UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO

UNIVERSITÀ DI TORINO

Ph.D PROGRAM

Sociology and Methodology of Social Research

38th Cohort

Department of Social and Political Sciences

PRACTICAL DIGITAL LITERACY

Youths' practical mastery of platform experiences

SPS/06

Doctoral dissertation by

Luca Giuffrè

Matr.: R13701

ORCID: 0009-0000-7341-9556

Tutor: Prof. Massimo Airoldi

Co-tutor: Prof. Carlo Genova

Director of Doctoral Program: Prof. Paola Alessandra Rebughini

Acknowledgements

"Not all who wander are lost", but I was lost.

Despite a heroic and encouraging line by Bilbo Baggins, a PhD forces the adventurer to lose their way. Yet for some, the journey becomes far less stressful when shared with the right people. For this reason, and infinitely many more, I would like to thank, first and foremost, all the professors who, to varying degrees, accompanied me throughout this research endeavour.

I am deeply grateful to Paola Rebughini for the patience in managing SOMET's anarchic punks. I wish to thank Carlo Genova, Mauro Barisione and Simone Sarti for the time they dedicated to discussing my dissertation with me. To Maria Luisa Leonini, whose inspiring lectures first sparked my sociological curiosity. My apologies for becoming a banal "Bourdieusian soldier".

My sincere thanks go to Sylvain Parasie for welcoming me at the *mèdialab* and introducing me to such a stimulating intellectual environment – and for allowing me to spend the time of my life in the greatest city in the universe. I would also like to mention Valentin Goujon and Tim Faverjon for their warm welcome to the lab and for sharing many coffees. Carlo Santagiustina deserves special mention for his truly invaluable methodological suggestions. From Amsterdam, I am grateful to Lucia Bainotti for the kind yet crucial conversations that helped me straighten the final chapters. A warm embrace also goes to Anunaya Rajhans, who treated me like a little brother and patiently guided me through the labyrinthine corridors of the University of Amsterdam.

This work would not exist without the guidance of Massimo Airoldi, whose supervision (and occasionally tough-love coaching) pushed me to reach heights I would never have imagined on my own. Infinite gratitude also goes to Alessandro's trinity: Gandini, Caliandro, and Gerosa, for their genuine interest in my research and their never-ending support and guidance through the often opaque academic market.

The walls of the university also brought me friends to whom I am enormously grateful. Laura, above all, for her constant emotional, psychological, and academic support through monthly, if not weekly, check-ins. Giulia, Ilir, and Camilla also helped me achieve one of the greatest milestones of any PhD: not losing one's mind in the summer before submission.

A fond embrace also goes to my comrades who share with me the labyrinth of infinite madness that is SOMET: Alia, Marta, Théophile, Chiara, and Giovanni, as well as Hanna and Ginny for sharing the struggles of this journey. I have not forgotten the *other* Giovanni, "Er Filosofo" as I like to call him. Thank you for everything: for letting me crash on your sofa in Paris, for the long conversations about Bourdieu, for triggering my political awakening, and for being there at my very first *manif*.

This work would also have been impossible without the wonderful life outside academia that the following people helped me build and sustain. Thanks to Andrea, with whom I discovered new frontiers of both sport and injury. To Raz, for his friendship, offered freely and without need for a *validated ticket*. To Alice, my best friend and unofficial personal therapist. I also wish to express my gratitude to the new friends I found along this journey, especially Carlos and Nico, for never letting me feel alone in Aubervilliers.

To my family, and especially my parents, thank you for your constant presence throughout my entire life, which made it possible for me to sit here and write these words in a PhD dissertation. Thank you also for your support, even if you remain understandably uncertain about what my thesis actually argues and why I now speak in terms of "capitals" and "habitus". A huge hug goes to my big brother for playing *adult life* with me in co-op. And finally, Benni – to whom I dedicate this work – for having supported me from day one, long before I decided to throw myself into this madness. I am sorry for having filled your head with Bourdieu, but endlessly grateful for everything else: for making me a better human being, every single day, and for sharing your life with me.

Table of contents

Chapter 1. Introduction **11**
Chapter 2. Teenagers and social media **19**
2.1 Social media: expanding, accelerating, changing youth cultures 20
2.2 Youth cultures and social media through the lens of consumption 22
2.2.1 Traditional approaches to youth consumption 22
2.2.2 Content consumption defining youth cultures 22
2.2.3 Shifting attention towards youth social media practices 24
2.3 Social perception of digital youth cultures 24
2.3.1 Psychological approaches to problematic social media use 25
2.3.2 News media and the scholastic call of duty 27
2.4 Conclusion 28
Chapter 3. Digital literacies studies **31**
3.1 Digital literacy for the knowledge economy 31
3.2 Digital literacy and the digital divide 34
3.2.1 First-level digital divide 35
3.2.2 Second-level digital divide 36
3.2.3 Third-level digital divide 37
3.2.4 Digital literacy(ies) to bridge digital divide 39
3.2.5 Data and media literacies 42
3.3 Digital literacy as shared competence 48
3.3.1 The New Literacy Studies 48
3.3.2 The New London Group 49
3.3.3 The heritage 50
3.3.4 The contemporary relevance of bottom-up approaches 51
3.4 Conclusion 53
Chapter 4. Algorithmic agency within platforms **55**
4.1 Platformisation and datafication 55
4.2 Recommender systems as social agents 57
4.3 Algorithmic agency and computational authority 59

4.4 Platform grammars, vernaculars and affordances 61
4.4.1 Platform grammars 62
4.4.2 Platform vernaculars 63
4.4.3 Platform affordances 64
4.5 Conclusion 66
Chapter 5. Practical digital literacy 69
5.1 Defining practical digital literacy 70
5.1.1 Dimension 1: shared competence 72
5.1.2 Dimension 2: dispositional competence 73
5.1.3 Dimension 3: structured competence 75
5.2 Conclusion 77
Chapter 6. Empirical strategy 79
6.1 The school fieldwork 80
6.1.1 Research Design 81
6.1.2 Sampling strategy and data collection 85
6.1.4 Analytical strategy 88
6.2 TikTok fieldwork 92
6.2.1 Computational ethnography 92
6.2.2 The research persona method 93
6.2.3 Accessing the field and data collection 94
6.2.4 Analytical strategy 94
6.3 Conclusion 98
Chapter 7. Shared understanding 100
7.1 Brief literature overview: the flow and platform vernaculars 101
7.1.1 Research question 103
7.2 Investigating the shared understanding 103
7.2.1 The group interviews 104
7.2.2 Analytical Strategy: Thematic Analysis 105
7.3 Findings 105
7.3.1 Early platform experiences 105
7.3.2 Practices of distinction 109

7.3.3 Algorithmic flow 117
7.4 Discussion and conclusion 124
Chapter 8. Dispositional understanding 130
8.1 Literature review 130
8.1.1 Understanding digital youth cultures through the lens of consumption 130
8.1.2 Sociological approaches to taste, distinction and legitimisation processes 131
8.2 Outlining the research question 132
8.3 Measuring social media consumption: the co-constructed taste 133
8.4 Measuring class in platformised youth cultures: the stratified socialisation model 134
8.5 Item selection and the sample 136
8.6 Analytical strategy: Multiple correspondence analysis 144
8.7 Findings 145
8.7.1 Interpreting the main dimensions 147
8.7.2 Introducing the supplementary variables 152
8.8 Discussion and conclusion 157
Chapter 9. Structured understanding 161
9.1 Literature review 162
9.1.1 The what: exploring youth cultures through content consumed 162
9.1.2 The how: exploring youth cultures through social media practices 163
9.1.3 Structured understanding as opus operatum 163
9.2 Methodology 165
9.2.1 Computational ethnography 165
9.2.2 Outlining two gendered personas 168
9.2.3 Stage 1: Access and immersion in the algorithmic flow 169
9.2.4 Stage 2: data collection through digital methods 169
9.2.5 Stage 3: Analytical strategy 170
9.3 Findings 172
9.3.1 Structured masculinity in the flow 172
9.3.2 Structured femininity in the flow 175
9.3.3 Structured practices in the comments 177
9.4 Discussion and conclusions 183

Chapter 10. Concluding remarks **189**
References **200**

Table of Figures

Figure 1. School fieldwork's methodological workflow 96
Figure 2. TikTok fielwork's methodological workflow. 97
Figure 3. Explicative points for Axis 1 148
Figure 4. Explicative points for Axis 2 149
Figure 5. Explicative points of Axis 3 150
Figure 6. Axis 1 and 2, categories and individuals. 151
Figure 7. Axis 1 and 3, categories and individuals 151
Figure 8. Educational path, factorial plane 1-2 153
Figure 9. Interaction, favourite and least favourite social media, plane 1-2 154
Figure 10. Educational path, factorial plane 1-3 156
Figure 11. Interaction, favourite, and least favourite social media, plane 1-3 157
Figure 12. Collection of images exemplifying scripted entertainment (left and centre) and memes (right) 173
Figure 13. Collection of images exemplifying unscripted entertainment (left) and clips (right) 173
Figure 14. Collection of images exemplifying social issues (left) and sports-related content (right) 174
Figure 15. Collection of images exemplifying lifestyle (left), motivational (centre), and car-related content 174
Figure 16. Collection of images exemplifying solitary performances 175
Figure 17. Collection of images exemplifying podcasts (left), and other artistic interests (centre and right) 176
Figure 18. Collection of images exemplifying everyday life storytelling 176
Figure 13. 3D t-SNE of word embeddings coloured by video gender (male in blue, female in pink) 177
Figure 14. 3D PCA of word embeddings coloured by video gender (male in blue, female in pink) 178
Figure 15. 3D UMAP of word embeddings coloured by video gender (male in blue, female in pink) 179
Figure 16. Words association network for *scuola* in female-recommended content 180
Figure 17. Words association network for *scuola* in male-recommended content 180
Figure 18. Words association network for *preferisco* in female-recommended content 181
Figure 19. Words association network for *preferisco* in male-recommended content 182
Figure 20. Words association network for *capezzoli* in female-recommended content 183

Chapter 1. Introduction

> "Something went suddenly and horribly wrong for adolescents […]. What happened in the early 2010s that altered adolescent development and worsened mental health? […] I think the answer can be stated simply, although the underlying psychology is complex: Those were the years when adolescents in rich countries traded in their flip phones for smartphones and moved much more of their social lives online—particularly onto social-media platforms designed for virality and addiction."
>
> (*End the Phone-Based Childhood Now* by Jonathan Haidt, The Atlantic, 2024)

Social media has become one of the main concerns in contemporary discourses about adolescence. Since their widespread use at the beginning of the new Millennium, these environments have attracted attention from various societal actors, from parents, educators, scholars, to policy-makers. The COVID-19 lockdowns intensified this trend, as youths' social and cultural processes shifted online. From movies watched simultaneously, yet remotely, to endless video calls to catch up with friends, this unprecedented historical event accelerated the adoption of digital platforms among youth cultures and introduced new practices, for instance, entertainment, news retrieval, as well as shaping one's identity and managing social relationships. However, the consolidation of social media's problematic uses, such as addiction and cyberbullying, further fostered said concerns. Today's educational system is consequently called to prepare students to critically and responsibly engage with digital technologies.

Here, digital well-being is often approached through the lens of digital literacy, where being digitally competent means adopting digital technologies positively and fruitfully. This opened a broad and nuanced research strand, rooted in the enthusiasm brought about by the advent of the Internet, which emerged at the intersection of multiple literacies and is capable of shedding light on the inequalities created by digital technologies. Yet, the current debate has often overlooked the extent to which digital literacy emerges from broader social, cultural, but also technosocial dynamics that shape users' experiences, particularly those of digital youth cultures. In this dissertation, I argue that digital literacy should also be understood as a product of enculturation: a process through which historical, cultural, and social conditions are internalised and expressed through individuals' discourses and practices.

To this purpose, I developed the concept of *practical digital literacy*. Building on Bourdieu's theory of practice, I define practical digital literacy as the system of shared and dispositional understandings, expressed through structured practices and discourses, that youth cultures mobilise to navigate social media. This approach is innovative as it shifts the focus from digital literacy as an abstract knowledge to be interiorised, to seeing such competencies as the outcome of the platform enculturation. By that I mean, digital youth cultures developed what Bourdieu defined *le sens pratique* (1980): a practical mastery of the rules of the platform game, which leads youths to perceive social media experiences as relevant, appropriate, and socially accepted.

As might be expected, the exploration of practical digital literacy showed that this literacy extends far beyond the simple positive or negative, competent or not, use of social media. Platform practices indeed encompass forms of digital distinction, where consumption preferences drive processes of classification and legitimisation of prestige and relevance. Moreover, social media experiences are deeply shaped by gendered forms of symbolic violence, as the pursuit of specific gender identities through consumption becomes a site of tension and negotiation within youth cultures. Finally, practical digital literacy highlights the importance of considering the role of recommender

systems in shaping digital competencies. Today's media landscape is dominated by platforms whose defining feature is the seemingly infinite stream of algorithmically curated content. In response, youth cultures have developed complex and nuanced vernacular practices to play with these algorithms and to appropriate the spaces of action offered by platforms.

The concept of practical digital literacy contributes not only to broadening academic understandings of youth cultures and emerging forms of digital literacies, but also, and most importantly, to offering a new perspective on digital experiences as shaped by the practical mastery. This tacit knowledge operates as a Bourdieusian habitus: it is structured by past experience and, in turn, structures perceptions and choices within the fabric of everyday platform uses.

Youth cultures have long been a central object of scholarly interest, particularly since the advent of modernity. The digital age and the rise of social media platforms have shed new light on youth as an analytical category. The notion of youth as a site of cultural invention and creative resistance is rooted in the work of the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies in the 1980s (Hall & Jefferson, 1976). At that time, the study of youth cultures shifted from viewing young people primarily as oppositional to adult authority, often framed through the lenses of deviance and crisis (see e.g. Mead, 1928; Parsons, 1961), toward recognising them as active cultural producers in their own right (Hall & Jefferson, 1976).

The role of youth as cultural producers underwent significant acceleration and transformation with the advent of social networking sites. At the beginning of the new Millennium, several scholars began to investigate the social as well as cultural changes brough about by the widespread adoption of mobile phones, the Internet, and other digital technologies among young people. The well-known series on Digital Media and Learning became a key reference during this period and continues to influence contemporary research on the topic among the main references at that time, and that still characterise contemporary research on this matter (see e.g. Buckingham, 2008c; Itō et al., 2009). Among the main scholars who became particularly relevant for their contribution is danah boyd (2008, 2014; boyd & Ellison, 2007; Marwick & boyd, 2011), whose work documented how adolescents shifted cultural and social practices onto these websites, platforms that impacted how they interact with others and perceive themselves. These early digital environments were heavily oriented around the exchange of comments, posts, and content, giving rise to what Jenkins famously termed *participatory culture* (Jenkins, 2009; Jenkins et al., 2016). More recently, however, the popularity of platforms such as TikTok and Snapchat has reshaped these practices, with a noticeable move away from active participation towards more ephemeral, narrative-driven sharing of everyday life (McRoberts et al., 2017). TikTok's algorithmic *ForYou* page represents a culmination of the ephemerality of the contemporary social media experiences, with a greater focus on the personalised flow of content, rather than the sharing of personal experiences (Schellewald, 2023).

This shift opened two main approaches to the study of digital youth cultures: one centred on consumption, and the other on production and practices within social media environments. On the one hand, traditional approaches to youth cultural consumption portrayed young people as passive recipients of consumer culture, emphasising the symbolic meanings of commodities while downplaying their active agency (Best, 2009). In contrast, contemporary research highlights how digital platforms serve as arenas for youth identity signalling and social distinction,

expressed through lifestyles, brands, and digital tastes (Wilska et al., 2023). Moreover, contemporary social media consumption implies the creation of *idiocultures*, that is, shared systems of knowledge, beliefs, and customs that serve as bases for group interactions (Fine, 1979). This is particularly evident, for example, in LGBTQ+ communities that use these platforms to affirm identities and build resilient communities within heteronormative structures (Craig et al., 2021; Hiebert & Kortes-Miller, 2023).

On the other hand, production- and practice-oriented approaches to social media have shifted attention towards how young people comment, react, produce, and remix content within digital environments. A prominent example is meme-making, which functions both as a generational marker and as a playful yet meaningful cultural form (Giorgi, 2025; Giorgi & Rama, 2024). This research strand demonstrates how youths tactically use platform features to critique and subvert institutional narratives (Berwick, 2024).

In parallel with these approaches, public discourse about youth and platforms has largely been informed by psychological studies of problematic social media use, as well as by media coverage of extreme cases. Building on earlier discussions of Internet addiction (Young, 1998), contemporary research has indeed identified phenomena such as the fear of missing out (FOMO) (Przybylski et al., 2013), "phubbing" (ignoring others in face-to-face interactions), and cyberbullying. Extreme events, such as the *Blue Whale Challenge*, have further amplified public anxieties about youth digital engagement (Mukhra et al., 2019), often resulting in calls for restrictive measures like smartphone bans in classrooms (Gerosa et al., 2024). While I do not wish to underestimate the importance of psychological studies on this matter, it is worth noting that their findings are frequently internalised in public discourse, contributing to partial and normative imaginaries of youth on social media. Within this context, digital literacy has emerged as a key objective to be fostered through the educational system.

The concept of digital literacy, first articulated by Paul Gilster (1997), reflected the technological enthusiasm surrounding the advent of the Internet and the World Wide Web. These new media introduced novel competencies for navigating and manipulating information, and the notion of digital literacy captured these emerging forms of interactions (Bawden, 2008). Over time, digital literacy has evolved into a broad, complex, and nuanced field of study, encompassing multiple dimensions of social life and reflecting diverse perspectives on reality. This body of research can be broadly divided into two main strands: top-down and bottom-up approaches (Sefton-Green et al., 2009). The former informs understandings of digital literacy as a system of discrete skills. The typical aim of this research is, for instance, to map the distribution of digital competencies using measurement scales. Instead, the latter does not define digital competencies *a priori*, but explores digital literacy as sociocultural practices constantly negotiated, contested, and subjected to power relations. The two approaches are strictly bound to historical conditions.

On the one hand, the neoliberal turn associated with the rise of the knowledge economy (Powell & Snellman, 2004) positioned digital competencies as the new core requirement for the modern workforce. The Lisbon Strategy exemplified this process at the European level (European Council, 2000; Lundvall & Lorenz, 2011). This paved the way for the development of 21st-century skills frameworks, that is, top-down definitions of digital competencies designed to meet the needs of the contemporary labour market (Ahonen & Kinnunen, 2015; Van Laar et al., 2017). Alongside this economic rationale, civic purposes also emerge, as unequal access to these competencies produced

forms of digital divide. This divide manifests not only in accessing material technologies (A. J. Van Deursen & Van Dijk, 2019) but also in skills (Hargittai, 2001) and actual benefits derived from digital engagements (A. J. A. M. Van Deursen & Helsper, 2015).

On the other hand, several scholars have critiqued top-down perspectives, arguing that digital experiences do not stem from purely rational understandings of platforms, but rather from the sociocultural integration of these technologies into everyday life (see e.g. Buckingham, 2019; Livingstone, 2004a, 2008; Weninger, 2022, 2023). Furthermore, the rise of the data economy, accelerated by the vast adoption of algorithmic systems (Pasquale, 2015; Zuboff, 2019), has created new competencies to both navigate and critically engage with these technologies. For instance, scholars developed frameworks to measure users' understanding and perceptions of algorithms in online context (Dogruel et al., 2022; Low et al., 2023) and to explore how people experience and deal with the datafication of social life (A. N. Markham, 2019; A. Markham & Pronzato, 2024; Pangrazio & Selwyn, 2023).

Bottom-up approaches increasingly emphasise that understanding contemporary digital youth cultures, and the associated digital competencies, requires attention to the inherently sociotechnical nature of platform interactions. Due to the increased entanglement of human and technological practices in the fabric of everyday life, framing literacy requires accounting for the situated agency that both shapes and is shaped by broader sociotechnical systems (Bhatt, 2023; Jandrić et al., 2018). Whereas research conducted in schools already shed light on this deep intertwine, especially regarding algorithms (A. Markham, 2022) and personal data (Pangrazio & Selwyn, 2019), further work is argued to be needed to capture how youth cultures engage with platform affordances and features as not being mere tools, but rather actual agents. The popularity of recommender algorithms to curate users' platform experiences triggered a new system of practices for people - especially younger ones - to engage and appropriate these spaces. Hence, at the intersection of digital youth studies and digital literacy research, there is a shared space that demands closer exploration: mapping how, and to what extent, digital youth cultures negotiate the tension between recommender systems, which shape what users are exposed to, and users' own practices of appropriation, which aim to make these experiences feel personal and meaningful.

Recommender systems now organise much of the content consumed on social media platforms by processing behavioural data. Recent critical research emphasised that these algorithms are far from being neutral tools. Rather, they function as agents that nudge cultural consumption according to platform economic logics (Beer, 2009, 2019; C. J. Thompson, 2019). On their end, users are not passive recipients. They develop algorithmic imaginaries (Bucher, 2017b) and folk theories (Eslami et al., 2016) about how these systems work, which, in turn, inform their adaptive behaviours. Airoldi and Rokka (2022) captured this dynamic as *algorithmic articulation*: recommender algorithms shape consumption, but users also resist and manipulate these systems, creating feedback loops where user actions become new data inputs (see also Airoldi, 2021a).

This conceptualisation outlines two forms of what has been described *algorithmic agency*. On the one hand, algorithms possess agency through their capacity to "make a difference" within sociotechnical networks (Airoldi, 2023). In other words, advanced algorithms, such as machine learning systems, adapt and learn based on massive datasets that reproduce cultural traits. This triggers a process that Airoldi defines *machine socialisation* (Airoldi, 2021a), where algorithms acquire culturally embedded agency.

On the other hand, algorithmic agency can be understood as users' reflexive ability to "make the algorithms work to meet their own ends" (Bonini & Treré, 2024, p. 19). This perspective emphasises how users engage in appropriation practices (Eglash et al., 2004). These are not forms of agentic power in the political sense, since these are not practices that play against platform rules and moral economy (Bonini & Treré, 2024). Nevertheless, they represent meaningful forms of appropriation that illuminate how agency is enacted and perpetuated within sociotechnical realms.

The intersection of the literatures discussed above raises central questions: how are digital youth cultures shaped by broader social and sociotechnical dynamics? And how should digital competencies be understood in light of these processes? The new concept of *practical digital literacy*, introduced earlier, seeks to address these challenges.
Building on Bourdieu's theory of practice, I conceptualised this practical knowledge as a *practical mastery* (Bourdieu, 1972), in which dispositions acquired through past socialisation processes interact with field-specific rules and capitals (Bourdieu, 2021). Fields (including social media) are structured social spaces governed by specific tacit norms, where agents seek recognition through symbolic, cultural, social and economic capitals (Bourdieu, 1992).
From this perspective, practical digital literacy can be understood as comprising three dimensions: shared, dispositional, and structured. First, the shared dimension corresponds to what Bourdieu defined as *doxa*: the unquestioned background of assumptions and taken-for-granted norms (Bourdieu, 1972). This is particularly relevant to exploring shared imaginaries about platform experiences and algorithmic imaginaries that emerge through peer interaction and mutual recognition. Second, the dispositional dimension of practical digital literacy is rooted in Bourdieu's concept of habitus (1972, 1979), that is, the system of durable disposition formed via socialisation. This dimension highlights how subjective dispositions and material conditions shape youths' engagement with platforms. Third, the structured dimension relies on the observable outcomes, the *opus operatum* (Bourdieu, 1980). Here, structured practices, such as users' comments and recommended content, mirror interiorised dispositions of the sense for the game. This is the dimension that focuses on the habitus *in situ*, visible through the very practices it has shaped.

To this purpose, this dissertation investigates the three dimensions following three research questions:

RQ1. What are the main shared discourses and practices characterising teenagers' platform experiences?

RQ2. How does youths' social background interact with social media consumption preferences?

RQ3. How does youths' practical understanding of platforms guide their social media practices?

I addressed these questions through two fieldworks: one conducted in schools and the other on TikTok. The first study involved 719 students aged 14-19, across 39 classes in nine Italian upper-secondary schools. All students completed a survey, and 161 of them took part in group interviews. The second drew on a computational ethnography of TikTok, analysing 60 algorithmically recommended videos and over 26,000 user comments.
Findings reveal that youth cultures collectively develop practical digital literacy through peer-mediated learning and the negotiation of platform rules, norms, and participation expectations, rather than by acquiring skills in isolation. From their earliest experiences, this practical mastery takes shape through forms of distinction, whereby young

people evaluate content quality, define legitimate participation, and maintain symbolic boundaries. Moreover, I conceptualised social media experiences through two forms of engagement with algorithms: *algorithmic standouts*, referring to content that breaks through the flow of recommendations, and *algorithmic copiloting*, referring to tactical and reflexive interactions through which users shape recommendation outputs. In addition, youth digital cultures display consumption patterns that reflect the pursuit of gendered identities, while other dispositions, such as scholastic trajectories, also influence platform engagement. The TikTok fieldwork further showed that algorithmic feed segmentation reproduces the same gendered logics observed in other contexts, a pattern also evident in commenting practices. This demonstrates the co-construction of gendered environments, where user behaviours feed into algorithms, and algorithms, in turn, shape subsequent user practices, reinforcing and at times bridging gender binaries.

With this dissertation, I aim to contribute to the understanding of digital youth cultures by extending bottom-up approaches, and proposing an ontological as well as epistemological framework centred on teenagers' own discourses, dispositions and practices. Overall, my research demonstrates that practical digital literacy emerges collectively within peer cultures, revealing how adolescents negotiate platform norms, develop evaluative frameworks, and strategically engage with recommender systems rather than passively consuming content.

The structure merges two styles of doctoral dissertation: monographic and paper-based. Chapters 2 to 6 represent the shared literature review, conceptualisation of this work's main idea, and the empirical strategy. Chapters 7 to 9 report three empirical cases that explore the three relative dimensions of practical digital literacy. These are designed as journal articles, hence the potential repetition of the main theoretical and empirical elements. Lastly, Chapter 10 summarises and discusses the main findings and outlines the horizons of application in academic, policymaking, and educational contexts.

Chapter 2 introduces the main theoretical background on teenagers and social media, focusing on the role of platforms in shaping digital youth cultures (Section 2.1). Section 2.2 reviews existing research on digital youth cultures, distinguishing between approaches centred on content consumption and those concerned with practices. Section 2.3 addresses societal reactions, contrasting psychological approaches to problematic uses of social media with media discourses and moral panics surrounding digital adolescence.

Chapter 3 turns to digital literacy studies. As previously noted, this research is divided into top-down and bottom-up approaches, reflecting both economic and civic aims. Section 3.1 discusses top-down, economically driven frameworks, such as 21st-century skills, designed to prepare the workforce for the knowledge economy. Section 3.2 examines civic approaches focused on the three levels of the digital divide. Section 3.3 summarises bottom-up approaches, situating them within the traditions of the New Literacy Studies and the New London Group, and tracing their development into more recent perspectives such as post-digital literacy.

Platforms are the common ground of these different research strands that need further investigation. Hence, Chapter 4 explores platform studies (Section 4.1). Within this context, recommender systems are understood as social agents (Section 4.2), shaping user agency while internalising cultural dispositions through iterative interactions. Section 4.3 discusses algorithmic agency, conceptualising the sociotechnical entanglement of recommended content and user appropriation. Section 4.4 extends this discussion by examining the logics of

platform grammars and users' vernacular practices, mediated by affordances that structure what users can do on platforms.

Chapter 5 develops the dialogue across these literatures by introducing the concept of practical digital literacy, which represents the main theoretical contribution of the present thesis. After outlining its theoretical grounding in Bourdieu's work, Section 5.1 defines its three main dimensions: shared, dispositional, and structured. Chapter 6 presents the overall empirical strategy. Section 6.1 introduces the school fieldwork, which investigated shared discourses and dispositional dimensions of consumption among Italian upper-secondary students, and details the research design, sampling, and analytical strategies. Section 6.2 focuses on the TikTok fieldwork, explaining its epistemological basis in computational ethnography, the research persona method, and the computational techniques used to analyse the data.

