

## What can I get from YouTubers and Instagrammers? Preferences of teenagers in Spain

¿De qué me sirven los YouTubers e Instagrammers? Preferencias de los adolescentes en España

De que me servem os YouTubers e os Instagrammers? Preferências dos adolescentes em Espanha

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## Abstract

In the current digital ecosystem, the content and practices generated by networks such as YouTube or Instagram have facilitated the emergence of a type of influencer or (micro) celebrity who, as well as generating business (Vizcaíno-Verdú et al., 2019), offer models of authenticity and lifestyles, narratives and influences to Millennials and Centennials that should be analyzed from the perspective of young users themselves. We present the results of an unpublished mixed methodology study carried out in Spain that collected the opinions of adolescents and young people (12-18 years old) from the autonomous communities of Catalonia, the Balearic Islands and the Basque Country from a sample of 2,749 questionnaires (and nine focus groups) during 2021, including the period affected by Covid19. The quantitative results show which platforms they prefer, the reasons for their preferences, their acceptance or rejection of aspects of communication elements and the characteristics that seem to create trends and favor the engagement of young people with their preferred influencers they prefer.

**Keywords:** influencers; YouTube; Instagram; teenagers; content; trends

## Resumen

En el actual ecosistema digital, los contenidos y prácticas que generan redes sociales como YouTube o Instagram han facilitado la emergencia de un tipo de *influencer* o (micro)celebridad que, además de generar negocio (Vizcaíno-Verdú et al., 2019), ofrece unos modelos de autenticidad y estilos de vida, unas narrativas y unas influencias entre las generaciones *Millennials* y *Centennials* que requieren ser analizadas desde la percepción de los propios jóvenes usuarios. Para ello presentamos parte de los resultados de una investigación inédita de metodología mixta realizada en España que ha recogido las opiniones de adolescentes y jóvenes (12-18 años) de las Comunidades Autónomas de Catalunya, Baleares y Euskadi a partir de una muestra de 2.749 cuestionarios (y nueve *focus group*) durante el 2021, incluyendo el período afectado por la Covid19. Los resultados cuantitativos permiten observar qué plataformas prefieren, los motivos de preferencia, su aceptación o rechazo de determinados elementos comunicativos, así como las características que parecen crear tendencia y favorecen su *engagement* hacia los *influencers* que prefieren.

**Palabras clave:** influencers; YouTube; Instagram; adolescentes; contenidos; tendencias

## Resumo

No atual ecossistema digital, os conteúdos e práticas gerados pelas redes sociais como YouTube ou Instagram facilitam o surgimento de um tipo de *influencer* or (micro) celebridade que, além de gerar negócios (Vizcaíno-Verdú et al., 2019), oferece modelos de autenticidade e estilos de vida, narrativas e influências entre as gerações *Millennial* e *Centennial* que precisam ser analisadas na perspectiva dos próprios jovens usuários. Para isso, apresentamos os resultados de uma pesquisa inédita de metodologia mista realizada na Espanha que recolheu as opiniões de adolescentes

e jovens (12-18 anos) das comunidades autónomas de Catalunha, Ilhas Baleares e País Basco a partir de uma amostra de 2.749 questionários (e nove grupos focais) durante 2021, incluindo o período afetado pelo Covid19. Os resultados quantitativos permitem observar quais plataformas preferem, os motivos de sua preferência, sua aceitação ou rejeição de determinados elementos comunicativos, bem como as características que parecem criar uma tendência e favorecer seu engajamento com os influenciadores de sua preferência.

**Palavras chave:** influenciadores; YouTube; Instagram; adolescentes; conteúdo; tendências

## 1. Introduction

In today's digital ecosystem, the content and practices of so-called influencers are part of the digital culture of younger age groups. Social media platforms such as YouTube and more recently TikTok, which are the preferred platforms for Generation Z (Conde del Rio, 2021), have facilitated the emergence of a type of (micro) celebrity (Marwick, 2015) who, besides generating business (Vizcaíno-Verdu et al., 2019), offer models (of authenticity and lifestyle), narratives and influence among Millennials and Centennials that fall to be analyzed from the perspective of the perception of those young users themselves (Buckingham, 2019, Creswick et al., 2019, García Matilla, 2022).

