

**GUIDEBOOK FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES ON HOW TO
ENCOURAGE THE PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN
THEIR SOCIAL NETWORKS**



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

UNDERSTANDING YOUTH SOCIAL MEDIA BEHAVIOUR

CHAPTER 2

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT WITH EUROPEAN VALUES

CHAPTER 3

YOUTH AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FOR LOCAL ACTIVITIES

CHAPTER 4

UNDERSTANDING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT: INSIGHTS FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSING YOUTH PERSPECTIVES: SNS, LOCAL ACTIVITIES & EUROPEAN VALUES



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CHAPTER 1

**UNDERSTANDING YOUTH
SOCIAL MEDIA BEHAVIOUR**

Social networks provide young people with a greater personal autonomy.

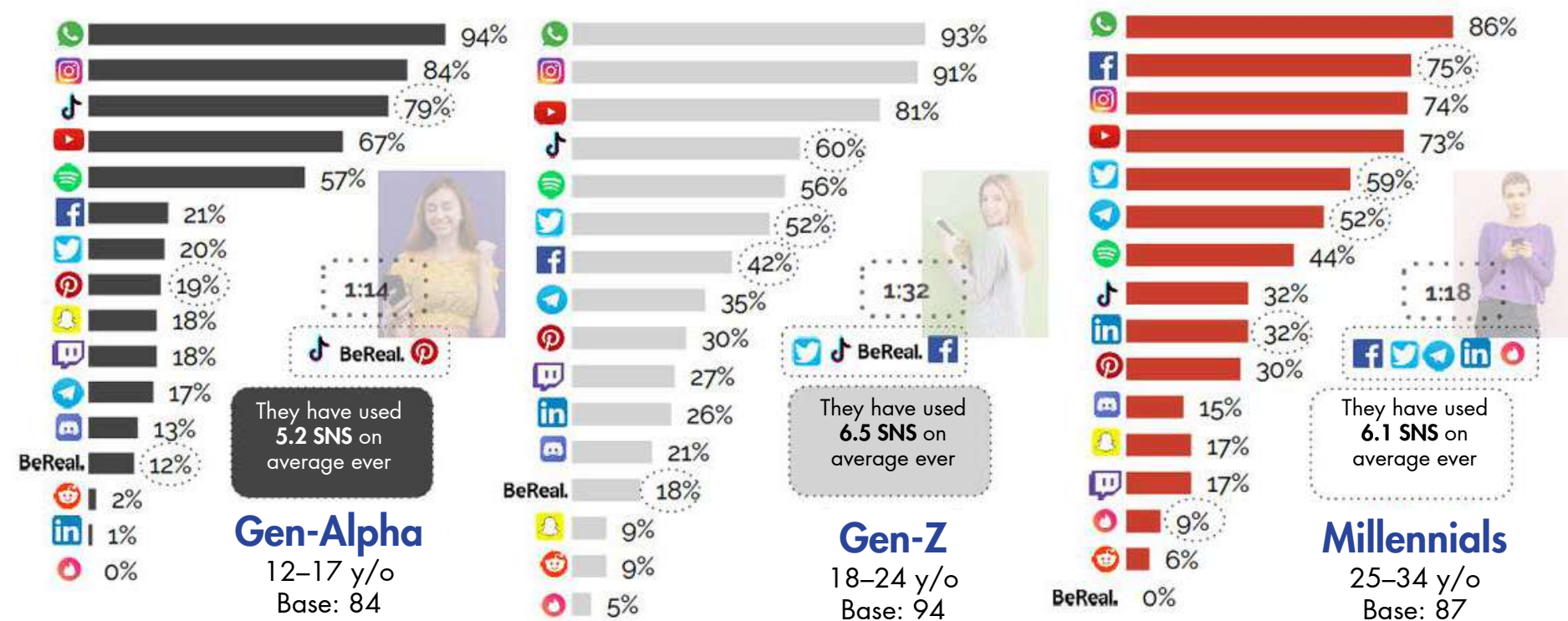
It is a tool for the formation of communities and personal identity, a means to organize their social life by enabling their participation in spaces where adults can have a limiting role.

Virtually all young people are using daily the social networking environment, showing a level of consultation that can be described as extensive and constant.

This phenomenon is experiencing a growing trend at a global level, both in terms of the number of users on social platforms and the amount of time they spend on them.

Gen-Alpha vs. Gen-Z vs. Millennials | Latest month use

Gen-Z is the one that uses SNS the most, especially **TikTok, Twitter, Facebook and BeReal**. While **Gen-Alpha** is the one who uses SNS the least and prefers apps like **TikTok, Pinterest and BeReal**. On the other hand, **Millennials** stand out for using **Facebook, Twitter, Telegram, LinkedIn and Tinder**. **WhatsApp, Instagram and YouTube** are the most transversal.



