VISUAL REVIEW | Vol. 16, No. 1, 2024 | ISSN 2695-9631
International Visual Culture Review / Revista Internacional de Cultura Visual
https://doi.org/10.62161/revvisual.v17.5177

YOUTH PERCEPTION OF TRUST IN PROFILES FOLLOWED ON SOCIAL NETWORKS

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KEYWORDS

Social Networks
Youth
Social profiles
Influencers
Trust
Social identity
Digital community

ABSTRACT

Social networks are part of young people's personal growth and development. Their consultation and presence on them is no longer an option, but a necessity. In this article, we analyse young Spaniards' perceptions of the factors that motivate them to choose the profiles they follow on social networks and the trust they place in the content they publish. We surveyed 935 young people between the ages of 16 and 25 and supplemented the results with three focus groups. Among the findings, the lack of importance attached to the recommendations of their friends and the lack of intentionality in the choice of profiles stand out. Young people show a strong distrust of the content published on networks, including that of experts, because networks allow them to choose and express their opinion on any subject, regardless of their knowledge.

Recibido: 18/ 01 / 2024
Aceptado: 29/ 01 / 2024

1. Introduction

Social media users have increasingly embraced and accepted social networks. As a result, the concept of *mass media* is no longer valid (Jarvis, 2015). Almost thirty years after the appearance of the first internet site —SixDegrees— that laid the foundations of social networks (Rodríguez Nolasco, 2017), we see that, as some authors have pointed out, social networks are not a passing fad (García, Alonso and del Hoyo, 2013, p. 97), but a fundamental change in the way we communicate (Posligua Quinde and Ramírez Rodríguez, 2024, p. 289), making them a central part of contemporary digital life around the world (Boyd, 2015). Social media have gradually replaced traditional media (Pérez-Escoda, Barón-Dulce and Rubio-Romero, 2021, p. 19), while new forms of consumption have emerged in which citizens, as users, value the immediacy of transmission, the brevity of the message, the possibility of interacting with the author of the content and with other users, and the affirmation of their opinions and beliefs (Pérez Escoda and Pedrero Esteban, 2021, p. 71).

The passage of time has also shown that the possibilities of social networks go beyond the realm of communication. The fact that they allow the creation, sharing and exchange of content of common interest has promoted new ways of socialising, thinking, accessing and consuming information (Soler Fonseca, 2016, p. 236), allowing any user to connect and express themselves in a world where space-time limitations disappear, thus promoting dialogue and global discussion (Moreno López, López Pérez and Sandulescu Budea, 2021). While it is true that these platforms were not the first channels designed to enable social interaction, their global spread has occurred at an unprecedented speed, making networks an imperative phenomenon (Boyd, 2015).

The context points to a steady increase in the use of social networks worldwide: if in 2012 the average time spent on these platforms was 90 minutes per day, in 2022 the average will be 151 minutes (Statista, 2023). In Spain, the Digital 2022 report, carried out by We are Social and Hootsuite, shows a significant increase in the number of registered users on social networks: 40.7 million people in 2022, 3.3 million more than in 2021. The same report shows that Spanish users spend 1 hour and 53 minutes a day on these platforms, with WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram being the most used (Hall, 2022). According to the General Media Study (AIMC, 2023), consulting social networks is one of the main uses that Spaniards —69.7%— make of the Internet.

In the case of young people, especially those born since the first decade of the 2000s, social networks have become part of their personal development and growth, becoming one of the central themes of their lives (Gallardo-Camacho, Rodríguez Carmona and Presol-Herrero, 2023, p. 10). For them, these platforms are communicative spaces that closely reflect their values and respond to their constant use of the Internet (López Vidales and Gómez Rubio, 2021). They allow them to be connected to many friends and to interact with users from different backgrounds and cultures, all without the barriers that exist in face-to-face communication. This makes the networks natural platforms in their social lives (Israel, 2017, cited in García-Ruiz, Tirado Morueta and Hernando Gómez, 2018, p. 293), so much so that they are practically unaware of the frequency with which they consult them (Gómez Rubio and López Vidales, 2022).

1.1. Young People and Social Networks: Between a Constant Reference and a Daily Need

Users' use of social networks is conditioned by the social network (Tarullo, 2020, p. 225), as each is designed and conceived in a specific way and has different themes and features. Their diversity and social nature are factors that make them very attractive to young audiences who find individualised and constantly changing content on them (Orben, 2020). However, social networks have ceased to be an option and have become a "necessity" for young people, who, from adolescence onwards, "feel the urgent need" to participate in them (Gutiérrez Arenas and Ramírez García, 2022, p. 8).