We first need to consider what is meant when we say someone is an influencer. Kádeková and Holiecinová (2018) identify four types of *influencers*: *blogger*, *celebrity*, *YouTuber* or *vlogger*, and *Instagrammer*. Vloggers and Instagrammers are the influencers mostly identified by young people (IAB, 2021) and they are the focus of this investigation.

In relation to the age of users, this investigation addresses the core of Gen Z (Djafarova and Bowes, 2021) in an age band from pre-adolescence (about 12 years of age) up to early youth (about 18 years of age). Across that age range, social media are a privileged space in which teenagers and people in early youth can build, negotiate and indeed represent their identities (Boyd, 2014; Buckingham, 2008; Cover, 2012). However, we see in the scientific literature that research is predominantly restricted to the secondary education age range (12-16 years of age) and that pre-adolescence is rarely included. A notable exception is the EU Kids Online survey (Smahl et al., 2020), both in terms of age range (9-16 years, so stopping before early young) and geographic scope (Europe-wide).

In Spain, on the basis of the results of recent studies, such as the work of García-Jiménez et al., (2021) based on a questionnaire completed by 515 students aged 12-16 in the Madrid Community, it has been concluded that for most activities, older teenagers (aged 16) evidence a slight shift towards greater use of Instagram and the converse movement in relation to YouTube. That is consistent with some of the data obtained earlier by Prades and Carbonell (2016), who identify a thematic hierarchy that lies behind the choice to use Instagram in 202 users (106 secondary school students and 96 university students).

Specifically, five types of motivation were detected, in order of priority: gossip, storage, social interaction, self-expression and distraction. In this research, with a sample that is wide both in terms of age range (12-18) and in statistical significance and geographic significance – from across of Spain – we were concerned both to make comparative observations of those diverse social and psychological motivations which may explain the age-related shift mentioned from YouTube to Instagram, and to determine the communicative aspects that lie behind the interest in forming part of a digital community. Despite the differences between YouTubers and Instagrammers and despite the more extensive academic literature concerning YouTubers (Vizcaíno-Verdú et al., 2019, p. 212), in this research we have grouped them together in the shared category of influencer or micro-celebrity (Marwick, 2015).

### **1.1. Characteristics of influencers that generate greater affinity among teenagers**

Often, both influencers themselves and their young followers define influencers as content creators. Creators of content that tends to guide consumption among young people, including children, even when it is not overtly branded content or entertainment (De Aguilera-Moyano, et al., 2015). In this instance and in order to balance the prevalence in the existing literature of studies focused on digital risks and vulnerabilities (García-Jiménez et al., 2021), we focus on activities and uses in teenagers and those in early youth so as to observe the effectiveness of communication by influencers among their young users. Investigations within the framework of theories close to Uses and Gratifications Theory generally identify a wide variety of activities preferred by teenagers involving social media<sup>1</sup>, but there are a number of shared constants:

an extreme cult of image in all its aspects, search behavior guided by affinity with personal interests, lack of interest in current political/economic affairs in contrast with excessive interest in following those closest to the user (family and friends) or the most popular/famous people. (García-Jiménez et al., 2021, p. 233).

Alongside diversity of subject matter, where there is a notable preference for amusement and entertainment (Gil-Quintana and Fernández-Galiano, 2020), there are also diverse factors that generate interest among teenagers. That is due in large part to the strategies deployed by influencers, who use different expressive and production resources that demonstrate their desire to create a feeling of community, and to the role of aspirational factors.

One of the most recognizable characteristics of the YouTubers and Instagrammers most followed by young people is their youth (Galán and Hinojosa, 2020) or, rather, the prolongation of their youth, in step with the contemporary social phenomenon of extended adolescence. More than the actual ages of influencers – who are certainly getting younger

all the time (Feijoo and Fernández-Gómez, 2021), just like their users (Jiménez-Morales et al., 2020) – what is at play is providing continuity for affinities and even, albeit with some modulation, behaviors associated with the interests and attitudes of today's young people.

