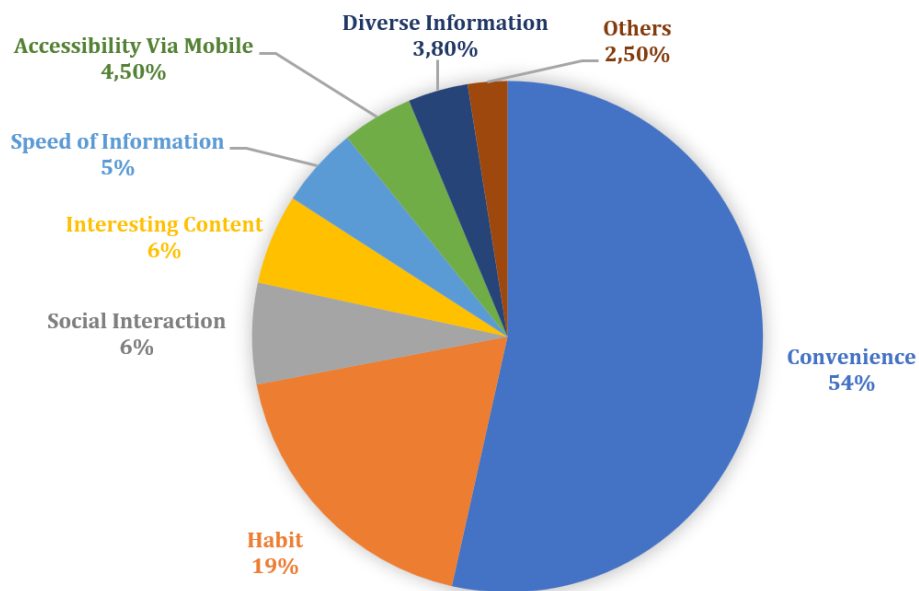
Figure 5 Reasons for Accessing Media Platforms for News and Information

Research findings reveal that Taiwanese youth primarily choose social media platforms for information and news due to ease of access, speed of information dissemination, and the freedom to select news sources that align with their personal preferences. Social media platforms offer high convenience and interactivity, enabling users not only to quickly receive information but also to engage in discussions and share views with a wider community. Additionally, algorithms used by these platforms often tailor content based on individual interests, making the presented information more relevant and appealing. However, the preference for social media also poses challenges, especially regarding the validity of information, which is often inadequately verified before being disseminated, increasing the risk of misinformation among youth.

The influence of media choice can also be observed in the duration Taiwanese youth spend on social media. As shown in figure 6, the highest percentage (23%) corresponds to those who spend 2-3 hours on social media daily. In comparison, only 4% of respondents indicated that they spend the same amount of time on mainstream media.
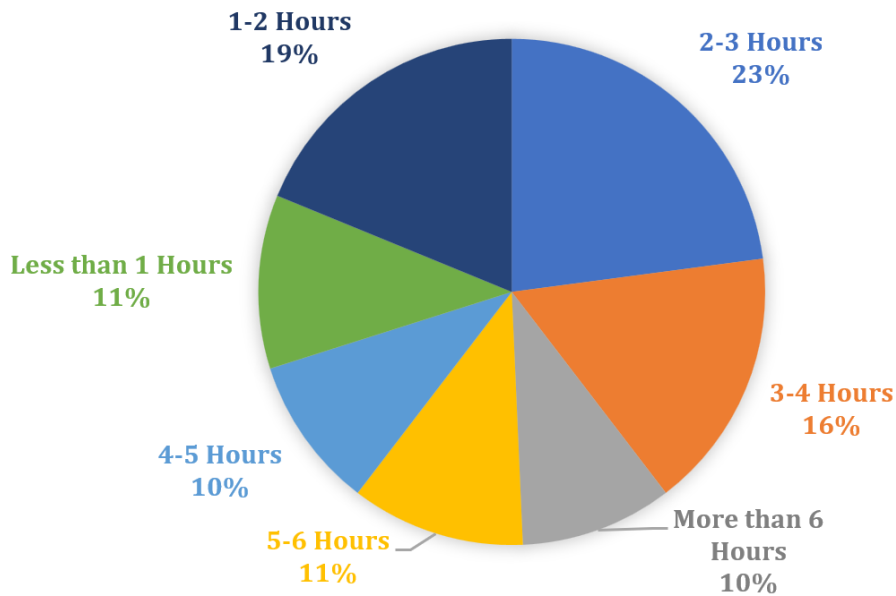
Figure 6 Daily Usage Time of Social Media

Media accessibility plays a significant role in shaping how individuals, including Taiwanese youth, choose information sources. The shift from traditional media to social media is often driven by factors such as convenience, speed, and the relevance of the information provided. This change reflects a broader trend of evolving preferences, as users seek platforms that better align with their digital lifestyles (Tarigan et al., 2023). The diversity of media choices available today highlights the increasingly varied perspectives and preferences within younger generations.

Taiwanese Youth Media Preferences: Mainstream vs. Social Media

Younger generations have distinct habits, needs, and expectations regarding information and communication compared to older generations. As highlighted by Alibegovic (2021), online media, including social networks and YouTube channels, are primary sources of information for young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina. These platforms provide easy access to diverse content like music, beauty, and sports, often delivered in engaging formats such as vlogs or celebrity interviews. Similarly, Taiwanese youth prefer the convenience of digital platforms, avoiding the effort required to seek out news from traditional media, which does not align with their fast-paced, digital lifestyles.

Social media has transformed the modern media landscape, influencing how information is delivered, received, and utilized by society. Traditional outlets such as

television, radio, and newspapers once dominated information dissemination, but social media has introduced significant changes in communication dynamics, offering a more decentralized and democratic space for information exchange (Kwet, 2020). This shift also fosters interactive relationships between content creators and consumers, enabling more personalized engagement (Permatasari et al., 2024). Despite these changes, some traditional media, like television, remain widely used by Taiwanese youth, with a usage rate of 88.4% (see table 4), reflecting a blend of old and new media consumption habits.