Through social networks, this collective generates groups that they turn into meeting places where they share "a collective tuning to one or more aspects of the reality they live and which, through sharing, allows them to interpret that reality and its context, from that position and for a specific circumstance" (Gértrudix Barrio, Borges Rey and García García, 2017). This is one of the values that has contributed most to the success of social networks among young people, a success that will continue as long as these platforms know how to adapt to the characteristics of the new generations. Unlike traditional media, the networks take into account many of the qualities attributed to the young people who make up Generation Z. Among them, Álvarez Ramos, Romero Oliva and Heredia Ponce (2019) point to young

people's desire for continuous interaction with others, their preference for visuals, their competence in using ICTs and their ease of movement in digital environments. The authors also refer to Quintana (2016) regarding their intensive use of social networks and the fact that they share content without limits between public and private spaces, where "three variables are statistically significant: I like to know what my friends say about the photos I upload, it makes me feel good when I am sad, and to make new friends" (Colás, González and de Pablos, 2013, p. 21).

Young people's relationships on social networks are limited to two spheres: the closer one, made up mainly of their friends and classmates, and another in which users can relate to people who are less close emotionally and geographically, but with whom they feel affinity because they share life experiences and opinions (García, Alonso and del Hoyo, 2013, p. 98). Some research shows, for example, that on Facebook and YouTube most users say they only add people they trust, such as family, friends and classmates, while on Twitter and Instagram this percentage decreases in favour of new contacts, sometimes strangers (Rodríguez García and Magdalena Benito, 2016, p. 36).

The degree of knowledge and trust that young people have of their contacts conditions their behaviour in networks. In networks, young people tend to adopt the behaviour of their friends in order to gain or maintain the acceptance of the rest of the group. This influence varies according to the level of relationship, with the closest people having the greatest ability to influence the behaviour of others (Marks et al., 2015). Stornaiuolo, Dizio and Hellmich (2013, pp. 86-87) speak of two types of 'communication work' that young people do when building their relationships on the networks: one that they call public, which is used in shared spaces on the network and aims to build a public image that serves as a bridge of communication with others; and one that is used in private spaces, where they take a greater risk when it comes to showing themselves as they are.

In this way, young people accumulate their own "social capital", understood as the acquisition of resources through contact with other members of the social networks to which they belong, among which Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007) highlight those that come from emotionally close relationships with the user, such as family and friends, who provide not only different opinions and useful information, but also emotional support.

1.2. Profiles Most Followed by Young People in Networks

A 2018 study of children and adolescents aged 6-17 in the United States found that 'social media stars' were their main role models, ahead of parents, teachers, siblings, movie stars and sports stars (puromarketing.com, 2018). In Spain, the latest edition of Internet Users (Navegantes en la Red) shows that one in three respondents claims to follow an influencer on social networks —12.5% say they do so regularly and 19.5% occasionally— with Ibai Llanos (13.4%), María Pombo (6.2%), Auron Play (5.1%), Dulceida (4.5%) and El Rubius (2.9%) being the five most followed influencers by internet users in 2022 (AIMC, 2023). In this ranking, among the "public figures" dedicated to disseminating diverse content through networks (González Larrea, Hernández-Serrano and Renés-Arellano, 2020) who have the largest number of followers are not those who, for decades, have been the great media references for previous generations. Now it is the social networks and the acceptance they enjoy among users that are the conditioning factors that construct youth referents, often forcing the traditional media to resort to them to secure audiences, since they are no longer the only means of information, opinion and entertainment (López Vidales and Gómez Rubio, 2021).

Traditional celebrities" coexist and compete on social networks with *influencers* who have built their careers and fame on these platforms and who were previously unknown to most users (Schouten, Janssen and Verspaget, 2020). Some authors have called them "native leaders" of social networks, as in the case of Ibai Llanos —*streamer*, YouTuber and e-sports presenter— or María Pombo —fashion and beauty influencer—, among whom are those known as *microinfluencers*, that is, users who are not particularly famous but have a certain relevance in social networks (Pérez Escolar, Alcaide Pulido and del Toro, 2023, p. 265). 265), among which the growth of female *influencers* stands out (Cuenca-Octavio and Llorente Barroso, 2023, p. 70).