Another characteristic widely shared by influencers is the incidence of content and behaviors that are notably narcissistic. As noted by Bidegain et al. (2022), 'The Internet and social media mean that teenage users focus on doing rather than being, and that they feel uncomfortable because of their lack of self-knowledge' (Gardner and Davis, 2013, p. 75).

The extreme cult of the image in all its facets is an evident aspect of this dominance of 'doing' and, we would add, of 'seeming' over 'being'. A characteristic that influencers share with their young followers is a mutually reinforcing pattern of communication. That phenomenon can be linked to the social environment of a modernity that is fluid (Baumann, 2001) or late modernity (Giddens, 1995) and to global figures that show that 50% of people now use social media to record their personal achievements (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2021). A cult of the image that can be seen in particular on platforms such as Instagram where, as noted by De-Casas et al. (2018), there is great predilection for the selfie, an unprecedented visual phenomenon, that is popular particularly among young people, in which images are quickly replaced and new paths to participation are established.

Consequently, the strategy used by influencers to ensure that young people follow them is in no way accidental, rather it is often implemented using business techniques and apparently intimate communication in the form of self-referential posts that chase likes and followers. According to Martínez Pastor et al. (2002), the success of young influencers is due to their skill in capturing the culture, language and content that the youngest audiences want to follow on social media. Their eccentric body language, a preference for weak jokes, the continual use of slang and a certain indifference to current affairs are some of the most distinctive characteristics among the YouTubers most followed by teenagers in Portugal (Pereira et al., 2018).

In order to build a shared group culture, influencers, including the youngest – so-called kidfluencers – communicate across different media. That not only strengthens the loyalty of their followers or fans but also allows influencers to generate business opportunities, often with the assistance of digital marketing agencies (Feijoo and Fernández-Gómez, 2021). That professional assistance does not mean their streamed scripted and post-produced content is free of spelling or language errors. With kidfluencers, those errors can be interpreted as a relaxation of normal rules of formality (Fernández-Gómez et al., 2021, p. 21) or, as it seems to us, they may even be part of a more or less deliberate affectation of spontaneity.

Indeed, another characteristic of YouTubers, and of Instagrammers, is the way in which the pretense of freshness and spontaneity is not necessarily related to the originality of their pictures and videos. The borrowing of content ideas from each other can be seen as another sign of group identity, and as postmodern codes of pastiche. Homage, adaptation, imitation, copying and frank plagiarism work together at different levels to form

a shared language. Paradoxically, that does not appear to affect either the credibility or the authenticity sought after.

Humor is another common characteristic of content generated by YouTubers and Instagrammers. A sense of humor that is generally undemanding, albeit sometimes the humor is crude and helps to create a 'fun' personality, which tends to involve talking about the same things or, rather, about the same person (Me!). Renes-Arellano et al. (2020) find that the most common communicative tone of YouTubers is humorous, with swearing and sexist forms of expression.

The humor draws on resources such as imitation as parody, visual and sound effects and even linking elements such as hashtags and profile labels, particularly emoticons and emojis. This new way of communicating is not only a mechanism of emotional display among influencers and their audiences (Montenegro and Hermenegildo, 2018), including the feeling of mutual gratitude (Korres and Elexpuru, 2022), but allows for a pared down use of language that is typical of the young online community, particularly on Instagram.

Despite the characteristics shared across the young online community, research has identified differences, particularly a bias in relation to gender (seen principally in binary terms), both in the unequal representation of influencers (Wotanis and McMillan, 2014) and in the type of content produced and how it is received (García-Jiménez et al., 2021; García-Jiménez et al., 2016; Booker et al., 2018). The importance of presence and type of engagement (Dubovi and Tabak, 2021) are a material aspect that allows observation of both the participation and the commitment of audiences, because engagement is not neutral, particularly from a gender perspective (Amarasekara and Grant, 2018; Cambronero et al., 2021; Da-Costa and Da-Carvalho, 2020; Welbourne and Grant, 2016).