Table 4

Frequently Used Mainstream Media

Newspapers/Magazines	Television	Radio
8,6%	88,4%	2,9%

The interviews reveal that many respondents were exposed to traditional media during childhood, largely due to family routines such as regularly watching television and reading newspapers. Over time, as they grew older, these habits became less prominent. Taiwanese youth now often turn to digital platforms, attracted by the ease and convenience that fit their fast-paced lifestyles and evolving media preferences. While traditional media is still part of their media landscape, it is often seen as more time-consuming or less accessible compared to new media options. As Angel, one of the respondents, noted, her limited time makes traditional media less practical for quick updates, so she finds herself using social media more frequently for that purpose.

"We can see the news in just 55 seconds because I don't have time to sit in front of the TV or pick up a paper, so I use IG to check social news." (Angel, interview, 2024)

Taiwanese youth have various reasons for their decreased engagement with mainstream media in a rapidly changing world. In today's fast-paced digital era, where information is instantly accessible via social media and other online platforms, mainstream media can sometimes be perceived as slower due to its more structured processes of verification and news presentation. While mainstream media aims to uphold accuracy and credibility, some audiences may feel that the speed of digital platforms better aligns with their need for immediate updates, even if those sources are sometimes less reliable. This perception contributes to the view that mainstream media may not

always keep pace with the demand for the latest news and information. One interviewee, Winnie, mentioned that mainstream media doesn't seem to match the rhythm of the fast-moving world.

"I think mainstream media is slow." (Winnie, interview, 2024)

For Taiwanese youth, mainstream media, such as newspapers, magazines, and television, is often perceived as slower in delivering updated content, especially since print media can only provide news updates after a delay (Pratama & Saragih, 2022). The preference for digital platforms is driven by a demand for real-time information, highlighting the challenges faced by traditional media in keeping up with modern audiences' needs (Jiang, 2022). Josh, one interviewee, confirmed that mainstream media feels outdated and very traditional, echoing a common sentiment among youth.

"I think they (mainstream media) are too old and traditional." (Josh, interview, 2024)

The figure 7 illustrates that 60% of Taiwanese youth continue to rely on mainstream media primarily due to convenience and availability. For many respondents, accessing mainstream media like television or newspapers is easy and comfortable because these sources are readily available in their homes or other familiar environments. For example, at home, a television might already be set up and frequently tuned to news channels, allowing youth to consume news effortlessly. Similarly, newspapers might be readily accessible if their parents have subscriptions and encourage reading as part of daily routines. This ease of access is especially relevant during youth, as was the case for Ling, an interviewee who, during her school years, relied on the convenience of watching TV news at home, driven by the established family routine. Although Ling no longer lives with his parents, her early exposure to mainstream media shaped his news consumption habits.
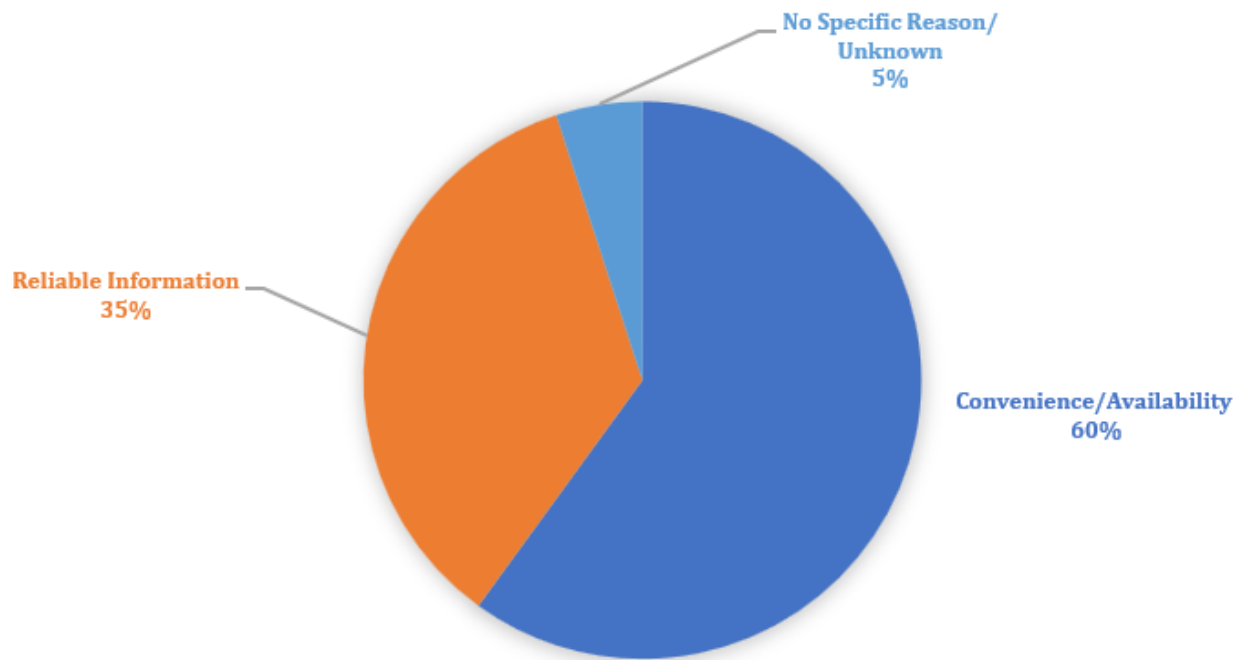
Figure 7 Reason for Accessing Mainstream Media Most Frequently

Meanwhile, 35% of respondents cited "Reliable Information" as their reason for accessing mainstream media. This reflects a trust in the credibility of traditional media, even in the digital age where social media dominates the landscape. This sentiment aligns with findings from the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2023, which indicates that despite the rise of social media, a significant proportion of people still prefer to read the news due to the perceived reliability and depth of written content (Newman et al., 2023). The report highlights that text-based news offers more control and a more in-depth approach to accessing information, which could explain why a considerable number of Taiwanese youth still value the credibility of mainstream media, even if it is less convenient than digital alternatives.