Source: [Annual Social Networking Survey 2023 \(Spain\)](#)

We live in a multi-platform context that is widely and intensely used by young people.

Topics	High	Medium	Low	Nothing
Environment and ecology.	21%	46%	23%	10%
Educational/academic	27%	49%	16%	8%
Job/employment	14%	33%	29%	24%
Artistic/cultural	25%	37%	26%	12%
Leisure, entertainment and fun	29%	45%	18%	8%
Social and citizen problems	18%	42%	25%	15%
Defense of Human Rights	19%	35%	28%	18%
Politic	13%	26%	27%	34%
Religion	8%	19%	34%	39%

These individuals exhibit varying levels of participation based on their different **motivations** for engagement. Four types of usage are identified:

- Informative.
- Participative.
- Close sociability.
- Recreational.

Moreover, young people perceive social networks primarily as spaces for obtaining information, sharing opinions and experiences with the community, and engaging in participatory activities that enable them to influence reality.

Nonetheless, they also exhibit caution regarding potential consequences when expressing opinions and sharing personal information publicly.

Source: López González, Rocío; Anaya Rodríguez, Roberto. "[University students interacting online: new scenarios of interaction, expression and citizen participation?](#)" *Inter-American Journal of Adult Education* vol. 38, no. 1, January-June, 2016, pp. 48-67



Online participation seems to be closely related to an **individual's attitude** in the real or physical sphere. In this context, various stances can be observed on social media, ranging from low-effort clicktivism, involving "participation" through likes or shares, to active engagement.

Most **young people access social networks daily**, and their usage can be classified as intensive due to frequent interactions. This is a growing trend that is solidifying on a global scale, both in terms of the increasing number of social media users and the time devoted to these platforms.

When it comes to more specific matters, **greater consideration is indeed given to the impact that published comments on social media can achieve.** Young individuals believe that complaints or praise directed at a particular service, product, event, or similar matters—essentially, expressions related to specific events—are considered by other users. They consider these opinions capable of influencing the decisions or actions of others. Moreover, young people express a certain apprehension regarding the public scrutiny to which their opinions may be subjected when expressed on social media platforms, as the consequences of exposure can lead to unpredictable outcomes (Lopez de Ayala et al., 2020).



For young people, **social networks represent a platform for leisure and fun.** However, it has been found that participatory activities, such as expressing opinions on social or political issues, as well as criticising or complaining in a public profile, are not predominant preferences among youngsters.

This finding highlights the **contrast** between the perception of social networks as a channel that enables any individual to express their views (whether on social, political, or other topics) in a public forum with a potentially wide reach, and the assessment of the limited transformative power attributed to the publication of such comments.

In any case, **youth should not be understood as a homogeneous group** in their perceptions and behaviours towards public and social issues. In this sense, there were important differences due to social class and gender among young Europeans even in digital forms of participation by young people.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. For young people, SNS help them feel part of a community and reinforce their personal identity.
2. Young people see SNS as spaces where they can express themselves without adult control.
3. There are important differences in the SNS used, depending on issues such as country or age.
4. There are multiple motivations and user profiles.
5. Young people's engagement on SNS with the topics posted depends on their personal attitude in the real sphere.
6. Young people believe that they can influence the real world with their comments on SNS.
7. SNS is a platform for civic participation for young people. But they use social media mainly for fun.
8. There are big differences between young people. They are not a homogeneous group.