Chapter 7 is the first empirical chapter, examining the shared understanding of young people's social media experiences through group interviews in schools. Section 7.1 presents the relevant theoretical framework, particularly the concept of social media flow, while Section 7.2 outlines the methodology. Section 7.3 presents the findings, arguing that youth digital cultures undergo a process of platform enculturation from their earliest experiences. Accessing shared discourses thus provides insight into this process of platform socialisation, from early encounters to current forms of distinction and perceptions of algorithmic flows. Findings reveal that youth cultures engage with platforms' algorithmic flows in nuanced ways. Their consumption of platform content heavily relies on what stands out from within these flows. To further personalise these experiences, they develop what I call *copilot practices*, that is, active forms of collaboration with recommender systems that treat algorithms as companions in navigating digital spaces. These creative practices, such as strategic liking and commenting, represent forms of appropriation that highlight the role of algorithmic agency in reframing digital literacies. Rather than an individual skill, digital literacy emerges here as a peer-mediated, sociotechnical process through which youth cultures negotiate platform norms.

Chapter 8 explores the dispositional dimension of platform experience. Section 8.1 reviews sociological research on youth consumption, especially theories of taste and distinction. Section 8.2 introduces the research question, while Sections 8.3 and 8.4 address challenges in measuring social media taste within algorithmically curated environments and defining social class in youth cultures. Section 8.5 explains item selection and sampling procedures, and Section 8.6 presents the rationale for using Multiple Correspondence Analysis. Section 8.7 interprets the analytical outputs, including the role of supplementary variables. The main outcome from the analysis is that the social media consumption among the sample is structured along three principal axes: gendered identity performance, highbrow versus lowbrow cultural engagement, and individual versus social forms of participation. The chapter contributes to showing how traditional class-based distinctions have been replaced by generational patterns, educational choices, and platform-specific capital as the primary sources of symbolic distinction. Inherited economic and cultural capital from parents exerted surprisingly little influence on platform consumption patterns.

Chapter 9 investigates the structured dimension of practical digital literacy. Section 9.1 situates the analysis within research on platformised youth consumption and practices such as commenting. Section 9.2 outlines the methodology, drawing on computational ethnography and describing the TikTok personas used for exploration.

Section 9.3 presents the findings, showing how algorithmic flows produce structured forms of recommendation that mirror internalised competences, and how users reproduce this knowledge through structured practices such as commenting. This chapter further contributes to the sociotechnical nature of platform experiences by showing how recommender algorithms do not merely filter content but actively reproduce cultural traits inferred from users' datafied tastes. Moreover, comment sections represent ritualised spaces where youth cultures collectively negotiate meanings. They therefore provide key environments in which to explore young people's tacit platform norms as well as the social and cultural dynamics.

Finally, Chapter 10 discusses and concludes the dissertation by synthesising the findings, outlining their contributions to broader debates and academic understanding, and reflecting on epistemological opportunities. It closes by acknowledging the study's limitations and pointing to directions for future academic and non-academic work.

Chapter 2. Teenagers and social media

The concept of youth cultures has animated scholarly debates for well over a century, evolving dramatically as new research has challenged older, reductive views of young people. Initially, youth were primarily studied through the lens of deviance, crisis, and transition, reflecting the influence of early disciplinary frameworks depicting adolescence as a universal, turbulent stage (Hall & Jefferson, 1976; Mead, 1928) to sociology's preoccupation with social control and delinquency (Parsons, 1961). In these models, youth cultures were often portrayed as countercultures, defined by their opposition to adult society and mainstream norms. This perspective tended to homogenise youth experience, focusing on generational conflict and viewing youth as problematic, incomplete adults rather than social actors in their own right (Bucholtz, 2002).

However, as youth studies grew, especially in the post-war decades, a paradigm shift occurred. Scholars increasingly recognised that youth were not merely reacting to adult authority but were engaging in distinctive cultural production, forming subcultures with their own languages, rituals, identities, and moral codes. This shift was catalysed by anthropological and sociological research emphasising the active agency of young people in shaping their social worlds. For instance, Eckert's (1989) ethnographic work in U.S. high schools demonstrated that adolescent peer groups were not simply miniature, oppositional versions of adult society, but autonomous communities with unique norms, aspirations, and ways of negotiating status and belonging. The "burnouts" and "jokes" she described embodied different ways of *doing* adolescence, each with its own logic, values, and social practices. This underscored the complexity and diversity of youth cultural experiences.

The Birmingham School of Cultural Studies, led by figures such as Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson, and Paul Willis, further radicalised this perspective, placing youth cultures at the centre of analyses of class, resistance, and social reproduction. Their seminal works (see e,g, Hall & Jefferson, 1976; Willis, 1977) explored how working-class youth, though positioned at the margins of institutional power, created their own cultural worlds through music, fashion, language, and style. These were not merely acts of rebellion, but sites of cultural invention, where young people negotiated identities, articulated grievances, and sometimes subverted dominant structures of meaning (Schwartz & Merten, 1967). Willis's *Learning to Labour*, for instance, showed how British working-class young people rejected the meritocratic ethos of the school, instead investing in a counter-school culture that valorised manual labour, masculinity, and solidarity among peers. This culture was not simply a failure to adapt, but a creative response to the structural constraints and inequalities embedded in the education system.

Moving beyond these traditions, more recent scholarship highlighted the intersectional character of youth culture, emphasising how class, race, gender, and migration status shape young people's experiences in profound and often unequal ways. Antonelli's (2021) ethnographic research, for example, confirms how adolescence is not a universal stage but a deeply stratified social experience. In her fieldwork with working-class migrant youth in Italy, the author reveals how material conditions frame young people's possibilities for cultural participation. For some, adolescence is a time of creative exploration, identity construction, and peer solidarity; for others, it is marked by exclusion, stigmatisation, and the imperative to "grow up" rapidly in order to support family.

Digital technologies, especially social media, have further transformed the landscape of youth culture, offering new

spaces for connection, creativity, and identity work, but also forms of surveillance, commercialisation, and social sorting. As young people increasingly mediate their social lives through platforms, apps, and screens, the boundaries between online and offline cultures blur, and the role of adults as gatekeepers or adversaries becomes more complex.

2.1 Social media: expanding, accelerating, changing youth cultures

The late 1990s have been characterised by an excellent diffusion of Web-based technologies, namely a phenomenon that would later be referred to as *the dot-com boom*. The consequent gradual shift of the teenagers' social life onto digital devices caught the attention of varied actors, first and foremost parents, news media and academia, who started to reason about the emerging harms deriving from widespread use of the Internet. During the first decade of the New Millennium, indeed, several scholars considered these technologies to be capable of reducing social connection and well-being among US adolescents. At the base of these concerns, three central assumption guided the early approaches: "(a) the Internet motivates adolescents to form superficial online relationships with strangers that are less beneficial than their real-world relationships and (b) time spent with online strangers occurs at the expense of time spent with existing relationships, so that (c) adolescents' social connectedness and well-being are reduced." (Valkenburg & Peter, 2009, p. 1). The growing apprehension towards the Internet allows us to better situate the academic gaze towards the early 2000s. These years were characterised by the spread of a broad array of technologies – especially within Western countries – which teenagers employed to conduct everyday social life. Indeed, by the beginning of the new Millennium, most of the US households owned a personal computer, and the same happened to mobile phones, which in two decades became fast, portable, and durable (Agar, 2013). The technological advancement and consequent commercialisation can be considered among the main factors favouring the popularity of social media among teenagers, with Friendster being the first.

In the early 2000s, indeed, thousands of US teenagers were increasingly spending time on Friendster, which became the online environment *par* excellence to manage social relationships, foster hobbies, and read the news (boyd & Ellison, 2007). The conjunction of a young generation growing up - and apparently spontaneously at ease – in a context rich in digital technologies led some authors to define these groups as "digital natives" (Prensky, 2001). Although later research confirmed that other factors, such as parental education and gender, influence such competence (Hargittai, 2010), a set of practices or skills emerged as the foundation for participation in youth online environments. The fall of Friendster as a popular social network among teenagers, in fact, happened after the platform decided to eliminate non-individual profiles (boyd & Ellison, 2007). These so-called *fakesters* were profiles of varied nature, such as college students, group profiles attending the same educational institution, or music bands promoting their music and events. This choice fuelled the emergence of another social network with a more open stance regarding such profiles, that is MySpace, which would rapidly become the most populated social media. The increasing popularity of this platform further changed the way in which teenagers carried out their social life. Here, one of the central aspects of MySpace used to be that it encompassed many of the aspects characterising the Web 2.0, in particular the "perpetual beta": the developing and constantly adjusting platforms based on users' preferences and choices (Ellison & boyd, 2013). Indeed, whereas users put great effort into creating and managing

their personal profiles, MySpace allowed them to personalise the aesthetic by introducing elements of HTML code. This fostered a *copy/paste* code culture to generate aesthetics, including non-experts (Perkel, 2008).

The popularity of social media among teenagers increased almost constantly in the past twenty years, with successive waves of platform adoption. For example, while most U.S. teens were on Facebook in the mid-2010s, only about one-third of them remain today (Pew Research Center, 2023). Conversely, platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok have risen rapidly, each introducing features that fundamentally altered how these platforms are used.

Snapchat, for instance, drove a key paradigm shift by introducing features that encourage the constant sharing and viewing of everyday moments. Released by two Stanford undergraduates, Snapchat initially allowed users to send disappearing text messages and photos. With the launch of Stories in 2013, users could compile sequences of ephemeral content visible to their network for 24 hours, prompting frequent returns to the platform to check for updates (McRoberts et al., 2017). Instagram later adopted a similar feature, Instagram Stories, emphasising the freedom to post without "worrying about overposting" (Instagram Blog, 2016). These changes have reshaped both how young people socialise and how they pursue hobbies online. Whereas early social media often involved crafting a permanent, curated online identity through posts carefully designed for a broad, imagined audience (boyd, 2014), the new formats encourage spontaneous, narrative sharing of daily life. The focus has shifted from accumulating a polished profile to exchanging ephemeral, in-the-moment experiences, reducing the sense of being under constant scrutiny. As a result, digital socialisation has become more fluid and conversational, and leisure activities increasingly intertwine with these ongoing, everyday exchanges.

This evolution reflects broader trends in youth digital cultures, which saw the increasingly central role of platforms as sociotechnical agents (Airoldi, 2021a). Platform features and affordances play a central role in mediating social and identity-making processes, along with habits, expectations, and the sense of belonging (Prieur et al., 2023). Here, TikTok represents the peak of such a historical sociotechnical conjuncture, which Gerbaudo (2024) defined as the second generation of social media. Its emergence has been characterised by the resonance and amplification of two main aspects previously introduced: the perpetual beta and the ephemeral content. Said platforms, indeed, rapidly became popular during the pandemic (Kale, 2020), reaching 1.7 billion users worldwide (We Are Social et al., 2024). TikTok's most relevant feature is the ForYou page, namely the main section of the platform where the user is exposed to sequences of videos algorithmically curated in accordance with users' interests and platform behaviours. This is constructed around a relatively limited number of interactions, such as liking, commenting and sending the content to others, along with the possibility of scrolling down to watch the following video. Indeed, as TikTok increasingly permeates specific situations in teenagers' everyday life (Van Dijck, 2013), scrolling down sessions allow the platform to mimic users' interests, thereby producing a tailored and entertaining experience. This is fundamental for TikTok to be situated in the escapist necessities of users, which the Covid-19 pandemic particularly brought upon (Schellewald, 2023).

The spread of social media usage in teenagers' social life is a consolidating phenomenon that started around twenty years ago. As seen previously, the adoption of digital technologies by teenagers always caught the attention of varied actors, mirroring historically consolidated approaches to the concept of youth, which is seen as an exposed

population to be protected. For instance, Buckingham (2008a) noted that the psychological approach considers adolescence as a period of crisis whereby the individual has to make choices, investments, and then become self-aware. Equally, the sociological approaches tend to consider such development – namely *socialisation* in sociological terms (ibidem) – similarly to passive recipients being filled by external inputs. Hence, adolescence is often constructed as *at risk,* and corrections are needed to solve its deficiencies.

2.2 Youth cultures and social media through the lens of consumption

The study of youth cultures has undergone significant shifts in recent decades, particularly as digital technologies proliferate and social media platforms become central to young people's lives. Consumption has long provided a foundational lens for understanding youth identities, social belonging, and cultural change. However, as social media environments evolve, so too do the approaches scholars use to examine how teenagers interact with these platforms.

2.2.1 Traditional approaches to youth consumption

Consumption is a central lens for exploring youth cultures, anchoring research in the ways that goods, media, and cultural texts serve as resources for identity performance and peer group membership. During the 1980s and 1990s, this scholarship often moved away from class-fixed interpretations, focusing instead on fluid styles and media images and positioning youth as emblematic consumers in late modernity (Wallace & Kovacheva, 1996). Consumption in this sense was understood as a set of cultural codes and symbols through which social meaning was produced and interpreted. Youth were seen as the vanguard of style, fashion, and expressive culture, with their consumption choices, whether in music, clothing, or media, helping to redefine cultural hierarchies and group boundaries.

Yet, these perspectives often portrayed youth as relatively passive recipients of a monolithic consumer culture, emphasising the symbolism of commodities over the active agency that young people exercise over those commodities (Best, 2009). Over time, research has increasingly recognised the creative ways that youth appropriate consumer resources for their own purposes, such as marking social positions, negotiating belonging, and constructing identities. For instance, consumerism overcame the boundaries of the social ideology to be intertwined in lived practices (Deutsch & Theodorou, 2010). This is clearly manifested in the gendered practices through which youth cultures enact their identity. Research underlined how young self-identifying females may use consumption to perform femininity and aspirations for independence. In contrast, young self-identifying men often align their consumption with expectations of being providers for family and community. This scholarship thus illustrates how consumption is deeply intertwined with broader social norms, personal aspirations, and the everyday identity work that defines adolescence.

2.2.2 Content consumption defining youth cultures

As digital technologies have redefined the landscape of youth cultures, scholarly attention has turned to more specific aspects of consumption, especially in relation to what, how, and why young people consume and produce content on social media platforms. Here, platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, or TikTok host forms of

consumption that are no longer a passive process of receiving and interpreting media messages. Instead, it encompasses the active curation of lifestyles, brands, and tastes. These processes are vital components of identity signalling and social distinction within youth cultures (Wilska et al., 2023). Youth negotiate group boundaries and construct belonging by aligning themselves with particular communities of taste, aesthetics, and digital practices, while also distancing themselves from others. This dynamic echoes Fine's (1979) *ideocultures*, that is, the system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviour, and customs shared by members of an interacting group, whose members can refer to and employ as a basis of further interaction. Moreover, platforms and genres become arenas for negotiating identities, friendships, and cultural capital (Leonhardt & Overå, 2021). In this sense, digital environments amplify the contingency of consumption, as seen in the gaming domain. Choices about which games to play, how to play them, and with whom are deeply implicated in the performance of gendered, sexual, and classed identities. Marginalised groups use social media as critical sites for affirming identities and building community. Through the consumption of cultural symbols, aesthetics, and narratives – whether in dialogue with mainstream culture or not – these young people create spaces of resilience and affirmation, using digital platforms to survive and thrive within heteronormative social structures (Craig et al., 2021; Hiebert & Kortes-Miller, 2023).

At the same time, the digital sphere's centrality in youth lives creates new pressures and vulnerabilities. Rodgers and Rousseau (2022), for instance, highlight how exposure to idealised body images and lifestyle content on platforms like Instagram can exacerbate body dissatisfaction, particularly among adolescents. Social media thus becomes a site where the positive possibilities of self-expression and community-building exist alongside and in tension with new forms of normative pressure, surveillance, and commercialisation.

Building on this, a growing body of research examines not only what is consumed, but also how specific types of content structure youth engagement in digital spaces. Early studies on youth political participation, for instance, explored how online content could expose young people to civic issues and inspire forms of political engagement (Gerodimos, 2008). More recent research turned to newer content formats, such as viral challenges, dance trends, and ephemeral videos, which have become among the mainstream content consumed on platforms like TikTok (Bainotti, 2024a; Kobilke & Markiewitz, 2024). The explosive popularity of TikTok challenges during the pandemic, for example, reveals how temporary visibility and fleeting attention structures shape youth cultures of consumption, with young people curating and sharing content that is not just performed for an imagined audience, but performed collectively, in real time.

The aesthetic and cultural trends popularised by teenage girls illustrate not only the centrality of gendered identities, but also how digital platforms have shifted from spaces of passive reception to arenas of creative cultural production and identity experimentation (Kennedy, 2020). These trends often transcend national and linguistic boundaries, yet remain powerfully shaped by local, classed, and racialised experiences. Concurrently, research on hypersexualisation illuminates how minors themselves perceive self-sexualising content, with ambivalence and often sharp distinctions between their own practices and those of peers, highlighting the complex negotiations of authenticity, empowerment, and stigma that characterise youth digital participation (Soriano-Ayala et al., 2023).

2.2.3 Shifting attention towards youth social media practices

The next layer in this evolving body of work is the turn toward social media practices, that is, how young people comment, react, produce, and remix content within digital environments. Commenting sections, for example, have become critical sites for peer communication, informal deliberation, and even political engagement (Marquart et al., 2020). Here, youth not only consume news or entertainment but also actively shape public discourse through their reactions and discussions, sometimes in ways that go unnoticed in more traditional media analyses.

Creative practices such as meme-making, remixing, and viral content production are increasingly recognised as central to contemporary youth cultures. Literat and Kligler-Vilenchik (2019) demonstrate how humour, irony, and memetic exchange allow young people to voice political views and collective identities, often in ways that are playful but deeply meaningful. Memes, in particular, serve as generational markers, distinguishing age cohorts through shared codes and inside jokes, yet they also reveal the ephemeral, hyper-contingent nature of digital cultural forms, namely, timely but fleeting, widely resonant yet contextually specific (Giorgi, 2025; Giorgi & Rama, 2024).

Resistance and alternative cultural production are also prominent themes. Berwick's (2024) exploration of humour and resistance within TikTok trends related to schooling illustrates how young people tactically use platform features to critique, comment on, and sometimes subvert institutional narratives. These creative engagements reflect a form of cultural agency that extends beyond passive consumption: youth are not merely recipients of media, but active producers, interpreters, and critics of digital culture.

Ethnographic and qualitative studies bring further depths, illuminating the local, situated nature of youth digital habits. Guerzoni and Matuk (2022) used netnography to analyse how the so-called Generation Z navigates TikTok during periods of social isolation, capturing not just what they consume, but how they interact, construct subjectivity, and negotiate belonging through live engagement. Likewise, research on *Ask.fm* chat conversations reveals an emergent reflexivity among young people regarding the impact and responsibility of their digital posts, suggesting the development of a self-aware, critical stance towards hate speech and online interaction (Pasta, 2019). This research reveals that, despite the visibility of broader trends, such as the shift away from Facebook towards image-first apps (Ilbury, 2022), youth digital cultures remain deeply embedded in local social contexts and personal identity projects.

2.3 Social perception of digital youth cultures

As introduced in Section 1.1, digital youth cultures have always attracted societal concerns. In the past, scholars were concerned that digital environments would have substituted in-person social interactions to the extent that it would produce a generation of isolated youths. The contemporary media ecology has further brought about new potential harms. From TikTok challenges driving self-harming behaviours, to cyberbullying, copycat, and FOMO (i.e., fear of missing out), contemporary media outlets and public discourse are still characterised by an overarching question: are social media safe for young people?

In the present work, the author is consciously avoiding the concept of media panics in developing the argumentation, as it would be insufficient to address the social, historical, and cultural complexity of the issue (Buckingham & Jensen, 2012). Nonetheless, societal concerns behind the vast penetration of digital technologies in mediating everyday life inevitably influence both the academic and media gazes. This will be the primary matter of the present paragraph, and it is summarised, for simplicity (and not in its entirety), within two main strands. On the one hand, the psychological aspects of and around problematic uses of social media. This literature is often at the core of argumentation coming from various institutions. Hence, understanding trends within this research strand is fundamental to shedding light on the theoretical substratum underpinning both institutional and everyday discourses about social media and teenagers. On the other hand, news media and the educational call to action can be perceived as complementary elements of the sum, the direct outcome of the growing concerns. This is going to be the main environment within which the present work aims to contribute.

2.3.1 Psychological approaches to problematic social media use

The psychological literature represents one of the main sources of information on which the public discourse relies when talking about the role of platforms – especially social media – in teenagers' everyday life. Here, often the concept employed in this sense is the one of problematic social media use, which has its own historical development, rooted in the broader notion of internet addiction.

By the end of the 1990s, the significant diffusion of digital technologies brought about the emergence of varied anecdotal experiences about parents becoming aware of children spending many hours surfing the web (Belluck, 1996), which had a significant impact on social life and school grades (see e.g. Young, 1996). At that time, the term addiction was also adopted in the context of the psychological approaches, since it situates its nature in pathological gambling (Young, 1998). Such psychologically-grounded bounding fostered an emerging research strand focused on exposing the relationship between technology use, with particular regard to the Internet, and users' maladaptive behaviours (Chou et al., 2005). To this purpose, early publications employed similar diagnostic criteria applied to substance addiction (see e.g. Young, 1996) and the outcomes pointed college students as among the most vulnerable to such pathologies (Widyanto & Griffiths, 2006). Although the addiction framework is still debated as efficient on this matter, compared to the one related to the behavioural disorders (Montag et al., 2024), in the last twenty years research on internet addiction expanded its boundaries by including smartphone (Ratan et al., 2021) and social media addiction (D'Arienzo et al., 2019), to a certain extent by following the fuzzy participation of teenagers in an ever-changing digital environments' ecology. Currently, the most common scales to assess the aforementioned disorders are the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (Andreassen et al., 2016) and the Smartphone Application-Based Addiction Scale (Csibi et al., 2018). Both are characterised by items reproducing substance addiction-like dimensions, namely salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict and relapse (H. Leung et al., 2020). However, research applying said frameworks is still lacking in finding a common understanding of teenagers and digital technologies. On the one hand, in fact, a meta-analysis confirmed that problematic social media usages are related to anxiety, depression and greater stress, especially among teenagers and young adults (Shannon et al., 2022), on the other hand, despite the previous correlation being moderate,

individual specific effects are still lacking and find no clarity in the current debate (Beyens et al., 2020). Moreover, a growing research area merges psychological frameworks and human-computer interaction approaches to explore the extent to which platforms are designed to be addictive (see e.g. X. Chen et al., 2023; Mujica et al., 2022; Noë et al., 2019).

The second relevant negative outcome deriving from problematic social media use is the *fear of missing out* (FOMO). Introduced in 2004 (McGinnis, 2023), FOMO became a common topic in problematic social media uses in the mid-2010s. During these years, the most consolidated definition envisaged FOMO as "pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent" (Przybylski et al., 2013, p. 1841). In other words, such experience is composed of two phases, with the first being the perception of missing out, that is, the feeling that we are missing a great event (Gupta & Sharma, 2021). Compulsive behaviours commonly follow this to maintain social connections, which, in the context of social media, is usually associated with compulsive checking for notifications or content posted (Przybylski et al., 2013).

Moreover, the fear of missing out gained centrality for its common association with adolescents. A study in 2017, in fact, exposed that adolescents with psychopathological problems, such as anxiety and depression, experience negative consequences of social media use (Oberst et al., 2017). In this causal relationship, as adolescence is generally susceptible to FOMO, family plays a central role in reducing these risks (Bloemen & De Coninck, 2020). To assess this, scholars developed a scale of ten items which, unlike the previous scales, proposes a set of statements related to the experience of missing out (Przybylski et al., 2013).

Usually related to the fear of missing out, *phubbing* attracted significant attention during the last decade. The term refers to the "act of snubbing someone in a social setting by using one's phone instead of talking to the person directly in one's company" (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2016, p. 10). In other words, for this purpose, the *phubber* is the person ignoring others in a social face-to-face setting by checking social media. Phubbing was introduced in 2012 by the Macquire Dictionary with the intent of finding a word to describe a phenomenon increasingly common among adolescents (Pathak, 2013). Apart from its explicit disrespectful nature (Anshari et al., 2016), phubbing has been explored for its possible impact on mental health in association with other social media-related addictions, such as the aforementioned fear of missing out (see e.g. Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2016) and excessive smartphone use (Wolniewicz et al., 2018). Also in this case, psychologically oriented research developed several scales, among which the most relevant is the General Scale of Phubbing (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018). Moreover, unlike what concerns the FOMO, phubbing is a phenomenon affecting also the so-called *phubbees*, namely the victims of the phubbing experience. Being a phubbee carries less satisfaction and connectedness with respect to interactions (see e.g. Vanden Abeele et al., 2016), hence Chotpitayasunondh and Douglas developed a second scale, namely the Generic Scale of Being Phubbed (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018). This leads to another relevant concept related to phubbing, which is social reciprocity. In the review of the predictors facilitating the emergence of such experiences, Arenz and Schnauber noted that sociodemographics and psychopathological profiles are just mildly associated with the phenomenon of phubbing. In contrast, media and technology factors represent a stronger incentive (Arenz & Schnauber-Stockmann, 2024). More specifically, "The general experience of being phubbed may influence one's assessment of the social normative acceptability of

phubbing and thus lead to a greater tendency to become a phubber. This, in turn, may encourage the phubbing behaviour of others, leading to a spiral of phubbing." (ivi, p. 650).

Last, among the following behaviour rapidly became among the primary matter of concerns when it comes to treat the relationship of adolescents and social media, in particular within the educational context, that is cyberbullying. The spread of social media in teenagers' social lives worsened the presence of bullying in adolescence. Most of the children and teens, in fact, experience some forms of cyberbullying or online victimisation (C. Zhu et al., 2021). The lack of geographical boundaries and the emergence of increasingly complex media ecosystems led such behaviours to reach vulnerable users at any time (Hutson et al., 2018). Moreover, the adverse psychological outcomes for the victims of cyberbullying appear greater when it comes to depression and anxiety (Larrañaga et al., 2016).

To date, the definition of cyberbullying is still at stake, as it might be considered as close to the one of bullying, albeit with substantial differences. However, scholars have already outlined the funding aspects of the phenomenon, specifically the intentionally aggressive behaviour that is perpetuated repeatedly, characterised by unequal power dynamics between perpetrators and victims, and facilitated by electronic technology (Englander et al., 2017; Vismara et al., 2022). As a matter of fact, today's cyberbullying happens in a broad spectrum of digital environments and their rapid development, as well as their constant rise and falls, prevent researchers from focusing specifically on a delimited context (Berne et al., 2013). However, social media platforms represent the most common environment for perpetrators (Giumetti & Kowalski, 2022). Over the past twenty years, cyberbullying has been categorised according to several categories: harassment, denigration, impersonation, outing, exclusion and cyberstalking (Q. Li, 2007; Scheithauer et al., 2021). Despite that, research on cyberbullying is still lacking in finding a consistent and valid measurement tool to detect the phenomenon from a psychological perspective, as noted in the review by Chun and colleagues (2020).

The emergence of the aforementioned problematic social media uses attracted concerns from a great variety of societal actors. Despite the outcomes of research on these behaviours still being at stake, the media landscape was gradually enriched by news on the direct as well as the negative impact of smartphones on adolescence (see e.g. Haidt, 2024).

2.3.2 News media and the scholastic call of duty

The emergence of the aforementioned problematic social media uses has also attracted growing attention from news media and educational institutions. While research results remain debated and often inconclusive, media outlets have tended to amplify concerns by reporting on extreme cases and harmful online phenomena.

One striking example is the so-called Blue Whale Challenge, which appeared on Russian social media in 2013 (Mukhra et al., 2019). The challenge allegedly consisted of a series of dangerous tasks culminating in suicide, and it was reported to have inspired young imitators in several countries. Stories like this, heavily covered by the press, contributed to public alarm over the risks of digital platforms. In many cases, such narratives increased parents' sense of vulnerability regarding their children's online lives and encouraged reactive rather than evidence-based policy responses (Phippen, 2025). These concerns echo a longer history of worries about youth and technology.

Already in the late 1990s, parents and institutions were debating the risks of children's exposure to explicit content online and the amount of time spent on the Internet (Potter & Potter, 2001). Today, social media platforms occupy the same role: recent surveys confirm that nearly half of U.S. parents are concerned about their children's exposure to harmful content or excessive use of social media (Gelles-Watnick, 2022).

Within this climate, schools are increasingly called upon to take responsibility for preparing students to navigate digital environments more critically and constructively. Policy debates often turn to restrictive solutions, such as banning smartphones in classrooms or postponing their introduction at an early age (Gajdics & Jagodics, 2022; Gao et al., 2014; Gerosa et al., 2024) (see e.g. Gajdics & Jagodics, 2022; Gao et al., 2014; Gerosa et al., 2024). At the same time, many scholars and practitioners argue that the more productive response lies in strengthening digital literacy education (Phippen, 2025). Early digital education initiatives, launched at the beginning of the 21st century, tended to focus on instrumental skills such as web navigation or software operation (Buckingham, 2007). However, as social media have become central to young people's everyday lives and identity-making processes, educational approaches need to go further. They must also address the cultural, social, and relational dimensions of digital participation (Charteris et al., 2018).