The preference for reliable information also underscores concerns about the accuracy and quality of information on digital platforms, such as social media. According to Emeraldien, Sugihartati, and Rahayu (2021), online journalism often struggles with issues of inaccuracy and the spread of misinformation, which undermines trust in these platforms. This inaccuracy makes mainstream media, with its more rigorous editorial standards and fact-checking processes, still worth reading or watching. For many users, especially those concerned with trustworthy news, the reliability offered by mainstream

outlets remains a critical factor, despite the slower pace and less engaging formats compared to digital media.

The impact of social media on entertainment consumption is particularly pronounced among Generation Z, who use platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, blogs, and forums more extensively for this purpose compared to Generation Y. Unlike Generation Y, who may use social media for various reasons, Generation Z is more likely to turn to these platforms for entertainment. This generational preference reflects a broader "civic divide" (Norris, 2001), where younger users, drawn to digital platforms by the desire for enjoyment and engaging experiences, are increasingly disengaged from traditional news sources. As a result, social media becomes a primary space for both entertainment and social interaction, shifting the ways younger generations interact with information and participate in public discourse. Younger users, in particular, expect these platforms to provide not just news, but also interactive and fun content for themselves and their peers (Mude & Undale, 2023).

In this context, table 5 shows that Instagram is the most frequently accessed social media platform among respondents, with 56.6% identifying it as their preferred choice. This popularity can be attributed to Instagram's unique ability to facilitate self-presentation, allowing users to curate their online identities through a visually driven interface. According to Andersson (2017), entertainment content posts on social media platforms, such as Instagram, tend to get more likes and comments because they are more enjoyable and engaging for users. Social media content generally falls into two categories—entertainment and informational posts—with Instagram providing a space that blends both effectively (Andersson, 2017). The platform's interactive features, such as stories, likes, and comments, enhance user engagement, making it particularly appealing to those who prioritize social interaction and personal branding. This trend illustrates a broader shift in how Taiwanese youth engage with digital spaces, favoring platforms that offer not only entertainment but also opportunities for self-expression and social validation.

Table 5

Most Frequently Accessed Social Media Platforms

Newspapers/Magazines	Television
Instagram	56,6%
Youtube	23,1%
Facebook	9,8%
Twitter	6,3%
Tiktok	1,4%
Line Threads	0,7%
Others	0,7%

Liking and commenting are ways users engage with content and share it with friends, driven largely by enjoyment—one of the most crucial factors influencing user behavior on social networking sites. On Instagram, it's very easy to find entertainment and gossip content, which naturally attracts substantial attention and engagement. The platform's design encourages frequent encounters with such content, increasing the likelihood of high interaction rates. Some studies suggest that certain user groups are particularly active on Instagram, often using the platform for socialization, maintaining relationships, and public communication. For these users, enjoyment and social connection are primary motivations, which explains why entertainment-focused posts tend to generate significant activity.

The preference for social media platforms that provide convenience and enjoyment reflects why users gravitate towards them. The choice of platform is often influenced by various factors, including ease of use and intuitive interfaces, which enhance the user experience. As seen in figure 8, 30% of respondents indicated that social connection is a key factor in their choice of platforms, suggesting that Taiwanese youth often select platforms that align with the communication patterns of their peer groups. This highlights a broader trend where platform choice is guided not just by the content offered but also by the social dynamics and ease of connectivity they facilitate.
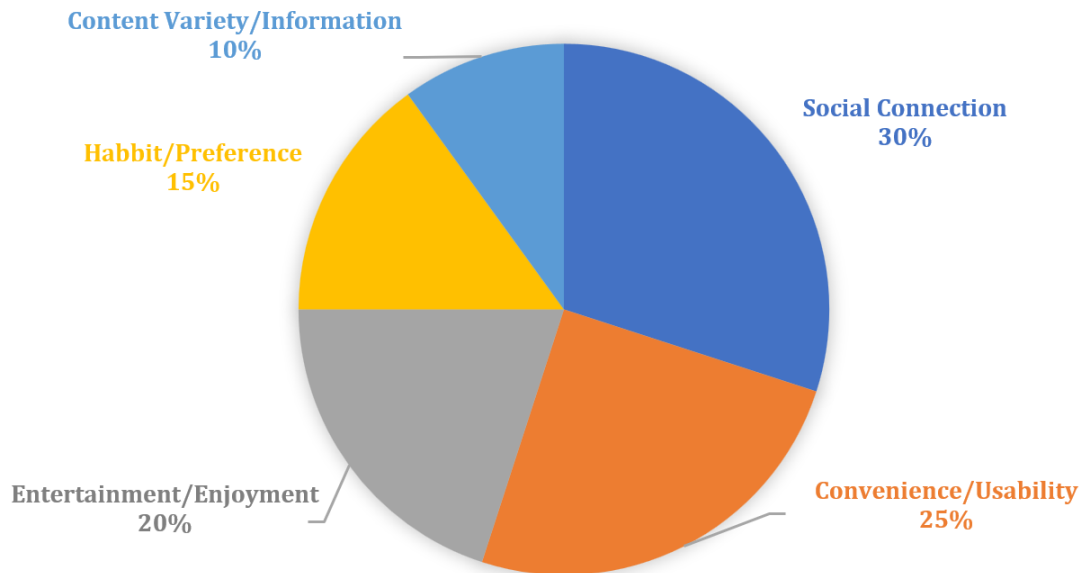
Figure 8 Reasons for Choosing Frequently Used Social Media Platforms

Previous generations relied primarily on traditional media to stay informed, as technology during their time was neither as advanced nor as widespread as it is today. In stark contrast, Generation Z, often referred to as "digital natives" (Prensky, 2001), was born into a world of ubiquitous internet access and digital devices. Growing up in this environment, they have seamlessly integrated technology into their lives, shaping how they consume information and interact with media. For example, one interviewee, Ning, shared that if the news isn't engaging, he prefers to shift his focus to entertainment content, illustrating the adaptive and selective consumption habits typical of this generation.