In summary, in this study we seek to analyze the degree of approval young users of YouTube and Instagram show towards the communicative practices, codes and possibilities for (self-) presentation through technology enabled by these social media platforms, which are so popular among pre-teens and teenagers. Second, to observe the possibilities that teenagers and young people see in these two platforms concerning the different practices, models and narratives offered by influencers.

Consistent with those general objectives for the research, we had three specific objectives:

Objective 1. To identify the degree of approval among teenagers and younger adults for the characteristics of content generated by influencers on YouTube and Instagram.

Objective 2. To analyze the role of the characteristics of influencers' content on YouTube and Instagram in constructing identity and affinity within teenage digital culture.

Objective 3. To determine similarities and differences in terms of age and gender among teenagers.

## 2. Material and methods

This study is part of broader research with a mixed methodological focus and a sequential explanatory design (Creswell, 2014) consisting of two phases. This paper sets out the results from the first phase, based on a quantitative analysis of the audience through a questionnaire. Participants were protected by protocols approved by the financing body and by the Research Ethics Committee of Ramon Llull University.

### 2.1. Data collection instruments

Based on an earlier model (Aran et al., 2018), a questionnaire to identify the motives for use and consumption preferences of teenagers and younger adults in the world of YouTubers and Instagrammers was reviewed, widened and finalized. The final questionnaire used a Google form administered online by secondary schools in Catalonia, the Balearic Islands and the Basque Country as listed by the Ministry of Education in each of those regions. Colleges and teachers of years 1 and 4 of Compulsory Secondary Education (CSE) (Grades 7 and 10 in the USA) and those teaching first year courses in the Faculties of Communication, Education and Psychology at the participating universities (Ramon Llull, Deusto and Pontifica-Comillas-CESAG) were emailed with instructions on how to administer the questionnaire. The questionnaire was in the official languages of the three Autonomous Communities to make it more accessible to participants. It had two parts:

- Five demographic questions (age, sex, educational institution, etc., without breaking anonymity),
- Eight questions on the subject of the study: two open questions and six closed questions (some multiple choice and others with a five-point Likert scale). For the open questions, respondents were asked to say whether they preferred Instagram to YouTube (and which Instagrammers and YouTubers) and why.

### 2.2. Sample Characteristics

The questionnaire was administered during December 2020 and March 2021 to students in Years 1 and 4 of CSE (aged 11-12 and 14-15) at 41 public and private schools in Catalonia, the Balearic Islands and the Basque Country and to first year students at the Faculties mentioned above.

In total, 2,749 questionnaires were received to give a statistically significant sample despite the difficulties in communication and in administering the questionnaire in educational institutions as originally planned as a result of the CoViD-19 pandemic and the associated lockdowns in Spain. Despite those issues, a large number of questionnaires

were completed and returned, mainly from students in Years 4 of CSE. Under the protocol for those older than 14, those students were able to reply individually from home rather than from school with the prior informed consent of their families. Those younger than 14 had to complete at home the questionnaire with their parents, who gave their consent at that time.

Finally, the sample was made up of 1479 girls (53.8%) and 1157 boys (42.1%) plus 2.2% of non-binary respondents and 2% who chose not to state their gender. In terms of academic years, 82.2% of respondents were in Year 4 of CSE (aged 14-15), 7% in Year 1 (aged 11-12) and the remaining 10.8% were university students.

## 2.3. Analysis

Database management and statistical analysis, both comparative and of scale reliability, were carried out using SPSS. As an initial step, reliability was measured by Cronbach's alpha, which gave high values for the scales 'Motives for use' (.817), 'What I like best about YouTube' (.790) and 'Helpfulness of viewed content' (.919).

Subsequently, both descriptive analysis and measurement comparison tests were performed. Descriptive analysis used frequency tables and descriptive statistics for the highest scoring categories of response for each variable (scalar questions, P1-P6). Measurement comparison testing broken down by sex and academic year (t-tests for independent samples) was performed. The effect size of the significant differences found was calculated by specific tests (Cohen's d).