The literature on this topic includes various examples. For instance, Lugaro and colleagues (2023) conducted an action research with 450 high school students. The project combined survey-based data collection, educational workshops with students, and teacher training sessions. Beyond documenting adolescents' perceptions and uses of digital media, the initiative explicitly aimed to foster a more critical and conscious approach to online engagement. This demonstrates how schools can integrate empirical research and pedagogy to cultivate deeper awareness among both students and teachers.

Another valuable contribution comes from ethnographic research in education. Romito and Antonelli's (2018) ethnography can shed light on how inequalities, institutional practices, and cultural dynamics shape educational experiences. Applied to digital contexts, such approaches can enrich digital literacy programs by grounding them in the diverse and situated ways students interact with platforms. This allows for more context-sensitive interventions that go beyond generic training.

Rather than focusing solely on restrictions or technical training, the challenge for schools lies in equipping young people with the critical competencies needed to make meaningful, safe, and socially informed use of digital media. In this sense, digital literacy emerges as a fil rouge connecting societal concerns, educational responses, and research perspectives. Given its complexity and multifaceted nature, the following chapter is dedicated to unpacking this concept. It will provide the foundation on which the present work aims to elaborate, to contribute new perspectives and nuances to the ongoing debate.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter introduced research on digital youth cultures, tracing their evolution from being framed as adult countercultures to becoming active cultural producers within algorithmically mediated environments. Social media has transformed the landscape of youth cultures, introducing both new forms of cultural participation and new societal anxieties.

The first analytical focus addressed how social media has shaped young people's everyday social lives over the past two decades. Following the dot-com boom of the late 1990s and the emergence of platforms like Friendster and MySpace, digital environments fostered participatory practices among younger, primarily Western, generations (boyd, 2008; boyd & Ellison, 2007), including forms of appropriation of these spaces (Perkel, 2008). This historical trajectory culminated in contemporary platforms like TikTok, whose algorithmic feeds represent a paradigmatic shift towards flow-based, algorithmically curated content consumption (Gerbaudo, 2024).

The evolution of digital youth cultures is particularly evident when viewed through the lens of consumption. Traditional approaches often depicted young people as passive recipients of consumer culture, emphasizing symbolic meanings while downplaying agency (Best, 2009). In contrast, contemporary research highlights youth as active curators of lifestyles, brands, and digital tastes, using platforms as arenas for identity signalling and social distinction (Wilska et al., 2023). This evolution encompasses the creation of what Fine (1979) termed *idiocultures*, particularly evident among marginalised groups (i.e. LGBTQ+ communities) who use platforms to affirm identities and build resilient communities within heteronormative structures (Craig et al., 2021; Hiebert & Kortes-Miller, 2023).

A second analytical strand emphasised youth practices on platforms, such as commenting and posting. Creative practices like meme-making have emerged as both generational markers and meaningful cultural forms (Giorgi, 2025; Giorgi & Rama, 2024). This shows how contemporary youth cultures engage in tactical uses of platform content to critique institutional narratives, reflective forms of cultural agency that extend beyond the misconception of passive consumption (Berwick, 2024).

However, digital youth cultures are also observed through the lens of the potential harms deriving from social media problematic uses, as explored in the psychological literature. This perspective has generated substantial academic and public concern, since the widespread use of digital environments in the early 2000s, when parents, news media outlets, and academia began reasoning about the risk these websites would have posed for young people, especially the possibility of social isolation (Valkenburg & Peter, 2009).

The psychological literature identified several key areas of problematic social media use that have shaped contemporary discourse about digital youth cultures. Among the various relevant aspects, the chapter reported social media addiction (see e.g. Adorjan & Ricciardelli, 2021), grounded in the consolidated Internet addiction (Young, 1998). Moreover, the fear of missing out (FOMO) as well as *phubbing* represent significant areas of concern. These phenomena are associated with adolescents experiencing psychopathological problems such as anxiety and depression, with compulsive social media checking behaviours (Oberst et al., 2017). Last, cyberbullying emerged as perhaps the most serious problem, overcoming the boundaries of academic research and becoming a problem broadly discussed in public discourses.

Here, a major role in the widespread concerns about this new platform among adolescents has been played by the news media coverage and institutional responses. More specifically, media outlets have tended to amplify concerns by reporting on extreme cases, such as the well-known *Blue Whale Challenge*, thus increasing parental vulnerability regarding children's online lives and encouraging reactive rather than evidence-based policy responses (Phippen, 2025).

Taken together, psychological research, media discourse, and educational policy form a historical backdrop for the study of digital literacies. The tension between celebratory accounts of youth digital creativity and widespread anxieties about potential harms has produced a complex landscape of competing definitions, pedagogical approaches, and theoretical frameworks. This contested terrain provides the foundation for examining how digital literacy has been conceptualised, measured, and implemented across disciplinary traditions: a topic explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 3. Digital literacies studies

The rise of digital technologies mediating youths' identity making and social processes rapidly attracted the attention of various scholars that questioned how a digitally literate users should behave to pursue positive digital experiences. In this sense, the emergence of digital literacy studies can be understood as both the evolution of traditional literacies and the educational response to this issue.

Outlining the development and eventual consolidation of digital literacy studies is quite a challenge, as it spans several histories of digital technology. Various scholars already outlined polarisations and categorisations to make sense of such a complexity. For example, Sefton-Green and colleagues (2009) separate top-down and bottom-up approaches to digital literacy. On one hand, bottom-up approaches arise from digital cultures, typically outside formal education; on the other hand, top-down stances relate to government policies that promote both media narratives and educational pathways for adopting digital technologies. Moreover, Livingstone distinguished the functional element of media literacy, thus the system of skills required to engage with digital media, from its critical nature, essential to evaluate content quality, production contexts along with the ideologies and power dynamics (Livingstone, 2004a).

Drawing on these categorisations, I developed a typology to cluster digital literacies studies. The intent here is to offer a categorisation to guide the interpretative lenses behind each of the mentioned approaches to such a vast research strand. Hence, in addition to top-down and bottom-up approaches, I distinguished between large-scale and limited-scale research, thus conducted on smaller samples. This is meant to enhance the focus and the main concept that each perspective tackled in developing the constellation of literacies that emerged in the past twenty years.

Table 1. Typology structuring the literature review on digital literacy studies

Scale / Perspective	**Large**	**Limited**
Top-Down	Job market	
Bottom-up	Digital divide	Sociocultural practice

3.1 Digital literacy for the knowledge economy

Despite being a pressing and highly significant issue, digital literacy studies arose from a range of literatures dating back to the early 1980s. The final quarter of the 20th century witnessed the intersection of various academic, political, and financial movements that would ultimately establish digital competencies as crucial to society's functioning. The values of self-expression, collaboration, and community that defined the counterculture of the late 1960s did indeed align with the emerging cyberculture of the early 1970s, whose shared principles of open

access and free information presented digital technologies as catalysts for individual liberation. (Van Dijck, 2013). For instance, Fred Turner understood such convergence within the context of the *Whole Earth Catalog,* namely a blog founded by Stewart Brand at the end of the 1960s*,* wherein users could exchange and recommend products and tools. This project, according to the scholar, reproduced and fostered values about self-sufficiency, decentralisation, and knowledge-sharing, which later influenced the development of early online communities (Turner, 2008).

Another aspect that impacted the permeation of digital technologies and competencies within everyday life was the political neoliberal turn that arose in the 1980s. Indeed, these years were characterised by the so-called laissez-faire philosophy towards financial reforms, especially under the presidency of Ronald Regan, which situated technological innovations at the centre of the economic and social development, in particular concerning digital technologies (Davies & Bansel, 2007). The mixture of the aforementioned technological, ideological and economic movements fuelled and dominated the culture of Silicon Valley in the 1990s, which Barbrook and Cameron describe as the *Californian ideology* (1996). Such a problematic and oftentimes criticised optimistic stance towards the so-called digital revolution relies on technological determinism, that is, a theoretical perspective according to which the introduction of the Internet, along with the spread of personal computers, would have functioned as drivers for democratising society, empowering individuals, and reducing the need for government intervention.

This context increasingly called for a new workforce whose core competencies shifted from manual to intellectual-centred, henceforth such a phenomenon was observed under the name *knowledge economy* (Drucker, 1969; Powell & Snellman, 2004). The emerging new economic system has triggered governmental policies aimed at preparing the aforementioned workforce through competencies fundamental to facing the new challenges. The period between the first half of the 1990s and the early 2000s was, indeed, characterised by top-down governmental policies to promote digital-related competencies through both formal and informal educational contexts.

For instance, during the European Council that took place in Lisbon in 2000, the former minister of employment, Maria João Rodrigues, contributed to the formulation of what would later be called the *Lisbon strategy*, namely a set of steps to overcome the period of stagnation in terms of productivity and economic growth in the European Union (Lundvall & Lorenz, 2011). Between March 23rd and 24th, 2000, the European Council set the directions for the European transformation towards a knowledge-based economy through a variety of steps to be achieved in a decade. Among the varied trajectories proposed to make the European economy and job market competitive in the new economic environment, digital skills emerged as one of the main aspects to address to accomplish the agenda. "A European framework should define the new basic skills to be provided through lifelong learning: IT skills, foreign languages, technological culture, entrepreneurship and social skills; a European diploma for basic IT skills, with decentralised certification procedures, should be established in order to promote digital literacy throughout the Union" (European Council, 2000). The Council fostered reforms throughout the member states. In Italy, for example, the *Lisbon strategy* was first enacted through the Berlinguer Reform (Law 30/2000) - aimed at acquiring technological tools – and later through the Moratti reform, which was focused on the adoption of digital skills by students and educators (Liotino et al., 2023, p. 153).

The following decade would have been characterised by an incredible array of initiatives, more or less institutionalised, which inevitably caused the consolidation of a system of competencies fitted for the purpose outlined so far. Such a competency sphere has been described as 21st-century skills, since it generally refers to the capability of "[selecting] knowledge from the amount of available information and effectively apply such knowledge" (Van Laar et al., 2017, p. 577). The vague definition is fundamental to situate better the varied dimensions that usually are covered within the context of this research strand, such as collaboration, communication, digital literacy, citizenship, problem solving, critical thinking, creativity and productivity (Voogt & Roblin, 2012). Hence, even though the broader concept of 21st century skills appears not to be directly related to Information and Communication Technologies, the gradual consolidation of digital literacy produces such integration. Van Laar and colleagues, in fact, noted that in the literature the integration of digital skills within the framework of the 21st-century competencies is usually structured along varied dimensions, namely technical knowledge, information management, communication (i.e. ensuring that the meaning is expressed effectively), collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, and problem solving (2017). These dimensions explain not only how digital competencies are designed and operationalised, but also how such skills are envisaged to make people achieve the ideal citizen of the knowledge economy.

Here, since the adoption of the *Lisbon strategy* by the member states of the EU, the school system represents one of the leading actors in the mission of preparing society to face the knowledge economy. This favoured large-scale projects specifically oriented – or at least integrating - digital literacy as their primary objectives. For example, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), an international policy-making body, launched the Future of Education and Skills 2030 project in 2015 with the intent of understanding and preparing the education system to design and implement learning environments able to intercept competencies brought upon by a changing job market (OECD, 2019). This example is reported because the project is considered among the leading frameworks that have emerged in the last few years by corporate, governmental, and non-governmental institutions to address this issue. As a matter of fact, in their meta-analysis, Martínez Bravo and colleagues (2021) referred to the OECD among the most relevant 21st-century skills-related frameworks, namely ATCS, enGauge, NAEP, NETS, P21, UNESCO, and the EU[1].

Furthermore, as the frameworks landscape increasingly aims to deliver digital literacy initiatives within educational contexts - whether in formal or informal settings, inside or outside classrooms - there remains no consensus on the definition of digital literacy. This highlights one of the main features of digital literacy studies, which will also be relevant in the following paragraphs, that is, the flexibility of the literacy concept and, consequently, digital literacy, as notably discussed by Chase and Laufenberg (2011).

However, over the past 20 years, these frameworks have expanded the concept of 21st-century skills to include not only job-related contexts, but also the social and multicultural aspects that typically define the broad range of digital technologies. Some of them have focused on proposing evaluation or measurement scales, thereby setting

[1] Respectively: "Assessment and Teaching of 21 Century Skillsen", "Gauge 21stcentury Skills: Literacy in the Digital Age", "Technological Literacy and Engineering Framework for 2018", "National Assessment of Educational Progress", "National Educational Technology Standards", "OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030", "Partnership for 21st-century skills", "A Global Framework of Reference on Digital Literacy Skills for Indicator 4.4.2", "Digital Competence for lifelong Learning".

and orienting future research (Ongardwanich et al., 2015), while others have mainly concentrated on implementing these competencies in real-life scenarios. In this context, what emerges is a combination of non- and technical skills, such as creative thinking and interpersonal competence, which highlights the need to train self-reflexive users to adopt digital technologies. in adopting digital technologies.

The framework's approach, yet, falls short in representing the actual digital experiences that shape everyday life in the digital world. Large-scale projects, as we will discuss in the next section, would greatly benefit from socially situated and constructed approaches. For example, one of the under-researched aspects of this issue is students' perception and attitude towards 21st-century skills. Students tend to view social skills as among the most important when it comes to facing 21st-century competencies (Ahonen & Kinnunen, 2015). This social dimension seems to be particularly linked to collaborative problem-solving attitudes (S. Li et al., 2023), which underlies the 21st-century paradigm.

Notwithstanding that, educational stakeholders have increasingly adopted such frameworks, in particular the formal education one, albeit with discrepancies that have affected its efficacy (Kain et al., 2024). In a recent study by Nehring and colleagues (2019), only a third of the educators who stated they applied 21st-century skills in their courses actually incorporated these competencies, while the remaining part introduced misconceptions. The main issue here is the presence of an educators' divide between the shared understanding of the importance of providing students with the appropriate knowledge and the actual competencies taught in the courses.

This opens to another relevant research strand related to the digital literacy of teachers and educators, which is a topic that firmly emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic (M. Li & Yu, 2022). Previous research, in fact, confirmed that teachers still "have a low or medium-low digital competence, as well as the absence of certain competencies, especially those related to the evaluation of educational practice" (Basilotta-Gómez-Pablos et al., 2022, p. 1).

Despite the necessity of preparing the new workforce to face the challenges deriving from an increasingly ICT-based society, most of the 21st-century skills frameworks are characterised by an overall optimism towards digital technologies. Nonetheless, one of the prominent criticisms usually presented to such an approach is that, since the end of the 1990s, the widespread use of digital technologies has reproduced, if not exacerbated, already existing economic, social and political inequalities (Romero & Margolis, 2005). The commercialisation of the Internet and consequently the World Wide Web further exacerbated such inequalities by separating those who could and could not access the Internet, whether due to infrastructural or skills limitations. Such a phenomenon still attracts scholarship and fuels a research strand exploring the digital divide (J. A. G. M. Van Dijk, 2006).

3.2 Digital literacy and the digital divide

As introduced in the previous paragraph, one of the main criticisms expressed in the essay *The Californian Ideology* is related to its unconditioned faith in the societal advancement that digital technologies would have carried by themselves, that is, what McLuhan described as technological determinism (McLuhan, 1964). "Across the world, the Californian Ideology has been embraced as an optimistic and emancipatory form of technological determinism. However, this utopian fantasy of the West Coast depends upon its blindness towards - and dependence on - the

social and racial polarisation of the society from which it was born" (Barbrook & Cameron, 1996, p. 58). Several scholars, indeed, pointed out the extent to which such technological advancement reinforced existing inequalities, therefore widening what, since the mid-1990s, has been described in terms of the digital divide.

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, outlining the history of digital literacy studies inevitably calls for the convergence of various literatures. Accordingly, the digital divide research strand allows for expanding the notion of competencies by including not only its intrinsic purpose of keeping pace with new-coming economic systems, but also as an approach to solving inequalities brought about by these advancements. Research on the digital divide, similarly, emerges from varied academic perspectives, whose structured levels would impact the conceptualisation of digital literacy. In light of this, the following paragraph will report the research on this matter by following the stratifications that scholars proposed in the last twenty years. Nonetheless, the reader should consider such levels as not hierarchical nor separate entities, since they emerged in the literature as an intertwined amalgamation of different elements (e.g. infrastructures, skills, privileges), albeit they appear as subsequent phenomena (A. J. A. M. Van Deursen et al., 2017).

3.2.1 First-level digital divide

Since the mid-1990s, the concept of digital divide has been widely adopted in political as well as academic discourses to monitor the unequal access to computers and the Internet. Jennifer Light, for instance, underlined the extent to which such an issue became a public problem and how it has been constructed throughout political discourses of US presidents, such as Bill Clinton (Light, 2001). Moreover, despite the overall increasing adoption of digital technologies in households, the article reported a widening divide of 42% between White and Hispanic households in owning a computer. At the same time, between 1997 and 1999, gaps in accessing the Internet at home increased by 29% among the households at the highest and lowest income (ivi, p. 713). These figures are fundamental to understanding, on the one hand, the extent of the phenomena, in particular in the US, at that time; on the other hand, to better focus on how the phenomenon was faced by the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the New Millennium.

According to this, the first approach to digital divide was characterised by the binary distinction regarding populations, whether or not able to access computers and the Internet (see e.g. Hoffman et al., 2006). Such conceptualisation, which is still described in terms of *first-level digital divide* (see e.g. Attewell, 2001), was employed to explore discrepancies in access according to varied factors, such as race (Hoffman et al., 2006), urbanisation rate (Choi et al., 2022), gender (Acilar & Sæbø, 2023; Antonio & Tuffley, 2014), and socioeconomic status (Yoon et al., 2020).

Despite being outdone by those explored in the next section, the conceptualisation of the first-level digital divide is still at stake. Recently, Van Deursen and Van Dijk (2019) argued that the policy-makers' common opinion that the Internet connection rate is the overall solution to solving digital inequalities is limited when the perspective is shifted from the physical to the material access. With material access, in fact, they refer to "the means required to maintain the use of the Internet over time, such as computer devices […], software […], and peripheral equipment […]" (ivi, p. 355). According to this perspective, even a wealthy and technologically developed country like the Netherlands, socioeconomic factors are still predictors of material access.

Nonetheless, while the public, academic, and political debate of the early 2000s was centred on providing access to computers and the World Wide Web to everyone (Light, 2001), at the same time, some articles advocate the necessity to teach people how to adopt such technologies. Here, the call for education used to be somewhat different from that of the 21st-century skills, as a more civic purpose characterised it. Although the former were specifically geared towards the emerging workforce, digital literacy in relation to the first-level digital divide was rather a widespread attitude focused on giving everyone access to ICT technical skills, with the aim of participating in and benefiting from digital technologies (Mehra et al., 2004; Mossberger et al., 2003). Rowena Cullen (2001), indeed, underlined that, apart from physical barriers, the limitations in accessing the Internet were also related to a lack of ICT skills and support. As a matter of fact, "people […] are often prevented from making use of ICTs because of low levels of computing and technology skills, and also, very importantly, literacy skills. […] Young people who do not go on to any form of tertiary education are equally disadvantaged." (Cullen, 2001, p. 314).
In this sense, the optimistic look introduced at the beginning of the paragraph, according to which technology *per se* would have solved inequality, was rapidly considered doomed to overlook structural inequalities, such as socio-economic, as well as educational disparities (Light, 2001). Moreover, several scholars expressed concerns towards access being the only determinant of the digital divide (see e.g. Fuchs, 2009; J. Van Dijk, 2005). This rapidly oriented academics towards the skills adopted by social groups to navigate Internet-based environments, and in doing so, a new digital divide emerged to monitor the presence of these Internet skills, namely the *second-level of digital divide*.

3.2.2 Second-level digital divide

The ownership of such a shift in the digital divide perspectives is usually recognised to Eszter Hargittai, who explored different levels of skills with respect to finding information online (Hargittai, 2001). However, at the beginning of the new Millennium, teenagers – mainly from Western countries – populated many Internet-based environments, whose most relevant were social network websites (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Helsper and Eynon (2010) noted that such rapid adoption led scholars to label the new generation of teenagers with adjectives, such as the net-generation (Tapscott, 1999) or – more commonly - the digital natives (Prensky, 2001). This fuelled the prejudice according to which generational dispositions used to be the main determinants in Internet skills and usages, in particular concerning educational purposes (Gibbons, 2007).
However, in the first fifteen years of research on said level, scholars pointed out that, apart from age, gender, social and economic status are relevant determinants in Internet skills and usages (Paul & Stegbauer, 2005; Scheerder et al., 2017). For instance, when it comes to older users (+60 years old), while gender disappears as a relevant determinant of Internet skills, education and income are the main predictors regarding autonomy of use, general and social media-related skills (Friemel, 2016; Hargittai et al., 2019).
Gender has also been explored as a predictor of the said level of digital divide. Research up to the early 2010s, indeed, reported that women's purposes behind Internet use tend to be different with respect to those of men (Acilar & Sæbø, 2023; Cooper, 2006; Hilbert, 2011). More specifically, the gender divide is not simply characterised by women capable of accessing computers; rather, it emerged as a sociocultural phenomenon. (Hafkin & Taggart, 2001). Arroyo (2020), for instance, found that women's expectations towards family care are among the main factors limiting their time available to connect to the Internet and develop digital skills.

Furthermore, during this period, internet practices were viewed as a single aspect of digital technologies, despite later research highlighting the importance of understanding these usages as a complex system that required disentangling (G. Blank & Groselj, 2014; Livingstone & Helsper, 2007). It was soon noted that assuming elderly users are not interested in or capable of adopting internet-based technologies was overly simplistic, as scholars highlighted dimensions of usage that seemed relevant across different age groups, countries, and attitudes (see e.g. Lapa & Cardoso, 2013).

Although age seemed not to be the only key predictor in the second-level digital divide, the rise of problem behaviours among teenagers, as discussed in previous sections, combined with the importance of developing Internet skills to overcome long-term social inequalities (Witte & Mannon, 2010), prompted several scholars to examine the factors that influence Internet use during adolescence.

Such a dimension of the digital divide is mainly concerned with the impact of socio-economic factors on Internet use. Peter and Valkenburg (2006) suggested that focusing on the role of background factors in Internet practices should be considered in terms of emerging digital differentiation, rather than a divide, as it better underlines the focus on the varied usages emerging from these digital environments. "In this approach, the characteristics of internet users play a more important role in shaping internet adoption and internet use than the characteristics of the Internet. The approach thus leans towards social determinism." (Peter & Valkenburg, 2006, p. 297).

Accordingly, Calderón Gómez (2019) defined the concept of *technological capital*, that is, a Bourdieusian-based theoretical stance to set socioeconomic conditions in relation to varied forms of accessing and using ICTs. What emerged from research following such a perspective is first and foremost the role of parents' socioeconomic status, whether occupational or educational. Indeed, Micheli (2015) noted that despite cultural, economic, or social capital not being linearly correlated with broader and positive internet use, class appeared to be a relevant determinant in adolescents' Internet use, either *vertically* or *horizontally*. On the one hand, the former primarily characterises upper-middle-class teenagers, and it represents internet practices and discourses mirroring parents' discourses on the internet as a tool for enrichment and productivity; in fact, such an approach brings teenagers to capital-enhancing activities. On the other hand, youth from less advantageous social contexts "appropriate the internet *horizontally*, jointly with peers, and are mostly interested in social-networking and UGC [user-generated content, Ed.] production" (Micheli, 2015, p. 37).

As the digital divide widened to encompass not just access to the internet but also the skills needed to navigate it and participate in digital environments, a unique aspect of digital literacy emerged. In this context, these skills are primarily about safely engaging with online experiences, rather than using them for job-related purposes. Moreover, various scholars agreed that it is essential to develop and evaluate digital skills for this purpose within training programmes (Chetty et al., 2018; Choudhary & Bansal, 2022).

3.2.3 Third-level digital divide

As networked infrastructures developed and became widely used, and affordable internet connections became available to households, wealthier countries were able to provide access and skills to almost their entire populations. However, several researchers pointed out that access and skills do not necessarily translate into benefits from IT

experiences (Lythreatis et al., 2022). Even at the start of the century, scholars observed that a hidden divide was emerging, not just among those who had access and skills to adopt digital environments, but also among those who did not. For example, Jan van Dijck (2005) proposed the concept of usage divide , as it highlights inequalities in meaningful, productive, and beneficial engagement with technology. Individual capabilities to exploit the Internet are therefore fundamental to determining possible outcomes and benefits (Ragnedda, 2017).

Although introduced by Wei and colleagues (2011), Van Deursen and Helsper (2015) are generally referred to as among the early scholars who grouped research on this kind of digital divide under the term *third-level* digital divide. They centre this divide in "disparities in the returns from internet use within populations of users who exhibit broadly similar usage profiles and enjoy relatively autonomous and unfettered access to ICTs and the internet infrastructure. Third-level divides, therefore, relate to gaps in individuals' capacity to translate their internet access and use into favourable offline outcomes" (ivi, p. 30).

The third-level digital divide framework has been successfully employed in recent research, for instance, to understand sociodemographic factors in shaping possible outcomes throughout varied domains in Thailand (Pukdeewut & Setthasuravich, 2024) or to assess Internet use among Korean older adults (S. Park & Chun, 2024). Furthermore, the results of research on the digital divide, which mainly look at individual factors like gender, age, and socioeconomic status as key factors in developing digital skills and, in turn, achieving tangible benefits (Merisalo & Makkonen, 2022), have prompted several scholars to interpret these findings through established social theories, with Pierre Bourdieu's theory of habitus and capital being the most common (Ignatow & Robinson, 2017).

For this paragraph, it is sufficient to understand that the habitus is the internalisation of dispositions deriving from past social contexts, such as family, school or job environments. Capitals are resources possessed by individuals that regulate the possibility of partaking in specific social environments. An example of the adoption of the theory of habitus to map digital technologies' use can be traced in Robinson's (2009) ethnographic work on ICTs' use among Californian families. Here, the concept of information habitus is employed to capture how one's social as well as economic backgrounds characterise habits when interacting with digital technologies. What emerged was "respondents with high-quality home access value the potential benefits of internet use quite differently than their less privileged peers" (ivi., p. 504). More specifically, the former develops a playful or exploratory information habitus, characterised by *high-brow* information seeking, whereas task-oriented information habitus emerged from the latter, due to their experiences of deprivation and urgency in terms of Internet access.

Furthermore, several scholars adopted the Bourdieusian conversion of capital theory to develop a new form of capital, namely digital (Calderón Gómez, 2021; Ragnedda, 2018), electronic (Merisalo, 2016), technological (Gonzales, 2016) and techno-capital (Straubhaar et al., 2012). Said theory conceptualises social situations as relying on the constant exchange of capital, whether it be either tangible (e.g. economic capital) or intangible (e.g. cultural capital) (Bourdieu, 2021). Moreover, the conversion process involves costs; for instance, investing in knowing norms of the economic field grants access and allows one to expand one's network (social capital) and peer recognition (symbolic capital). The newly earned capital is subsequently capable of leading to more profitable job opportunities (economic capital) (see e.g. Haase Svendsen et al., 2010).

Within the digital technologies context, the rise of digital competencies as key to utilising such environments has inadvertently reinforced existing social inequalities, as discussed earlier. As Ragnedda (2017) notes, accumulating these competencies can be viewed in terms of capital, specifically digital capital. Digital capital encompasses the accumulation of digital competencies, such as information, communication, safety, content creation, and problem-solving, alongside digital technology. Like other forms of capital, its continuous transmission and accumulation perpetuate social inequalities. From a Bourdieuian perspective, we can define digital capital as a set of internalised abilities and aptitudes (digital competencies) and externalised resources (digital technology) that can be historically accumulated and transferred between different contexts (ivi, p. 71). In this way, digital capital interacts with other resources, serving as a gatekeeper for various types of resources, such as information (e.g. news retrieval) or social connections.

Furthermore, recently Calderón Gómez (2021) mapped the process of mutual conversion among three types of capitals (i.e. economic, cultural, social) and digital capital. The scholar first elaborates on the concept of digital capital by distinguishing embodied digital capital (EDC) from objectified digital capital (ODG), thus accounting for both tangible and intangible features. Through a series of interviews, he emphasises the cyclical nature of capital exchange, highlighting the role of the two forms of digital capital within this loop. For example, while economic capital covers the costs of digital devices and infrastructure (ODG), this facilitates access to improved digital skills (EDC) and eventually boosts job opportunities and professional networking (economic and social capital). The concept of digital capital also integrates Bourdieu's theoretical framework of the field, which enables the understanding that capital conversion improves positioning within specific fields of action, such as the economic one. In this context, according to Bourdieu, the field functions as a system of objective relations characterising social environments (e.g., the economic field). Here, individuals act according to a 'sense of the game' to improve their position, which depends on their composition of tangible and intangible capital (i.e., positioning). Interactions and capital exchanges are governed by the resources at stake (i.e., illusio), such as money in the economic field (Bourdieu et al., 2020).