"If it's interesting, I'll check it out, but if not, I'll just access the entertainment section." (Ning, interview, 2024)

Research by Salaudeen & Onyechi (2020) revealed that respondents access specific types of information from both mainstream and digital media. The findings show that students primarily use digital media to access entertainment and light news, while they turn to mainstream media for serious news and to verify information obtained from digital sources. These findings further explain the higher exposure to digital media. Given that the participants in this study are young students, their information preferences lean

more toward entertainment and showbiz than serious news and political issues, making them more inclined to access digital media than mainstream media.

In the table below, 22 respondents (12.6%) selected *The Liberty Times* as their preferred channel for accessing information and news. This finding suggests that despite the dominance of entertainment content on social media, the demand for credible and up-to-date news remains a critical aspect of Taiwanese youth's media consumption. *The Liberty Times*, recognized as one of Taiwan's most trusted news sources, continues to attract those who prioritize reliability and accuracy in their information sources, even in a digital age heavily influenced by social media.

Table 6

Preferred Channels for Accessing Information and News Among Taiwanese Youth

Channel	Respondents	Percentage (%)
The Liberty Times	22	12.6%
ETtoday	18	10.5%
TGOP	15	8.7%
TVBS	13	7.5%
Dcard	11	6.4%
SET News	11	6.4%
CTS	10	5.8%
PTS	8	4.6%
CTS News	8	4.6%
Yahoo	7	4.1%
Apple Daily	7	4.1%
ET TODAY	6	3.5%
The Reporter	4	2.3%
Today	4	2.3%
CNN	4	2.3%
BBC	4	2.3%
Kao-Ti-News	3	1.7%
Mission Circle	3	1.7%
Fan-Koo	2	1.2%
BBC News	2	1.2%
Simple Guy	2	1.2%
Focus Taiwan	2	1.2%
Other	27	15.7%

This finding suggests that despite the dominance of entertainment content on social media, the demand for credible and up-to-date news remains a critical aspect of Taiwanese youth's media consumption. The Liberty Times, recognized for its reliability and journalistic standards, continues to attract those who prioritize accuracy in their information sources, even in a digital age heavily influenced by social media. According to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2023, a significant portion of audiences still prefer to read news due to its perceived reliability and depth, especially among those seeking more comprehensive and trustworthy information (Newman et al., 2023). This reflects a similar pattern among Taiwanese youth, who, while heavily engaged with digital media, still value the credibility offered by traditional news sources.

The survey results from this study indicate that Taiwanese youth predominantly favor entertainment content. Among the various types of content accessed, music emerges as the most frequently consumed, with 58% of respondents selecting it as their primary choice. This preference underscores the importance of entertainment in shaping the media consumption habits of this generation, highlighting how leisure and enjoyment drive their engagement with digital platforms. This trend is consistent with findings from previous studies, which suggest that digital natives are more inclined to engage with content that is both entertaining and interactive, reflecting their preference for media that offers immediate gratification and social engagement (Tarigan et al., 2023)

Table 7

Types of Content Most Frequently Accessed by Taiwanese Youth on Selected Channels

Content	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Music	83	58%
Culinary	73	51%
Socio-Political	67	46.9%
Travel	60	42%
Gaming	57	39.9%
Culture	54	37.8%
Fashion	44	30.8%
Gossip	37	25.9%
Sports	33	23.1%
Technology	32	22.4%
Business	30	21%
Health	25	17.5%
Pets/Care/etc.	1	0.7%

Table 7 further illustrates how entertainment-oriented content dominates Taiwanese youth's media consumption. Although socio-political content remains significant, it is notably less accessed compared to more engaging and leisure-focused topics like music, culinary trends, and travel. These insights reflect a generational shift toward content that provides immediate enjoyment and fosters social connections rather than solely focusing on serious or academic information. This shift aligns with research suggesting that while young people are aware of serious news topics, they often prioritize content that resonates more closely with their personal interests and social lives, making platforms that offer a blend of entertainment and light information more appealing (Newman et al., 2023; Emeraldien et al., 2021)

According to Permatasari et al. (2024), five factors influence Gen Z's exploration of information. The first is interest, which is often defined as a liking, high desire, or feeling manifested in behaviors driven by internal motivation. This internal interest shapes what topics they engage with and invest time in. The second factor is locality/localism. Gen Z's need for localized information is one of the critical aspects of the information ecosystem, prompting them to follow social media accounts that focus on content relevant to their immediate environment. The third factor is proximity, which is closely linked to locality. Proximity influences their tendency to seek information that directly affects their lives (Tubbs & Moss, 2012). Gen Z views information with proximal relevance as more impactful on their personal experiences. The fourth factor is satisfaction. For Gen Z, the process of verifying information on social media, often by cross-referencing with mainstream sources, is driven by personal satisfaction rather than a commitment to fact-checking. This self-oriented approach reflects Gen Z's focus on immediate gratification and present-oriented thinking. The final factor is incidental information. Beyond planned searches, Gen Z is also drawn to content related to tragic events such as accidents, natural disasters, and crime. The desire to be informed about these events is often linked to a need for self-protection and anticipation of possible risks.

This discussion is not solely about technological preferences but also reflects generational differences in values and information needs. The preference of Taiwanese youth for social media signifies a broader shift in how they consume information, driven by factors such as convenience, speed, and perceived relevance. However, this transition also highlights challenges for mainstream media in retaining youth audiences and maintaining their role as reliable sources of information. The decline in trust towards

mainstream media, combined with the rise of digital platforms that are more susceptible to misinformation, presents both challenges and opportunities for shaping informed citizenry. The next chapter will explore the factors influencing media trust among Taiwanese youth, examining how these preferences impact their trust in both traditional and digital media sources.

Factors Influencing Media Trust Among Taiwanese Youth

The role of press freedom is integral to the health of a democracy, which in turn influences public trust in media. Credibility remains the cornerstone of journalism and news media. As online news platforms proliferate, traditional journalism faces increased competition. Research into media credibility has long been central to mass communication studies, emphasizing that trust in media is critical to its role in society (Kohring & Matthes, 2007; Tsfati, 2010).