MOST USED
SNS IN
GENERAL



MOST USED
SNS AMONG
YOUNGER
PEOPLE



SNS THAT
EXPERIENCED
HIGH
GROWTH IN
ITS USE



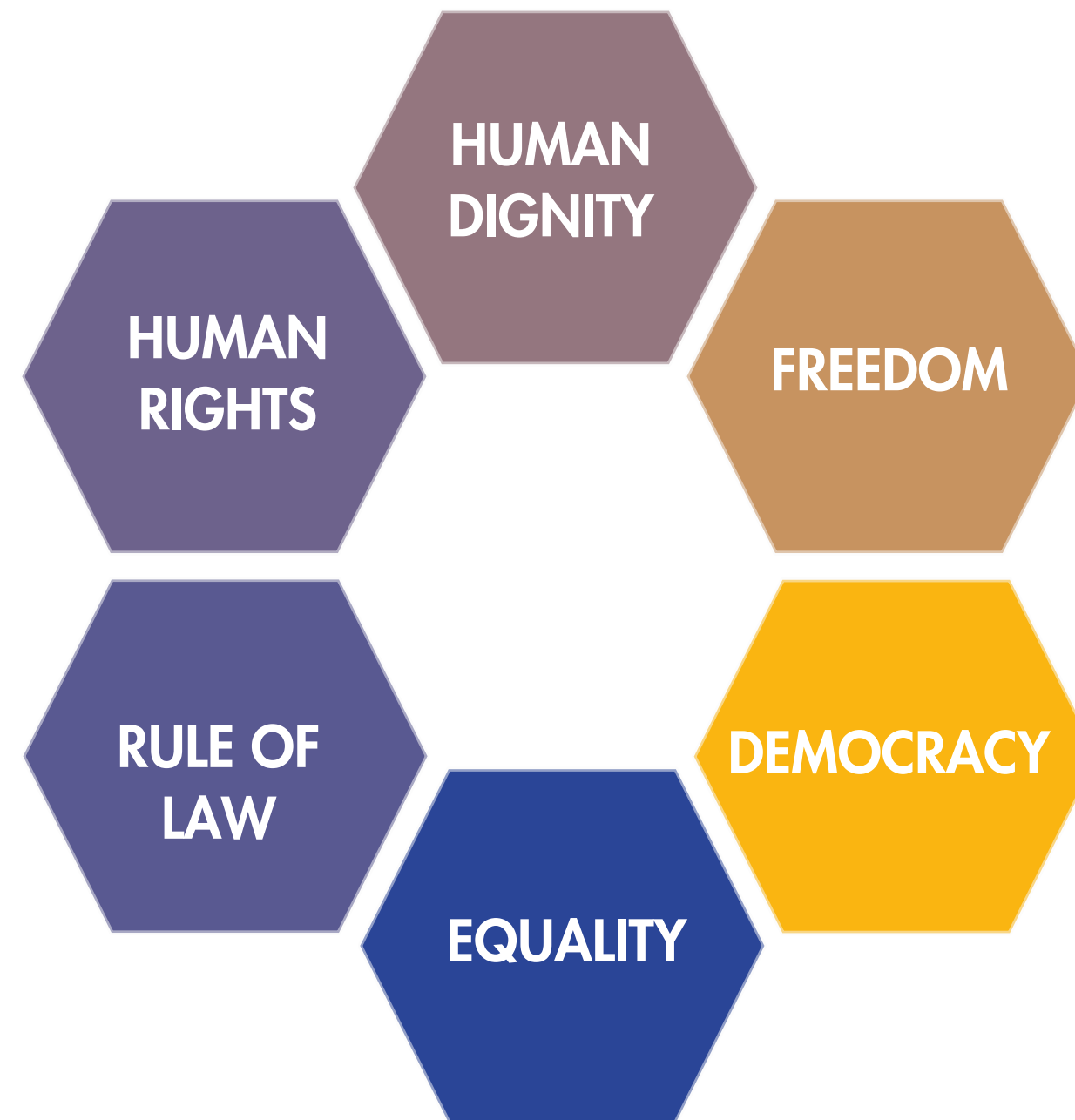


CHAPTER 2

**YOUTH ENGAGEMENT WITH
EUROPEAN VALUES**

Values are basically the things you think are important, no matter what's going on. They're like your personal compass, guiding how you act. They're not just ideas; they shape who you are, what you believe in, and how you behave.

Now, when we talk about the EU's values, they've got a list that they take seriously:



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Human dignity:

Saying everyone deserves respect and protection, like making sure folks have basic needs and aren't treated badly for thinking differently.

Freedom:

Covering everything from moving around the Union to personal freedoms like privacy, thoughts, religion, assembly, expression, and information. They've got it all written down in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Democracy:

It means the EU runs on citizens having a say. If you're a grown-up in the EU, you can vote and run for office in European Parliament. It doesn't matter if you're in your home country or where you live.

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Now, when we talk about the EU's values, they've got a list that they take seriously:

Equality:

It's all about treating everyone the same under the law. The EU has been into this since the beginning, with a rule about equal pay for equal work way back in 1957.

Rule of law:

The EU is all about following the rules set out in treaties that its countries agreed on together. They've got an independent judiciary to make sure everything is fair, and the European Court of Justice has the final say.

Human rights:

The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights is like a superhero cape, protecting people from discrimination based on things like gender, race, religion, disability, age, or who they love. It covers everything from data protection to the right to access justice. That's the lowdown on the EU's values.

Since 1988, the European Union has been all about pushing this idea of a European identity and citizenship that plays nice with the identities of its member countries. However, each EU country does its own thing with education and laws when it comes to teaching young folks about Europe.

In the '80s and '90s, Germany tried to build a "Europeanized national identity" to make young people aware of being European and responsible EU citizens. They wanted to encourage learning from other countries and feeling a sense of solidarity.

Fass (2007) looked at data from 1982 to 2001 and saw not much progress in a shared European identity. He thinks there's still a gap between the political big shots and the public when it comes to EU citizenship and identity. So, he suggests digging deeper into what young people think about it.

