56% OF YOUNG ITALIANS USE AI TO ACCESS INFORMATION, AND 54% CONSIDER IT RELIABLE

Interest in news is growing, but so is uncertainty: 57% of young people find it more difficult to form an opinion (+10 percentage points vs. 2025). Social media are the leading source of news (59%), while search engines and AI are gaining importance as tools for finding explanations.

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Young people are interested in the news and in what is happening around the world and in Italy, but navigating the information landscape is becoming increasingly difficult. Today, 57% of young people aged 16 to 35 believe it is harder to form an opinion about current events (+10 percentage points vs. 2025). Yet 56% say they are very or extremely interested in the news (+4.5 percentage points). These are among the findings of the **"Young People and Information" focus report from the GenerationShip Observatory 2026 of Changes Unipol, conducted by Kkienn Connecting People and Companies**. Against a backdrop of growing concerns about the future, access to an ever-increasing volume of content does not automatically translate into a greater ability to interpret it.

Young people are paying more attention to current affairs, work and education

In 2026, young people are paying increasing attention to issues affecting the present and their future prospects. Among the topics they say they prioritise, national and international current affairs account for 23%, up 5 percentage points compared with 2025. A similar increase is recorded in the priority given to information about education (18%, +5 percentage points) and employment (16%, +5 percentage points). Interest in local news is also growing (16%, +3 percentage points), while more modest increases are recorded for Italian politics (16%, +1 percentage point) and international politics (11%, +2 percentage points). This shift reflects a growing need to understand current events and navigate an increasingly uncertain environment, accompanied, however, by greater difficulty in forming an opinion.

Where young people get their news: social media dominate, but other sources are used to gain a deeper understanding

Social media are the leading source of news for 59% of young people, compared with 28% of adults. Traditional and online news publications are cited by 39% of young people and 65% of adults. The use of news aggregators and AI tools is also increasing.

However, when young people need to understand an important issue, they take a different approach: 31% start with a search engine, 24% turn to a news website and 15% use AI, compared with 8% of adults. Platforms and algorithms make content easier to access, but they can also make the original source less visible and its reliability more difficult to assess.

One hour and 40 minutes a day spent consuming news, but in-depth research is more occasional

Young people spend approximately one hour and 40 minutes a day consuming news, a figure that has remained stable compared with 2025, while adults spend around one hour and 30 minutes. Among young people, 42% prefer print or online articles, 40% favour videos on social media and 18% opt for

radio and podcasts. Among 16-22-year-olds, social media videos have already become the preferred way of accessing news, while reading progressively regains prominence with age.

For 53%, news arrives through a continuous flow of content across social media, search engines, television and messaging apps. However, 47% set aside specific moments to look for news.

Almost all young people (97%) seek additional information at least occasionally when a news item does not provide sufficient detail, but only 28% of this group do so frequently. When exploring complex topics in greater depth, 29% turn to search engines and 12% to AI.

Perceived quality of information declines as fatigue and confusion increase

Perceptions of the quality of information in Italy are deteriorating. Among young people, the average rating has fallen from 5.6 in 2025 to 5.1 in 2026, with 46% expressing a negative assessment. These figures reflect respondents' perceptions rather than an objective measurement of journalistic quality.

70% of young people believe that major national news organisations overuse sensationalist and clickbait headlines, undermining their credibility. Meanwhile, 68% believe that algorithm-driven personalisation influences public opinion, and 66% think it reinforces individual beliefs, limiting exposure to different perspectives.

More than half (54%) sometimes feel overwhelmed by the sheer volume of news (+5 percentage points vs. 2025), while 48% experience anxiety about the need to stay constantly informed (+9 percentage points). Some 45% struggle to distinguish important information from less relevant content (+7 percentage points), and 43% feel more confused after consulting different sources (+5 percentage points).

Almost half (49%) avoid certain news stories to prevent feeling overwhelmed, while 64% choose not to explore content that could negatively affect their mood without providing any useful benefit. An abundance of information can therefore go hand in hand with a reluctance to explore issues in greater depth.

Trust in information sources: search engines rank ahead of traditional media

Among young people, reported trust is highest for search engines (72%), followed by other information websites (58%), AI (56%), newspapers and their websites (55%), and television news programmes (54%). Trust is lower for online journalists and content creators (42%) and social media (36%).

Assessments of different information sources reveal significant changes. Newspapers and television remain among the highest-rated sources, with 55% positive assessments, but AI has recorded a 12-percentage-point increase compared with 2025, reaching 48%. Podcasts have improved to 51% (+4 percentage points).

Criticism of television and newspapers mainly concerns impartiality and political or economic influence. For social media and AI, concerns focus primarily on reliability and fact-checking.

The most frequently cited criteria when choosing an information source are fact-checking (72%), credibility and authority (71%), accuracy and impartiality (70%), and free access (70%). Compared with 2025, many of these criteria have become less important to respondents, with independence from political and economic interests declining by approximately 8 percentage points.