Recent literature suggests that trust in mainstream media is not uniformly declining but is challenged by the emergence of selective media environments. In such environments, audiences are more likely to consume information that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs, complicating the relationship between media and public trust. This nuanced view of media trust is essential for understanding how Taiwanese youth interact with both traditional and digital news sources. Studies have shown that while younger audiences engage heavily with digital media, their trust in these platforms remains cautious, often turning to traditional outlets for more reliable information (Newman et al., 2023).

Moreover, traditional media is often criticized for its limited appeal to younger audiences. Despite efforts to engage youth through content relevant to their interests, research indicates that these efforts have not been entirely successful. For instance, Alibegovic (2021) found that traditional media frequently fails to offer content that resonates with the youth, even as media representatives assert that they strive to cover youth-related activities and issues.

Building on the complexities surrounding media trust and the selective consumption environment discussed earlier, my research interviews provide personal insights into how Taiwanese youth navigate these challenges. For example, one respondent, Vivian, a young Taiwanese individual, described her method of verifying news before determining its credibility, whether for personal use or sharing with others.

This cautious approach is particularly relevant in a media landscape where reliable information coexists with misleading content.

Research indicates that media users are becoming increasingly vigilant, employing strategies to ensure the information they consume is trustworthy (Kalogeropoulos et al., 2019). Vivian's careful attitude toward media trust reflects a growing trend among younger audiences who recognize the risks associated with misinformation and the importance of cross-referencing sources.

> "When I see something important or related to my friends, I share it with them. I share weather news with my family. For scientific or knowledge-related news, I verify it. There's a website in Taiwan called 'Taiwan Fact-Checking Center' where I can check the information." (Vivian, interview, 2024)

To tackle the growing challenges of misinformation, organizations in Taiwan such as the Taiwan Fact-Checking Center have become increasingly active. This center, run by professional journalists, regularly releases fact-checks on a wide range of topics, from consumer safety to geopolitical claims, to enhance media literacy and promote critical thinking among the public. Similarly, organizations like Watchout engage citizens in media verification efforts by offering tools and resources to identify misinformation during crises. Additionally, notable figures have made significant financial contributions to further these efforts, emphasizing the importance of equipping citizens with the skills needed to navigate today's complex media environment. For example, Robert Tsao, a prominent Taiwanese businessman, has pledged substantial funding to train citizens in open-source intelligence and cybersecurity (Newman et al., 2023).

Fact-checking has emerged as a pivotal tool in combating disinformation and has become a central aspect of modern journalism. Unlike internal verification processes, fact-checking is a public-facing initiative aimed at holding public figures accountable for spreading false information and enhancing the accuracy of news reporting (Graves, 2013). It is seen as essential not only for journalistic integrity but also for empowering the public to discern credible information from falsehoods in an increasingly selective media environment. This approach is recognized as a key development in rebuilding public trust in journalism and fostering informed public discourse (Kyriakidou et al., 2023).

Mainstream and social media platforms serve distinct functions in the media ecosystem, with varying levels of trustworthiness and verification practices, particularly

among Taiwanese youth. As demonstrated in table 8, the percentage of youth engaging in fact-checking differs across these platforms. On mainstream media, fact-checking is reported at 66.3%, while on social media, the rate rises to 76.2%. This discrepancy suggests that, despite mainstream media's longstanding reputation for credibility, social media users are more likely to scrutinize the information they encounter.

Table 8

Fact-Check the Information Disseminated on Mainstream Media

Media	YES	NO
Media Mainstream	66,3%	33,7%
Media Social	76,2%	23,8%

The higher rate of fact-checking on social media, as shown in Table 8, can be attributed to the platform's inherently dynamic and less regulated nature. Kalogeropoulos et al. (2019) emphasize that while mainstream news consumption is linked to higher trust levels, reliance on social media as a primary news source correlates with lower trust. This discrepancy likely encourages users to engage more actively in fact-checking practices due to the potential spread of unverified information on digital platforms. Similarly, Wilson et al. (2011) suggest that youth, though they still rely on traditional media, often turn to alternative news websites that provide more critical perspectives and diverse viewpoints, which drives more frequent fact-checking behaviors among young users.

Additionally, Hu and Pu (2023) discuss how unofficial media can erode political trust in the context of China, highlighting the need for critical evaluation of unregulated media content. This finding supports the notion that skepticism about digital content quality can motivate users to verify the information they encounter. On the other hand, traditional media's perceived reliability is grounded in structured content and established editorial standards. However, Kohring and Matthes (2007) highlight that trust in news media is multi-dimensional, factoring in biases and potential ownership influences. This complexity can lead to a nuanced trust dynamic where audiences might still verify information from mainstream sources.

Moreover, Salaudeen & Onyechi (2020) find that, despite a higher dependency on digital media for information, mainstream media are perceived as more credible due to

organized information delivery systems. Nonetheless, concerns over ownership influence and editorial independence remain, leading some audiences to maintain a level of skepticism. These findings reflect the broader trust dynamics among Taiwanese youth, who engage differently with mainstream and social media platforms in their quest for reliable news.

Furthermore, this research finds that 12.4% of respondents most trust BBC as their primary source of information and news. Table 9 highlights a preference for international media outlets among Taiwanese youth, reflecting a shift in media trust that transcends local boundaries. The inclusion of both traditional and digital platforms in the list of trusted sources emphasizes the diverse media consumption habits of the respondents, illustrating the complex landscape of media trust.