The reframing of digital capital according to Calderón Gómez, indeed, allows for enhancing the role of said resources in tangible and intangible outcomes, therefore better situating research on the third level-digital divide into a consolidated sociological framework, which is fundamental to better orient future research on this matter, as noted by Van Deursen and Helsper (2015).

3.2.4 Digital literacy(ies) to bridge digital divide

Digital divide studies are fundamental to offering an encompassing account of the varied perspectives that influenced the consolidation of digital literacy studies. Indeed, while the emergence of the new economic paradigm (i.e., the knowledge economy) led to 21st-century frameworks, digital divide studies fuelled perspectives concerned with the role of digital technologies not only in job-related but also in social processes. That became particularly central in the *Digital Youth Project*, in which this issue has been broadly explored by scholars such as David Buckingham, Mizuko Ito, danah boyd and many others (see e.g. boyd, 2008; Buckingham, 2008c; Itō et al., 2009). These studies establish a dialogue between research on digital literacy and scholarship on the social life of digital

youth cultures. Mizuko Ito's work, for instance, has always reasoned about how new media in the life of early-2000s American youth shape the relationship between the same new media and learning (Ito et al., 2020; Itō, 2009; Itō et al., 2009; Jenkins et al., 2016). The scholar employs the concept of new media literacy, precisely focusing on the system of "competencies, skills, and literacy practices that youth are developing through media production and online communication" (Itō, 2009, p. xvi).

Moreover, since the beginning of the Millennium, danah boyd has widely analysed how teens used social media as an extension of their offline interactions, challenging the notion that digital spaces isolated them (see e.g. boyd, 2008, 2014; Ellison & boyd, 2013; Marwick & boyd, 2011). By pointing out issues such as online privacy, digital inequality, and the role of social media in teen culture, boyd's work on the teens' digital cultures influenced a branch of digital literacy studies, which would later become mainstream. According to this perspective, being competent in adopting digital technologies cannot be reduced to the mere technical skills that classic conceptualisations of literacy would suggest. This academic gaze toward digital competencies, therefore, usually agrees in situating the origin of the digital literacy studies in Paul Gilster's book *Digital Literacy*. Nonetheless, before starting the analysis of Gilster's idea of digital literacy, it is relevant to note that this perspective did not appear suddenly and out of nowhere.

In this sense, when exploring the literature of the social processes behind platform and other digital media practices, it is somehow inevitable to refer to digital literacies studies. Since the early definitions, meant as the ability to read and write, the concept of literacy encompassed the complex system of contestations over the power and authority to access, interpret and produce printed text (C. Luke, 1989). "Such scope for contestation is magnified as the materiality of symbolic texts increasingly relies on audiovisual and computer-based technologies" (Livingstone, 2004a, p. 2).

As noted by Bawden, in fact, "Gilster's idea of digital literacy did not appear *out of the blue*. There was already a substantial body of literature and practical experience around the ideas of information literacy and computer literacy" (2008, p. 21). On the one hand, since the mid-1980s, research on computer literacy has been primarily oriented toward covering competencies fundamental for workers in the library or information contexts. Scholars, indeed, privileged skill-based as well as pragmatic approaches to computers with the intent of "… taking control of your computer and not letting it control you" (Morgan, 1998, p. 1). Despite some attempts to move beyond mere technical definitions, the approach to computer literacy has been characterised by knowledge at the basis of software- or hardware-related tasks (Bawden, 2001). On the other hand, scholars employed the concept of information literacy to expand the system of competencies beyond the job context. For example, Taylor (1986) defined information literacy as the knowledge "that any educated person will need to operate effectively in an information-rich technological society" (p. 47). That represented the theoretical substratum for the emergence of digital literacy by Paul Gilster (1997).

Far from providing a discrete list of competencies, Gilster defined being digitally competent as "the ability to understand and use information in multiple formats from a wide range of sources when it is presented via computers" (ivi, p. 1). Such a vague definition allowed to accomplish two main aspects: on the one hand, to overcome the prescriptive competence as seen in the theoretical substratum of computer and information literacy;

on the other hand, to account for the multimodal information that the World Wide Web brought upon in everyday life activities (Bawden, 2008). Accordingly, Gilster defined digital literacy also as "mastering ideas, not keystrokes" (1997, p. 1).

Additionally, these aspects are often cited as key to understanding the history of digital literacy from a social perspective (see e.g. Techataweewan & Prasertsin, 2018; Vercruyssen et al., 2023), although less emphasis is placed on another aspect of Gilster's definition. In fact, traditional literacy encompasses a competence that is more complex than simply being able to read. Literacy is, in essence, the mastery of the Discourse, as put by Gee (1987), a combination of language, actions, beliefs, values, and other forms of interaction that are characteristic of a particular social group.

In this sense, digital literacy expands such competence as the emergence of networked media brought upon a new kind of information, that is multimodal. "It conjures up a new set of challenges that require you to approach networked computers without preconceptions. Not only must you acquire the skill of finding things, you must also acquire the ability to use these things in your life" (Gilster, 1997, p. 2). What is relevant about such a conceptualisation of digital literacy is that the scholar envisaged a connection between technical competence and the integration of such technologies in everyday life. This might be considered as the prodromes, the prelude of the participatory culture that Jenkins and colleagues (2016) will later outline. At the same time, in digital literacy studies, *Digital Literacy* by Paul Gilster functions as a historical artefact that remembers the period of technological enthusiasm, which characterised the WWW fervour at the beginning of the 21st century.

Since the emergence of the second level of digital divide, several scholars have focused on defining the competencies fundamental to taking advantage of digital environments. However, the decade following Gilster's book was characterised by relatively scarce attention. The academia was more centred on adopting information literacy as the central concept of the strand. As anticipated previously, ontological as well as epistemological stances toward said concept were prescriptive and skill-based, since they were mainly focused on the possible adoption in the context of education (Bawden, 2008).

Despite this period being characterised by an emerging confusion, the concept of digital literacy has been widely adopted for civic purposes in the context of governmental policies between the beginning of the Millennium and the 2010s. For example, Sefton-Green, Nixon and Erstad (2009) noted that, starting from the late 1990s, the Norwegian government introduced plans to integrate digital technologies and training programs related to digital technologies. Along three main programmes, the Ministry of Education first adopted hundreds of schools of hardware, software, and internet access, and second, "attempt to make digital technologies integral to learning activities in all subjects and at all levels in Norwegian schools" (ivi, p. 115). This example can be considered as one of the main approaches through which governmental policies made the scholastic system employ digital literacy paths within the educational programmes.

While it outlines the top-down civic purpose of this approach to digital competences, particularly in addressing the socio-economic inequalities that emerge as the second and third levels of digital divide, the case also highlights its similarities with the 21st-century skills approach introduced earlier, which conceptualises digital literacy in terms of specific skills. Frameworks that emerged around the mid-2010s were primarily focused on digital skills, either

hard or soft. Nevertheless, the approach introduced dimensions related to evaluation and critical thinking, which would later become the foundation of 21st century frameworks, adding to the increasingly complex conceptualisations and applications of digital literacy.

For instance, the Internet Skill Scale formulated by van Deursen, Helsper, and Eynon (2016) is composed of four main dimensions: operational skills (i.e., basic technical skills), information navigation skills (e.g., choosing relevant search results from a list), social skills (e.g., participating in online discussions), and creative skills, such as editing or modifying online content. Ferrari (2012), in addition, they argued that thinking skills are central when outlining the dimensions of digital literacy, such as critical and creative thinking as well as problem-solving capabilities. Furthermore, Tinmaz and colleagues (2022) noted that digital thinking skills have recently become central in shifting the perspective from merely navigating digital technologies to doing so safely. The consolidation of fake news as both a non-academic and academic issue triggered the relevance of digital literacy in contrasting such a phenomenon (McDougall et al., 2019).

3.2.5 Data and media literacies

Frank Pasquale's 2015 book, *The Black Box Society: The Secret Algorithms That Control Money and Information*, explored the hidden role of algorithms in shaping modern societies, particularly in finance, search engines, and reputation management. This work offers a valuable insight into the algorithmic and big data revolution that transformed societies, particularly in the Western world, during the 2010s. In recent years, the role of algorithms in governing platforms has become increasingly notable, impacting everyday social processes.

Noble's 2018 book, Algorithms of Oppression, highlighted the negative biases against black women in Google's search engine algorithms when specific keywords were used. The textual and media search analysis revealed that the algorithm was reproducing a discriminatory, racist culture.

In 2019, sociologist Shoshana Zuboff published The Age of Surveillance Capitalism, a comprehensive analysis of social media's data extraction logics, which quickly became a media sensation. Zuboff defined this emerging form of capitalism as turning human behavioural data, such as social media analytics, into predictive products that anticipate current, near, and future actions (Zuboff, 2019, pp. 8–9).

The books mentioned above are helpful in historicising the technological landscape that characterised societies at the beginning of the 2010s and for understanding its impact on digital literacy studies. Indeed, data represents new forms of economic capital (Sadowski, 2019) and the consequent capitalistic necessity to quantify human behaviour fostered social processes accountable from a data perspective, so to "be recorded, sorted or indeed commodified by governments and private companies" (Pangrazio & Sefton-Green, 2022, p. 1). For example, such economically-driven data turn, which in academic terms has been described as *datafication* (Mejias & Couldry, 2019), is now reproducing the economic imaginary of young people as a relevant global market (Hendry, 2024; Nilan et al., 2015). Hence, this age cluster is particularly targeted within algorithmic media platforms. Southerton and Taylor (2021) found that the data extraction logics impacted teenagers' platform consumption behaviour, prompting them to deploy strategies aimed at regaining control over their privacy.

The growing influence of data economy logics has further complicated the landscape of digital literacy by

introducing new challenges, both in terms of competencies and pedagogical approaches (Livingstone et al., 2020). In response, scholars have broadened the scope of literacies, as exemplified by the development of the algorithm literacy scale (Dogruel et al., 2022). Frank Pasquale's (2015) work is instrumental in highlighting that the algorithmically mediated digital environment cannot be understood merely as a set of neutral tools passively assisting human activity. Such a perspective would neglect the reciprocal relationship between these systems and their users. While algorithms shape and mediate everyday practices, human interactions simultaneously serve as inputs that influence the adaptive outputs of these technologies. Scholars have therefore emphasised the need for a socio-technical perspective to grasp the extent to which these technologies operate as non-human actors within a complex ecosystem of shared agency(Bucher, 2017a; Gillespie, 2014). In this vein, Dogruel has pointed out that "less attention has been dedicated to studying media users' understanding and perceptions of algorithms in online contexts" (Dogruel, 2021, p. 67), thereby laying the groundwork for the algorithm literacy framework. Although the concept is not entirely new, emerging first in computer science before entering broader discourses (Eslami et al., 2015) and literacy studies (Vraga & Tully, 2021), Dogruel's contribution lies in distinguishing algorithm-related competencies and their specific dimensions. This distinction made it possible to construct and validate the Algorithm Literacy Scale (Dogruel et al., 2022). Nevertheless, while this represents an innovative step in recognising the pervasive role of algorithmic technologies and the need for non-technical competencies, the framework has been reduced mainly to a skill set. As a result, it proves helpful in measuring existing competencies within specific populations but is less effective in addressing the broader discursive and imaginative dimensions of algorithmic influence introduced earlier.

Among the varied propositions of perspectives accounting for this very last point, the data literacy studies have garnered significant attention from scholars for their capability to capture the growing role of datafication, along with its technologies and logics, in the conduct of social life.

Emerged at the crossway between the information literacy (R. Schneider, 2013) and statistical literacy (Frank et al., 2016) during the first half of the 2010s, data literacy was initially conceived as an educators' tool to prepare students to face the complexities carried by an increasingly datafied as well as big data-based society. Definitions related to this flavour tend to focus on specific aspects, based on the field of application (A. Wolff et al., 2016), although some typical traces can be found. One of the main definitions reporting such commonalities describes data literacy as "the ability to understand and use data effectively to inform decisions. It is composed of a specific skill set and knowledge base that enables educators to transform data into information and ultimately into actionable knowledge" (Mandinach & Gummer, 2013, p. 30). However, in parallel with theories of *algorithmic power* seen in the previous section, another critical stance towards datafied societies was consolidating in the academic debate, that is, the open data movement.

This initiative emerged to contrast the spread of unregulated big data collection, which fostered forms of surveillance – as seen in the aforementioned work by Zuboff. Couldry and Powell, indeed, noted that "A shift is underway from discrete forms of intervention in social space based on intermittent and/or specific information-gathering to a continuous process of management based on total and unremitting surveillance" (Couldry & Powell, 2014, p. 1). Researchers argue that this large-scale data collection would have compromised users' autonomy and

freedom of expression; hence, they advocate for transparency in data gathering processes and calculation logic.
This concern particularly resonates with the values of the open data movement, which involves a group promoting the open data culture by making software code accessible and incorporating contributions from everyone. Furthermore, the rationalities that emerged from this movement can support the agency of datafied audiences, so the group aims to distribute knowledge related to gathering and understanding data in order to balance the distribution of power (Baack, 2015). To this purpose, Baack (ibidem) noted that open data activists underlined the crucial role of journalists as intermediaries in allowing everyone to access and, most importantly, understand information behind data. However, "little attention was paid to who would use the data, how they would use it and what support they would need to do so" (Frank et al., 2016).
Despite the open data movement failing to produce a consistent data literacy, its heritage set the flourishing ground for the emergence of a new perspective towards data literacy, more sensitive to instances put forth by the project, namely, problematising privacy and surveillance. As a matter of fact, recent conceptualisations of data literacy go beyond the mere technical competence in manipulating data. They, instead, involve critical stances oriented at understanding technological infrastructures and the political as well as economic dynamics behind digital platforms (Pangrazio & Sefton-Green, 2020).
When it comes to conceiving data literacy for teenagers, this oftentimes results in a reflexive approach towards the use of digital technologies, in particular social media. Markham's research on critical pedagogy involving young adults, for instance, puts at the centre the crucial role of personal reasoning about datafication experiences to develop a reflexive attitude towards platforms in the context of the data economy (see e.g. A. Markham & Pronzato, 2024). Another example explaining the impact that the open data project had on conceptualising data literacy can be found in Gebre's work about data literacy for secondary education, which underlined said competence being framed into recent literature along three main areas, namely developing competencies, data-driven inquire process/thinking with data, personal data awareness, and civic engagement (Gebre, 2022).

The critical turn that said research strand manifested, in particular with the establishment of data-driven technologies, indeed found its roots within another approach to literacy whose foundations can be traced back even before Gilster's book, namely media literacy studies.
By the end of the 1990s, indeed, research on media literacy emerged at a crossway between two main approaches to literacy, with the first being protectionist, namely shielding youths from media manipulation; the other one empowering: more focused on the way in which young users could do more than evaluating content, rather also producing their own (Hobbs, 1998; Nichols & Stornaiuolo, 2019; RobbGrieco, 2014). With that rationale, Aufderheide produced one of the most cited definitions of media literacy. During the 1992 National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy, indeed, the scholar defined media literacy people as those who "can decode, evaluate, analyse and produce both print and electronic media. The fundamental objective of media literacy is a critical autonomy relationship to all media. Emphases in media literacy training range widely, including informed citizenship, aesthetic appreciation and expression, social advocacy, self-esteem, and consumer competence" (Aufderheide, 1992, p. 3). As digital platforms emerged, Livingstone's work on how children learn to interpret risky opportunities on social network sites demonstrated the persistence and evolution of these dual approaches,

simultaneously protective and empowering, in contemporary digital contexts (Livingstone, 2014). Similarly, Hobbs (2008) identified the fundamental challenges facing new literacies in the 21st century, emphasising how older literacy frameworks required recalibration for emerging media ecologies.

What emerged from the early stages of media literacy research is a critical stance on which people would have relied to evaluate content retrieved from the media. As a matter of fact, Sonia Livingstone reported such competence being "the ability to access, analyse, evaluate and create messages across a variety of contexts" (Livingstone, 2004b, p. 18). At that time, the approach appeared also to cover the entire media ecology, including traditional and new media (Koltay, 2011). The conceptualisation of media literacy as an encompassing phenomenon to be addressed in a growingly complex media landscape has been widely explored in the extensive work by David Buckingham on media education.

According to the scholar, in fact, there are two main coexisting dimensions within media literacy studies, that is, functional and critical. Whereas the former include competences fundamental to consuming media content, therefore referring to the skill-based literature introduced in the previous sections, critical literacies go beyond mere usage, thus emphasising the capacity of individuals to evaluate content retrieved and consequently understand how media shapes perceptions in society (Buckingham, 2008b; Lee et al., 2015). In the following year, this very last dimension was widely explored due to the aforementioned consolidation of extraction logics of users' data along with the algorithmic media. Several scholars explored the competencies to face such challenges by introducing critical media literacy as a separate competence to be deepened (see e.g. Kellner et al., 2019; Kellner & Share, 2005; Yildiz & Keengwe, 2016).

Then, how do digital literacy studies relate to the constellation of approaches mentioned in the previous paragraphs? According to Nichols and Stornaiuolo, media, along with information and computer literacies, born in earlier years, influenced the conceptualisation of digital literacy. "In this sense, digital literacy can be understood less as a bounded concept and more as an assemblage – a layering together of historical meanings and practices that have congealed, for the moment, into a usable discourse" (Nichols & Stornaiuolo, 2019, pp. 17–18). Here is why the differences and commonalities of the aforementioned constellation of literacies resonate with the concept of Wittgenstein's *family resemblance*, as it constitutes a network of nodes mutually influencing and with some overlapping aspects: in other words, a closely-knit family (Hobbs, 2010; Horton, 2006).

Moreover, with specific regard to the influencing aspects, scholars agreed that research on digital literacy manifested a second generation of approaches by the early 2010s. In these years, in fact, whereas media literacy studies, in particular the British school, with David Buckingham being among the most cited scholars, noted the necessity to leverage on the socially-situated practices of users to elaborate and introduce critical approaches in the media education system (see e.g. Buckingham, 2019), digital literacy studies became populated of similar approaches that will be later summarised in terms of the second generation of this research strand (Nichols & Stornaiuolo, 2019). More specifically, this generation can be accounted for by following two main key terms employed in the literature, namely digital *literacies* and critical digital literacy studies.

First, inspired by the sociocultural and practice-oriented approach triggered by media literacy studies (Thorne, 2013), Lankshear and Knoble consolidated research adopting such an attitude within the well-known book *Digital Literacies* (2008). Here, the two invited several scholars to overcome the prescriptive attitude towards digital literacy, usually seen as a skill set, to embrace a sociocultural perspective. According to them, "Texts are parts of lived, talked, enacted, value-and-belief-laden practices carried out in specific places and at specific times […]. From a sociocultural perspective, these different ways of reading and writing, along with the "enculturations" that lead to becoming proficient in them, are literacies.

Engaging in these situated practices where we make meanings by relating texts to larger ways of doing and being is engaging in literacy—or, more accurately, literacies, since we are all apprenticed to more than one." (Lankshear & Knobel, 2008, p. 7). That is the reason why they promoted the use of the plural *literacies*: to account for not only the multiple modalities for a text to be consumed, but also the varied situational context that can emerge in such consumption practices. This approach is widely adopted in the literature and continues to influence the way in which a section of recently employed approaches is conducted. For example, Steinkuehler (2010) explored the relationship between videogames and literacy practices among teenagers, primarily male, and discovered that playing videogames could be considered a form of literacy per se, but when it comes to analysing related online communities, here lies an entire as well as structured constellation of practices-driven literacies.

Second, another research strand that has recently found its popularity in the literature is grouped under the term "critical digital literacy". Such a term emerged at the crossway of three main waves: the aforementioned socio-cultural turn, on the one hand, and the 1980s critical literacy movement, on the other hand (Bacalja et al., 2021; Pangrazio, 2016). As a matter of fact, by the end of said decade, Green proposed a conceptual framework to understand subject-specific literacies along three dimensions, namely operational, cultural and critical (Green, 1988). At the heart of this conceptualisation was a key aspect that later became prominent in media literacy studies – and one that already shaped the digital literacies movement – specifically, the importance of being able to evaluate content and put it into wider contexts.

The concept of critical literacy has been further elaborated in terms of a metaknowledge relying on the meaning-making processes and sociocultural contexts behind messages, along with the capacity to investigate how such processes and contexts operate in the field of power (A. Luke, 2000; Pangrazio, 2016). This anticipated – and partially structured – the recent academic adoption of critical digital literacy in the mid-2010s (see e.g. Hinrichsen & Coombs, 2014; Lohnes Watulak, 2016). As reported by Pangrazio (2016), the same sociocultural turn that fuelled the emergence of the assemblage approach to digital literacy, primarily rooted in media literacy studies, also established a sub-strand of critical digital literacy that considers such competence as a way to play against power dynamics set by the media.

The increasing penetration of digital media within many social processes led several scholars to prioritise critical approaches towards digital literacy, which is meant as "not simply critical awareness and understanding" but most importantly as "critical autonomy" (Buckingham, 2003, p. 102). The later consolidation of digital media curated by algorithms to increase time spent on platforms, such as social media, characterises recent research on critical digital literacy. In the context of education, for instance, whereas mid-2010s proposals about critical digital literacy-related

curricula integration mainly were focused on digital contexts and content evaluation (see e.g. Hinrichsen & Coombs, 2014), contemporary pedagogical frameworks account for the role of said recommender systems as non-human actors shaping individuals' agency when interacting within platforms (Low et al., 2023).

Despite what was introduced so far, the socio-cultural as well as critical turn that characterised the second generation of digital literacy studies did not become the primary research trend, neither in the first years of the Millennium nor in the present days. Unlike other intersecting and parallel research strands, such as media, data, and information literacies, digital literacy studies have always been influenced by a certain degree of conservatism. Reasons can be grasped from the fact that digital literacy studies have the *responsibility* to be the umbrella term accounting for a broad spectrum of literacies (European Commission, 2019). The advent of lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic also exacerbated the necessity to develop valid and reliable scales to measure digital competencies and, therefore, produce large-scale pedagogies. As a matter of fact, in the last fifteen years, reviews reported that scholars developed around forty tools to assess students' digital skills, either in the form of platforms or assessment scales (Sillat et al., 2021). In contrast, research on teachers' digital competence produced nearly thirty similar instruments (Nguyen & Habók, 2024).

What is remarkable about this research is that most assessment methods were developed within a relatively narrow group of frameworks, both non-European and European (see 2.1), over the past decade. On the one hand, this large-scale top-down approach offers significant advantages, such as global standardisation and excellent adaptability despite the broad topics. On the other hand, it has consolidated concepts of digital literacy, potentially marginalising under-researched aspects. For instance, Nichols and Stornaiuolo (2019) noted that "both then and now, digital literacy (and digital literacies) has remained centrally concerned with the ways users (e.g., individuals, groups, communities) leverage technologies (e.g., computers, software, mobile devices) to consume or produce content (e.g., textual, visual, multimedia artifacts)" (p. 19).

This particularly resonates, for instance, with the conceptualisation of *critical thinking* elaborated within the context of the DigComp, among the leading European frameworks for digital competences. Indeed, under the dimension of information and data literacy, with respect to the competence in evaluating data, information and digital content, said framework conceive the critical skills and attitudes in terms of knowing "how to analyse and critically evaluate search results and social media activity streams" and being "inclined to ask critical questions in order to evaluate the quality of online information, and concerned about purposes behind spreading and amplifying disinformation" (European Commission. Joint Research Centre., 2022, p. 11).

As mentioned previously, despite the frameworks having been adapted to the possible harms deriving from platforms such as social media (e.g. fake news and misinformation), they still do not account for the critical approaches introduced in the context of media and data literacy studies, which are significantly related to broader and contextualised power dynamics deriving from said platforms. Moreover, as per the marginalisation of the sub-research strand related to digital literacy, such frameworks tend not to account for how technologies are perceived and employed in one's everyday life, which is not due to obvious reasons related to the inability to quantify such practices. A more in-depth investigation of this could, however, lay the groundwork for more effective pedagogical tools that better align with users' actual experiences.

As a result, the following paragraph explores bottom-up perspectives, both in civic and economic contexts, aiming to highlight an under-researched approach that emerged from the New Literacy School in the late 1990s and continues to produce significant research to the present day.

3.3 Digital literacy as shared competence

This section outlines bottom-up approaches to understanding digital literacy. This strand of digital literacy studies, as it will be elaborated below, found great enthusiasm in the decade between the late 1980s and 1990s, possibly following the *practice turn* that sociological research faced in these years (Gee, 2023). While the consolidation of digital technologies in everyday life fuelled the so-called digital turn (Mills, 2010), bottom-up socio-practical approaches remained relatively marginal between the early 2000s and the mid-2010s. Over the last fifteen years, though, they have developed into a considerably more complex and multifaceted framework, extending across diverse bodies of literature. At this stage, digital literacy studies are a consolidated research strand, with trends fluctuating in accordance with historical, social, economic, and political reasons.

In this paragraph, I argue that outlining the main aspects of the existing literature is fundamental to shedding light on the importance of socio-practical, bottom-up approaches. While large-scale projects and standardised measurement instruments have played a significant role in shaping the field of digital literacy, they often fail to capture the lived experiences of individuals and the constantly evolving practices through which people make sense of and appropriate technologies in their everyday lives. The conceptual ambiguity surrounding digital literacy further complicates efforts to draw clear boundaries between different approaches. Against this backdrop, socio-practical perspectives become crucial, not because they offer standardised frameworks, but because they ground research in context-related literacies that can provide new nuances of what it means to be digitally literate. To better situate this perspective, it is necessary to trace back four decades to the academic movement that would later come to be known as New Literacy Studies.

3.3.1 The New Literacy Studies

> "In the 1980s a number of scholars from different disciplines […] began to critique the traditional view of literacy as 'the ability to read and write' (a largely individual and mental phenomenon) and to argue for a social and cultural approach to literacy" (Gee, 2023, p. 371).

In the 1980s, a broad spectrum of disciplines faced an intellectual shift centred on highlighting the fundamental social nature of human activity, especially concerning knowledge and meaning-making processes, namely the *social turn*. Scholars, for instance, took renewed attention to Lev Vygotsky's work on the social and interactive foundations of learning (see e.g. Vygotskij & Cole, 1981), while cultural dispositions guiding human behaviours became the core of Pierre Bourdieu's work on the *habitus* (see e.g. Bourdieu, 1979).

This intellectual movement also influenced the work of literacy and language scholars, which expanded the concept of literacy beyond the boundaries of mental competence. Accordingly, literacy is not only situated as a mental representation, but as a system of relations emerging from the interaction of individuals within specific physical, social, and cultural environments (Gee, 2012). Among the leading scholars contributing to such an approach, it is

necessary to include James Paul Gee, who expanded the notion of literacy by exploring videogames-related competences (Gee, 2003), and Brian Street, who is one of the earliest scholars researching the new literacy. The latter is particularly known for directly challenging the consolidated and skill-based conceptualisation of literacy, by outlining two main models of literacy: on the one hand, the autonomous one envisage competences driving towards universal cognitive and social effects, while the ideological one, on the other hand, is meant to account for the socio-cultural context along with power relations, values and social practices in shaping the literate person (Street, 1984).

New literacy studies converged on the conceptualisation of literacy as being part of broader socio-cultural dynamics. Indeed, by looking at the acquisition and development of literacy, Gee argues that "a way of reading a certain type of text is only acquired when it is acquired in a 'fluent' or 'native-like' way, by one's being embedded (apprenticed) as a member of a social practice wherein people not only read texts of this type in this way, but also talk about such texts in certain ways, hold certain attitudes and values about them, and socially interact over them in certain ways" (Gee, 2023, p. 373). This resonates with the concept of socialisation elaborated by Berger and Luckmann in *The Social Construction of Reality*. In this well-known work, the scholars defined socialisation as the two-step process through which individuals are introduced to the *commonsense* of reality, with the first step happening during childhood within the context of family (Berger & Luckmann, 1966 [1966]). Building on this sociocultural perspective, when approaching literacy, researchers uncover not only practices, but also – and foremost – the multiplicity of ways of interacting, thinking and valuing characterising social groups or institutions (Gee, 2023).