Now, the 2022 barometer is a big step forward in understanding what young people think about getting involved in politics.

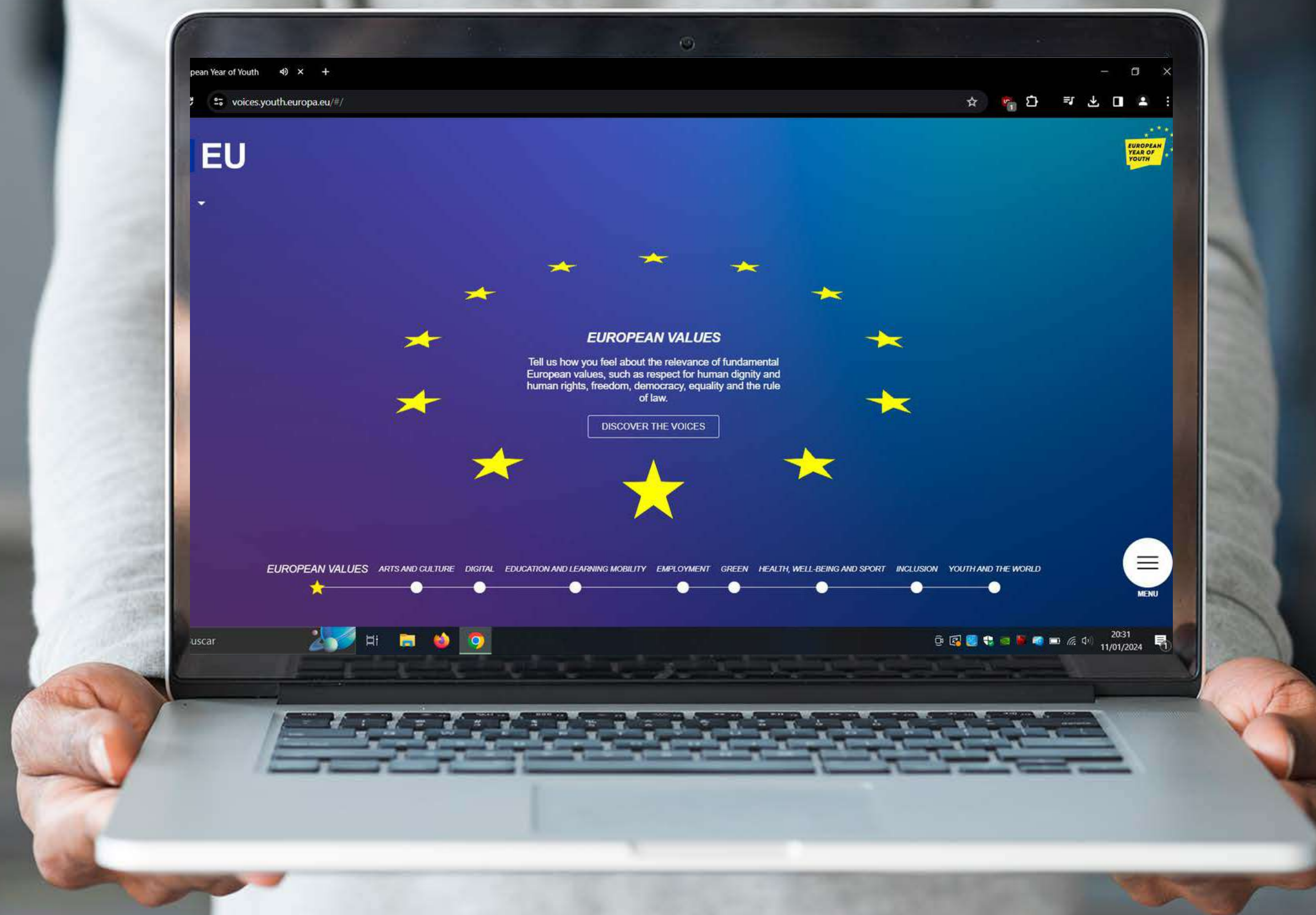
According to the latest Eurobarometer (European Commission 2023):



If schools switch up their curriculum and make it more about Europe instead of just their own country, young people might feel even more connected to Europe. Fass (2007) talked about this, saying it could help build loyalty to Europe among the new generations.

In this field, the European Union has some initiatives such as [Voice Your Vision](#), created by the European Commission, which tries to get young folks engaged by encouraging them on sharing their point of view and suggestions not only about European values, but also about other topics such as digitalization, education, employment or their role in the world.