Regardless of their origin, all *influencers* are linked to some activity (Andrade Sánchez, Velasco-Donoso and Gallardo-Pérez, 2022, p. 60) and their content on social networks has two main objectives: "to increase the purchase intention of their followers and to increase product awareness or attractiveness" (Kay, Mulcahy and Parkinson, 2020).Users identify these social references as people

close to them (Meyers, 2017), and their persuasiveness is directly related to the perception users have of them as role models for others (Casaló, Flavián and Ibañez Sánchez, 2020). To this end, it is essential to create a parasocial relationship between users and *influencers* based on the sense of friendship that users develop around these social figures (Tobert and Drogos, 2019). In addition, it is important for *influencers* to deliver their messages in an atmosphere of closeness and familiarity, so that their followers perceive them as close and trustworthy, and even make followers feel like they know the social celebrity, thus achieving greater intimacy (Kim, Song, and Luo, 2016). The stronger this closeness between the user and the *influencer*, the stronger the parasocial interaction will be and, consequently, the more trustworthy and attractive their message will be (Zozaya-Durazo, Feijoo-Fernández and Sábada-Chalezquer, 2023, p. 403).

Carat's (2022) analysis of social media usage shows that *influencers* have become opinion leaders for Gen Z. The report finds that 74% of Gen Z network users follow *influencers*, particularly on Instagram (72%) and YouTube (37%). The study also reflects an interest in eSports —73% say they have consumed this content— while more than half of those aged 15 and under regularly watch videos about *gaming*.

2. Objectives

The main objective (OP) of this study is to find out how young people perceive the factors that motivate their choice of the profiles they follow in social networks and also the trust they place in the content they publish.

In addition, the following specific objectives have been set:

SO1. Find out what activities young people say they do most on social networks and what they look for on them.

SO2. Determine whether the profiles they follow are known *influencers* for whom social success is a key factor, or whether their choice is based on whether the content published aligns with their interests, regardless of the profile's social success.

SO3. Note whether the selection of profiles is random or planned.

SO4. Check the influence of your contacts' recommendations when following a profile.

The basic idea is that young people try to affirm their personal and social identity through the profiles they follow on the networks. As a result, they choose profiles that correspond to their ideas and opinions, as well as those recommended by their contacts, although in the latter case it is mainly a matter of projecting a certain image to others. Young people attach great importance to the number of followers of profiles and to the knowledge of their creators about the subject matter of what they post, but this evaluation is part of their perception of their use of networks, which they consider to be informed and more restrictive than it is.

3. Methodology

This study is based on the results of 935 surveys of Spanish adolescents and young adults between the ages of 16 and 25. The group was made up of individuals who were in non-university education —compulsory secondary education, intermediate and higher education cycles and baccalaureate—, higher education —university degrees and master's degrees— and young people who had completed their studies, regardless of the academic level attained. The average age of the participants was 21.44 years; 31.6% were men and 68.4% were women. The level of study of the participants is distributed as follows: 47% are studying at the baccalaureate level, 16% are in an intermediate or higher training cycle, 33% are studying for a university degree and 4% are studying for a postgraduate degree (de Frutos, Pastor and Cruz, 2021, p. 57).

The questionnaire, which was distributed proportionally across the country, consisted of closed-ended, multiple-choice questions arranged on a Likert scale with the extremes of strongly disagreeing with the question and strongly agreeing with the question. The fieldwork was divided between members of the research team —who conducted the surveys of young university students and graduates— and an external company, which was responsible for the surveys of adolescents and non-university students.

The questions posed were structured around four axes:

1. Consumption habits of young people on social networks.
2. Youth preferences and motivations for choosing social networks.

3. The trust and credibility that young people give to content published on social networks.
4. Sense of identification with the profiles followed and the content consumed in social networks.