Table 9

Most Trusted Media Sources for Information and News Among Respondents

Media	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
BBC	19	12.4%
Central News Agency (CNA)	12	7.8%
YouTube	18	11.7%
Instagram	18	11.7%
Facebook	15	9.7%
PTS	11	7.2%
ETtoday	7	4.6%
TVBS	7	4.6%
Set News	6	3.9%
Yahoo	6	3.9%
Google	5	3.2%
Dcard	5	3.2%
TVBS News	4	2.6%
CNN	4	2.6%
Other	19	12.4%

The findings indicate that BBC, as an international media outlet with a strong reputation, is recognized by Taiwanese youth as a highly credible and trustworthy source. Known for its comprehensive and balanced reporting, the BBC provides extensive news coverage on global and local issues, which appeals to audiences looking for objective journalism (Stanyer, 2020). The preference for BBC among respondents reflects a broader trust in foreign media that maintains high journalistic standards, often seen as more

impartial compared to some local media outlets. Moreover, the popularity of BBC as a trusted media source suggests that respondents appreciate the quality and depth of information provided, particularly in international news coverage and detailed analyses, which are often perceived as lacking in local media environments. This trend is significant as it underscores a demand for rigorously vetted news content, especially among younger, more discerning media consumers.

Furthermore, skepticism toward fact-checking platforms can be linked to concerns over perceived 'political bias.' Past instances where such platforms displayed partisan leanings, particularly during elections, have led to apprehensions about their neutrality and objectivity (Ünal & Çiçeklioğlu, 2019). This sentiment was echoed by an interviewee, Andy, who pointed out that one of his concerns about certain media outlets is the evident bias they exhibit, which influences how users perceive their content.

"Mainstream media is biased regarding politics, partly because of political party support. I trust independent media more." (Andy, interview, 2024)

Figure 9 illustrates that the most common reason Taiwanese youth trust media is due to the factual and accurate information it provides, with this factor accounting for 34% of responses. Accuracy remains a cornerstone of media trust, especially in an environment where misinformation can spread rapidly (Emeraldien et al., 2021). The significance of this percentage underscores how crucial factual accuracy is for younger audiences when evaluating media credibility.
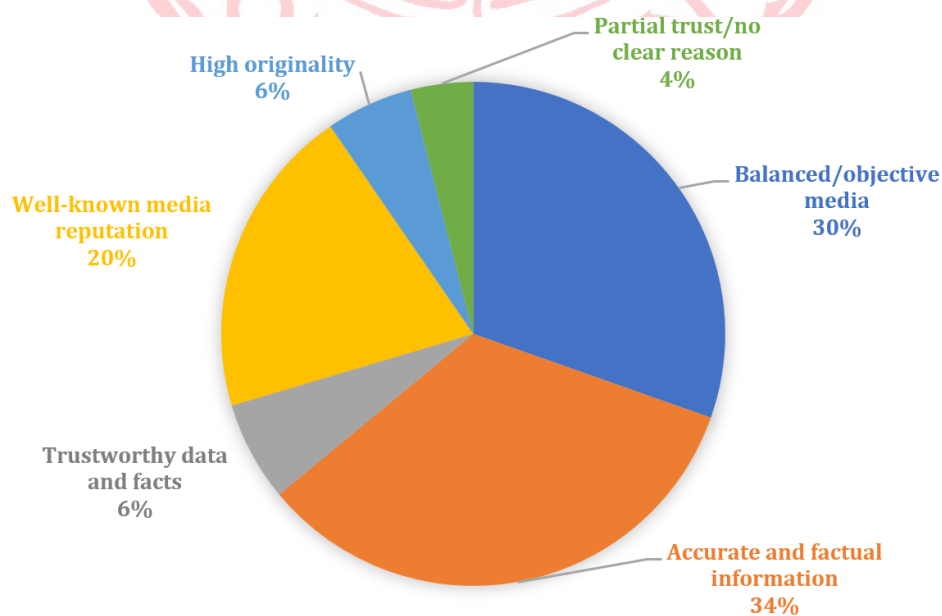

Figure 9 Reasons for Trusting Media

The second most significant factor, "Balanced/objective media," accounts for 30% of responses, suggesting that Taiwanese youth value impartiality in news reporting. This indicates a preference for media outlets that provide multiple perspectives on issues rather than those with a biased or one-sided view. Such a preference could be reflective of a more critical media literacy among young people, who are increasingly aware of the importance of diverse viewpoints in a polarized digital landscape.

Another notable finding is the 20% who trust media due to a "Well-known media reputation." This shows that reputation and the legacy of media brands still play a vital role in establishing trust among young audiences. However, this factor ranks lower than accuracy and balance, implying that while a well-established name adds a level of initial trust, it does not supersede the content quality itself.

The study by Kalogeropoulos et al. (2019) also explores how perceptions of undue political and business influences on media are significantly associated with lower levels of trust in news. This finding suggests that in countries where media are perceived to be shaped by political or commercial interests, citizens are less likely to trust news outlets. This notion can be relevant when considering Taiwanese youth's media consumption habits. If media outlets in Taiwan are perceived as independent and free from such influences, they are more likely to be trusted by younger audiences. Therefore, media that maintain transparency and independence from external pressures can further solidify trust among youth, who are becoming increasingly aware of the potential biases and motivations behind news reporting.

Interview findings from another respondent, Daniel, underscore the importance of cross-referencing multiple sources before trusting and sharing news. His approach suggests that verifying information often requires reading various reports to form a well-rounded understanding of a topic and to identify any inconsistencies that could indicate misinformation. This cautious attitude reflects the growing awareness among Taiwanese youth of the challenges in navigating today's complex media landscape.

"If I'm interested in a topic, I'll read several reports and draw conclusions." (Daniel, interview, 2024)

The media landscape varies significantly across different countries and environments, with non-mainstream and partisan outlets often competing with traditional news sources. As noted by Strömbäck et al. (2020), non-mainstream media in

many cases actively engage in efforts to undermine trust in traditional news media, often supported by politicians who accuse the press of producing 'fake news.' Disinformation is frequently manufactured to capture attention in a fast-paced news cycle or to produce sensational headlines that dominate the narrative. Ultimately, such reports often fail to provide reliable coverage of real events.