**EUROPEAN
YEAR OF
YOUTH**



KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Values shape who you are, what you believe in, and how you behave.
2. “Europeanized national identity” to make young people aware of being European and responsible EU citizens.
3. Shared European values, like human rights and democracy, seem to be what really makes people feel European, more than stuff like the economy or history.
4. Young people are more into politics on social media.
5. Desperate need for open forums and ways to connect policymakers with regular people's lives.



CHAPTER 3

**CREATIVE TOURISM AS A
FORM OF CULTURAL TOURISM**



UNICEF defines civic engagement as "individual or collective actions in which people participate to improve the well-being of the community or society at large".

The most common forms of civic engagement include actions such as voting, attending community meetings or events, contacting public officials, attending protests, signing petitions, or writing articles about one's community.

There is much debate about whether this set of activities may be too limited, especially in the digital age and from the perspective of young people.

Today, a significant proportion of young people live in a digital environment. Therefore, to think that their civic engagement also takes place in digital media is reasonable. The distinctions between "online" and "offline", as totally separate spheres, are inaccurate for young people.



In recent decades, young people's participation in "traditional" civic engagement actions, such as voting or joining political parties (in the case of young adults), has steadily declined.

SNS favour horizontal and non-hierarchical communication, which is important for young people who remain excluded from mainstream media, such as the press, radio, or television, due to structural and ideological constraints.

Thus, social networks offer a field of political participation for many marginalized groups with apathetic behaviour in the mass media.

Youth civic engagement is especially important because:

1. Education and exposure to civic issues by young people contribute to creating future civic actors.
2. It creates a sense of socio-political empowerment, which improves young people's well-being and self-esteem.

A diverse group of young people, including men and women of various ethnicities, are smiling and looking towards the camera. They are dressed in casual clothing, and some are wearing t-shirts with text like "Obtained Affirmative Volun".

In short, online social networks are a suitable tool for young people to participate in society and to develop civic engagement. At the same time, European values favour the development of civic engagement among young people.

Young people are not apolitical or disengaged from civic causes but are understandably frustrated and cynical because of four decades of neoliberal policies that have presented youth as a threat to democracy and law and order.

Politicians introduce measures to educate and train "future citizens", but at the same time young people are excluded from political participation. In practice, this means that the most effective organizations for youth advocacy are those that allow or encourage young people to participate:

- Seek information on the issues at hand.
- Participate in group decision-making.
- Explore diverse viewpoints on the issues discussed.
- Find new ways of perceiving the issues at hand.
- Develop communication, public speaking and debating skills.
- Take on leadership, organizational and representative roles.
- Participate in community service.

This initiative can be summarized in 10 main ideas:



In this field, there have been projects developed by the European Union.

For example, the Youth Democracy Academy (YDA) focused on engaging young people aged 17–21, from 12 different EU countries, to move towards a Europe closer to its citizens. To build dynamic and positive European societies by supporting the development of youth programmes based on values such as solidarity, citizenship, democracy, and respect for diversity, where young people can develop their sense of critical thinking and belonging to the European Project. This project took the form of the "EU is YOU" campaign.

The campaign was created by young people for young people in a Get-Out-The-Vote format, which means that its main (and only) objective was to encourage young people to vote in the European elections.

Be neutral:

This means that the campaign does not endorse, support, or promote any political party, candidate, elected office, or any party-related opinion. All political sectors should be represented. There should be an organization to facilitate effective and efficient events.

Plan ahead:

This is based on a strategically developed plan, which schedules activities in a way that maximizes their impact on the target group. Local help is needed to attract people, especially from other areas.

Master the issue:

In this case, to understand how elections work is essential, what the chosen institution does and how it works. In addition, to be prepared to answer questions from the audience/participants and not to give false or incorrect information is always important. It is better to check and come back to the question later.

The "EU is YOU" campaign was created to build dynamic and positive European societies by supporting the development of youth programmes based on values such as solidarity, citizenship, democracy, and respect for diversity, where young people can develop their sense of critical thinking and belonging to the European Project.

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Establish local partnership:

A campaign has the potential to reach many more people outside the 'politically interested' bubble if it establishes partnerships at the local level with, for example, local businesses, libraries, youth centres, etc.

A partnership does not necessarily involve direct fundraising. It can also consist of indirect fundraising (e.g., use of a free room) or logistical support during an action (e.g., allowing posters to be put up).

Consider the context:

A nationally or even internationally coordinated campaign should be adapted to the local context in which the actions take place.

This means that the cultural context, the socio-economic level of the population, the presence of a certain school and at what level, the average age of the population and other factors should be considered before planning the campaign.



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Adapt the tools:

Each activity may not only take place in a different environment, but also have a different target group.

To organize the activity in a way that it attracts the attention of the audience is crucial, considering the characteristics of the participants (students, passers-by, activists, etc.), the location (public space, school, institution, etc.) and the time and/or day it takes place (in the morning, on a bank holiday, etc.).