For this article, we have used the answers given by young people to the variables in the following questions:

1. Indicate the type of profiles you are interested in (P9): Sports and Athletes (V1), Music (V2), Video Games (V3), Leisure and Culture (V4), TV Series, Movies and Programs (V5), Celebrities (V6), Experts in a Field (V7), Health, Diets, Nutrition and Wellness (V8), Beauty, Fashion and Styling (V9), Other (V10).
2. Rate the reasons for following profiles on social networks (P10): they appear in the media (V1), they are experts in the subject they write about (V2), they are famous people even if they are not experts (V3), my friends recommended them (V4), I like what they say and I share their points of view (V5), out of sympathy (V6).
3. You value trust in the content you see on social networks (P6): commercial and brand information (V1), recommendations from profiles with many followers (V2), comments, opinions and complaints from users (V3), messages forwarded by WhatsApp groups you belong to (V4), news that appear on social networks (V5), YouTube video tutorials (V6), content shared by your circle of friends on social networks (V7).
4. Indicate how often (P1) you do the following: view content from aggregated profiles (V1), share content with my friends and acquaintances (V2), comment on the profiles of my group of friends (V3), upload recommendations and reviews about a product or service, create content and share it with a small group of friends (V5), create content and publish it openly (V6), view content from profiles that appear in suggestions (V7).

The data obtained were analysed using SPSS *software.*

In order to complete the perception of young people on some of the relevant variables in this study, three *focus groups* were held: the first was carried out as a pilot in November 2022 with 10 students, and the others were held on 25/05/2023 and 08/06/2023 with students between 18 and 25 years old, from different territorial origins, in which 20 people participated, with an equal gender distribution, and 2 members of the project acted as moderators. The variables that expanded the answers to the questionnaires were discussed in particular: the functions that young people attribute to social networks, the interest of young people in the content disseminated by the media and social networks, and the level of trust in the content recommended by their circle and by the profiles they follow.

Sessions were recorded for later transcription and analysis.

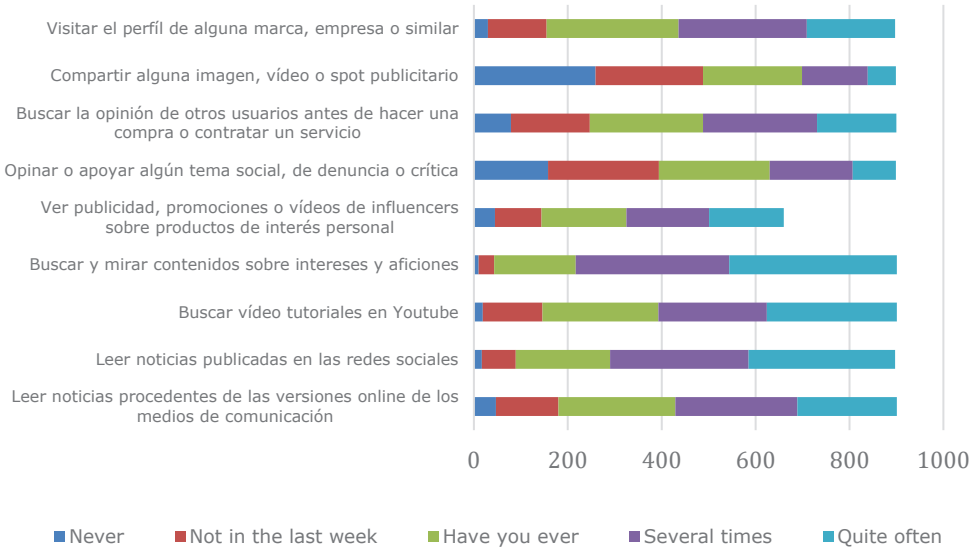
4. Results

4.1. Relationship Between Most Performed Activities and Youth Interests in Social Networks

One of the most common practices among young people is searching for content that corresponds to their interests and hobbies (M 3.25; σ 0.933; N 917), with 76% stating that they do this with medium or high frequency, three or four times a week. The use of social networks to read the news stands out: 67.7% say they do so regularly, a figure that drops to 52.4% for young people who say they only read news on social networks when it comes from the online versions of the media. This figure shows that most young people are interested in information and that social networks have become an important ally for the transmission of news. However, only half of the young people pay attention to the source of the information they read on the networks, although they say that they prioritize information from the media (M 3.07; σ 0.981; N 930).

Another of the practices most frequently used by young people on the networks is searching YouTube for video tutorials to help them carry out an activity (M 3.06; σ 1.065; N 927), generally related to solving technical problems or doubts related to academic matters. In this case, 56.3% of the adolescents interviewed recognize that they use these video tutorials with a medium-high frequency.

Figure 1. Youth practices in social networks



Source: own elaboration.