The fact that access to literacy practices inevitably leads to a broader system of practices and signifiers can be considered as the fundamental approach that several digital literacy scholars adopted with the increasing penetration of digital technologies in individuals' everyday lives. As a matter of fact, as noted by Mills (2010), the decade following the advent of the WWW was marked by literacy practices that expanded the traditional understanding of literacy, which was previously defined as the ability to read and write. The aforementioned Gilster's *Digital Literacy* represents a clear example, since the author envisaged the content retrieved on the Internet as a multimodal text, therefore calling for a complex combination of different competencies, namely what later would have been titled *digital literacies* (Lankshear & Knobel, 2008). While the concept of digital literacies is already explored in the previous paragraph, the theoretical foundation upon which such a perspective is drawn allows to a better understanding of the bottom-up as well as sociocultural turn that characterised digital literacy studies by the end of the 1990s.

3.3.2 The New London Group

In September 1994, ten academics met for a week in New London, New Hampshire, in the United States, with the intent of finding a pedagogical common ground to face, among the varied points of discussion, the challenges that "the newly prominent modes and technologies of communication" (The New London Group, 1996, p. 61) were brought to the surface. During these meetings, which would be recognised as *The New London Group*, the scholars outlined two main arguments.

On the one hand, the rapid global interconnectedness of diverse contexts has led to the emergence of multiple languages, often crossing cultural, community, and national boundaries. The group therefore argues that literacy

must consider the growing diversity of languages and specialist registers, whether technical or specific to particular groups. On the other hand, the second relates to "the increasing multiplicity and integration of significant modes of meaning-making, where the textual is also related to the visual, the audio, the special, the behavioral, and so on" (p. 64).

The consolidation of mass media, multimedia and electronic hypermedia completely changed the way in which *being literate* was conceived. To this purpose, they recognised the importance of understanding how individuals deploy and shape shared meanings when it comes to adopting such technologies, which is what they described in terms of *Design*. This is the process through which individuals "are both inheritors of patterns and conventions of meaning and at the same time active designers of meaning" (p. 65). Accordingly, understanding literacy, in this case digital literacy, means understanding the meaning-making processes behind technological usages. The scholars, in fact, consider each of the usages as outcomes of a three-step process that includes Available Designs, Designing, and the Redesigned.

First, individuals adopt the so-called Available designs to conduct any *semiotic activity*, for example, writing texts for blogs or participating in chatrooms. Available designs are the consolidated practices and orders already present in the social space wherein one operates (i.e. *grammars*). Second, Designing is the act of transforming the previous resources of meaning while operating on them. Individuals, indeed, would never passively reproduce Available Designs; on the contrary, they enter into an iterative loop of meaning-making composed of a succession of adoption and tailoring in accordance with the context. Lastly, the Redesigned represents the new meaning developed through the design process. The new outcome represents the "evidence of how the active intervention in the world that is Designing has transformed the designer" (p. 76).

3.3.3 The heritage

As Pangrazio (2016) notes, since the early 2000s, scholars have drawn on the New London Group's framework of design to extend literacy concepts into the digital domain, emphasising both the inherited patterns of meaning and the agentic practices individuals employ to transform these resources.

Building on this sociocultural lens, Kress (Kress, 2007 [2003], 2010) distinguished between *critique* and *design*: while critique looks backwards and interrogates power relations, design is forward-looking, enabling the imagining of possible futures through the creative appropriation of semiotic resources. Similarly, Jenkins' (2009) conceptualisation of participatory culture highlights competencies for negotiating meaning within increasingly mediated environments. Notably, judgment, often foregrounded in mainstream digital literacy frameworks, is only one of the twelve competencies he identifies, suggesting that broader socio-practical skills are equally critical in enabling meaningful participation (Pangrazio, 2016). Scholars such as Sheridan and Rowsell (2010) further emphasise design as central to building agency. At the same time, Gauntlett (2018) underscores the relational and knowledge-generating power of making, a notion later extended to the formation of everyday creative identities (Culpepper & Gauntlett, 2024).

More recently, scholars elaborated these bottom-up perspectives through the lens of critical digital and data literacies. Weninger (2022, 2023) critiques top-down, decontextualised digital literacy curricula, arguing that they often emphasise efficient tool use, data handling, and ethics without empowering students to generate knowledge

independently or to navigate the ideological dimensions of digital communicative spaces. Similarly, Pangrazio and Selwyn (2018, 2019, 2023) advocate for "personal data literacies" and broader critical data literacy frameworks that account for everyday digital practices, agency, and socio-technical interactions. Complementary work by Markham (2019) and Sander (2024) situates these approaches within critical pedagogical frameworks that interrogate datafication, algorithmic governance, and power asymmetries, offering insights into how young people and learners engage with digital platforms in nuanced, context-dependent ways. The recent review by Kubrusly and colleagues (2024) further consolidates evidence on youth data literacies, highlighting interventions that bridge the gap between abstract skills and lived practices.

These approaches resonate with the emerging postdigital literacy studies, which similarly emphasise the entanglement of human and technological practices, the situatedness of knowledge, and the need to critically engage with digital information ecosystems. In this context, scholars further explored how critical media literacy must adapt to the postdigital era, accounting for algorithmic mediation, AI-generated content, and the blurred boundaries between online and offline experiences (see e.g. Bhatt, 2023; Jandrić et al., 2018; Jiang & Vetter, 2020). In this context, bottom-up, socio-practical, and critical approaches to digital literacy converge, recognizing that literacy is not merely a set of competences but a form of situated agency that shapes and is shaped by broader socio-technical systems.

Finally, the advent of large language models (LLM)-based generative AI further expands the notion of literacy. Kalantzis and Cope (2025a) introduce the concept of the literate agent, emphasising that semiotic production now involves not only design and creativity but also the ability to navigate, evaluate, and co-construct meaning in highly dynamic, AI-mediated environments. Collectively, these strands highlight that digital literacy - whether critical, participatory, or postdigital - is deeply rooted in everyday practices, contextualised agency, and the continual negotiation of power, knowledge, and technological affordances.

3.3.4 The contemporary relevance of bottom-up approaches

The research outlined so far shows the extent to which bottom-up perspectives permeated a limited branch in digital literacy studies, whose most part is influenced by the theoretical foundations developed in the context of the New London Group and New Literacy Studies. However, with the advent of large-scale projects and governmental policies, the risk is to flatten the concept of digital literacy based on shared media concerns. I therefore argue that while on the one hand the growing complexity of digital technologies, especially with the consolidation of algorithmic media, calls for technical and skill-based approaches to face the challenges brought upon by these new environments; on the other hand, bottom-up perspectives are central in accounting for how said skills are interiorised and consequently appropriated by individuals, according to their individual dispositions and positionings within social fields.

Social media, new media, and also platform studies already provide frameworks that might be fundamental to enrich said latter approach, whether for civic or economic purposes. Cotter's paper on Instagram influencers can represent an example of the interiorisation of algorithm-related grammars for economic purposes. As a matter of fact, in a context characterised by growing concern around the power of algorithms and AI, for instance in shaping consumption or reproducing inequalities (Airoldi & Rokka, 2022; Beer, 2009; Bucher, 2018; Gillespie, 2024), Cotter

investigates practices, either as mental or physical processes, to overcome said power relations. To this purpose, the scholar involved Instagram influencers to understand how they manage social media interactions (e.g. content production and community management) to pursue influence on said platform, namely the "visibility game" (Cotter, 2019).

The relevance of this work relies on the fact that it overcomes the common idea in the literature of *gaming* the algorithm, reproducing the idea of a "lone manipulator to one of an assemblage of actors" (p. 896). This contribution, in fact, allows us to understand better how bottom-up produced, interiorised, and shared practices – deriving from the manipulation of pre-existing grammars (i.e. understanding the functioning of Instagram's recommender system) – allowed a group of professional actors to increase their economic possibilities. Moreover, Swart (2021)'s work on young people's consumption of algorithmically-curated news elaborates on the concept of algorithmic literacy by underscoring its limitations when deployed with top-down approaches.

Young people's algorithmic reasoning is, indeed, inclined to be context-specific and experience-based, so much so that they find it difficult to verbalise their competency. Additionally, the scholar pointed out that, even among interviewees with high algorithmic literacy (cf. Bruns, 2019), perceptions towards said automated systems are fundamental in guiding practices and the adoption of platforms. The outcomes of this investigation through practices of young individuals in consuming algorithmically curated news allow us to introduce the relevance of practical and bottom-up approaches to understand young users' adoption of digital technologies, which allow us to achieve civic purposes when employed to develop pedagogical strategies in digital literacy curricula.

This chapter is meant to address the central research strand on which to build the present dissertation. Digital literacy studies, indeed, find their traces in the increasing enthusiasm triggered by the advent of modern computing and the consequent penetration of digital technologies in the conduct of everyday life. However, far from being a linear story, its development follows the emergence of varied perspectives, gathered around the question "what does it mean to be literate in a growing digitalised, platformised, and datafied society?". While subtly mirroring imaginaries deriving from both the widespread problematic usages, especially by teenagers on social media, and the contemporary job market necessities, current mainstream digital literacy projects favour top-down approaches, which, on the one hand, increase scalability and standardisability; on the other hand, they tend to overlook actual people's experiences and reasoning.

To enhance meaningful pedagogical strategies, practice-based and bottom-up approaches become crucial to face such issues. Although literature on this matter has been produced in the last three decades, recent research seems to have underestimated the importance of such approaches. However, other disciplines have been and increasingly are calling for practical and sociocultural gazes on literacy.

With that in mind, the argument of the present dissertation is built on this literature gap. For this reason, the following chapter turns to research on platforms and their surrounding debates, to identify points of convergence between digital youth culture studies and digital literacy scholarship. The chapter seeks to situate the knowledge developed within platform studies as a crucial step in rethinking contemporary understandings of digital literacy, particularly by considering algorithms as sociotechnical agents that shape everyday practices of platform-based

consumption and redefine the scope of action in digital environments marked by continuous streams of algorithmically curated content.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter introduced the main frameworks of the broad research strand of digital literacies. To simplify access to this complex research field, the chapter summarised the approaches following Sefton-Green and colleagues (2009) division between top-down and bottom-up approaches.

Top-down approaches are characterised by their institutional origins and standardised nature, emerging from governmental policies and economic imperatives rather than grassroots digital practices. These frameworks have been shaped by two primary motivations: economic and civic purposes, both reflecting broader societal concerns about preparing populations for digital participation while addressing emerging inequalities.

More specifically, the economic dimension of top-down approaches manifested through the development of 21st-century skills frameworks, which positioned digital competencies as essential requirements for the modern workforce in the knowledge economy (Powell & Snellman, 2004), paving the way for a standardised definition of digital competencies designed to meet contemporary labour market needs (Ahonen & Kinnunen, 2015; Van Laar et al., 2017).

The civic dimension emerged from concerns about the digital divide, recognising that unequal access to digital competencies produces new forms of social stratification. This approach evolved through three distinct levels of analysis: physical access to computers and internet infrastructures (Light, 2001; A. J. Van Deursen & Van Dijk, 2019), access to digital skills (Hargittai, 2001), and actual benefits from digital engagement (A. J. A. M. Van Deursen & Helsper, 2015).

In response to the growing complexity of the data economy, accelerated by the widespread adoption of algorithmic systems (Zuboff, 2019), top-down approaches have expanded to include new literacy frameworks, such as algorithm literacy, to navigate algorithmically mediated environments (Dogruel et al., 2022) or data literacy, initially developed to address the pervasive datafication of social life through technical competencies for data manipulation (Pangrazio & Sefton-Green, 2020).

In contrast, bottom-up approaches are grounded in the lived experiences and peer-driven practices of young people, emphasising how digital literacies emerge organically within everyday activities rather than being prescribed by institutions (Weninger, 2022).

The New Literacy Studies scholars were the ones who first reconceptualised literacy as a set of social practices embedded in specific cultural and material contexts (Barton et al., 1999; Street, 1984). From this standpoint, digital literacies are not neutral skill sets but negotiated repertoires that young people co-construct through participation in online communities. In this sense, participatory culture theories further highlight how youth have platform features for creative expression, collaborative knowledge building, and identity work (Jenkins, 2009; Jenkins et al., 2016). These practices demonstrate that digital literacy extends beyond reading and writing to encompass remixing, curation, and networked collaboration as core competencies.

More recent bottom-up research has emphasised the tactical and critical dimensions of youth platform

engagement. Adolescents develop evaluative infrastructures to judge content credibility and algorithmic biases (Bucher, 2018; Gillespie, 2014; Pybus & Coté, 2024) These studies reveal that digital literacies involve reflexive negotiation of platform affordances and algorithmic power, underscoring the political and ethical stakes of everyday online actions.

Between digital youth cultures and digital literacies studies lies the centrality of platforms and how they are appropriated by the younger generations. Platforms, indeed, represent the common ground between these two literatures. Yet, they call for a deeper inquiry into their sociotechnical configurations and affordances. The next chapter examines these dimensions in detail, focusing on how platform architectures and algorithmic flows shape experiences and, in turn, redefine what it means to develop digital competencies.

Chapter 4. Algorithmic agency within platforms

This chapter seeks to broaden the boundaries of digital knowledge by drawing on recent conceptualisations emerging from platform studies and digital youth cultures. The central claim is that current understandings of digital competencies can be further developed along two main directions. First, research on this matter puts less stress on exploring forms of knowledge that are latent, emerging through the cracks of everyday discourses and practices, yet widely shared, dispositional, and structured within digital youth cultures. In Boudieusian terms, this can be described as a form of complex practical mastery (Bourdieu, 1980). Second, the majority of youth cultural practices now unfold within platforms whose defining feature lies in the constant flow of algorithmically curated content. This raises important questions: how does this flow reshape what it means to be digitally competent, and in what ways do young people adapt their practices to such environments?

To situate this transition, the present chapter introduces research in and around platform studies, with particular attention to algorithms as sociotechnical actants and to recent discussions of platform agency. By doing so, it aims to strengthen the dialogue between digital literacy studies and platform scholarship, foregrounding how platforms actively shape consumption practices, while at the same time opening spaces for youth negotiation, adaptation, and reappropriation.

4.1 Platformisation and datafication

Today, an extensive array of platforms participates in the fabric of everyday life. The mere act of ordering our favourite pizza on a food delivery app activates a complex system of platforms that harmoniously cooperate to make such a simple consumption choice as seamless as possible. Restaurant options are algorithmically curated based on our location and past consumption choices. Tapping the Confirm button connects at least three main stakeholders. The bank digitised and stored the debit card payment in a digital *wallet*. The restaurant cashier sends confirmation or rejection of the order. Finally, the nearest delivery riders are identified to determine who will deliver the order. Such a (simplified) story about what happens behind the modern platformised way of ordering food introduces one of the most relevant phenomena of the contemporary era: the *platformisation* of society.

The concept of platform has been echoed since the beginning of the 2000s, along with the concept of Web 2.0, and at that time it was employed to define the increasingly complex digital environments offering a broad spectrum of services (Poell et al., 2019). Two decades later, platforms are at the core of everyday activities, such as the one described in the introduction of the paragraph, and they currently mediate a great variety of social processes. As a matter of fact, the primary objective of the concept of platformisation is to increase the widespread adoption of these platforms in contemporary societies. Here, Poell, Nieborg, and van Dijck summarised various literatures defining these processes to redefine – and consolidate – the notion of *platformisation*, which is defined as "the penetration of the infrastructures, economic processes, and governmental frameworks of platforms in different economic sectors and spheres of life" (Poell et al., 2019, pp. 5–6).

This concept has twofold implications. On the one hand, it refers to the platformisation of the infrastructures – the process that reconfigured various institutional actors. For instance, the last few years saw the significant rise of

educational technologies in the context of public education for either pedagogical purposes or as measurement tools to track students' progress (Rivas, 2023). Moreover, according to Helmond (2015), platformisation signalled the process through which social network sites gradually became platform-ready, more programmable and complex environments increasingly relying on the circulation of unprecedented amounts of data. On the other hand, the concept of platformisation has been adopted to describe the impacts of platforms in the fabric of social life. This concept has been widely explored in the context of consumer culture studies (see e.g. Caliandro et al., 2024b). Platforms, in this sense, both actively and partially shape consumption behaviours, through recommender systems tailoring platform experiences based on users' behavioural data. For instance, these algorithms today play a crucial role in shaping music consumption, so much so that streaming platforms represent current primary gatekeepers in this industry (Bonini & Gandini, 2019).

Moreover, consumers developed practices that account for these logics to navigate content consumed on platforms. Recent research, in fact, observed both non- and professional users taking part in practices to optimise visibility by manipulating recommender systems within social media (Bainotti, 2024a; Cotter, 2019). Hence, platformisation is a phenomenon that sheds light on the intrinsic sociotechnical architecture of platforms, which relies on the interplay between platform economic ends and users' reappropriation practices. In addition, the former allows for the introduction of a second phenomenon that needs to be discussed better to frame the impact of platforms in contemporary social processes – that is, *datafication*.

As reported by Flensburg and Lomborg (2023), datafication is an economic, technological, and partially social phenomenon that emerged in the mid-2010s, driven by a fervour for collecting vast amounts of data from various sources. The concept was introduced by Mayer-Schönberger and Cukier (2013) as "the transformation of social action into online quantified data, thus allowing for real-time tracking and predictive analysis" (p.73). However, in the same year, other scholars noted how the transformation of human behaviour into large datasets was at the centre of a broader business transformation, fostered by platform owners and the so-called *Big Techs*, that impacted many organisations, institutions and corporations (Lycett, 2013). The extraction logic behind data collection of digital traces left by more or less inattentive users is at the core of contemporary platform economies (Srnicek & De Sutter, 2017; Van Dijck, 2014), whose increasing penetration in the last few years fuelled research on the capitalistic project based on surveillance – that is, not only generating value from users' data extraction but also developing possible consumption patterns to make said behaviours predictable (Zuboff, 2019).

Within the scope of this work, the processes of platformisation and, in particular, datafication represent the structural foundations upon which social media economies are built. Datafication is far from a neutral practice; instead, it is intrinsically tied to the economic logics that drive platforms, serving as the mechanism through which user activity is rendered measurable, exchangeable, and monetisable (Gillespie, 2010). This perspective has significantly advanced our understanding of platform logics by highlighting how every interaction becomes raw material for value extraction.

Recommender systems stand at the heart of ongoing debates in sociology and consumer culture theory, since they not only extend the time users spend on platforms but also actively shape patterns of consumption and participation in cultural processes. Far from being neutral agents, they operate as gatekeepers of visibility and

engagement, constantly reflecting the economic imperatives of the platforms that deploy them, even when they appear responsive to user behaviour. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for rethinking digital literacy, as the competencies required to navigate digital environments must adapt to ecosystems structured around platformisation, datafication, and the algorithmic governance of attention and cultural consumption.

4.2 Recommender systems as social agents

Today, much of the content we consume on social media is curated by recommender systems that organise the flow to be tailored to our predicted tastes. These are complex tools based on algorithms that take as inputs a great variety of data produced by users to recommend content. In this sense, behavioural data are represented by active interactions, such as commenting, sharing or liking content on TikTok, but also inattentive ones, such as time spent and geographical location. The advancement put forth by these systems is twofold, since they are personalised on the inferred users' taste while at the same time helping the latter in navigating an otherwise excessive and limitless vastness of content (Burke et al., 2011).

Algorithms gained popularity between the end of the 1990s and early 2000s, following the commercialisation of the Internet and the subsequent diffusion of webpages and e-commerce websites. Google's PageRank remains one of the most referred examples when it comes to describing such tools (see e.g. Sharma, 2020). The primary function of PageRank was to *crawl* websites and count the links referring to each page. The higher the number of so-called in-links, the higher the page's position in relative queries on Google's search engine. Moreover, the attempt to make sense of the vast amount of content also impacted social media, which in the 2010s introduced algorithmically curated news feeds to reduce complexity in seeing relevant content (Freyne et al., 2010). The logic behind this paradigm shift was to leverage users' interactions to display content potentially relevant to them, thereby offering a genuinely personalised experience. In this sense, it might be argued that platformisation and datafication find their peak in recommender algorithms since these latter are meant to be fed on the great variety of data produced by users to tailor experiences, thus increasing time spent on platforms. Today, the role of algorithms in shaping our everyday social media content consumption has entered the public discourse, especially concerning TikTok algorithms in youth social media consumption, due to their potential to keep them in a seemingly constant state of consumption (Klug et al., 2021).

The widespread adoption of recommender systems attracted various concerns about their implications for social processes. More specifically, early approaches to this matter, which would later have been recognised under the label of critical algorithm studies (see e.g. Gillespie & Seaver, 2016), were founded on the concept that users were actively participating in social networking sites, therefore perceiving as relevant what they would have posted (Jenkins et al., 2016). This participatory culture, established by Henry Jenkins (2009), was profoundly influenced by recommender systems, which exerted power through the visibility of published content. Indeed, in feeds increasingly curated on inferred users' interests, algorithms drive consumption practices according to black-boxed logics (Pasquale, 2015) that sort out content, thus fundamentally deciding what is displayed and consumed. This fuelled Foucaultian visibility games, namely, an understanding of platforms as fostering forms of power constituted on the threat of making invisible the content posted (Bucher, 2012). In this sense, algorithms are not passive tools,

but agents of power nudging cultural consumption (Beer, 2009, 2019) and consumer choices are inherently intertwined with, if not determined by, market logics pursued by data-driven control (see e.g. C. J. Thompson, 2019).

In parallel to such critical perspectives, various scholars conducted research to overcome taking-for-granted understandings of algorithmic power (Cardon, 2018), which oftentimes overlook the importance of imagined actions as forms of agentic reappropriation by users (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Research conducted from this perspective outlines fundamental notions to understand better how people account for algorithms. For example, algorithmic imaginaries are stories, anecdotes, and beliefs based on which users adapt their behaviours on platforms (Bucher, 2017b). This is later situated in a relationship with platforms' designers, whose respective imaginaries influence the development of algorithmic systems to anticipate consumption choices (Schulz, 2023). Such imaginaries are oftentimes expressed as specific beliefs on the functioning of said automated systems – that is, the well-known *folk theories* (Eslami et al., 2016). These are ways of approaching recommender algorithms, usually shared among the informants involved in research, that allowed us to explore emotional reactions behind the functioning (or not) of said systems (Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2021). Moreover, the system of stories, narrative and actual experiences that people take in place when interacting with recommended content opened up to broader frameworks of agency, which suggests this very latter to be *fluid* - that is, intertwined with platform logics, with the two actors shaping each other (Siles, 2023; Siles et al., 2024).

In this sense, the dualism between platform power and human agency has influenced research on consumer culture studies, especially for the potential of platforms to free the consumer from the constraints of materiality while at the same time shaping consumption practices through recommended content tailored to the consumers. Airoldi and Rokka (2022) overcame such dualism through the concept of *algorithmic articulation*, meant to be the iterative, non-neutral process through which algorithms take non-neutral input data to offer outputs which are influenced by platform strategies. However, the users act upon these outputs, and the resulting interactions are converted into data that feeds the algorithms again. According to this perspective, therefore, algorithmic articulation is not merely companies attempting to shape consumption practices, but they are also the outcome of the consumers' resistance towards said systems. In other words, the sociotechnical interplay between users and algorithms defines a feedback loop that shapes both the user and the machine, which may also internalise users' values and preferences not anticipated by platform owners (Airoldi, 2021a).

The sociotechnical perspective on recommender systems is crucial to understand better why youth social media experiences and the competencies put in place during them should not be reduced to either consumption entirely pre-determined by platforms, as the *scrolling* imaginary might suggest, nor pure expression of self-reflexive consumer choices, as the digital literacy pedagogical outcomes aim to pursue by increasing competencies in adopting social media. Platform experiences are inevitably rooted in a complex sociotechnical interplay between platforms sorting content that may be consumed and consumers interacting with algorithmic outputs to achieve various personal ends. Users, in this sense, share their agency with social agents such as recommender systems whose iterative interactions mutually shape each other's choices (or outputs).

Within such an intertwine, the practices individuals adopt – either intentionally or unintentionally – play a crucial

role in what is experienced on platforms. Moreover, these practices are oftentimes enacted tactically to reappropriate one's space of action, when not properly overcoming platform power (Yu et al., 2022). These ecosystems of practices represent, therefore, an actual – oftentimes latent – practical competence that people, especially teenagers, deploy to make sense of platform experiences by dealing with recommender systems. The practical knowledge, which I refer to as *practical digital literacy*, draws upon – and hopefully expands – recent research focused on how users manipulate, resist, and *game* algorithms to navigate platforms. Such a form of agency has been named *algorithmic agency*.

4.3 Algorithmic agency and computational authority

The widespread integration of recommender systems into platforms introduces new questions about the traditional division between structure and agency. At one extreme lies the view that algorithms entirely determine our social media consumption; at the other, the idea that users freely choose what to consume. While both positions are exaggerations, they highlight the deeply intertwined technical and social dynamics that shape contemporary platform experiences. To address this tension, scholars have introduced the notion of algorithmic agency, which is typically approached from two main perspectives.

We can reduce the first approach to algorithmic agency as the capacity to participate in the world, in Giddens' terms, to "exert some sort of power" (Giddens, 1984, p. 14). In this sense, algorithmic agency refers to the capacity of algorithms, especially those powered by machine learning (ML), to participate in and shape social processes, not merely as neutral tools but as consequential actors in complex sociotechnical systems. This construct fundamentally revises traditional views of agency, which privilege human intentionality and reflexivity, by recognising that nonhuman elements can also "make a difference" within networks of interaction and power.

A *networked* perspective sheds further light on this concept. As articulated by Airoldi (2023), algorithms can be observed as part of extended sociotechnical assemblages. They do not act in isolation but are entwined with digital infrastructures, material devices, institutional protocols, cultural values, and, critically, human practices. In this sense, as Bucher (2018) demonstrates, these algorithms do not possess intentions or reflexivity. However, they do effectuate actions through their programmed conditions and iterative responsiveness to data, such as organising content, shaping visibility, and modulating user behaviour. In the mentioned work, Bucher illustrates how platform algorithms, such as those on Facebook or Instagram, *exert* agency by mediating what users see and do, not autonomously, but as integral components of a broader actor-network. Their agency is relational and situational, emerging from the dynamic interplay between technical design, data flows, and human participation.

This concept resonates with Actor-Network Theory (ANT), which posits that agency is distributed across human and nonhuman actants. Following Latour, algorithmic agency is not a property inherent to the technology itself but a product of its embeddedness within networks of practices. As Cooren (2010) and others in the Montréal School have argued, nonhuman actors such as algorithms gain authority and relevance when other actors, both human and nonhuman, recognise and respond to their outputs. This attribution of relevance is evident in platforms where algorithmic recommendations are trusted, contested, or resisted by users, thereby reinforcing or disrupting the "authority" of the algorithm.

In addition, Airoldi (2023) emphasises that ML systems differ from simpler algorithms in their operational autonomy: they adapt and "learn" from data in ways that are not entirely predictable or transparent, even to their creator. This leads to what the scholar terms "machine socialisation" (2021a, 2023), a process in which ML systems, by ingesting and reproducing cultural patterns, acquire a form of agency that is both culturally embedded and dynamically emergent. This *cultural* view acknowledges that these algorithms can produce effects that extend beyond the direct intentions of their designers, sometimes generating "alien" outcomes that challenge traditional notions of causality and responsibility.

However, as van Dijck and colleagues argue (2019), the agency exerted by algorithms is inseparable from the infrastructural and economic power of platforms. Platform companies design and deploy algorithms not as neutral mediators but as instruments for steering user behaviour, capturing value, and sustaining their market dominance. Algorithmic agency, in this light, is always implicated in broader regimes of platform power, which shape the conditions under which algorithms operate and the sorts of agency they can enact. Algorithms do not simply "afford" specific actions; they actively construct social reality through processes of datafication, recommendation, and modulation.

The second approach is built around Bonini and Treré's (2024) proposition of algorithmic agency as the "users' reflexive ability to make the algorithms work to meet their own ends" (p. 19). Unlike approaches focused on algorithms as independent actants or gatekeepers, this perspective foregrounds the ways in which users exercise power by understanding and interacting with algorithmic systems. Users here exert influence over the outputs of algorithms; these outputs, in turn, feed back into recommendation systems, creating a space where users themselves can appropriate their space of action through small, everyday interventions.