Effect sizes were interpreted using Cohen's suggested ranges. Effect sizes were classed as small ( $d = 0.2-0.3$ ), medium ( $d = 0.5-0.8$ ) and large ( $d > 0.8$ ). The detail for some categories with low percentages are not shown or are mentioned briefly in this work so as to focus on the most noteworthy results. For example, although there are data for two different Years of CSE, the data have been grouped into categories of school and university respondents, reflecting stages of maturity as explained above, and by gender, consistent with Objective 3. Geographical location was not a significant variable, principally because there are no significant differences in the data across locations.

## 3. Results

We set out below the most significant results directly related to the objectives of this work. To that end, motives for use (Question 1) and functions on YouTube and on Instagram, the reasons for preferences and the things not liked (Questions 2, 3 and 3b) and the most



valued aspects in an influencer (Questions 4b and 8) in function of their preferences for YouTubers and Instagrammers.

Table 1. YouTube: Motives for use and functions by sex and stage of education (1 Not at all – 5 A lot)

FUNCTIONS	MOTIVES	Sex			Stage of education		
		MALE	FEMALE	<i>d</i>	CSE	UNIV	<i>d</i>
Entertainment	Killing time	3.69**	3.33**	0.34	3.49	3.53	--
Entertainment	Amusement	3.85**	3.23**	0.60	3.52	3.39	--
Socializing	To follow what my contacts are viewing	1.87**	1.57**	0.32	1.72	1.69	--
Socializing	To stay in contact with friends	1.57**	1.26**	0.39	1.43*	1.27*	0.19
Coolness	To follow celebrities	2.58*	2.71*	-0.10	2.66	2.53	--
Coolness	Because it's fashionable	1.6**	1.47**	0.15	1.54	1.45	--
Socializing	To not feel alone	1.62	1.61	--	1.61*	1.76*	-0.15
Affinity with my interests	To post things	1.46**	1.2**	0.32	1.34*	1.23*	0.14
Affinity with my interests	To learn things	3.28**	3.07**	0.19	3.14*	3.34*	-0.18
Affinity with my interests	To test myself	1.9**	1.59**	0.31	1.74	1.65	--
Socializing	To share interest with other followers	1.75**	1.38**	0.39	1.57*	1.42*	0.15
Coolness	To post things and become famous	1.28**	1.08**	0.33	1.19	1.14	--
Coolness	To earn money	1.28**	1.05**	0.36	1.17	1.15	--

Note Statistically significant differences \* $p < 0.05$  \*\* $p > 0.01$

Source: prepared by the authors

As shown in Table 1, the main motives for use given by participants were principally 'Amusement', 'Kill time', and 'To learn things'. Responses with lower values were 'To follow celebrities' and 'To follow what my contacts are viewing'. By stage of education, there is a detectable difference among university students with higher scores than in compulsory secondary education for 'To learn things', whilst 'Amusement' (but not 'To kill time' or 'To follow celebrities') go down. In terms of gender, boys score higher for 'To kill time' and 'To learn things' whilst girls have higher scores for 'To follow celebrities'. There is clear gender-based differentiation in patterns of use.

A posteriori, the motives for use were organized into four functions based on prior studies (García-Muñoz and Fedele, 2011; Igartua and Muñiz, 2008; Medrano et al., 2010): entertainment; socialization, sharing with peer group; coolness (whether they think some person or content is 'cool') and affinity with their own interests. The most common functions under the results are Entertainment and Affinity with the user's interests.

Table 2. Instagram: Motives for use and functions by sex and stage of education (1 Not at all – 5 A lot)

FUNCTIONS	MOTIVES	Sex			Stage of education		
		MALE	FEMALE	<i>d</i>	CSE	UNIV	<i>d</i>
Entertainment	Killing time	3.15	3.11	-0.4**	3.3	3.1	0.2*
Entertainment	Amusement	3.12	3.08	-0.4**	3.3	3.1	0.2*
Socializing	To follow what my contacts are viewing	4.3	4.5	-0.2*	4.6	4.4	0.2*
Socializing	To stay in contact with friends	4.2	4.6	-0.4**	4.6	4.3	0.3**
Coolness	To follow celebrities	2.9	3.1	-0.2*	3.8	3.7	0.1*
Coolness	Because it's fashionable	2.5	3.4	-0.9**	3.5	3.1	0.4**
Socializing	To not feel alone	3.7	4.2	-0.5**	4.2	4.1	0.1*
Affinity with my interests	To post things	3.2	3.5	-0.3**	3.1	3.3	0.2*
Affinity with my interests	To learn things	3.3	3.3	0	3.1	3.3	0.2*
Affinity with my interests	To test myself	2.1	2.0	-0.1	2.0	2.0	0
Socializing	To share interests with other followers	2.5	2.3	-0.2*	2.1	2.2	-0.1*
Coolness	To post things and become famous	2.4	2.1	0.3**	2.0	2.3	-0.3**
Coolness	To earn money	2.4	2.0	0.4**	2.0	2.3	-0.2**