On the other hand, among the activities least carried out through the networks are those directly related to the field of advertising, such as sharing a video or an advertising spot, and those in which young people express their opinion on something through practices such as giving their opinion or supporting a social, denouncing or critical issue, where 43.9% say they have never done so, or at least not in the last week, compared to 10.2% who say they do it quite often. Although they see themselves as engaged, supportive, and vindictive, it is clear from the focus group discussions that they are reluctant to express their opinions publicly about anything unless it is in front of a group of trusted friends and acquaintances. Among the reasons they give for this is that it is very easy to generate controversy on social networks (M 3.48; σ 0.936; N 919), as well as the "lack of tolerance" that often exists on social networks, which increasingly often leads to "lynching or viciousness" towards what is expressed on social networks. This not only makes it difficult for them to show their commitment to something or someone on social networks, but also means that they are not inclined to create content to share openly, a practice that only 8.6% of respondents do daily, compared to 21.5% who say they have never done so.

When deciding which profiles to follow, they recognize that their interests and hobbies are the factors that motivate their choice (M 3; σ 1.004; N 920). In this sense, the difference between men and women is striking: while in the case of men, the four most followed topics in their profiles are those related to sports and athletes, music, series, movies and TV programs, and experts in another field of interest, for women, the most followed profiles are music, beauty, fashion and styling, series, movies, TV programs, and celebrities in general. It can therefore be seen that, at least in the case of social networks, there is a gender difference in the subject matter of the channels chosen by young people.

Table 1. Profiles that most interest young people by topic

	Man		Woman	
	Yes, I am interested in	**I am not interested**	**Yes, I am interested in**	**I am not interested**
Sports and sportsmen and sportswomen	75,9%	18,3%	48,5%	42,3%
Music	84,6%	9%	85,1%	8,8%
Video games	65,9%	28,9%	20,5%	70,3%
Leisure and culture (cinema, books, concerts, exhibitions)	68,8%	21,9%	75,6%	12,7%
Series, films, TV programmes	74,9%	18,3%	82,5%	11,7%
Celebrities	66,9%	25,1%	77%	14,2%
Experts in an area of interest	75,6%	16,7%	70,1%	13,3%
Health, diet, nutrition, wellness	54%	36,3%	67,6%	22,5%
Beauty, fashion, styling	28,9%	63,3%	84,2%	11,2%
Other	37%	13,8%	37,9%	9%

Source: own elaboration.

Among the least interesting for women are those related to video games and sports, while for men it is beauty, fashion and styling.

4.2. Factors that Influence Young People's Following of Certain Social Media Profiles

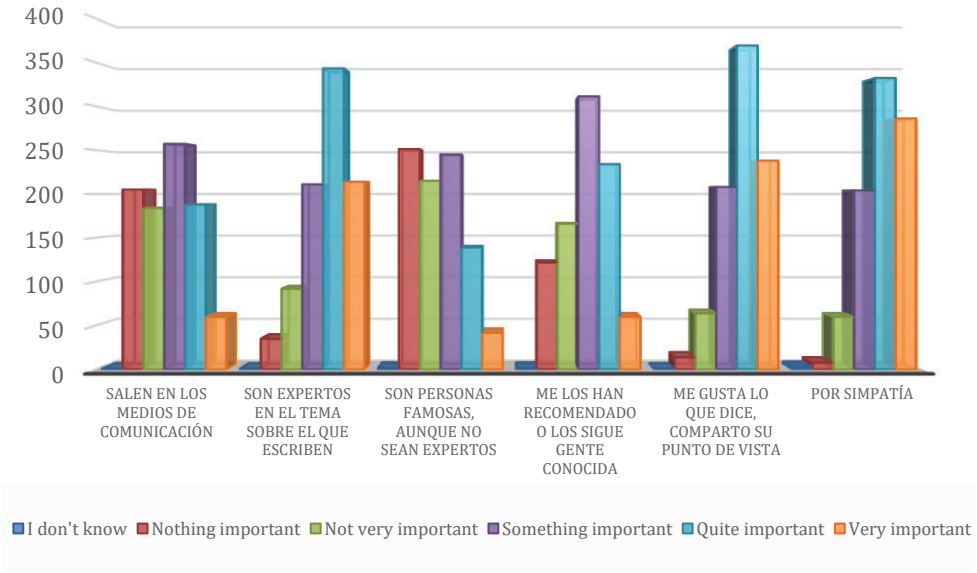
The subject matter of the profiles followed by young people is directly related to their interests and hobbies. However, when it comes to choosing a specific profile, the fact that they like and share the author's opinions and viewpoints is the most important factor for young users (M 3; σ 1,004; N 920). This shows that most young people expect the profiles they follow on the networks to confirm many of their thoughts and opinions. They shy away from those who do not share their ideological views, for example: for 67.9% of respondents, it is very or fairly important that a profile shares their views, and for 69.2% it is very or fairly important that they like the creator of the profile.