Bonini and Treré situate this form of agency along two key axes. The first draws on Thompson's (1971) notion of moral economy distinguishes between the platform's moral economy, which prioritises efficiency and competition, and self-optimisation, and the user's moral economy, which reflects users' perceptions of fairness, relevance, and legitimacy. The second axis builds on De Certeau's (1984) dichotomy of strategies and tactics. Strategic engagement refers to longer-term, deliberate efforts to optimise visibility or outcomes in ways aligned with platform logics. In contrast, tactical engagement encompasses adaptive, short-term actions that creatively negotiate the constraints imposed by algorithms. Bonini and Trerè extend this framework by showing that not all tactical actions are acts of resistance: many are subtle, habituated practices aimed at personalising the platform experience rather than subverting it.

Whereas MySpace users appropriated platforms through visible practices such as copy-and-paste customisation of profiles, layouts, and music embeds (Perkel, 2008), contemporary users engage in more subtle and often less observable forms of algorithmic appropriation. On platforms such as TikTok or Instagram, users manipulate the content they engage with, through likes, shares, watch time, or commenting, to influence what the algorithm prioritises in their feeds. A notable example of this subtle appropriation is the use of *algospeak*, where users intentionally alter keywords, hashtags, or captions to evade algorithmic content moderation while still communicating their intended messages (see e.g. Klug et al., 2023; Steen et al., 2023).

These practices do not challenge the platform's economic logic, but they allow users to shape a personalised experience that aligns with their preferences, interests, and aesthetic sensibilities. Such everyday manipulations resonate with Eglash's (2004) notion of vernacular science and technology, which highlights how communities creatively adapt available tools and systems to serve local purposes within larger structural and technical constraints. These algorithmic tactics can include micro-adjustments, such as scurating watch histories, interacting with specific trends, or strategically engaging with niche content, all of which operate within the affordances of the platform. While largely non-political and compatible with the platform's broader economy, these practices are essential for producing experiences that feel personal, responsive, and meaningful. They illustrate how micro-level, situated interactions constitute a form of algorithmic agency that is reflexive, users actively consider how the system responds, adaptive, and co-constitutive of the digital environment, demonstrating that even ordinary, habituated practices play a significant role in shaping the social and technical contours of platformised spaces.

Algorithmic agency plays a vital role in understanding teenagers' platform experiences within a complex sociotechnical context where they actively engage in tactical resistance or manipulation. This embeds the concept of practical digital literacy as a competence arising from these reflexive interactions, which are deeply ingrained in everyday platform experiences. Furthermore, this affects how adolescents interact with what platforms offer, including both content and features. Notably, regarding the latter, teenagers continually negotiate, adapt, and assign new meanings and symbolic values to the features originally intended by the platform itself. (A. Arvidsson et al., 2016). To this purpose, the literature distinguishes between platform features and affordances to explore how such features are interpreted by users and the extent to which this gives rise to the so-called platform vernaculars.

4.4 Platform grammars, vernaculars and affordances

In algorithmically curated environments, user agency crystallises in the negotiated balance between what platforms envisage users to do, which are strategies materialised as feature-level prompts and constraints, and what users actually enact by appropriating these spaces to make experiences feel personal. This dynamic is best unpacked through three intertwined concepts: platform grammars, platform vernaculars, and platform affordances.
Platform grammars are the platform-shaped "units of action" and built-in means that channel how content is produced and circulated (for example, reactive interactions and tools like *retweets*), while platform vernaculars are the shared linguistic conventions and narrative patterns that emerge from ordinary users' creative practices within a platform's material architecture and cultures of use (Caliandro & Anselmi, 2021). At the intersection of the two, there are platform affordances. These are the relational socio-technical "possibilities for action" that emerge at the intersection of platforms' technical architectures, platform politics, and culture of use (Bucher & Helmond, 2019). Taken together, these concepts foreground the sociotechnical nature of platform experience: practices are neither entirely free nor wholly dictated by platform expectation, but instead evolve through an iterative internalisation and selective contestation of platform logics. This is the grounding for the practical mastery that I referred to as Practical Digital Literacy (see Chapter 4): a situated competence that emerges as a vernacular through enculturation into youth platform cultures. In developing this competence, actors learn, and a times challenge, platform

grammars, cultivating a productive tension between what platforms want them to do and what they come to expect platforms should do. This is analysable precisely through the lenses of grammar, vernacular, and affordances.

4.4.1 Platform grammars

The concept of grammar, first introduced by the linguist Noam Chomsky in the second half of the 20th century, as a finite system of rules capable of generating infinite sentences (Chomsky, 1957), has more recently been adopted in media and platform studies to explore how communicative environments are structured and how they shape users' behavours and consumption practices. Initially, scholars drew on the idea of *media grammars* to describe patterned ways in which media technologies and industries organise the production, circulation, and reception of content. From the late 1990s onward, this framework helped to conceptualise how media systems are never neutral but instead embedded with conventions and criteria that delimit what can be said, seen, and done within a given medium (Thimm, 2018).

Meyrowitz, as reported in Thimm (2018), approached media grammars through he lens of literacy. For him, understanding media grammar required not only knowledge of the "standard range of production variables within each medium" but also the capacity to recognise "the ways in which variables are typically used to attempt to shape perception and response to mediated communications" (Meyrowitz, 1998, p. 101). In this sense, a *media grammar literacy* implies awareness of the "pragmatic forces of the media in use" (Thimm, 2018, p. 123). Such an approach emphasises that engaging with media means navigating a system of structural rules that guide communication, even when these rules remain largely invisible to users.

Building on this tradition, Thimm (2018) extends the notion of grammar to digital platforms, introducing the concept of *platform grammars*. A key contribution here is the distinction between surface and property grammars. Surface grammars refer to the set of tools and affordances made available to users, such as remix functions, hashtags, mash-ups, or links, that is, elements that invite creativity and participatory practices. Property grammars, by contrast, are the underlying structural rules that remain closed to direct user manipulation, such as recommender algorithms, metrics, or interface architectures. These govern the ways interactions unfold and determine what kinds of content gain visibility, but they do so in ways largely inaccessible to ordinary users.

Caliandro and Anselmi (2021) further develop this framework in their study of memetic brands on Instagram. For them, platform grammars are not only technical systems, but affordance-based structures that condition the relation between brands, users, and cultural practices. In this perspective, grammars are sociotechnical: they both constrain and enable, defining the range of possible actions while also serving as resources for creative and strategic expression. This allows scholars to account for how platforms, far from being neutral infrastructures, actively shape cultural production and meaning-making processes.

Despite this, platforms typically present themselves as open, neutral, and participatory environments. As Gillespie (2010) notes, the very term platform carries connotations of "openness, neutrality, egalitarianism and progressive support for activity" (p. 352). For regular users, platforms appear as spaces of identity expression and creativity, well exemplified by YouTube's motto *Broadcast Yourself*. Yet, behind this user-facing rhetoric lies a different economic logic: the continuous extraction and exploitation of user-generated data. This process intensifies with the rise of Web 2.0 and has only accelerated with the advent of AI-driven media. As Natale (2021) argues, AI

systems capitalise on human tendencies to project intelligence and personality onto machines, thereby reshaping social interactions and altering the perception of agency.

Taken together, the concept of platform grammars highlights the dual character of platforms: environments that present themselves as participatory arenas for cultural creativity, while simultaneously operating through opaque, property-level grammars that direct behaviour, organise participation, and sustain the data economy.

4.4.2 Platform vernaculars

Recent scholarship in platform studies has increasingly turned to the notion of *platform vernacular* (see e.g. Bainotti et al., 2021; Caliandro, 2024; Caliandro et al., 2024a; Caliandro & Anselmi, 2021; Peeters et al., 2021), often situating it in contrast to the related concept of grammar. The point of departure for much of this literature is the definition proposed by Gibbs and colleagues, who describe platform vernaculars as "the popular (as in 'of people') genres of communication" that arise from "the mediated practices and communicative habits of users" (Gibbs et al., 2015, p. 260). What this emphasises is that vernaculars are not abstract stylistic tendencies but concrete communicative forms that emerge from everyday user activity. They are developed collectively, circulated within groups, and often tied to the specificity of a given platform. They are developed collectively, circulated within groups, and often tied to the specificity of a given platform. At the same time, these practices are rooted in the creative reappropriation of platform affordances, that is, the constraints and allowances embedded in the technological environment.

Vernacular practices, however, are never static. They evolve dynamically, spreading across different platforms and being adapted to new contexts. A clear example is the hashtag: initially popularised on Twitter, it has since migrated across most major social media platforms, acquiring slightly different functions and meanings in each. This illustrates how vernaculars originate in particular environments yet constantly travel and are negotiated. Conceptually, this is significant because it captures two complementary dimensions. On the one hand, vernaculars highlight the everyday, ordinary modes of communication that flourish within platform constraints. On the other hand, they demonstrate how users repurpose those very constraints for expressive and interactive ends (Gibbs et al., 2015). This line of thinking is strictly aligned with Jean Burgess's work on *vernacular creativity* (Burgess, 2006), which drew attention to the proliferation of cultural practices devised by ordinary users in digital environments during the early 2000s. Burgess's contribution is often credited with establishing vernacular creativity as a central object of study at a time when non-institutional actors were rapidly expanding their role in online cultural production.

Building on this foundation, subsequent studies have expanded the scope of platform vernaculars. Keller (2019), for instance, examined how specific communicative styles and norms develop within the particular affordances of different platforms, showing how online feminist activism takes distinct shapes on Twitter, Facebook, and Tumblr. In another refinement, Trillò (2024) contrasted platform vernaculars with platform imaginaries. Here, imaginaries refer to the beliefs, expectations, and assumptions users hold about how a platform works. At the same time, vernaculars denote the observable aesthetics, conventions, and practices through which users adapt to, and play with, platform features. This distinction has been mobilised to analyse the spread of PoV memes on TikTok, which act as vehicles for both expressing and reinforcing vernacular practices. Users participate in shared formats that are specific to TikTok's technological design and social ecology, thereby making vernaculars a central means of

social negotiation and affiliation on the platform.

Yet, despite these rich contributions, existing research often treats platform grammars in a limited sense, reducing them to the visible features made available to users. Less attention has been given to how platforms actively steer user behaviour, through strategies that remain invisible but are designed to maximise data-economic outcomes. As Poell and colleagues (2019) emphasise, platforms should not be regarded as neutral infrastructures but as institutions of power that mediate and shape communication. This relative neglect has also obscured the insights of earlier media scholarship. Already in the late 2000s, scholars described participatory media as zones of contestation (Appadurai & Breckenridge, 1998), where mass and folk cultures collided. Robert Glenn Howard (2008), in particular, sought to conceptualise the hybridity of digital vernaculars by combining two theoretical traditions. Drawing on Gramsci's notion of subcultural vernaculars, he highlighted the counter-hegemonic discourses developed by marginalised groups (Gramsci, 1985 [1937]). At the same time, he incorporated Lantis's concept of common vernacular, which emphasised the everyday cultural practices of ordinary people as distinct from elite or institutionalised "high culture" (Lantis, 1960). By integrating these approaches, Howard underscored the dialectical nature of digital platforms, where institutional logics and grassroots creativity intersect and constantly reshape one another.

Finally, another underexplored dimension is the interplay between online and offline vernaculars. While much research has focused on digital environments alone, scholars such as Blank (2013) have argued that platform vernaculars are deeply engaged with corporeal, real-world practices. His notion of hybridisation captures this feedback loop: vernaculars do not arise in a vacuum but reshape existing folk cultures even as they reshape them. Digital environments, therefore, are best understood as sites where cultural practices are continuously negotiated across the boundaries of the online and offline, producing new hybrid forms of expression.

4.4.3 Platform affordances

Platform grammars and vernaculars provide complementary perspectives for understanding how users engage with platforms. However, it is through the concept of platform affordances that the dynamic interplay between user agency and platform design becomes most evident. Affordances capture the relational possibilities for action that emerge at the intersection of a platform's technical architecture, its social and cultural context, and the practices of its users. IN this sense, affordances bridge the structural constraints embedded in platform grammars with the emergent, socially negotiated patterns captured by platform vernaculars. They foreground the ways in which users not only operate within platform limitations but also creatively appropriate, reinterpret, and even challenge these limitations, often producing practices that diverge from platform expectations and intended behavioural pathways.

The notion of affordance originates in James J. Gibson's ecological approach to perception (Gibson, 1979), where it refers to the system of possible actions offered by a specific environment. Most importantly, Gibson highlighted the relational nature of affordances: different actors perceive different possibilities for action within the same environment, depending on their capacities and goals. This relationa perspective was subsequently adapted to human-computer interaction through Donald Norman's work in *The Design of Everyday Things* (1988). The author emphasised the designer's role in making affordances perceivable, defining them as "the perceived and actual properties of the thing" (p. 9) to highlight that technological features only matter when users can recognise and

act upon them (Withagen et al., 2012). Extending this reasoning to digital technologies, William Gaver (1991) proposed the idea of technological affordances, pointing to how the material qualities of technology partially mediate communication and social practices. Hutchby (2001) further argued that affordances are not static; they are "materially constraining and enabling" while simultaneously socially constructed, highlighting the active role of users in negotiating technology's possibilities (p. 238).

The study of social media affordances builds directly on these foundations. Bucher and Helmond (2019) identified a central tension in this literature: between abstract, high-level interpretations of affordances, as general enablers of media practices and low-level, feature-oriented approaches focusing on the specifics of how platforms mediate interactions. For example, boyd (2010a) identified persistence, replicability, scalability, and searchability as key structural affordances, shaping social media use, while feature-oriented studies investigate how particular tools, such as likes, retweets, or comment threads, enable or constrain specific behaviours. Both levels of analysis are important, but feature-specific affordances make the dialectical relationship between platform design and user practice more tangible.

Importantly, early research often underemphasised the agentic role of users in shaping affordances. Nagy and Neff (2015) introduced the notion of *imagined affordances*, framing affordances as the product of a dynamic interplay between material technology and users' perceptions, affect, and mediation. Users interpret, negotiate, and sometimes repurpose platform features in ways that designers can not fully anticipate. McVeigh-Schultz and Baym (2015) describe this as *vernacular affordances*, where practices emerge across nested technological scales, shaped by prior experiences and broader media ecologies. These affordances are contextually and socially embedded. Costa (2018), for instance, shows that users actively resist the phenomenon of context collapse, introduced by Marwick and boyd (2011), by creating multiple accounts or managing privacy settings to maintain boundaries between social spheres, illustrating how affordances are co-constructed rather than passively encountered.

The interplay between affordances and user agency becomes particularly salient in algorithmically curated environments. On platforms like TikTok, algorithms are designed to tailor content flows to users' inferred preferences. Yet, youth engage with these affordances tactically, experimenting with and subtly manipulating the systems to influence the content they receive. In this context, the affordance of algorithmic curation is not simply a top-down feature but a co-constructed space, produced through the intersection of platform strategies and users' practical tactics (Siles & Valerio-Alfaro, 2025). Recognising this co-construction is essential for understanding platform vernaculars: the socially and culturally situated practices that emerge are inseparable from the affordances through which they operate.

Platform affordances are the relational, sociotechnical possibilities that make the tension between grammars and vernaculars visible. They foreground how platforms shape, but do not fully determine, user practices; how users actively negotiate, reinterpret, and appropriate platform features; and how emergent practices feed back into platform logics. Through this lens, the study of affordances highlights the practical mastery and situated competence that emerge when users navigate and contest the limits of platform design. This competence is the one at the core of the present work, that is, what I term the *practical digital literacy*.

4.5 Conclusion

When examining youth competencies in social media contexts, scholarship on digital competencies generally acknowledges the growing pervasiveness of platforms in everyday life. What tends to receive less emphasis, however, is the extent to which these environments are deeply sociotechnical, actively shaping and being reshaped by user practices. This chapter therefore seeks to expand the discussion by foregrounding how digital competencies must be understood as adaptive skills, developed in response to the evolving interplay of technical architectures, cultural practices, and platform logics.

First, introducing the concept of platformisation. In order to better merge the literature on digital literacy, the first section of the chapter is dedicated to said phenomenon, with the intention of setting the focus on how contemporary platforms are not only environments wherein teenagers engage in entertaining content, but also that mediate socialisation and other social processes. The concept of a platform originates from the necessity of referring to an environment that serves users by offering a wide range of features. However, on the other side, platform owners offer to third parties large amounts of data collected from users' more or less aware datafied interactions. The nature of these systems of services has to be disentangled to appreciate better how and with what intent they colonise users' everyday life (Couldry & Mejias, 2019).

The second aim is to introduce one of the main tools platforms use to personalise users' experiences: recommender systems. These complex algorithms have drawn significant scholarly attention over the past decade due to their ability to shape consumption by selectively presenting content. To move beyond the view of platforms as neutral tools, this chapter engages with recent research in critical algorithm studies. In this context, algorithms are examined not only for their ubiquity in today's media environment but also for their role in shaping and intensifying users' engagement with platforms, primarily through recommender systems. Building on sociological literature, the chapter shows how such algorithms structure everyday life by curating the content users encounter, inevitably excluding other categories. While this might suggest a passive user role, the concept of algorithmic consumer culture reveals a more dynamic interaction. Recent sociological studies emphasise how platform experiences arise from a complex sociotechnical relationship between users and algorithms, with user-generated data serving as both input and influence on outcomes. Thus, datafied user interactions are central to how these algorithms operate.

The third aim of the chapter is to underline the active role of users in the aforementioned sociotechnical interplay through the concept of algorithmic agency and tactical resistance. Literature on algorithmic agency, in fact, allows us to understand better how platforms design, with their grammars and features, are meant to drive behaviours, thereby increasing processes of datafication and data extraction. However, users actively engage with platform allowances and constraints to tactically reappropriate their spaces of action. In doing so, they develop a shared vernacular understanding of what to do on and to expect from platforms, oftentimes not aligned with platform economic ends. Especially in algorithmic media, they develop algorithmic tactics not only to resist recommendations, as in higher political sensibilities, but also to manipulate and tailor ordinary platforms' experiences, which in this sense are co-constructed. This has to be accounted for, and then frameworks should be outlined to understand what teenagers do when they consume content on social media.

To this purpose, the chapter has been subdivided into four main sections to cover insights from the platformisation of society, through the interplay between users and recommender systems, until the everyday forms of appropriation that users take in place to navigate platform experiences.

First, the platformisation of society marks a defining feature of the digital era, with platforms now mediating a vast array of social and economic processes (Poell et al., 2019). From the simple act of ordering food via an app to the integration of educational technologies in schools (Rivas, 2023), platforms have become infrastructural, reshaping institutional actors and everyday practices. Helmond (2015) describes how social networks have evolved to become increasingly programmable, relying on the circulation and extraction of unprecedented amounts of data. Moreover, the paragraph delves into the concept of datafication, as the transformation of social actions into quantifiable data, enabling real-time tracking and predictive analysis (Mayer-Schönberger & Cukier, 2013). This process, driven by platform owners and Big Tech (Lycett, 2013), is central to the economic logic of contemporary platform economies (Srnicek & De Sutter, 2017; Van Dijck, 2014). The extraction and analysis of digital traces underpin a surveillance-based capitalist project (Zuboff, 2019), where user data is leveraged not only for value generation but also for making consumption patterns predictable. Importantly, this datafication is non-neutral (Gillespie, 2010), shaping the very fabric of social life and feeding the recommender systems that curate users' experiences.

The second paragraph is dedicated to defining recommender systems as social agents. These systems of algorithms are now central to the organisation and consumption of content on digital platforms. They are employed to personalise users' experiences by processing a vast range of behavioural data, from explicit interactions (likes, shares) to more passive signals (time spent, location) (Burke et al., 2011). The rise of algorithms, exemplified by Google's PageRank (Sharma, 2020), and later by social media news feeds (Freyne et al., 2010), reflects a shift towards algorithmic curation designed to reduce information overload and increase engagement. However, these systems are not neutral intermediaries. They exert significant influence over cultural consumption and visibility, operating as agents of power that nudge user choices in line with platform strategies (Beer, 2009, 2019; C. J. Thompson, 2019). This has led to concerns about the "black-boxed" nature of algorithmic decision-making (Pasquale, 2015) and the Foucauldian dynamics of visibility and invisibility (Bucher, 2012). Yet, critical perspectives have been complemented by research into users' adaptive and agentic responses, highlighting the importance of algorithmic imaginaries—stories and beliefs about how algorithms work (Bucher, 2017b; Schulz, 2023)—and folk theories (Eslami et al., 2016) that shape user behaviour. The concept of algorithmic articulation (Airoldi & Rokka, 2022) captures the iterative feedback loop between users and algorithms: platforms shape consumption practices, but users also resist, manipulate, and reappropriate these systems, feeding new data back into the loop (Airoldi, 2021a). This sociotechnical interplay underscores that platform experiences are neither wholly determined by algorithms nor entirely the product of autonomous user choice.

Practices of users' tactical agency to reappropriate the space of action are crucial to understand their competencies within these environments better. Hence, the fourth paragraph is centred on the concept of algorithmic agency. Algorithmic agency, indeed, emerges as a practical competence through which users, especially teenagers, navigate, resist, and even reframe the dynamics of power embedded in datafied societies (Bucher, 2018; Van Dijck et al., 2019). This concept offers a third way between viewing users as passive victims of algorithmic control or as entirely

self-reflexive agents. Instead, it recognises the fluidity of agency in digital contexts, where users and algorithms mutually shape each other's actions (Siles, 2023). Research into algorithmic agency reveals a spectrum of practices, from tactical resistance and gaming of algorithms (Bainotti, 2024a; Cotter, 2019; Yu et al., 2022) to more subtle forms of adaptation and negotiation. These practices constitute a vernacular competence—a set of shared, often tacit, strategies that users deploy to make sense of and influence their platform experiences.

To this purpose, the chapter ends with the concepts of platform grammars and vernaculars, which refer to the culturally specific ways users learn to "speak" the language of platforms, adapting to their rules and constraints. The theory of affordances (as discussed in platform studies) further illuminates how platforms both enable and constrain user action, shaping the possibilities for agency and resistance.

The chapter demonstrates the extent to which implementing insights from platform studies is crucial to introducing areas of expansion in the investigation of digital literacies. Far from being passive actors, in fact, today's teenagers are involved in a complex interplay with platforms, through the mediation of recommender algorithms. Hence, to navigate these environments, they develop a tacit, shared and structured system of competencies and practices that allows them to reappropriate and further personalise platform experiences. Similarly to what happened with the widespread use of MySpace at the beginning of the new Millennium, with this social networking website allowing profile and interface personalisation through HTML code copied and pasted (boyd, 2008; Perkel, 2008) Following comparable logic, we tailor social media experiences through the ordinary tactical forms of resistance. To better account for this, I merged the two literatures to develop the concept of *Practical digital literacy*. Theoretical grounding and empirical strategies are outlined in the following chapter.

Chapter 5. Practical digital literacy

The concept of *Practical Digital Literacy* integrates two strands of literature by offering sociopractical and technosocial perspectives on digital competencies as field-related rules of the game that young people develop to navigate platform experiences. Such practical knowledge is grounded in teenagers' understandings of platforms, meant to be an ongoing process composed of interiorisation and appropriation of platform grammars to define the possibilities offered by these digital environments. Moreover, the practical approach to digital literacy adopted in this work further accounts for the active role that platforms play in mediating youths' social life and consumption practices, especially throughout the complex system of recommender algorithms, which act as social agents reproducing the social order.

This chapter is therefore dedicated to introducing the core concept of this work, structuring its foundations around three main attributes. Practical digital literacy is a shared and dispositional set of understandings employed by teenagers to navigate platform experiences through structured discourses and practices. In this sense, the three founding blocks are: being shared, dispositional, and structured. First, such cultural knowledge is shared among teenagers as it arises from the need to feel connected to others, emerging through processes of information exchange among peers (Shankleman et al., 2021). Second, understanding what platforms offer in terms of experiences also relies on one's individual and contextual factors. Past research, in fact, outlined how upper- and middle-class teenagers engage social media in a cultural capital-enhancing stance, whereas less advantaged ones are more inclined to social capital–enhancing activities (Micheli, 2015). By underlining the dispositional nature of practical digital literacy, the aim is to foster further research on this perspective and, at the same time, to define the context-dependent, more-than-individual nature of said competence. Third, these also manifest not only in discourses but also in practices, whether inside or outside platforms. As a matter of fact, whereas imaginaries have already been developed to define everyday encounters with platforms (see e.g. Bucher, 2017b; Gandini et al., 2023; Schulz, 2023), teenagers are accustomed to "taking, editing, selecting, hiding, and sharing (Márquez et al., 2023, p. 907) as a part of ordinary forms of interactions.

Practical digital literacy builds on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice, which conceptualises practices as the crossway between internalised social conditions, expressed as systems of dispositions, and the objective conditions in which individuals act (Bourdieu, 1972). In sum, practical digital literacy serves as an analytical tool for understanding how people participate across different fields of social life by unconsciously adjusting their actions in relation to others: what Bourdieu described as the *feel for the game* (Bourdieu, 1980). This sense can be interpreted as a tacit, practical, and collectively shared orientation that develops through dispositions acquired through socialisation processes, such as family upbringing. These dispositions, which Bourdieu called *habitus*, shape perceptions and guide practices within specific social arenas. Fields are structured social spaces, including those linked to social media content consumption, that are governed by tacit rules and competitive dynamics. Within them, individuals occupy positions determined by their composition of resources, or *capitals* (Bourdieu, 1992). Participation in a field also implies a shared understanding of what is at stake (doxa), a commitment to investing in the field (illusio), and the pursuit of legitimacy through recognition from others (Bourdieu, 1992).

This theoretical framework highlights three key dimensions. First, it shows how individual practices and understandings are shaped within social contexts and are inherently collective. Teenagers, by participating in digital fields, cultivate shared systems of meaning and practice that are visible in how they exchange information, imitate behaviours, and negotiate norms with peers. Second, the concept of habitus underscores the dispositional character of these practices, reflecting how teenagers' actions are shaped by their backgrounds, such as family, social class, and prior experiences with technology, as well as by the specific contexts in which they operate, including home and school. Third, Bourdieu emphasises that habitus not only emerges from social structures but also actively structures practices and discourses. This dynamic can be observed in the ways teenagers' digital literacies simultaneously reflect and reproduce the rules, hierarchies, and power relations of digital platforms and peer cultures. Consequently, the practices and discourses surrounding digital literacy are not random but patterned, shaped by the underlying logics of the digital field and the distribution of different forms of capital.

Bourdieu's work is also employed for a more epistemological stance. More specifically, in the empirical strategy that is developed in the next chapter, teenagers' consumption practices are investigated as a proxy for the broader set of digital competence informing them. Taste is indeed among the main social *praxis* explored in the work of the sociologist, especially in one of his most established works, *La distinction* (1979). Here, Bourdieu shows how cultural consumption patterns reflect shared class-based dispositions. Similarly, it might be argued that teenagers' digital practices can be observed as expressing shared generational and socio-cultural dispositions embedded in the concept of practical digital literacy. Moreover, in *Les règles de l'art* (1992), taste operates as a form of symbolic capital, that is, a crucial resource to be recognised and gain distinction within fields of consumption. In this research, taste can be understood as the embodied preferences, styles, and evaluative judgments that teenagers develop and express through their digital practices.

The theoretical foundations of the concept of practical digital literacy led to three main research questions, developed to investigate the three dimensions outlined beforehand: shared, dispositional, and structured.

RQ1. What are the main shared discourses and practices characterising teenagers' platform experiences

RQ2. How does youths' social background interact with social media consumption preferences?

RQ3. How does youths' practical understanding of platforms guide their social media practices?

This introduction has provided a general overview of the theoretical grounding of the concept of digital literacy, its three fundamental elements and how these pillars are investigated throughout the empirical strategies. Each of the sections is deepened in the following paragraphs.

5.1 Defining practical digital literacy

Practical digital literacy is a field-specific social competence. In other words, far from being a concept isolated from the related literature on digital (and other) literacies, it participates in this broader constellation by shedding light on how the younger generations participate in increasingly platformised fields of social life and how they develop a nuanced system of rules of the game to engage with them in a meaningful manner. Such a focus is necessary to carry over the exploration of youths' digital social life. This already took off at the beginning of the

Millennium, although it now needs further investigations due to the advent of increasingly complex platform features and affordances. Hence, the following paragraph aims to define a dialogue among the literatures introduced in Chapter 4, in which situating the concept of practical digital literacy.