AI: more opportunities to understand, but less engagement with original sources

In the September 2026 survey, 96% of young people reported using AI tools in general, compared with 84% of adults, while 38% use them several times a day. Among young AI users, 56% frequently or always use these tools to search for information or understand a topic, compared with 45% of adults.

Among young people who use AI to access information, 31% consider it a starting point, 29% consult other sources when necessary, and 20% use it to organise content. Some 12% say they rely almost exclusively on the answers provided. Within the same group, 60% say AI encourages them to explore topics they would otherwise overlook, while 59% discover new sources or subjects through these tools. However, 57% report reading fewer articles or web pages because the AI-generated answer is often sufficient, while 56% compare fewer sources thanks to the summaries they receive.

Some 54% of young people consider the information provided by AI fairly or very reliable, compared with 28% who consider it unreliable. Among young AI users, 72% say they cross-check answers against other sources when making important decisions, while 68% want to know where the information comes from. Verification, however, is not systematic: 71% are more likely to check an answer when it contradicts their existing beliefs, while 52% do not question the origin of information if the answer appears convincing.

Fake news: growing concern over plausible but difficult-to-verify information

Some 41% of young people are most concerned about news that is partially true but misleading, while 31% are particularly worried about information based on rumours or unverifiable sources (+17 percentage points vs. 2025). Completely fabricated news is cited by 28%.

Some 61% of young people say they have encountered at least one deepfake online. Among them, 74% report recognising it immediately, although 67% still consider the phenomenon worrying.

Ragebait: young people caught between provocative content and growing silence on social media

Ragebait, i.e., the practice of creating content designed to provoke anger and outrage, is a double-edged mechanism: it attracts attention and generates engagement but undermines trust in information sources. Some 81% of young people say they occasionally encounter this type of content and, among those who have experienced it, 71% lose trust in those who publish it. Meanwhile, 67% read other users' comments and reactions, and 40% go on to share the content. Young people exposed to this phenomenon are themselves aware of how it works: 70% recognise that provocative content gains greater visibility through the reactions it generates.

The aggressive nature of online discussions is prompting some young people to withdraw from public debate. Across the entire sample of 16-35-year-olds that experienced ragebait, 70% avoid commenting on certain news stories to stay out of arguments. 66% of young people prefer not to express their opinions on social media even when they have a clear view. In addition, 73% choose to discuss certain topics only with people they know. The risk is that online public debate becomes a space where the most confrontational views gain visibility while more moderate voices remain silent, providing a partial representation of public discussion and contributing to the perception of social media as hostile environments.

Information inequality: access alone is not enough

Some 73% of young people believe that recognising reliable sources requires specific skills, while 68% think that education and knowledge help people make better use of the information available. In young

people's perception, therefore, the availability of content does not eliminate differences in people's ability to use it. For 64%, AI can help people with less knowledge understand complex subjects, while 67% believe it can expand opportunities for those who know how to use it effectively. However, 61% fear that people who lack these skills will be left behind.

From messaging apps to content creators: new forms of sharing and new responsibilities

Some 40% of young people frequently receive news through private chats and messaging groups. Among those who receive news this way, 71% say that content is considered credible at least occasionally simply because it has been shared by someone they know. However, forms of verification also exist within these conversations: 69% report that the reliability of information is checked, 65% say potentially false news is flagged, and 62% report requests for clarification about the origin of content.

Content creators have become fully fledged channels for disseminating information. Some 54% of young people acknowledge their ability to explain issues in ways that relate to everyday life, but 67% point out that authenticity does not guarantee reliability. Meanwhile, 71% believe that content creators who provide news and information should follow clear rules on source transparency and sponsorship disclosure, while 69% think that those who reach millions of people on social media have responsibilities similar to those of traditional media organisations.

Fernando Vacarini, Head of Media Relations at Unipol Group, said: *"Today, the real challenge is not finding information, but understanding which information we can trust. GenerationShip shows that young people recognise the importance of verifying sources, but this awareness does not always translate into concrete behaviour. AI offers new opportunities to acquire knowledge, but it can also encourage people to rely on the answers they receive without checking where the information comes from. The Observatory's findings highlight the need to strengthen the skills required to navigate the information landscape, explore news stories in greater depth and develop independent judgement. This is a challenge that concerns not only young people, but everyone's ability to understand reality and make informed decisions."*

For further information: **GenerationShip Observatory 2026 – "Young People and Information" Focus Report**

GenerationShip Observatory
GenerationShip is Unipol Group's Observatory on younger generations, established in 2022. The 2026 "Young People and Information" focus report, conducted by Kkienn Connecting People and Companies, is based on an online survey carried out between May and September 2026 involving 1,500 respondents: 900 young people aged 16-35 and 600 adults aged 36-74, who served as a comparison sample. A further investigation into AI was conducted through a second survey involving approximately 1,000 people who had already participated in the initial research. The percentages refer to respondents' answers and, where specified, to particular subgroups.

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