It is striking how little importance they attach to the recommendations of their friends and acquaintances to follow a certain profile, because they say that there is "a lot of posturing" (M 3.43; σ 1.04; N 915). For 32.2%, this aspect is of little or no importance, compared to 6.8% who consider it very important. They also do not value the fact that the profiles are written by experts in the field they are writing about. Although most respondents —61.9%— consider it fairly or very important that they are experts, we see that this percentage is almost 10 points lower than aspects such as sympathy and affinity, which are the ones that most often determine the choice of profiles they follow.

The fact that only 4.7% of respondents indicated a preference for profiles of people who appear in the media shows that young people place little value on media content, both conventional and digital, and on the spokespersons of this content. This shows that the references of young people are no longer those who have become known to the general public thanks to the media, regardless of the field in question, but those who manage to stand out on social networks. Whereas success used to be measured by the number of viewers, it is now measured by the number of followers on social networks. While they do not attach much importance to the fact that the profiles belong to celebrities, i.e. mainly those who appear in the media, they do indicate that they follow those profiles that they describe as "successful" because they have a high number of followers. They therefore make a clear distinction between what

we can call "conventional celebrities" and "social network celebrities", the latter being the ones they prefer to include in their list of favourite profiles or profiles to follow.

Figure 2. Reasons influencing young people's choice of profiles followed on social networks



Source: Own elaboration.

The young people who participated in this research recognise that the choice of the profiles they follow is not very planned and that it happens because at some point something stands out or generates enough interest to start following someone. In fact, among the young people surveyed, those who say that they do not need a specific reason to follow a profile (35.7%) and those who say that they do need a specific reason (35.5%) are equally divided.

They also indicate that they do not intentionally search for new profiles, but that these profiles emerge from other profiles that have already been added. The answers given by these young people place the videos they follow on YouTube as one of the sources that contribute to the consultation of new profiles, since these videos often invite them to follow the protagonist on other networks where they can access more content.

On the other hand, loss of interest in certain content is the most common reason for unfollowing a profile, cited by around 90% of the young people surveyed. Table 2 also shows that young people particularly value the fact that the content posted on the profiles they follow is not offensive or disrespectful, and that they are not particularly interested in the promotion of certain products and services. It is worth noting that young people do not blame brands for using social networks to promote their products and services —indeed, they recognise the important value of the networks as a promotional tool— but that they "hide" their promotional messages through the content offered by profiles that are not explicitly linked to these brands.

They are also very aware of the commercial use of their data as social network users, so they say they are careful with the personal information they provide, but they are less aware that the time they spend on social networks has a direct impact on the profits they make from advertising. For them, it is an important value that certain content can be accessed through their Google (email account) or Facebook logins, as this gives them a sense of security.

Table 2. Reasons why young people stop following profiles on social networks.

	I don't know	I don't give it any importance	I do think it is important
Because it is no longer new to me	11,1%	21%	67,9%
Because I am no longer interested in the contents	5,4%	4,7%	89,9%
Because they have too much interest in promoting products and services.	8,4%	11%	80,6%
Because their content may be offensive or disrespectful	7,7%	7%	85,3%
Because I don't like what he says, I don't share his point of view.	11%	13,6%	75,4%
Because I don't like them	8,2%	9,7%	82,1%

Source: own elaboration.

In conversations with the young people who participated in the focus groups, many of them were critical of the content of the profiles they followed, which they described as lacking in novelty or offering too much commercial content. This leads them to perceive a certain weariness in the influencers and Instagrammers they follow, which they feel is more than enough reason to stop following a profile. This conveys the idea that unfollowing requires a certain level of fatigue, in contrast to the ease with which profiles are added.