Be inclusive:

We need to consider inequalities within societies.

A good Get-Out-The-Vote campaign would consider equity and inclusion as core values by facilitating access to participants from disadvantaged backgrounds and with fewer opportunities compared to their peers.



**Diversity, Equity,
& Inclusion**

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Draw attention:

These actions must be innovative, creative, and attractive in order to attract the attention of the target group, in this case, first-time voters. Therefore, to consider not only the context and the tools, but also how the campaign is being disseminated and with which actions, is decisive.

Use non-formal education:

Non-formal education refers to planned and structured programmes and processes of personal and social education for young people designed to enhance a range of skills and competencies. Non-formal education methods contribute to the use of interesting and engaging tools to achieve a common goal.

Make it visible:

Any campaign must be highly visible, reach as many people as possible and provoke behaviours.

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1. Young people spend most of their daily lives in a digital environment.**
- 2. It is only logical that their civic engagement participation also takes place in the digital sphere.**
- 3. Following profiles, giving "likes" or retweeting "memes" can be considered as participation in this context.**
- 4. We cannot expect young people to participate in traditional events, such as strikes or protests.**
- 5. SNS is an arena for youth participation.**
- 6. Young people are more likely to participate when they play an active role.**



CHAPTER 4

**DEFINITION AND
IDENTIFICATION OF NEEDS**

In the current scenario described above, local authorities have a key role to play in disseminating European values among young people.

Beyond the widely spread stereotype where young people have a hedonistic behaviour, far from politics and more interested in looking good in the next selfie on SNS, we have found that this idea has many nuances.



Young people are more interested in politics than others think they are, although they distrust political parties and politicians.

In the current scenario described above, local authorities have a key role to play in disseminating European values among young people. Beyond the widely spread stereotype where young people have a hedonistic behaviour, far from politics and more interested in looking good in the next selfie on social networks, we have found that this idea has many nuances.

We have seen how young people are committed to their immediate environment. The volunteering activities they do tend to be with organizations local to where they live. Not all activities are equally successful. Local sports and cultural activities are the most successful and where they can most easily be counted on to participate. In general, non-formal education activities are recommended.

Non-formal education allows young people to learn by feeling part of the process. In general, we have found that young people are logically more committed to those activities where they feel that they are part of the design and active implementation process. For this reason, we recommend the opening of participatory processes for the design of the composition and calendar of activities by local entities.

Similarly, young people in the 21st century demand active participation in these activities. This means giving priority to non-formal education activities such as workshops and games, as opposed to others such as talks and colloquiums.

It is necessary that the activities designed and developed by local entities have the maximum dissemination. To this end, not all communication channels are equally good.

Traditional dissemination channels such as television, radio or the press are very little frequented by young people. Their main communication channel is online social networks. This idea is congruent in a world where online is gaining importance over offline. Since they spend most of their time on the Internet and social networks, these are also their main communication channels.

Regardless young people's preferences on SNS, there are some common recommendations to highlight:

1. Today's young people have passive behaviour on networks. That is, they watch and read rather than share and post.
2. The main sources of the messages they receive are friends and family. Young people give more attention to family and friends messages than to what it comes from other accounts.
3. It is difficult to run influencer campaigns targeting young people on these issues, as audiences are too segmented.
4. Interestingly, young people do trust the recommendations made by social media algorithms about what content they should see.
5. Local authorities' SNS campaigns should also have an active component to achieve greater participation. For example, it is preferable to develop games or participation surveys, rather than simply disseminating messages.

Differences among countries: For example, the most popular SNS in Germany and Spain are Instagram and TikTok, while in Romania is Facebook.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Local authorities have a key role to play in disseminating European values among young people.
2. Youngsters are more interested in politics than others think they are, although they distrust political parties and politicians.
3. Young people show clear support for equality and non-discrimination.
4. Non-formal education allows young people to learn by feeling part of the process.
5. Their main communication channel is SNS.
6. They watch and read rather than share and post.
7. They give more attention to family and friends messages.
8. It is preferable to develop games or participation surveys, rather than simply disseminating messages.

MOST POPULAR SNS IN
GERMANY & SPAIN



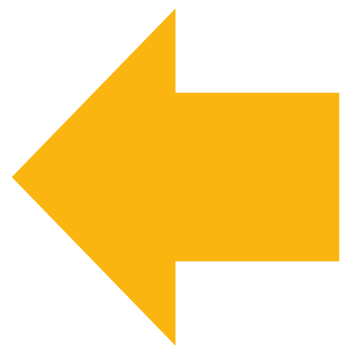
MOST POPULAR SNS IN
ROMANIA





CHAPTER 5

**ANALYSING YOUTH
PERSPECTIVES**



CHAPTER 5.1

ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA

They also indicate that they prefer to follow people they know personally or because they are part of their hobbies.