Additional issues with traditional media include limited content diversity and the prevalence of uninspiring information. Moreover, the decline in traditional media's relevance in the face of new media is well-documented, as new media's rapid adaptability and innovative approaches attract more audiences (Gong, 2023). This shift challenges traditional media to find ways to blend effectively with new media, ensuring their survival in a rapidly evolving media landscape. Consequently, skepticism persists among young audiences, who often question the credibility of both mainstream and social media platforms.

Technological advancements and digitalization have significantly transformed how people access and consume information. In the modern era, the flow of information is rapid and seemingly limitless, with various digital platforms allowing news to be sourced from numerous outlets within seconds. However, this convenience introduces substantial challenges, including credibility issues, information validity, and the overwhelming phenomenon of information overload, which often leaves users struggling to filter out relevant and accurate information amid a sea of content.

The chart (figure 10) illustrates that the largest percentage—28%—identifies the spread of fake news or misinformation as the primary concern in today's digital information landscape. This finding underscores that fake news remains a major obstacle when seeking trustworthy information, highlighting the ongoing struggle between convenience and accuracy in the digital age. Closely following this, "Ease of Access" at 18% suggests that while digital platforms offer quick and easy access to information, this convenience can come at the cost of quality, often exposing users to unreliable or biased sources. The 16% of respondents indicating "Social Media Dependency" further emphasizes the challenge of distinguishing credible information amidst the overwhelming content on these platforms, which are frequently criticized for their role in amplifying misinformation.
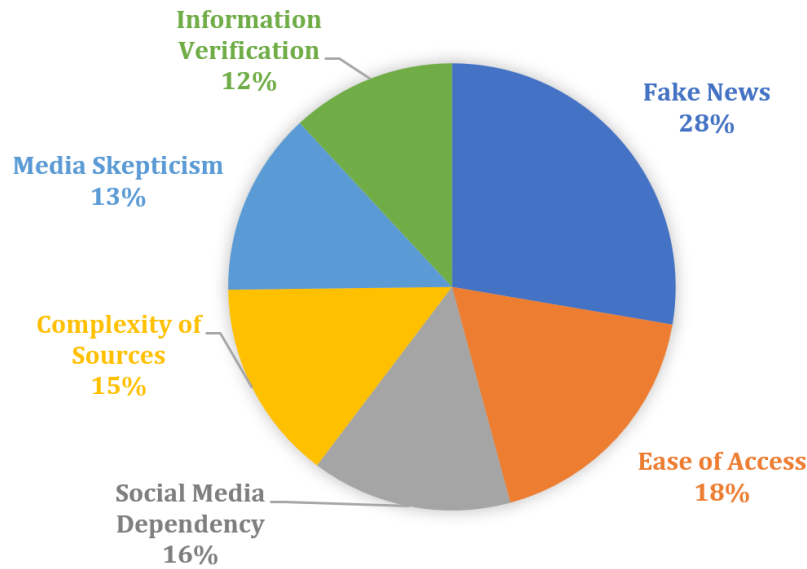
Figure 10 Impressions of Seeking Information and News in Today's Era

"Complexity of Sources" (15%) and "Media Skepticism" (13%) reflect a growing awareness of the difficulties in navigating a diverse and fragmented media environment, where multiple sources may present conflicting information. This complexity contributes to an environment of skepticism, where audiences are cautious about the credibility of the news they consume. Finally, "Information Verification" (12%) indicates that a significant portion of users are concerned with the processes of checking and validating the authenticity of information. Altogether, these factors suggest that while access to information has never been easier, the challenge of ensuring its reliability remains significant. This complex interplay of factors highlights the importance of critical media literacy and robust fact-checking mechanisms in the modern media landscape.

Diverse perspectives on professional journalism practices in both mainstream and digital media, along with audience perceptions of information credibility, have been central topics in media and communication research. Over the years, empirical studies have produced mixed results regarding which platform is considered more credible. For instance, Wilson et al. (2011) found that while youth still rely on traditional media, they often perceive digital media as more trustworthy due to its critical viewpoints, in-depth analysis, and perceived freedom from interference. Conversely, Poler Kovačić et al. (2010) argue that traditional media retain higher levels of trust among journalists, who often uphold conservative views on journalistic credibility and favor the established standards of traditional outlets. Furthermore, Tsfati (2010) explored the relationship between

media exposure and public trust, revealing that while exposure to mainstream media is generally associated with higher trust levels, increased exposure to non-mainstream sites correlates with greater media skepticism.

In conclusion, this chapter has provided a comprehensive analysis of the evolving dynamics of media trust among Taiwanese youth, highlighting the pivotal role of factual accuracy and credibility in shaping trust. The findings reveal that while traditional and digital media both vie for audience confidence, the rise of digitalization and the pervasive spread of misinformation present significant challenges. These results underscore the urgent need for enhanced media literacy and critical thinking skills among young consumers to navigate the complex media landscape effectively. By laying the groundwork for future research and offering practical strategies to counter misinformation, this chapter aims to contribute to fostering a more informed, discerning, and resilient audience in the digital era.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this report synthesizes the key findings regarding media trust among Taiwanese youth, particularly those of Generation Z, highlighting the civic divide in the digital era, the role of media accessibility, media preferences, and the factors influencing trust. Firstly, the divide in civic engagement is evident, shaped by differential access to and reliance on various types of media. As media trust correlates with broader civic attitudes, including trust in political institutions, the proliferation of digital platforms without adequate regulation may exacerbate societal divides. Taiwanese youth, largely represented by Gen Z, exhibit a preference for media that align with their perspectives and digital habits, which may reinforce pre-existing beliefs and potentially lead to polarized viewpoints. This situation underscores the need for a more balanced media environment where both traditional (mainstream) and digital platforms provide credible, fact-based information to bridge these divides.

The findings also reveal that the accessibility of media plays a pivotal role in shaping trust among Taiwanese youth. Traditional media, such as newspapers and television, despite their slower and more conventional approach, are still perceived as credible by some due to their structured content and established editorial standards. However, the convenience and interactivity offered by digital and social media make them the preferred choice among Gen Z. The rapid dissemination of information and algorithm-

driven content personalization on these platforms appeal to younger audiences, yet they also pose challenges regarding misinformation and reduced trust in institutional sources. The challenge, therefore, lies in enhancing media literacy among youth to critically evaluate the diverse content they encounter online.