4.3. Factors Influencing Youth Confidence in Network Profiles

Young people do not show the same level of trust in all content published on social networks. The profile, the social network and the reason for consulting a particular piece of content are the three factors that most influence young people's trust in social networks. Videos offered as tutorials on YouTube are the content they trust the most: 22.2% of respondents say they have a great deal of confidence in these video tutorials, and 45.8% say they have a fair amount of confidence in them. The "preparation" and "professionalism", even if *amateurish*, of these video tutorials are two of the characteristics most highlighted by young people. When asked about this content in the *focus groups*, the most repeated answers included the following:

- "All tutorials require a lot of preparation about what to say and how to say it".
- "It requires knowledge and technical means".
- "Not everyone can do it, because in addition to knowing what you want to explain, you have to have the communication skills to explain it and be understood".
- "Not everything goes in these videos, like in the TikTok videos, because people are looking for them so they can do something by following the steps in the video".

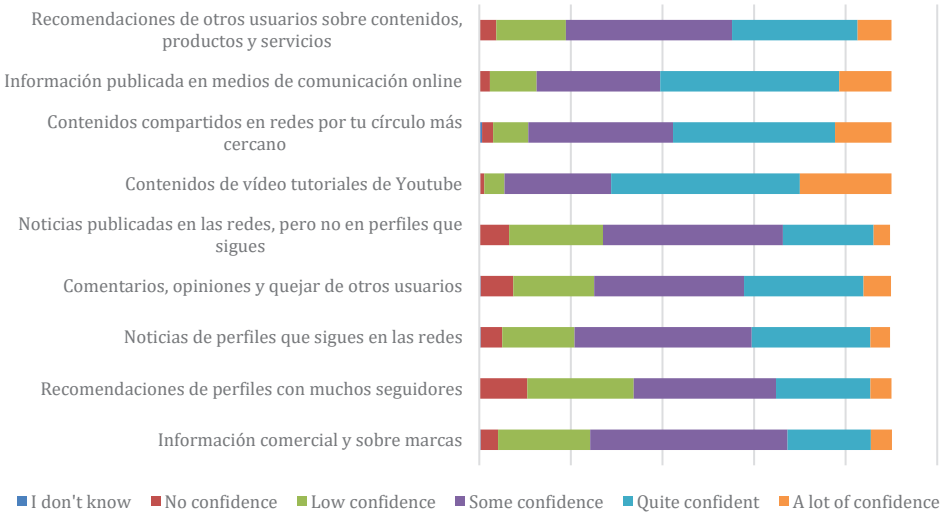
In addition to these characteristics, it is worth noting that the young people surveyed rate the work of these video tutorials as "very positive". They indicate that most of the times they have consulted one of them they have found it very useful, which contributes positively to the confidence they say they have in these contents (M 3.06;σ 1.065; N 927).

Moreover, as can be seen in Figure 3, most responses regarding the trust they have in the content published on the networks are those grouped in the options "somewhat trustworthy" and "fairly trustworthy". Among the former, commercial and brand information is the most frequently mentioned (47.8%), content that young people clearly identify as "marketing" and to which they say they give "fair" credibility because they are clear that its purpose is to promote a product or service (M 2.47; s 0.872; N 934). The same level of trust is shown in the messages published by profiles that they regularly follow on networks (43.1%) and those published by profiles that they do not follow (43.8%), as well as in the recommendations of other users about different products and services (40.3%), recommendations that

they admit to reading with interest but that they do not trust too much, considering that they are mostly personal opinions (M 2.73; σ0.96; N 927).

The level of trust increases in the case of content shared by their circle of closest friends (M 2.84; σ 1.063; N 930) and in the case of news published on social networks but coming from digital media, where 39.3% and 43.4% of the young people interviewed, respectively, say they are fairly trusting. However, young people are rather sceptical about the information published in the media, both traditional and digital, because they perceive that the editorial line of the media determines what is said and how it is said.

Figure 3: Youth trust in content posted on social networks.



Source: own elaboration.

The level of trust in content published on networks decreases significantly when it comes to issues that affect them directly, as is the case with health. Thus, when asked about the trust they place in the sources they usually use for different topics when they want to find out about health, we find that YouTube video tutorials, which are generally the most trusted by young people, are now trusted by only 7.9%, compared to 33.7% who trust them somewhat and 25.5% who say they have little trust in them for health issues. In these cases, the preferred channels are forums and specialised blogs, in which 26.8% of respondents say they have a great deal of trust, while mobile messaging apps and Instagram are the least trusted: 33.9% and 30.2% of respondents, respectively, say they have no trust at all in these channels for health information.

In addition to specialised search engines, online search engines, digital media, and traditional *mass media* are the sources that young people say they trust most for health information.