Note Statistically significant differences \* $p < 0.05$  \*\* $p > 0.01$

Source: prepared by the authors

Table 2 shows that the principal motivations for using Instagram are 'To keep in contact with my friends' and 'To following what my contacts are viewing', both of which fall within a strongly social function. On average they scored less highly in terms of both gender distribution and age on YouTube (Table 1). Posting and the 'coolness' function (particularly among boys) increase with age.

The results for levels of approval of content generated by influencers (Objective 1) are discussed below.

Table 3. What I like best about YouTube by sex and stage of education (1 Not at all and 5 A lot)

	Sex			Stage of education		
	MALE	FEMALE	<i>d</i>	CSE	UNIV	<i>d</i>
Technical quality	3.16**	2.96**	0.21	3.03	3.11	--
It's easy to use	4.14	4.14	--	4.12*	4.28*	-0.18
The variety of content	4.06	4.04	--	4**	4.33**	-0.32
Tutorials	3.39**	3.61**	-0.19	3.47**	3.81**	-0.30
Memes/Jokes	3.56**	3.03**	0.42	3.28	3.16	--
Music/videoclips	3.98**	4.42**	-0.45	4.2*	4.38*	-0.17
Games	3.9**	2.17**	1.33	3.03**	2.32**	0.46
TV programs/series	2.58**	3.08**	-0.40	2.83*	3.04*	-0.16
Sharing videos	1.83**	1.58**	0.23	1.67*	1.89*	-0.19
Uploading videos	1.85**	1.54**	0.28	1.68	1.72	--
Posting comments	1.9**	1.58**	0.30	1.75*	1.62*	0.12
'Liking' and 'Not liking'	2.52**	2.23**	0.22	2.37	2.26	--

Note Statistically significant differences \* $p < 0.05$  \*\* $p > 0.01$

Source: prepared by the authors

The features of YouTube preferred by participants are linked to communication in terms of technology (speed, usability, video quality), connectivity (upload videos, share videos, post comments and "Like") and discourse/topics (music, videogames, TV series and programs, tutorials, memes/jokes). The specific aspects of YouTube that are most liked are its ease of use, variety of content and music/videoclips which, by category, show concentration of preferences particularly in technology-related features (total mean 4.14) and connectivity (total mean 4.05). However, there is a distinct pattern in students in CSE, with significantly lower scores for ease of use (4.12), variety of content (4) and consumption of music/videoclips (4.2). Consumption of TV programs/series, music/videoclips and tutorials increases with age and is at each stage greater in girls than in boys. In terms of gender, scores for ease of use and variety of content are practically the same. However, girls score lower than boys in all aspects related to interactivity, higher in consumption of music/videoclips and with a significantly lower difference in videogames (Cohen's  $d$  1.33).

Results for 'What I don't like' are the converse of Table 3, with no significant differences by educational level in scores for different least liked features. The least liked features of YouTube identified by participants were advertising (3.72 in girls, 3.59 in boys) and harvesting of personal data (3.43 and 3.14 respectively). The principal difference between boys and girls is that girls score significantly higher in their dislike of the harvesting of personal data and advertising.

In the case of Instagram, 'What I like most' is concentrated in three responses: communication with friends (70%), seeing Instagram as a more private or personal platform (20%) and variety of content (10%). There were no significant differences across ages or genders.