Section 3.1 reports how the widespread use of social media by younger generations fuelled various societal concerns both inside and outside the academic community. Early and ongoing scholarship often frames young users either as passive recipients of digital influences (Valkenburg & Peter, 2009) or as fully reflexive actors who deploy digital competencies for civic or career-related purposes (Van Laar et al., 2017). Both approaches emphasise risks, deficits, and the need to protect youth from potential harms, reflecting a long-standing focus on younger generations (Buckingham, 2008c). While such frameworks have underpinned large-scale initiatives providing measurement tools and pedagogical guidelines (Ferrari, 2012), they are often grounded in public discourses, news media narratives and psychological literature focused on problematic behaviours. However, these approaches overlook that youth cultures negotiate, if not even resist, digital environments' logics to appropriate these spaces and to engage with socially meaningful experiences.

Bottom-up approaches have sought to address this limitation. Sefton-Green and colleagues (2009) highlight the complex emotional and intellectual engagement of young people with commercial digital culture, noting that digital literacy develops socially and in relation to other media literacies. Similarly, the rise of social network sites has placed participatory practices at the centre of teenage engagement (Jenkins, 2009; Jenkins et al., 2016). Subsequent research extends this perspective to platform use, showing how teenagers negotiate and repurpose pre-designed platform grammars to generate new meanings and forms of participation (Pangrazio, 2016).

At the same time, scholarship has highlighted the deep sociotechnical nature of contemporary platforms. The platformization of society is not neutral: it embeds economic logics, from datafication to surveillance capitalism (Gillespie, 2010; Poell et al., 2019; Zuboff, 2019), and uses data to fuel recommender systems that shape content exposure. Digital technologies operate as actors, or actants, in Latour's terms, actively influencing what and how users consume content (Beer, 2009, 2019). Yet, users are not passive actors in the platform experience: their interactions influence algorithmic outcomes, which internalise not only consumption preferences but broader taste structures (Airoldi, 2021a). They also engage strategically with these systems, tailoring algorithmic outputs to their own ends (Bonini & Treré, 2024). Hence, AI-driven systems both shape and are shaped by users' practices, creating co-constructed platform experiences in which social and technical factors are continuously intertwined (Siles & Valerio-Alfaro, 2025).

This represents the theoretical substratum onto which I situate the concept of practical digital literacy. In the aforementioned summary of the literature, the aim was to outline the main *cracks* in which the practical perspective of digital competences might operate, to elaborate on research on youth and social media further. To this purpose, I conceive practical digital literacy as follows:

Practical digital literacy is the shared and dispositional understanding, manifested throughout structured practices and discourses, that teenagers enact to navigate platform experiences.

The definition is constructed to integrate frameworks derived from the work by Pierre Bourdieu, who developed a nuanced understanding about the reproduction of the social order within educational contexts (Bourdieu, 1979, 1984/2007; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1994). Similarly, his work has also been employed in the context of literacy studies (see e.g. Collins, 2000; Grenfell et al., 2013; Hasan, 1998), albeit Allan Luke outlined a perspective that better adapts to the context of the present work. Luke offers a Bourdieu's reading of literacy meant as a discursive space, a *field* "in which certain resources are produced, attributed value, and circulated in regulated way, which allows for competition over access and, typically, unequal distribution" (Albright & Luke, 2008, p. 80). Drawing on Brian Street (1984 see Section 3.3), the scholar also separates autonomous from ideological models of literacy. With the first summarising the views considering literacy as an "objectively existing set of technologically mediated tools for the advancement of cognition" (Albright & Luke, 2008, p. 83), ideological approaches are the one at the basis of this work's argument. These models, indeed, refer to literacy as a "set of historically contingent social practices, necessarily embedded in the ideological frameworks which allow for the reproduction of regimes of truth" (ivi). In this sense, practical digital literacy is not the project to abstract a discrete knowledge, but rather the lens through which exploring how youth cultures develop such platformised practical mastery and why it is relevant for them in the context of their social life. This is crucial to also explore how external actors, such as teachers or parents, try to superimpose a different system of practices, a separated "good" way of carrying out social life on platforms.

Starting from these premises, I define practical digital literacy as a multimodal practical mastery. The following section delves into each of the three pillars: shared, dispositional, and structured.

5.1.1 Dimension 1: shared competence

The shared dimension of practical digital literacy highlights how digital knowledge and practices are collectively constructed and maintained among teenagers. First and foremost, this resonates with the concept of the *field* introduced by the aforementioned sociologist. The basic idea behind this concept was to observe interactions between people not only according to what was said, but rather looking at the space (i.e. the social space) wherein interactions and events take place (Bourdieu, 1992; Thomson, 2008). Hence, the field is the objectified social, "the rules that govern the working of a social space, the rules of the game" (Bourdieu et al., 2020, p. 26). Bourdieu outlined social spaces as a relational space of struggles: fields governed by untold, shared rules where people position themselves within specific *positionings*. These positions are determined by the forms of capital deemed relevant within the field, which individuals leverage to establish and legitimise their standing within it (Bourdieu, 1992). Moreover, each field hosts a dominant space, usually composed of the dominant class, which defines the principle of domination, that is, the so-called *field of power*. Here, the dominant class define "the dominant and legitimate principle of domination: people fight to establish in whose name it is legitimate to dominate. The symbolic struggle […] is a fight to establish the dominant principle of domination, which is not identified as such, but is recognised and therefore legitimate" (Bourdieu et al., 2020, p. 293). Fields of social life are, therefore, relational spaces with their own rules, hierarchies, and stakes.

Agents' actions are guided by their *feel for the game*, that is, a practical understanding rooted in their habitus. This understanding directs their participation in the field and is expressed through their *illusio* (Bourdieu, 1980). In this

sense, illusio is first a condition for the field's functioning; thus, without it, there would be no competition or engagement. Second, the same is a product of the field, as it is continually reinforced through participation and recognition by others (Bourdieu, 1996). Moreover, a shared understanding of the rules of the game defines people's commitment to the field's principles. This commitment is driven by their presuppositions (i.e., the doxa), which reproduce common sense – understood here as the shared understanding of the field's purpose.

The concept of fields applies to digital environments. Social media are, in fact, fields of cultural production and consumption in which teenagers develop a shared understanding of what is valuable or meaningful (Lindell, 2017). This shared sense of purpose and engagement is not innate, but emerges through ongoing interactions, peer exchanges, and the mutual recognition of what is at stake in digital participation (Shankleman et al., 2021). Past research has already outlined the extent to which collective imaginaries about technologies represent a shared understanding of what happens on social media, especially regarding recommender algorithms (Bucher, 2017b; Gandini et al., 2023; Siles, 2023). However, considering social media as a field of cultural production and consumption allows these perspectives to incorporate the tacit, latent, and often overlooked meanings behind practices. This approach better highlights how shared discourses, norms, and practices around digital literacy are negotiated, mimicked, and reinforced, making practical digital literacy a fundamentally social and collective phenomenon.

5.1.2 Dimension 2: dispositional competence

The dispositional aspect of practical digital literacy refers to the ingrained tendencies and orientations that shape how teenagers engage with digital platforms. This pillar of digital knowledge is grounded in Pierre Bourdieu's well-established conceptualisation of habitus.

Habitus is defined as the "systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures" (Bourdieu, 1972, p. 72). In other words, it can be understood as the embedded dispositions people develop throughout major socialisation phases, such as family upbringing and educational contexts, as well as those shaped by social background and accumulated experiences. People's perception of reality is also shaped by habitus, which thus drives their perception of relevance and consequent commitment (i.e., illusio) within various fields of social life (Bourdieu et al., 2020). Consequently, habitus is the system of sedimented dispositions that gives rise to practical sense: "the socially constructed sense of the game […] constantly aimed at practical, as opposed to cognitive, functions" (Wacquant, 1989, p. 42).

Dispositions are shaped, formulated, and influenced by the specific composition of what Bourdieu defines as capital. These are resources that individuals inherit or acquire within their social contexts (Bourdieu, 2021). More specifically, the sociologist outlined four primary forms of capital: economic, cultural, social, and symbolic (ibidem). First, economic capital refers to material wealth and financial resources, such as income, property, and financial assets. It underpins access to education, technology, and cultural goods, playing a central role in reproducing social hierarchies by enabling the acquisition of other forms of capital.

Cultural capital, by contrast, is less tangible and exists in three states: embodied, objectified, and institutionalised. Embodied cultural capital consists of long-lasting dispositions internalised through socialisation, such as language competencies and, to some extent, the conventionally conceived digital literacy (see e.g. Ragnedda, 2018).

Objectified cultural capital includes material cultural goods, such as books, devices, and art, which require embodied capital to be meaningful. Lastly, institutionalised cultural capital comprises formal certifications (e.g., degrees, qualifications) that legitimise cultural competence and confer social advantages. Bourdieu emphasised how such capital is unevenly distributed, with dominant classes leveraging it to maintain privilege in education and cultural fields (Bourdieu, 1979).

The third form, social capital, comprises networks of relationships and group memberships (Bourdieu, 2021). It provides access to collective resources, such as professional connections and peer support, which can be converted into economic or cultural capital, albeit relying on mutual recognition and reciprocity within a field. For example, Julien (2015) noted how Internet memes serve as elements through which social media users "created requirements, standards, and structures that must be fulfilled for a successful interaction and the granting of a place among the digital inhabitants to occur" (p. 370). In other words, what the scholar described as digital social capital is crucial to understanding such forms of digital production.

Finally, symbolic capital derives from recognition and prestige that legitimise authority and dominance within a field (Bourdieu, 2021). Unlike economic and cultural capital, which rely on material or knowledge-based resources, symbolic capital concerns the perceived value that others attribute to certain qualities, statuses, or achievements. Here, the role of the aforementioned illusio is particularly significant. Symbolic capital manifests in forms such as honour, reputation, titles, awards, or distinctions, whose power stems from the shared belief in their relevance or value among members of the field. For instance, Woods and Scott (2025) observed how the contemporary platformized music industry is influenced by the quantification of audience metrics. These data are turned into intangible assets for music entrepreneurs to legitimise their career success, while savvy musicians tactically engage with platform algorithms to increase such capital.

Habitus and capitals are two fundamental concepts in defining practical digital literacy, playing a dual role in its development. These concepts can be understood from two main perspectives. On one hand, habitus is the system of structured structures – that is, the dispositions one inherits from the sedimentation of past experiences, which for teenagers primarily arise from primary socialization (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). This phase is the foundational process through which individuals become members of society by internalizing the norms, values, and realities of their immediate social environments. The same applies to capitals, which are instilled in this phase by the family. Bourdieu and Passeron (1987), noted how children from privileged families acquire forms of cultural capital that closely align with what schools value and reward, such as linguistic proficiency, familiarity with cultural references, and confidence in academic settings. More recently, Micheli (2015) observed how social class influences teenagers' internet appropriation: adolescents from upper- and middle-class backgrounds may use social media "vertically"—namely, to enhance cultural capital—while those from "less advantageous social and cultural contexts appropriate the internet 'horizontally' together with their peers" (ivi, p. 37), focusing more on social capital-building activities. Defining practical digital literacy as a dispositional competence means it is characterized and shaped by both individual and contextual factors. This dispositional nature foregrounds how these factors interact to shape access to and engagement with digital resources. It emphasizes that digital literacy is not a uniform skill set but a context-dependent competence reflecting the diverse habitus and capitals present within the field.

Before moving to the third pillar of practical digital literacy, a final remark is necessary. The shared and dispositional nature of this digital competence sheds light on the "how" of social media experiences – the underlying logics, dispositions, and procedures that produce everyday consumption practices in digital environments. These aspects belong to the first perspective, whereas the third pillar – structured knowledge – relates more to the "what" produced by social media practices, such as norms or behavioural patterns. Bourdieu articulated this dualism through the distinction between *opus operatum* and *modus operandi*. To overcome the narrow dualism between structure and agency—which depicts actions as mere outcomes of conditions or as pure "deliberate pursuit of conscious intention" (Wacquant, 1989, p. 42) – Bourdieu developed a theory of practice that accounts for systems of practices as "the product (opus operatum) of a practical mastery (modus operandi)" (Bourdieu, 1972, p. 111). Accordingly, the system of dispositions embedded in individuals defines how they participate in fields of social life, including digital environments.

5.1.3 Dimension 3: structured competence

The structured dimension of practical digital literacy focuses on how practices are not only shaped by social structures but also actively reproduce and organise them. This pillar accounts for the observable outcomes (opus operatum) defined by the habitus through its function as "structuring structures" (Bourdieu, 1972, p. 72). Indeed, Bourdieu outlines habitus as both a product of history and a generator of future practices, primarily operating at a subconscious level (ivi). It functions generatively by adapting to social structures while simultaneously reproducing them through practices. To better understand this, we can distinguish two main properties within the definition of habitus.

The second pillar of practical digital literacy is represented by its dispositional nature, the so-called "structured structures" (ivi, p. 72). This refers to how habitus develops in the form of dispositions according to social structures and conditions of existence, such as class, education, and family. Moreover, Bourdieu emphasised that such dispositions act as "structuring practices," guiding actions and generating patterned behaviours within specific fields. "It ensures the active presence of past experiences, which tend to guarantee the 'correctedness' of practices and their constancy over time" (Bourdieu, 1980, p. 54). However, this property should not be understood as rendering habitus a static or deterministic entity producing patterns from predetermined behaviours. On the contrary, this system of dispositions is both dynamic and generative (Kebede, 2011).

In structuring practices, habitus constantly adapts to new experiences and structural shifts, making this conceptualisation dynamic and flexible across various social fields (Adams, 2006). As Bourdieu and Wacquant famously stated:

> "Habitus is not the fate that some people read into it. Being the product of history, it is an *open system of dispositions* that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures. It is durable but not eternal!" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 133)

In response to common critiques, Bourdieu clarified that changes related to historical conditions, as well as everyday experiences perceived by individuals, impact the development and deployment of habitus schemes. Furthermore, new skills and dispositions are acquired and internalised over time, either challenging or reinforcing

those already sedimented within the habitus. One well-known example is Loïc Wacquant's work, highlighting the plasticity of habitus through three years of boxing training in Chicago (Wacquant, 2004). Similarly, Reay (2004) noted that habitus is a multi-layered, contradictory, and dynamic entity, especially in contexts like education, where individuals from diverse social backgrounds navigate new fields.

The generative nature of habitus is fundamental to understanding it as a system that resists deterministic interpretations. Rather than dictating behaviour in a fixed or mechanical way, habitus possesses what Bourdieu described as an "infinite yet strictly limited generative capacity" (Bourdieu, 1980, p. 55). This means that while habitus can produce a wide range of practices, the scope of those practices is constrained by the historical and social conditions under which habitus was formed. In other words, habitus generates actions that are both creative and bounded: actions that are neither imposed from outside nor entirely invented anew but emerge from a history sedimented in body and mind. Bourdieu uses this idea to transcend the traditional dichotomy between structure and agency, conceptualising social action not as the outcome of conscious calculation or structural coercion, but as what he calls the "intentionless invention of regulated improvisation" (ibidem). This phrase captures how agents produce practices that are contextually appropriate and socially intelligible without necessarily being the result of deliberate planning or external constraint.

This generative process occurs at a pre-reflexive level, that is, below the threshold of conscious awareness. Bourdieu defined this as the *feel for the game* (Bourdieu, 1980), which represents the synthesis of the concepts introduced so far. More specifically, it is the manifestation of habitus in the seemingly natural, non-declarative understanding individuals have when participating in various fields of social life. When participating in a specific field, the feel for the game is "what gives the game a subjective sense—a meaning and a raison d'être, but also a direction, an orientation, an impending outcome, for those who take part and therefore acknowledge what is at stake" (p. 66).

Similarly, Lizardo (2017) offered a cognitive interpretation of this perspective by introducing the concept of *nondeclarative culture*. According to him, individuals internalise experiences as patterns through a developmental learning process (i.e., enculturation). In contrast to declarative culture—which is intentional, accessible, and points at objects and events—nondeclarative culture is acquired "via a 'slow learning' pathway in the form of implicit, durable, cognitive-emotive associations, bodily comportments, and perceptual and motor skills built from repeated long-term exposure to consistent patterns of experience" (p. 91). Such tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1966) represents the embodied principle of production that enables agents to navigate complex social fields with practical mastery. According to this final pillar, practical digital literacy manifests not only in teenagers' internalised dispositions and discourses (i.e., modus operandi) but also in the observable outcomes and patterns of their practices (i.e., opus operatum). This sense of the game drives how they produce, interact with, and consume content on social media. Indeed, while great emphasis has been placed on their imaginaries (see e.g. Bucher, 2017b; Gandini et al., 2023; Schulz, 2023), recent research highlights how teenagers are habituated to "taking, editing, selecting, hiding, and sharing" (Márquez et al., 2023, p. 907) as part of ordinary forms of interaction. One prominent example of this is memes. Rogers and Giorgi (2024) are among the first scholars to recognise memes as forms of cultural production, "resulting from a combination of digital participatory culture as well as software production practices" (p. 74).

Accordingly, memes are collections of technical content whose specific structuration depends on the platforms where they are produced. They therefore emerge as an "internet vernacular" (p. 86) with related competencies (i.e., literacy) and norms required to be perceived as appropriate.

5.2 Conclusion

The chapter introduces and elaborates the concept of practical digital literacy as a multifaceted competence developed by teenagers from the bottom up, specifically through their engagement with social media platforms. This concept is situated at the intersection of two central bodies of literature: sociopractical perspectives, which focus on how digital knowledge is constructed through everyday practices, and technosocial perspectives, which emphasise the active role of platforms and their algorithmic systems in shaping communication and consumption behaviours. Practical digital literacy is thus conceptualised as a competence that emerges from teenagers' ongoing integration and reappropriation of platform grammars, enabling them to define and exploit the affordances of digital environments. At the same time, it acknowledges the mediating influence of platforms, particularly through mechanisms like recommender algorithms, which structure and guide user experiences.

The chapter structures practical digital literacy around three foundational attributes: it is shared, dispositional, and structured. The shared aspect refers to how this literacy arises from peer-to-peer connections and information exchange, as teenagers collectively negotiate and disseminate knowledge about platform use (Shankleman et al., 2021). The dispositional dimension highlights the influence of individual and contextual factors, such as social class and cultural background, on how teenagers engage with social media. Research has shown, for example, that upper- and middle-class teenagers tend to use social media to enhance cultural capital, while those from less advantaged backgrounds focus more on social capital (Micheli, 2015). The structured attribute points to the patterned nature of practical digital literacy, which manifests not only in discourse but also in everyday practices – such as taking, editing, selecting, hiding, and sharing content (Márquez et al., 2023) – that are embedded in both online and offline interactions.

The theoretical framework underpinning practical digital literacy draws heavily on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice. Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, and capital are employed to analyse how social conditions are internalised as systems of dispositions and how these, in turn, shape practices within specific social fields (Bourdieu, 1972, 1980, 1992).

Habitus, as a system of dispositions acquired through socialisation, provides teenagers with a "feel for the game" – a tacit, shared understanding of the rules and stakes of social media participation. Fields, such as the digital environments of social media, are structured spaces with their own logics and hierarchies, where individuals seek recognition and legitimacy by mobilising various forms of capital, including symbolic capital expressed through taste (Bourdieu, 1979, 1992). This framework allows for an analysis of how teenagers' digital literacies are both shaped by and help reproduce the social structures and power relations of their environments.

The epistemological stance of the chapter also builds on Bourdieu's work on taste and cultural consumption. Here, taste is understood not merely as individual preference but as an embodied expression of shared generational and socio-cultural dispositions. In the context of digital literacy, teenagers' platform practices and evaluative judgments

are seen as reflecting and reinforcing their position within the digital field, and as a means of gaining distinction and recognition among peers.

Based on these theoretical foundations, the chapter formulates three research questions corresponding to the three dimensions of practical digital literacy:

RQ1. What are the main shared discourses and practices characterising teenagers' platform experiences?

RQ2. How does youths' social background interact with social media consumption preferences?

RQ3. How does youths' practical understanding of platforms guide their social media practices?

In the following chapter, the empirical strategy adopted to investigate all three attributes of practical digital literacy is introduced.

Chapter 6. Empirical strategy

This chapter introduces the empirical strategy adopted to investigate the concept of practical digital literacy across its three aforementioned dimensions: shared, dispositional, and structured. Overall, the methodologies employed to answer the research questions are grouped around two main fieldworks.

First, a group of Italian upper-secondary (high school) classes participated in an initiative based on the embedded-lesson approach, that is, a collaborative methodological stance that makes participants active actors in the research process by embedding lectures with workshops to collect various kinds of data (Dennen & Rutledge, 2018). Students were asked to complete a survey mapping consumption tastes, sociodemographic variables, and social media preferences. They also participated in class-level interviews to explore their platform experiences and ordinary encounters with recommender systems.

RQ1 (*What are the main shared discourses and practices characterising teenagers' platform experiences?*) is addressed through content analysis of the interview transcripts, integrated with fieldnotes collected during the high school initiatives. This approach aligns with a consolidated epistemological tradition concerning shared algorithmic imaginaries and narratives about the platformization of everyday life (see e.g. Bucher, 2017b; Gandini et al., 2023; Siles, 2023; Siles et al., 2020).

The dispositional nature of practical digital literacy, which grounds RQ2 (*How does youths' social background interact with social media consumption preferences?*), is investigated through multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) of the questionnaire data. This analytical technique synthesises the most relevant principles structuring relationships within a dataset and projects these relations into a vector space to enhance interpretability. Pierre Bourdieu has widely adopted MCA in his major works (see e.g. Bourdieu, 1979), although later research confirmed its efficacy in investigating the role of social background in consumer cultures (see e.g. Flemmen et al., 2018; Le Roux & Rouanet, 2010).

Second, to answer RQ3 (*How does youths' practical understanding of platforms guide their social media practices?*), I conducted a computational ethnography to investigate how gendered social structures are reflected, negotiated, and reproduced in teenagers' TikTok practices. I chose gender as the primary structuring lens to explore these social media practices, as it emerges as one of the strongest dimensions characterising platformised experiences in the school fieldwork. Accordingly, the empirical case builds on the creation of two research personas – a male and a female teenager – modelled on the extensive observations and survey data about platform and social media consumption preferences, following the research persona method (Bounegru et al., 2022). After calibrating these profiles across a month of engagement, thirty TikTok videos were collected for each persona using *Zeeschuimer* (Peeters, 2023), systematically representing the algorithmically recommended flow of content.

Visual snapshots were analysed qualitatively to identify gendered patterns in content types (Bainotti, 2024a), whereas all the 26,000 comments were extracted for computational analysis. Comments underwent intensive preprocessing and tokenisation and were grouped by the gendered identity of the associated video. Word embeddings and dimensionality reduction techniques (t-SNE, PCA, UMAP) were applied to map semantic patterns

across genders (Boutyline & Arseniev-Koehler, 2025). In parallel, dependency parsing revealed grammatical and contextual relationships, visualised through bipartite networks linking syntactic neighbours and core concepts (see e.g. Costola et al., 2021; Santagiustina & Warglien, 2022). The following paragraphs will introduce the empirical apparatus thoroughly.

6.1 The school fieldwork

The theoretical foundation of practical digital literacy calls for a multi-method approach to investigate the three main features identified in the previous chapter. In this section, I introduce the empirical approach employed to examine the modus operandi.

As introduced earlier, the modus operandi characterising practical digital literacy is subdivided into two main features of this competence: being shared and dispositional. To investigate these dimensions, it is necessary to employ methodological techniques that can capture how individuals claim their positions within the digital field of social media consumption: individuals do so in both declarative and latent ways. For instance, the former may emerge through conversations, such as explicit statements about preferred platforms or verbal discussions of online news. At the same time, the latter may manifest through structured consumption practices, like consistently following specific content creators or routinely engaging with algorithmically curated feeds.

On one hand, exploring individuals' understanding of technologies and how this shapes their interactions with platforms is grounded in qualitative research. Among the leading frameworks, folk theories (Eslami et al., 2015, 2016) provide an empirical stance commonly used to investigate how users' beliefs about social media algorithms impact their practices, interactions, and consumption behaviours. This is typically explored through interviews (see e.g. Siles et al., 2020) or thematic analysis of open-ended survey items (see e.g. Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2021). Similarly but distinctly, Bucher (2017b) introduced the concept of algorithmic imaginaries to emphasise how people think about the influence of algorithms on social media experiences, thus conceptualising these imaginaries not merely as mental representations but as phenomena that shape how individuals sense, feel, and interact with algorithms. This conceptualisation has been further developed in studies on algorithmic *glitches* (Swart, 2021) and processes of othering (Gandini et al., 2023). However, in both cases, the epistemological aim is not to establish correlations or causal inferences but rather to explore broader, shared phenomena within social media experiences.

On the other hand, investigating how individual factors function as dispositions influencing cultural consumption, taste, and digital engagement with cultural products has deep roots in quantitative approaches. Classic studies, such as Peterson and Kern's (1996) research on cultural omnivorousness, employ survey methods to reveal how variables like education, occupation, and social status influence the diversity and breadth of cultural tastes. More recent research extends these methods to digital consumption, as seen in Budanceva and Svirina's (2023) survey-based analysis of digital cultural engagement in Latvia, which uses regression techniques to identify predictors such as occupation and place of residence. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that quantitative methods are essential for mapping and understanding the complex interplay between personal dispositions, socio-demographic factors, and both traditional and digital cultural consumption, further expanding how tastes and engagement are socially patterned and evolving in the digital age.

Therefore, I developed a fieldwork to be conducted in high schools that integrates these two dimensions with the intent of answering the first two research questions:

RQ1. What are the main shared discourses and practices characterising teenagers' platform experiences?

RQ2. How does youths' social background interact with social media consumption preferences?

To this end, I conducted an initiative across high school classrooms (upper-secondary educational institutes) in the northern area of Italy. The process followed three main steps: research design, sampling strategy and data collection, and analytical strategy.

6.1.1 Research Design

The initiative was developed following the embedded-lesson approach, a methodological stance designed to deliver lectures while incorporating moments dedicated to data collection. Dennen and Rutledge (2018) addressed challenges in studying youth social media practices, such as privacy concerns, parental consent, and access to non-consenting peers, by designing a series of three consecutive classroom lessons about social media. Within these lessons, they embedded research activities including surveys, focus groups, and observations. This approach enabled the rapid collection of rich data on students' social media behaviours and attitudes, while simultaneously providing students with opportunities to reflect on and articulate their own experiences.

The present fieldwork builds heavily on this approach, with some modifications. Due to time constraints, the initiative was structured as a single-day lesson instead of three. However, the sessions were longer, spanning two time slots (approximately two hours). This approach has both benefits and drawbacks: on the one hand, it demands sustained attention from students, risking loss of interest after the first hour; on the other hand, it offers greater organisational flexibility, increasing the likelihood of positive reception when proposing the initiative to educational institutions. In the Italian context, where the educational schedule is crowded with external activities, such flexibility is crucial for researchers addressing this subject. To mitigate potential challenges, the two-hour session was divided into two main activities.

The first activity consisted of an hour-long participative lecture titled *Che cosa (non) sai sui social media* (tr. "What you (don't) know about social media"), providing a comprehensive introduction to key research areas including platforms, data economy, and recommender systems. This section was developed based on prior experience from school initiatives as part of the dissemination of the *Algocount* project in 2022, and further inspired by Annette Markham's pioneering work on engaging young people with digital media in educational contexts (A. Markham, 2020, 2022; A. N. Markham, 2019; A. Markham & Pronzato, 2024). The tested approach was enriched with group discussions and participatory examples to enhance relatability.

6.1.1.1 Shared competence through group interviews

The second hour comprised the first actual data collection phase. Students participated in class-level group discussions, which academically correspond to group interviews (Currie & Kelly, 2012). Although more limited than small-group discussions (see e.g. Pollock et al., 2011) and focus groups (see e.g. Hundley & Shyles, 2010), this approach was chosen to optimise the number of voices and map broader shared understandings within a shorter

time frame.

The group interviews followed a semi-structured format, a widely used methodological approach to explore "hidden aspects of social life, problems that are not immediately perceptible" (Belina, 2023, p. 331). This method allows integration of deductive dimensions outlined *a priori* while enabling follow-up and deepening of spontaneously arising stories, comments, and conversations. To investigate the shared dimensions of practical digital literacy, the first set of questions was constructed around three main themes: social life on social media, practices of distinction, and algorithmic copiloting. These themes cover dimensions relevant to shared understandings of, respectively, others' use of social media, content consumption, and interactions with recommender systems.

The first theme aimed to expand understanding of the reasons behind accessing the social media consumption field and how teenagers develop their "feel for the game", that is, the process of digital enculturation (Lizardo, 2017, 2022). This dimension also explored which content categories were popular initially and how these changed over time. Particular attention was given to introducing a diachronic perspective to investigate *illusio* over time: the investment in remaining engaged in the flow of consumption for many years. Questions addressed not only changes in consumed content but also the times of day when participants accessed content flows, along with related interaction practices (e.g., commenting, liking, sharing).