In other words, they mainly follow their friends and their posts, work colleagues, and influencers, although they mention completely different favourite accounts for some young people compared to others.

They like the news pre-selected by the networks or by algorithms, to catch up quickly.

- They prefer news summary accounts, which indicates a passive search for what the algorithms offer them rather than an active search for what they would prefer to be informed about.

Some of them don't hesitate on acknowledging they're addicted to SNS.

- Others point to their efforts to decrease usage time, temporarily switching off when they are doing something that seems important to them, and so on. They may even have taken periods off to break the addiction, but say that as soon as they return, they quickly feel addicted again.

Regarding the SNS that the young people mainly belong to and access, they say that the networks they use most are:



In the way they select accounts and profiles, they admit that they have been influenced primarily by recommendations from friends and family.

Friends and family encourage them to try them out. They also choose them influenced by recommendations from SNS **algorithms** (based on their previous activities) or from **influencers**.

They also highlight the aspect of evolution over time or their change in tastes, interests, purposes, or projects, in the use of SNS.

- It should be noted that podcasts are now booming, some are also about history, science, or education, and have an increasing number of subscribers on social networks.

Their most frequent activity in SNS is posting pictures related to news or stories about what they're doing and where they are.

- Another way of digital interaction among young people is to **"like" or repost** from their SNS accounts what they find interesting or approved for sharing.

Regarding the SNS that the young people mainly belong to and access, they say that the networks they use most are:





Using their accounts as their means of communication to **create content of collective interest is something that only a few do**, but there are some cases, sometimes with undercover identities.

The pattern of posting or interacting on networks varies according to the social network: they mainly post on Instagram, but they can participate in debates on different networks. However, some of them are **afraid of debating or discussing topics** because of the conflicts or reactions that may arise (e.g., Twitter —aka. X—).

But most of them value positively the experience of exchanging opinions on SNS and the reactions to their posts.

RECOMENDATIONS

1. The information about activities and events of the organization better in WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter or Facebook.
2. Use videos instead of text or news.
3. Look for partnerships with sports and educational institutions of your municipality.
4. Try to achieve dissemination of the messages through family and friends.
5. All the topics related to freedom, equality and human rights will cause more impact than other values.

SOME HIGHLIGHTS ABOUT SNS & YOUTH

MOST USED SNS:



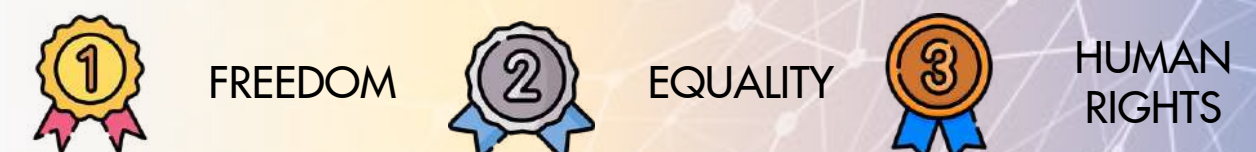
MOST FREQUENT ACTIVITIES IN SNS:

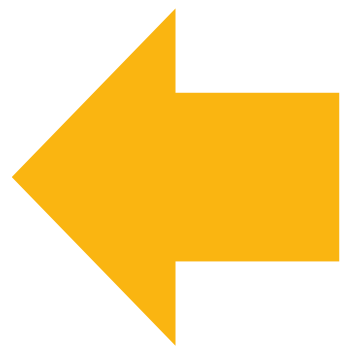


MOST FOLLOWED INSTITUTIONAL SNS ACCOUNTS:



MOST SUITABLE VALUES TO BE PROPERLY PROMOTED BY SNS:



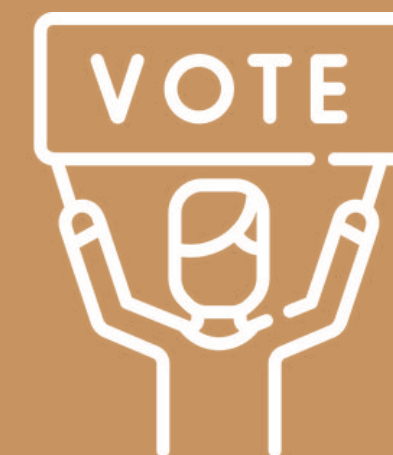


CHAPTER 5.2

**ABOUT LOCAL ACTIVITIES OF
YOUTH**

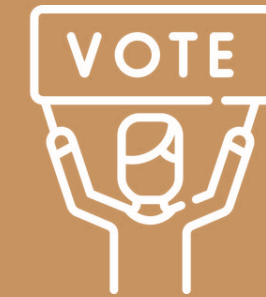


The majority of the **young people are active and participative**, although the activities in which they participate, only in some cases, are organized by Local Administrations; **mainly from their places of origin** and they participate less in events organized by Local Administrations in the places where they now reside, where they are studying or working. Rather, the activities in which they currently participate are usually organized by associations created within the **Universities** where they study, followed by those organized by various **NGOs** or by **Governments** in the case of political elections in which the majority vote.