Table 3. Youth trust in sources that publish health-related information.

	I don't know	No confidence	Low confidence	Some confidence	Quite confident	A lot of confidence
***Online* search engines**	0%	5,1%	15,6%	31,8%	32,4%	15,1%
Videos on YouTube	0,1%	11,1%	25,5%	33,7%	21,7%	7,9%
Twitter	1%	19,2%	26,5%	32,2%	17%	4%
Messaging applications	0%	33,9%	28,3%	20,8%	13%	4%
Specialised search engines	0,6%	3,5%	8,7%	27,5%	33%	26,8%
Blogs and specialised forums	0,6%	6,2%	16,4%	33,8%	32,4%	10,6%
***Online* media**	0,2%	7%	16,1%	37,3%	29,4%	10%
Instagram	0,2%	30,2%	30,1%	22,6%	12,4%	4,5%
Podcast	2,6%	17,1%	27,8%	33,3%	15,6%	3,7%
Traditional media	0%	6,6%	15,7%	36,4%	31%	10,4%

Source: own elaboration.

Young people associate the credibility and trustworthiness of content published on social networks with the fact that their messages explicitly state that they are not interested in selling anything, although they recognise that this situation is becoming less common, especially in the case of profiles with many followers. They even distrust the content shared by their friends, because most of the time it does not reflect reality, but rather tries to "look, appear, show the best side of the situation", a practice that they acknowledge. They often upload content to their profiles that they categorize as "bluffing (postureo)", with the aim of projecting positive aspects, mainly hedonistic values and an image of pleasure, fun and beauty. In many cases, they follow the pattern of successful profiles, with constant retouching of images and the use of all kinds of effects. Most young people agree that the negative aspects are not told or shared through the networks, and if they are, they are limited to the most intimate circle of friends.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

Social networks have established themselves among today's young people as a primary channel for finding content that corresponds to their interests and hobbies. In general, they are not aware of the time they spend on these platforms or the reason why this activity occupies a large part of their free time or any other time of the day (OP). They perceive the consultation of the networks as a need to know what is happening in the closest private sphere, but also in the more distant one that is exposed as entertainment, where the recreated or constructed profiles for public consumption mix with the real ones, as well as the images and personal discourses that are learned and ready for individual reproduction, often unconsciously.

Generation Z recognises that they are on social networks because of the need to belong to a digital community imposed on them by their social environment, but also because they have become fundamental tools for many of their daily needs, including reading the latest news and resolving doubts through video tutorials published on YouTube (SO1). However, while the latter enjoy a high level of trust among young people, they are increasingly reluctant to read news on social networks if it does not come from sources they trust.

Media and information professionals have lost credibility with a young public that considers the information published as biased because it responds to the editorial interests of each media group. Their lack of trust and credibility in content with many followers on the networks goes beyond the purely informative sphere; young people think that most of the content published on these platforms is conditioned by sponsorship —companies, products and services— and by "bluffing" that conveys idyllic personal situations and images that are far from reality. They also confirm that it is common and

accepted practice in their community to exercise this "posturing" in the content they publish, so that they unconsciously apply the doubt of veracity to what others publish (SO4).

The authority of experts is questioned not only because of these factors, but also because the very nature of the networks, participatory and diverse, authorizes them to choose and express their opinion on everything, regardless of the knowledge and influence that each person possesses. However, they do not want to be associated with any particular ideology, nor do they want to discuss important issues in the networks, except those that are of little importance or that do not affect their "social" image in the virtual environment they inhabit. In a way, they have transferred to these platforms the same traditional idea that has existed for decades in the consumption of conventional media: follow those who confirm what I think (OE2).

This contributes to the fact that young people do not place a high value on the relevance that someone may have as a specialist or expert in a given field. Knowledge loses authority, while the number of followers of profiles is the determining factor for aggregation. Unless it is a matter that directly affects them in a significant way, such as health, they do not consult expert profiles, but rather those they like or with whom they share opinions and points of view, with the social success of the profiles taking precedence over their specialization. Most do not want to know the opinion of dissenting voices, but rather to have their ideas confirmed in the published content (SO3).

6. Acknowledgements

The present text arises in the framework of an R&D&I project funded by the Ministry of Science Innovation and Universities (Ref. PID2019-104689RB-I00) entitled "Truth and ethics in social networks. Perceptions and educational influences in young users of Twitter, Instagram and Youtube." (INTERNET)

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