Lastly, several factors influence media trust among Taiwanese youth, including the provision of accurate and factual information, the balance and objectivity of the media, and the reputation of the media outlet. While traditional media continues to be valued for its structured approach to delivering reliable and comprehensive news, digital media attract youth with diverse and engaging content that caters to their interests. The research highlights that maintaining relevance and credibility in this evolving landscape requires traditional media to adapt to digital trends without compromising journalistic standards. Meanwhile, digital platforms need to establish stronger verification mechanisms to address misinformation. Ultimately, fostering a media environment that prioritizes accuracy, objectivity, and a strong reputation is crucial for nurturing a more informed and engaged youth demographic in Taiwan.
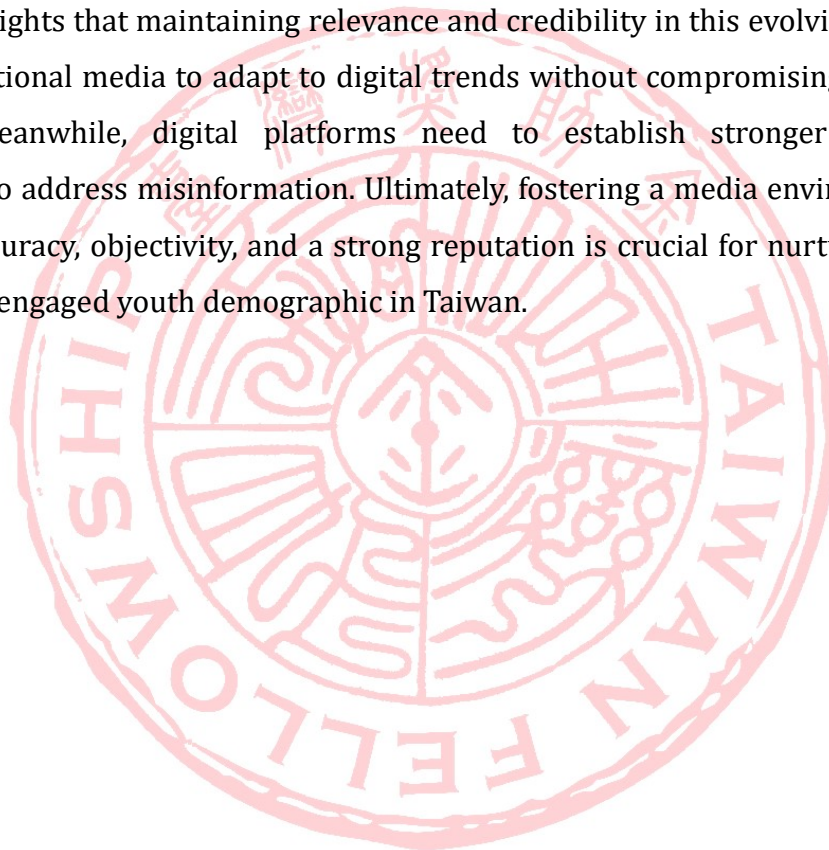
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Appendix
List of Google Form Questions

Media Access

1. Which mainstream media do you access to seek information and news? (You can choose more than one) 你從哪些主流媒體獲取信息和新聞？（可以選擇多個）

2. For those who still access mainstream media, could you please explain why do you do so? 對於那些仍然使用主流媒體的人，請解釋一下你為什麼這麼做？

3. In total, how long do you access the above mainstream media in one day? (For example: "5 hours" or "30 minutes") 你每天總共花多少時間使用上述主流媒體？（例如："5小時"或"30分鐘"）

4. What social media platforms do you access to seek information and news? (You can choose more than one) 你通過哪些社交媒體平台來獲取信息和新聞？（可以選擇多個）

5. Please explain why you access those media platforms to seek information and news! 請解釋你為什麼選擇這些媒體平台來獲取信息和新聞!

6. In total, how long do you access social media in one day? (For example: "5 hours" or "30 minutes") 你每天總共花多少時間使用社交媒體？（例如："5小時"或"30分鐘"）

Media Preferences

7. Which mainstream media do you access most frequently? (If you do not access, proceed to question 9) 你最常使用哪種主流媒體？（如果你不使用，請直接回答問題9）

8. Why do you access that media most frequently? 你為什麼最頻繁地訪問那個媒體？

9. Which social media platform do you access most frequently? 你最常使用哪個社交媒體平台？

10. Why do you access that media most frequently? 你為什麼最頻繁地訪問那個媒體B

11. Please list 3-5 channels that you access most frequently when seeking information and news! 請列出你在尋找信息和新聞時最常訪問的3-5個頻道！（例如："自由時報 The Liberty Times", "葉式特工 Yes Ranger", "這群人TGOP", "滾石唱片 ROCK RECORDS"）

12. What content do you access most frequently from those channels? (You can choose up to 5) 你從這些頻道最常訪問哪些內容？（你可以選擇最多5個）

Media Trust

13. Do you fact-check the information disseminated by newspapers/magazines, radio, and television? (If you do not access mainstream media, proceed to number 15) 你是否會核實報紙/雜誌、廣播和電視傳播的訊息？（如果你不使用主流媒體，請直接回答問題15）

14. Do you fact-check the information disseminated on social media platforms (Youtube, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, Facebook)? 你是否會核實在社群媒體平台 （Youtube, Instagram, 抖音, 推特, 臉書）上傳播的訊息？

15. Mention 1-3 media (both mainstream media and social media) that you trust the most in seeking information and news? 請提及1-3個你在尋找資訊和新聞時最信任的媒體（包括主流媒體和社群媒體）？

16. Please explain why you trust those media? (You can choose more than one) 請解釋為什麼信任這些媒體？（可以選擇多個理由）

17. Please convey your impression of seeking information and news in today's era! 請表達你對於在當今時代尋找資訊和新聞的印象!