In terms of the type of local activities in which they participate, the ones that stand out are: **political, sporting, solidarity, cultural and religious activities.**



In terms of how they participate, the following stand out: **volunteering** in the organization of local sporting or cultural events, **attending NGO meetings and supporting activities** (e.g., Food Bank), and actively **participating in demonstrations or political elections.**

Regardless of who organizes the activities in which young people participate, the topics of the events are as diverse as the hobbies and tastes of the different young people themselves: **sporting activities, social activities, trade unions or political parties.**



However, there are some common patterns in terms of the accounts or characters they follow on SNS.

The priority is **friends, classmates or workmates and family members**; people they know personally.

They also like news feeds pre-selected by the networks or by algorithms to catch up quickly. They prefer news summaries to having to go to every single newspaper to get the latest news.

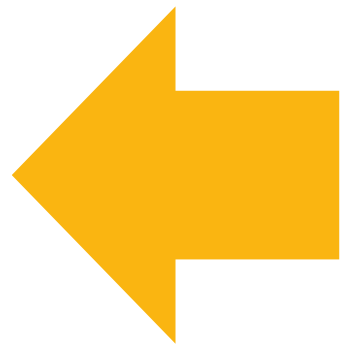


RECOMENDATIONS

- 1. Young people are not going to make an effort to find information about local activities and events. Therefore, the effort must be done by the institutions to reach these young people through SNS.**
- 2. City councils generate a certain confidence in young people, not so much their politicians. Try to offer the information through technicians and managers of sports clubs or cultural associations.**
- 3. Local issues generate important feelings among young people; local issues must be integrated with European values. This must be done more with informal activities such as games, gymkhanas, sports competitions, prizes... than using written messages.**

SOME HIGHLIGHTS ABOUT LOCAL ACTIVITIES & YOUTH

- To look for information about local activities and events is not a preference for young people.
- Town Hall SNS accounts is among the three most interesting institutions for youngsters.
- Local and European elections arouse less interest among youth.
- Young people feel a great closeness to their municipalities, much more than to their country or to Europe as a whole.
- Young people have intermediate trust in local and municipal authorities, above other territorial, or political spheres.
- Politics produces a certain interest in young people, but the problem is that they do not trust politicians or political parties.



CHAPTER 5.3

ABOUT EUROPEAN VALUES



European values must be defended on the networks since SNS are where the biggest stupid things are said and there is no punishment for that.

Among all young people from different countries, the attitude of surfing online responsibly and in line with European principles and values, which they consider to be of the utmost importance, stands out. In general, most of the participants take the information they receive about local entities, or the EU selected by the algorithm for everyone, which is conditioned by what each person has been interested in or interacted with in previous periods. As far as the EU is concerned, the **little information they receive** is within the news accounts they follow.

Regarding equity, it is pointed out that the European institutions should demand that European countries have **the same legislation of rights** and prevent them from “legislating against”. Others suggest that the tendency is for immigrants, from other countries, to have European values and rights less guaranteed in our territories.

RECOMENDATIONS

- 1. Young people have a centre-left political tendency, so messages regarding European values must take this characteristic into account. Although this trend is less pronounced for young Romanian people.**
- 2. The European authorities should make a huge effort to engage young people on social accounts oriented and directed to them.**
- 3. Values related to equality, freedom and no discrimination arise more interest than others related to law and justice, or to be candidate in an election.**

The best SNS for young people:



SOME HIGHLIGHTS ABOUT EUROPEAN VALUES & YOUTH

- A high level of economic growth should be the priority for countries according to the feelings of young people.
- The UE is the 2nd most confident institution for youngsters. This reveals the respect that the institution brings about. But at the same time is seen like an institution that is not close to young people. Only 47.3 % always vote in European elections.
- Having a democratic political system is the best way of governing their countries followed by having experts making decisions according to the feelings of the respondents.
- To share European culture and to be born in Europe are the most important elements to be European.
- It is absolutely crucial to live in a country governed democratically, but only 14.4% think they live in a completely democratic country.
- TOP 3 LEAST IMPORTANT VALUES: Right to stand as a candidate in elections; Judgements have to be respected by all; and Law and justice are upheld by an independent judiciary
- TOP 3 MOST IMPORTANT VALUES: Equal rights for all citizens before the law; All human beings should be born free and equal in dignity and rights; and Right to be free from discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.



CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE

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