To conclude, we should not forget that responses as to reasons for most liking a particular influencer were open, and although the majority of mentions were of a YouTuber, those people were generally active on both platforms. Thus, the principal reasons for liking a specific YouTuber given by participants were 'He/she is fun' (4.01), 'He/she talks about things that I'm interested in' (3.91) and 'He/she is intelligent (3.45). In other words, functions of entertainment, affinity with respondents' interests and admiration for an influencer, mainly on account of their intelligence, but also (in sixth place) due to their beauty. Coolness is the reason in last place and relates to the value attributed to the social life and fame of a particular influencer. There is a difference between CSE and university, with lower scores among university students for 'He/she is fun', when picking a YouTuber. In terms of gender, boys score significantly higher than girls for all the motives discussed above. On Instagram, the principal motivation stated is following contacts (70.2%), not necessarily celebrities, but rather friends and people in respondents' immediate circle.

Table 4. Helpfulness of YouTube viewing by sex and stage of education (1 Not at all and 5 A lot)

	Sex			Stage of education		
	MALE	FEMALE	<i>d</i>	CSE	UNIV	<i>d</i>
To see how other people think	3.24	3.24	--	3.21**	3.53**	-0.24
To find out about other cultures	3.47	3.47	--	3.43**	3.76**	-0.25
To know that I'm not the only one who thinks like me	2.73*	2.91*	-0.13	2.82*	3.02*	-0.14
To find out about important things: healthy eating, cooking, health....	2.66**	3.03**	-0.28	2.83**	3.23**	-0.30

Note Statistically significant differences \*p<0.05 \*\*p>0.01

Source: prepared by the authors

In the context of the CoViD-19 pandemic, data relating to the value of content viewed (Tables 4 and 5) appear particularly significant, and for YouTube responses in descending order were: 'Learning about other cultures', 'Learning about other ways of thinking', 'Learning about important things (healthy eating, cooking, health...)' and 'Knowing that I'm not the only one who thinks like me'. CSE and university students are different with significantly lower values in relation to the features analyzed, except in 'Not having learned anything and it didn't help my mood' and in 'I felt worse', where CSE students scored higher than university students. The principal difference between boys and girls is that girls score significantly higher for 'Learning about important things (healthy eating, cooking, health...)' and 'Knowing that I'm not the only one who thinks like me'.

Table 5. Helpfulness of Instagram content viewed by sex and stage of education

	Sex			Stage of education		
	MALE	FEMALE	<i>d</i>	CSE	UNIV	<i>d</i>
To see how other people think	3.30	3.30	--	3.20**	3.55**	-0.35
To know that I'm not the only one who thinks like me	2.80*	2.91*	-0.11	2.82*	3.15*	-0.33
To find out about important things: healthy eating, cooking, health....	2.46**	3.13**	-0.67	2.53**	3.33**	-0.8

Note Statistically significant differences \* $p < 0.05$  \*\* $p > 0.01$

Source: prepared by the authors

In relation to Instagram, most notable was the help provided for learning about other ways of thinking, alongside more instrumental concerns closely associated with health and everyday habits. In all the results, girls and older students score higher.

## 4. Discussion

This work, which forms part of a larger investigation that is in train, allows us to observe on the basis of statistically significant quantitative results the interaction between social media such as YouTube and Instagram and the digital culture of young people, in an encounter in which teenagers (re)present their identities through perceptions and expectations in a changing social and technological environment. It is even more imperative in current *Media Life* to point out together with researchers such as Buckingham (2019) and Creswick et al. (2019) how the voices of young people themselves have been systematically ignored by digital tech companies, except when it suits their business objectives, with consequent infantilization of the people who are the most prolific consumers of social media and deserve commensurate educational and communicative empowerment. We set out below the discussion and conclusions from those results.

In relation to Objective 1, the results for our sample show clear approval for the technological features of YouTube in terms of ease of use and the variety of its content, particularly music and videoclips, especially among girls. With age, those content preferences increase along with the use of tutorials and consumption of TV series through YouTube. Instagram is particularly appreciated for communication with friends. The data may indicate a shift with age from early consumption for fun towards consumption that seeks experience and knowledge. Objections to advertising and the harvesting of personal data on YouTube are the mirror image of the generally favorable views of the level of privacy on Instagram.

In relation to Objective 2, we see convergence in the nature of the content offered by influencers and the interests and preferences of their young users. The predominant culture is one of entertainment that seeks to sustain a markedly narcissistic juvenile culture in which content and the things referred to, beyond affinity with (and projection of) the interests of teenagers, are (self-)referential and are shown to others on a scale that is more or less private or shared. Approval of quickness and humor are evidence of an economy of language – (Korres and Elexpuru (2022) see that in the success of emoticons and/or emojis) –, that adapts textual and audiovisual language to enable influencers to (re)present themselves, with skill of varying levels of charisma, that their audience recognizes and in which they recognize themselves. Transparency, speed, credibility are part of the pragmatic contract of the digital community of young people.

The reported reasons for preferences (Tables 1 and 2), and the support that participants perceive (Tables 4 and 5), suggest greater attraction towards variety and ease of access to YouTubers, whilst Instagrammers enable them to carry on communication with their friends, with a greater degree of involvement and a detectable trend towards microinfluencers, something that advertisers already seem to have noticed and that emerges from our results as rejection by young people of invasive forms of advertising.

Thirdly, Objective 3 has also been met by showing across all participants that the variables with greatest differentiation are not geographic but those relating to age and, notably, gender. In a so-called globalized world, similarities in the identity of adolescents at different stages of development do not mask common gender differences that can act as a barrier. As young people grow older, platforms such as YouTube appear to make sense as a sort of search engine, both for consumption of culture, particularly music and videoclips, but also fiction series (especially among girls), and entertainment and games (especially videogames among boys). As they enter early youth at the same time as they start their university studies, use of YouTube among young people increases significantly in order to acquire knowledge by accessing tutorials and different audiovisual sources that help to consolidate academic content or, looking to identity, access other ways of being and managing emotions, with narratives of individual and group self-improvement – acknowledged to have a higher degree of privacy on Instagram – something that may have been reinforced by the occurrence of the CoViD-19 during the study. In terms of gender, the results of prior investigations (García-Jiménez et al., 2021) as to preferences for different types of content are confirmed and call for in-depth reflection on still essential actions to make progress towards greater equality, most notably in relation to the (self-)exclusion of girls from involvement in social aspects. Whilst the data have shown that girls are equally adept at using the technology, they score markedly less than boys in all aspects related to interactivity and are more critical of the use of personal data on social media. The technology landscape inevitably affects use of social media, but it also affects psychological and social development, because it is all part of Media Life.

As well as reporting a significant, recent sample, this work has limitations. In future stages, analysis should use qualitative techniques to supplement quantitative techniques

to make more observations, such as the structural relationship between young people and technology – as considered in *Generation App* by Gardner and Davis (2013) and Prensky's (2011) digital natives. For all those reasons and as a final thought, we insist on the importance of regularly assessing the reasons for which adolescents use social media. Those motives are not only in constant flux (Throuvala et al., 2019), but young people are often portrayed as mere consumers when they are in fact players on a social stage in which the need for self-satisfaction and exaltation of Me, and other references, formats (Mihelj et al., 2019) and functions co-exist. The components of a lifestyle with as-yet little explored emotional connection (Barrientos-Báez et al., 2022) that point to more intimate uses, a more considered management of emotions and the emergence of online groups of young people (Vizcaíno-Verdú and Aguaded, 2022) with notable cultural and social involvement.

## Authors' contribution

**Sue Aran-Ramspott:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Funding acquisition, Project administration, Investigation, Methodology, Supervision, Writing-original draft, and Writing-review and editing. **Álvaro Moro Inchaustieta:** Investigation, Methodology, Formal analysis, Software, Validation, Visualization, Writing-original draft, and Writing-review and editing. **Lluís Botella García del Cid:** Formal analysis, Software, Validation, Visualization, and Writing-original draft.

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#### Notes

- 1 The term 'social media' is used to highlight the social character of some digital media platforms, such as those that are the subject of this study (Bechman and Lomborg, 2013; Papacharissi, 2015).