Practices of distinction functioned as the second operationalised theme of platforms' shared understanding. Drawing on well-established cultural analysis literature on legitimation and classification practices (see e.g. Bourdieu, 1979; Friedman & Reeves, 2020; Warde, 2016), access to this perspective was facilitated through the concept of perceived quality, which allowed for an exploration of what students considered quality content. To introduce this topic, a prompt was delivered via a video from Geopop, a YouTube channel popular among Italian teenagers. The video challenged the common perception that content on TikTok and YouTube is fast and purposeless, presenting Geopop as an example of producing "quality" content on platforms typically associated with easy-access entertainment. Students were then asked to elaborate on what constitutes quality in social media content, what kinds of videos deserve attention, and why. They were also encouraged to legitimise their tastes by expressing judgments about others' interests. To support this, screenshots of TikTok videos representing various categories were shown. Categories were not pre-defined to avoid forcing interpretation. Participants were asked to rank the images from most to least favourite. The processes of classification and legitimation were investigated through how students justified their selections and reasoned about others' rankings.

Finally, shared understandings of interactions with recommender systems were explored by asking how much of the consumed content was actively searched via queries and search bars versus recommended by algorithms. Both responses and follow-up comments were crucial in this discussion. To expose the emotional and profound relationship users have with recommender systems, Garfinkel's (1956) breaching experiment method was adapted to disrupt social norms around this topic (see e.g. Braswell, 2014; Caron & Mays, 2021). Students, divided into pairs, took turns choosing what their partner would watch, like, and comment on. They were instructed to behave disruptively, purposefully creating a disorienting recommendation experience for their partner.

This outline represents the core of the group interviews, which served as the starting point for conversations.

Follow-up questions were introduced based on stimuli offered by students, encouraging active participation in formulating the imaginaries and understandings underpinning this research. This approach aligns with the empirical stance of participatory research previously applied to similar topics (see e.g. Dennen & Rutledge, 2018; Risi et al., 2020).

6.1.1.2 Dispositional competence through questionnaire

Among the various activities offered during the initiative, students were asked to complete a survey designed to map individual dispositions as well as multiple dimensions of social media consumption practices. Anonymised responses were primarily used to exemplify how platforms utilise personal data to understand users' preferences and subsequently recommend content and advertising. Additionally, the survey data form the basis for investigating dispositional competence, the second dimension of practical digital literacy.

The questionnaire comprises four clusters of items: sociodemographic variables, social media preferences, consumption practices, and interactions. The items presented below represent the final set approved by the ethical committee, as detailed in the following paragraph.

Sociodemographic variables were designed to map individual capitals and social class. Bourdieu offers a relational perspective on social class (see e.g. Bourdieu, 1979), conceptualising it as a specific distribution of various forms of capital (e.g., economic, cultural, social). Recent survey-based literature on taste and consumption practices relies on this framework to integrate diverse items that capture social class as a complex system of privileges, ranging from educational background and income to social connections and cultural competencies (see e.g. Flemmen, 2013; Flemmen et al., 2018; Savage, 2015; Savage et al., 2005). Accordingly, the sociodemographic items in the present study were constructed to generate a nuanced and comprehensive account of individuals' composition of capitals. These questions were grouped into two main subcategories: *subjective capitals*, developed and internalised through family upbringing and past experiences, and *objectified capitals*, representing resources present in the environments experienced by students. The questions were formulated based on the European Social Survey, a well-established, academically driven cross-national survey conducted across Europe since 2001 (see e.g. for an introduction Davidov et al., 2008).

Subjective capitals were measured through variables such as age, gender (male, female, non-binary), the highest educational degree of parents, parents' occupations, and the number of books owned at home. Graphic novels and manga have been included in the count of the owned books, reflecting their growing relevance as cultural forms among contemporary adolescents (see e.g. Chandler-Olcott, 2015; M. M. Leung et al., 2017; Loh, 2024).

Objectified capitals were assessed by examining the environments in which students are situated. To this end, questions investigated objectified resources and how various scholastic fields add value to each form of capital. This was operationalised through two main questions related to educational paths (i.e., lyceums, technical or professional institutions) and fields of study (e.g., classics, applied sciences, marketing)

The cluster of items mapping social media preferences aimed not only to identify favoured and disfavoured platforms but also to uncover the boundaries of taste. As introduced previously (see Section 4.1), this study employs taste as a proxy to understand practical, specifically dispositional, competence in navigating and

consuming social media content. Taste reflects not only what users choose to consume or avoid but also connects individuals' embedded dispositions to consumption practices and legitimation processes, thereby revealing dispositions through practices (see e.g. Bourdieu, 1992; Paßmann & Schubert, 2021). To address this, the second set of items included questions about preferred and least preferred social media platforms, as well as content considered worth watching or of poor quality. Additionally, two items asked respondents to list three of their most preferred accounts and the first three elements they engage with (e.g., videos, posts, Instagram Stories). These items were introduced to ground the subsequent TikTok fieldwork (see Section 5.2) in actual relevant accounts, whether chosen by students or recommended by algorithms.

The third group of items is central to the empirical analysis, as it represents actual consumption practices. It consists of Likert-scale questions measuring the frequency with which students consume various content categories: funny videos, tutorials, news, fine arts, sports, music, friends' content (e.g., friends' Instagram Stories), video games, and makeup. The formulation of these questions contrasts with previous approaches that project consumption practices onto relational Euclidean spaces, where the positioning of each category is determined by its relationship to others. For example, Flemmen et al. (2018) explored how concepts like healthy food are pursued differently by Norwegian upper and middle classes through itemised lists of food examples (e.g., "cod, salmon, Brussels sprouts").

In contrast, as noted by Siles and Valerio-Alfaro (2025), social media experiences, especially on platforms like TikTok, are better understood through the metaphor of broadcasting television, where content flows continuously, and users engage with what is made available and somehow emerge from the flow, rather than actively selecting from a predefined show schedule. This analogy is supported by research on algorithmic feeds, which shows that user exposure is primarily structured by recommendation systems that prioritise visibility and attention over deliberate choice (boyd, 2010b; Siles, 2023; Ytre-Arne et al., 2020). In this sense, consumption practices are less about seeking particular items (as in the case of food or cultural goods in Flemmend and colleagues' study) and more about navigating a stream whose boundaries are co-constructed with algorithms. For this reason, measuring the frequency of engagement with broad content categories through Likert scales provides a more accurate proxy of actual practices: it captures habitual exposure patterns without presupposing a rationalised hierarchy of preferences.

The final dimension of the questionnaire includes a single item addressing practical interaction with content. While previous dimensions covered platform selection and content consumption, this item focuses on how users interact with content. Although central to the TikTok fieldwork, understanding shared interaction practices remains relevant to assessing how embedded dispositions influence behaviour. Students were asked to indicate their most frequent interaction while scrolling through social media content (e.g., commenting, liking, sharing).

This methodological strategy was refined through a pilot trial involving a small sample of Italian high school students over 18 years old. Adjustments, especially to the questionnaire, were implemented following feedback received during the approval process by the University of Milan's ethical committee.

6.1.2 Sampling strategy and data collection

After obtaining authorisation from the ethical committee, numerous schools were contacted via institutional email addresses or school phone numbers. However, due to the exploratory nature of the research and a relatively low response rate, snowball sampling emerged as the optimal strategy for this study. As anticipated (see Section 5.1.1), the school network developed within the Algocount project served as the starting point for data collection. Through these initial connections, it was possible to involve a large number of educators from upper-secondary schools in the northern regions of Italy. No incentives were offered for participation, although the activities aligned with several educational objectives promoted by the Italian Ministry of Education. Many participating teachers confirmed that some topics covered in the first session were helpful for students preparing for their final high school exams, which helped increase the number of schools involved. The sample is composed as follows.

Nine schools agreed to participate in the research. As detailed in the following description, most were lyceums (6), while the others were technical institutes (3). The Italian upper-secondary school system (scuola secondaria di secondo grado) lasts five years, typically for students aged 14 to 19. It is divided into three main types: lyceums (licei), technical institutes (istituti tecnici), and vocational institutes (istituti professionali). Lyceums emphasise theoretical education and prepare students for university, offering specialisations such as classical studies, sciences, arts, languages, human sciences, music, and dance. Technical institutes combine theoretical and practical training in fields like economics, technology, administration, law, and tourism, often including internships. Vocational institutes focus on practical skills for direct entry into the labour market. All paths culminate in a state exam granting a diploma for higher education or employment.

Nearly all participating schools are located in Lombardy, a northern Italian region with Milan as its capital. Lombardy is one of Italy's most active regions in promoting basic digital skills among young people, investing in numerous projects aimed at developing digital competencies for work, social inclusion, and active citizenship (see e.g. Il Sole 24 Ore, 2025). The region encompasses major urban centres such as Milan, Brescia, and Bergamo, as well as rural areas. This diversity ensures representation of varied economic, cultural, and social backgrounds, providing broad access to different social clusters. According to data published by the Ministry of Education and Merit for the 2022–2023 school year, students without Italian citizenship account for more than 11% of the national student population, with Lombardy alone hosting over 25% of all non-Italian students in Italy (Italian Ministry of Education and Merit, 2024). Moreover, several studies have examined the impact of digital technologies on youth in Lombardy. For example, the University of Milan-Bicocca conducted the "Digital Well-Being" project, a teacher-led media education initiative aimed at promoting responsible digital media use and improving students' digital competencies and well-being (Gui et al., 2018).

Although the sample is not intended to be representative of either the Italian population or the Lombardy region specifically, it is nonetheless heterogeneous enough to allow a comprehensive exploration of Italian teenagers' platformised experiences and relative competencies. Of the nine schools, three are located in small towns in the countryside of the Milan province, three in the suburbs of Milan, and one in the city centre itself. The remaining two schools are situated in medium-sized cities, namely Piacenza and Mantua, representing environments distinct from Milan and thereby introducing additional contextual nuances.

The nine schools contributed 39 classes to the study. Across these classes, 719 students completed the survey, providing a robust dataset suitable for exploratory quantitative analyses such as multiple correspondence analysis. Furthermore, eight of the 39 classes consented to audio-record the group interviews, generating a qualitative subset of 161 participants. This large qualitative sample allowed for richer, more nuanced data capturing peer interaction dynamics and collective reflection.

The composition of the sample is summarised in Table 1.

Variable	**N**	**N = 719**[1]
Education Type	719	
Lyceum		517 (72%)
Technical Institute		201 (28%)
Vocational Insitute		1 (0.1%)
Education Path	473	
Applied Sciences		27 (5.7%)
Classics		33 (7.0%)
Construction		14 (3.0%)
Linguistics		102 (22%)
Marketing		38 (8.0%)
Science		94 (20%)
Social Sciences		84 (18%)
Sport		46 (9.7%)
Tourism		35 (7.4%)
MV		246
Year attended (age range)	719	
2nd (15-16)		1 (0.1%)
3rd (16-17)		76 (11%)
4th (17-18)		491 (68%)

Variable	N	N = 719[1]
5th (18-19)		151 (21%)
Gender	704	
Female		449 (64%)
Male		245 (35%)
Non Binary		10 (1.4%)
MV		15
City of residence	719	
Large		234 (33%)
Medium		157 (22%)
Small		328 (46%)
Parents Education	697	
Low		80 (11%)
Medium		328 (47%)
High		289 (41%)
MV		22
Parents Job	671	
Unemployed		5 (0.7%)
Employed		471 (70%)
Self-Employed		195 (29%)
MV		48
Number of books at home	476	
0-50		135 (28%)
51-100		111 (23%)
100+		230 (48%)
MV		243

Variable	N	N = 719[1]

Table 1 – Sociodemographic variables and sample description

Regarding subjective capitals, most students were in their fourth year of high school, while approximately 33% were distributed between the third and fifth years. Female students predominated, likely because the sample includes educational paths that are more popular among females, as will become clearer in the discussion of objectified capitals. Apart from males, the non-binary category was underrepresented. The large majority of participants came from middle to high educational backgrounds[2], with 70% of their parents employed. Additionally, nearly half of the students reported having more than 100 books at home, which is above the national average (ISTAT, 2024).

Concerning objectified capitals, nearly two-thirds of the students attended lyceums, whereas the others were enrolled in technical institutes. Educational paths were diverse, with many students studying linguistics, sciences, and social sciences. Although underrepresented, some students attended programs in applied sciences, classical studies, construction, marketing, sports, and tourism. The sample also showed a balanced distribution in terms of urbanisation: about one-third lived in large cities, 22% in medium-sized cities, and nearly half in small towns.

Overall, these characteristics highlight a sample predominantly composed of female students, academically oriented, and of middle to high socioeconomic status. This composition may limit the broader applicability of the study's conclusions to more diverse student populations. The sample also reflects various obstacles, both institutional and non-institutional, encountered when conducting research within Italian scholastic environments, which may serve as an opportunity to initiate broader discussions on this topic. However, the primary objective of this study is not to produce generalizable or causal results but rather to explore an under-researched dimension of digital competencies.

6.1.4 Analytical strategy

Data were converted into appropriate formats for analysis. First, audio recordings were manually transcribed verbatim, preserving natural language fillers, disfluencies, and hesitation markers. Personal names were replaced with randomly generated pseudonyms that preserved the speakers' gender. Geographical locations mentioned during conversations were generalised to broader regions to prevent the identification of individual students. Ethnographic observations were also systematised to enrich the analysis of interview data.

Second, questionnaire responses were exported into CSV format after removing all columns potentially containing personal information. For example, columns recording the date and location of survey completion were deleted for privacy reasons and because they were not relevant to the study's aims. Both datasets and transcripts are

[2] The level of parental education was measured using standard survey items common in the literature (e.g., European Social Survey). Respondents reported the highest level of education of each parent with the following options: no formal education, primary school diploma, lower secondary school diploma, upper secondary school diploma, university degree, postgraduate or master's degree, or specialization diploma, and "don't know." For analysis, these were grouped as low (no formal education, primary, lower secondary), medium (upper secondary), and high (university, postgraduate/master's, specialization); "don't know" responses were treated as missing values.

securely stored on a separate solid-state drive protected by a password to ensure data cybersecurity.

Following data preparation, two primary analyses were conducted: thematic analysis of qualitative data and multiple correspondence analysis of quantitative data.

6.1.4.1 Thematic analysis

To analyse the qualitative data generated through group interviews with teenagers, I employed thematic analysis based on the approach developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Although initially emerging from psychological research, this method has been widely adopted in educational studies (see e.g. Michel-Villarreal et al., 2023; Xu & Zammit, 2020).

Specifically, this thematic analysis follows six primary phases: (1) familiarization with the data through iterative reading and reflective note-taking; (2) generating initial codes using both theory-driven and data-driven coding strategies; (3) searching for themes by grouping coded extracts into broader categories reflecting shared meanings; (4) reviewing themes through recursive engagement with the data to ensure internal coherence and relevance to the research questions; (5) defining and naming themes by articulating the analytical essence of each; and (6) producing the analytical narrative, synthesizing themes into coherent findings illustrated with representative interview excerpts (V. Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Thematic analysis was chosen for its flexibility in capturing both common patterns and divergent perspectives within qualitative data, especially when exploring young people's lived experiences, practices, and discourses around social media use. This flexibility allows for theory-driven, structured interrogation while remaining open to spontaneous emergent meanings. To achieve this, I implemented a hybrid coding procedure as proposed by Xu and Zammit (2020), who build on Braun and Clarke's work to combine deductive coding grounded in theory with attention to participants' language and narratives to identify relevant themes in heterogeneous qualitative data.

After transcription, the transcripts were read repeatedly to gain familiarity. The initial codebook was deductively constructed based on the three dimensions of shared understanding of social media: access and enculturation, content consumption, and algorithmic copiloting practices. Additional themes emerged iteratively. For example, habituation to social media practices followed two main paths: one social, driven mainly by peer pressure; the other related to capital enhancement for those who viewed social media as a way to nurture hobbies. Copiloting practices surfaced as a necessity for making sense of and, to some extent, manipulating the content flow. Consequently, flow experiences became an important theme added to the third dimension. Further examples are discussed in the chapter dedicated to this empirical case.

Regarding tools, I manually coded the transcripts by inserting comments in Microsoft Word, which were then exported to Microsoft Excel to facilitate analysis. This approach aligns with a growing trend favouring these widely accessible tools for cost-effectiveness and ease of sharing codebooks without requiring training in specialised software (see e.g. Isangula et al., 2024; Ose, 2016).

The coding process involved highlighting relevant text segments and inserting comments reporting the broader theme, specific narrative, qualitative observations, and the quoted text. For instance, one comment read:

"Practice;Access;Accessing derived from IG as social capital;Me lo ricordo benissimo perché ero in montagna a sciare con un'altra famiglia e la ragazza mi piaceva particolarmente e lei continuava a mettere roba su sta roba che era Instagram e ho pensato 'ma me lo scarico anche io.'"

All comments were then exported as text into a new file and imported into Excel. The semicolon-separated format allowed Excel to recognise the data as a dataset with four columns corresponding to the elements in the comments, including specific in-text references. This format facilitated easier access to key transcript elements and enabled filtering and descriptive analysis.

Throughout the process, I maintained a reflexive stance, remaining aware of my positionality as a researcher and the potential influence of my assumptions on the analysis. Themes were discussed and refined iteratively, paying close attention to both what teenagers said and how they expressed their understandings, tensions, and agency regarding social media. This approach enabled a granular exploration of main narratives and discourses on platform experiences, bridging individual experiences with broader cultural logics.

6.1.4.2 Multiple Correspondence Analysis

The analytical strategy adopted to make sense of the survey responses is Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA). This statistical technique focuses not on the intrinsic value of each answer but on its relationships - and oppositions - with other responses. This approach reflects the established Bourdieusian logic that consumption practices function as forms of distinction, structured by dispositions and adapted to specific fields of consumption (see e.g. Bourdieu, 1992). Therefore, no substantive meaning is assigned to individual data points in advance. For example, "sport" is not inherently considered lowbrow entertainment; instead, its meaning emerges from its relative position to other forms of consumption.

A key example illustrating this concept is Pierre Bourdieu's seminal work *La Distinction* (Bourdieu, 1979). Bourdieu frequently employed MCA, describing it as "a relational technique of data analysis whose philosophy corresponds exactly to what, in my view, the reality of the social world is" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 96). In that work, MCA was used to construct the social space by creating Individuals × Properties tables that simultaneously represent individuals and their associated social characteristics within the same geometric space. This dual representation revealed how social positions and cultural preferences are intertwined and structured. The same methodological stance remains widely used in consumer research (see e.g. Tian et al., 2025) and cultural sociology (see e.g. Flemmen et al., 2018).

MCA is a statistical technique used to visualise patterns in multivariate categorical variables. It represents data as clouds of points in a multidimensional Euclidean space, where distances reflect associations between categories. Interpretation is facilitated by constructing latent dimensions (or axes) that explain oppositions between points (Le Roux & Rouanet, 2010).

More specifically, given a dataset of categorical variables, MCA generates a matrix of *Individuals* × *Categories*, where individuals are respondents and categories are the answers to each question. The chi-square distance between points is calculated to generate a multidimensional Euclidean space that separates points based on their dissimilarity. The resulting cloud of points is arranged so that proximity reflects similarity: individuals with similar response patterns cluster together, as do categories that are considered similar.

From this cloud, the algorithm defines the first axis (latent structure) to maximise the variance (inertia) explained by the projection. In other words, this axis represents the direction along which the cloud shows the greatest dispersion, measured by chi-square distance. This axis captures the principal opposition or contrast among categories or individuals in the data. A second axis is then defined to capture the remaining inertia, constrained to be orthogonal to the first. This process continues for subsequent axes, each maximising residual inertia and orthogonal to all previously extracted axes.

Interpretation relies on two main elements. First, the analysis produces two clouds of points: one of categories and one of cases (individuals). The cloud of categories reveals differences and similarities between categories, while the cloud of cases reflects opposition or proximity between individuals' responses. In both clouds, visual proximity indicates similarity. For example, if "sport" and "cooking" appear close in the category cloud, it suggests they belong to the same consumption dimension. Similarly, proximity in the case cloud indicates similarity in response patterns between individuals. The generated dimensions are constructed to fit the variance of the matrix best and reveal oppositions within the space. "Axis 1 describes the most dominant opposition, Axis 2 the second most dominant, etc. The meaning of the axes is determined by interpreting the difference between the categories at each pole, with special emphasis given to categories with contributions above average – so-called *explicative points*." (Flemmen et al., 2018, p. 134). This highlights the fundamentally relational nature of MCA. Each position is constructed in relation to others, and interpretation assigns meaning not to individual points but to the overall structure, generating oppositions and subgroups.

Additional elements enhance data interpretation, including modified rates, coordinates, contributions, squared cosine, and test values. Due to the high dimensionality of MCA-generated clouds, variance rates tend to be low. Therefore, as suggested by Le Roux and Rouanet (2010) modified rates are calculated to assess the importance of the first axis better. Coordinates indicate the position of a category along the principal dimension of variation; large absolute values imply strong association with that axis and thus strong differentiation. Contributions measure how much a category influences the definition of an axis; higher contributions shape the axis more. The squared cosine measures the quality of representation of a category on an axis, equivalent to the squared correlation between the category and the axis; values close to 1 indicate excellent representation. Finally, the v-test, similar to a z-score, tests the null hypothesis that the category's coordinate on the axis is zero. Values beyond ± 3 provide strong evidence of association (ibidem).

Chapter 7 reports that the MCA Analysis employed ten active variables capturing consumption frequencies across different content categories, with a total of 37 possible response categories. These active variables operationalise taste through self-reported exposure frequencies to content domains including fun and entertainment, news and current affairs, arts, music, sports, friends' content, video games, and makeup. Each variable was treated as ordinal, reflecting increasing frequency of exposure from low to high levels. Additionally, a categorical variable derived from open-ended responses about preferred quality content was included, processed through dictionary-based coding to extract fourteen categories ranging from animals and arts to sports and travel content. These active variables directly shaped the geometric space construction and axis definition in the analysis.

Supplementary variables were organised according to a stratified socialisation model encompassing three capital dimensions: subjective capitals (parental education, occupation, gender, books at home, city size), objectified capitals (school type, field of study, year attended), and platform capitals (preferred and least favourite social media platforms, interaction patterns, posting frequencies, and daily usage hours). After handling missing data, 563 students were included in the final analysis, generating 516 distinct response patterns. These supplementary variables were projected onto the MCA space without influencing axis construction, enabling interpretation of how social background factors align with consumption practice patterns.

6.2 TikTok fieldwork

To explore the structured competence embedded in social media practices, this conceptual notion is investigated through fieldwork on TikTok. Hence, this empirical section is aimed at answering the following research question:

RQ3. How does youths' practical understanding of platforms guide their social media practices?

The empirical strategy uses TikTok as a case study to examine the structured and visible dimensions of practical digital literacy. In the preceding chapters, gender consistently emerged as a central factor shaping youth consumer cultures on social media. Group interviews revealed gender as a site of struggle, negotiation, resistance, and stereotype reproduction. Male participants often objectified content perceived as feminine and reinforced narrow models of masculinity, while female participants challenged these norms, highlighting tensions in digital identity and power. This dynamic was also evident in the mapping of social space, where consumption practices aligned with gendered norms: beauty and relational content were linked to feminine identities, and sports and video games to masculine ones. These polarised patterns reflect forms of gender capital, resources youth use to perform and validate gender identities in both social and digital contexts(Bridges, 2009). Hence, the chapter focuses on how youth enact and negotiate masculinity and femininity within algorithmically curated spaces, capturing both the visible practices and the underlying skills that structure social media engagement.

6.2.1 Computational ethnography

Computational ethnography builds on digital ethnography, which has shown the value of integrating online interactions into broader social ecologies (Lingel, 2017; A. Markham, 2020; Orgad, 2010). Digital ethnography highlights that digital environments are deeply entangled with offline practices, identities, and communities, providing tools to study how online and physical domains co-constitute cultural realities (see e.g. Airoldi, 2018; Caliandro, 2018).

More specifically, the logic of the fieldwork conducted here is derived from digital ethnography's methodological orientation, primarily through the principles of "following the algorithm". As Airoldi, Beraldo, and Gandini (2016) demonstrate in their exploratory study of music on YouTube, this means attending to how algorithmic systems themselves structure pathways of visibility, discovery and engagement, and how these technical operations shape the social worlds being studied. In other words, to "follow the algorithm" is to treat recommendation systems not simply as background infrastructure but as active agents that condition practices, relations, and cultural meanings.

Computational ethnography extends this by applying computational techniques to trace patterns across large datasets while maintaining sensitivity to context and meaning (Marres, 2012; Marres & Gerlitz, 2016). Unlike traditional digital ethnography, which emphasises immersion and participation, it incorporates analyses of algorithmically mediated content, such as platform recommendations. As Brooker (2022) notes, users actively experiment with algorithms and interpret recommendations, echoing ethnomethodology's focus on how ordinary people produce social order. Computational ethnography similarly observes how users and data infrastructures jointly produce cultural order.

Following Brooker (2022), this chapter emphasises computational approaches for three reasons. First, studying youth culture requires attention not only to what users post but also to how algorithmic systems shape these practices. Recommendation flows become a form of data revealing how gender performances are co-produced by humans and algorithms. Second, computational tools allow analysis at scale, identifying patterns of gendered representation across large text corpora without losing cultural context. Third, documenting computational methods enhances transparency, reproducibility, and triangulation between qualitative and quantitative analysis, strengthening both internal and external validity. Building on this approach, the study examines teenagers' lived experiences and gendered practices through everyday interactions and algorithmic flows, using the persona method (Bounegru et al., 2022).

6.2.2 The research persona method

In today's highly personalised media ecosystem, which relies on behavioural data and recommender algorithms, analytical approaches often capture either a top-down, large-scale view (Airoldi, 2018) or an immersive, ethnographic perspective on user experiences (Pink et al., 2016). The research persona method addresses this tension by combining digital methods (Rogers, 2013), ethnography and participatory design (Boellstorff et al., 2012; Marshall et al., 2020), and speculative techniques (Wilkie et al., 2015). Personas are fictional profiles created and enacted by researchers on digital platforms to probe how personalisation is produced, encountered, and experienced. These profiles simulate subject positions, allowing access to personalised feeds, algorithmic recommendations, and back-end data that would otherwise be difficult to study.

In this empirical case, speculative personas are used, drawing on character-building methods informed by theatre and socio-cultural knowledge (Bounegru et al., 2022; Bruschi et al., 2024). Two gendered personas guide the fieldwork: a self-identified male, Federico, and a self-identified female, Sara. Both were developed from ethnographic observations during school fieldwork and survey responses. Federico, 18, is a sociable football player who follows AC Milan on Instagram, watches TikTok match highlights, and engages with Twitch clips. His friendships, social activities, digital practices, and sporty-casual style reflect a typical hybrid teenage consumption. Sara, 17, is sociable and interested in beauty, fashion, and lifestyle. She engages with TikTok for entertainment, trending dances, and gossip, maintains an Instagram presence for curated posts, and expresses her identity through TikTok-inspired aesthetics. Both personas provide insight into how algorithmic recommendations intersect with gendered practices and youth culture.

6.2.3 Accessing the field and data collection

After defining the personas, TikTok was selected for the exploration. Although youth cultures engage with multiple platforms, TikTok emerged as a shared reference point for most participants in the scholastic fieldwork. While no longer exclusive to teenagers, these platforms remain a primary space for content, consumption, and interaction.
Fieldwork began with the creation of two TikTok profiles based on the personas. During sign-up, users select content categories to initiate recommendations. These categories were chosen using responses to the open-ended survey question, "Which are your favourite categories of content?", filtered by gender and analysed with a dictionary-based method to assign the most frequent categories to each persona. Next, the personas followed accounts identified through the question, "What are your favourite profiles on social media?", establishing a baseline network of content sources.
Once the profiles were calibrated, systematic data collection began, exploring both the algorithmic and cultural dimensions of gendered content. Saturation was reached when additional interaction produced little new insight, consistent with established ethnographic thresholds (DiStefano & Yang, 2024; Glaser & Strauss, 2017; Gold, 1997).
For the algorithmic dimension, thirty videos per profile were collected using Zeeschuimer, a browser extension for social media data collection (Bainotti & Rogers, 2022; Peeters, 2023). Thumbnail images from these videos generated a dataset capturing the visual structure of recommendations and how gendered preferences were materialised in the feed. For the cultural dimension, all comments on each video were collected and analysed as structured practices, illustrating how users interact with and negotiate meanings around algorithmically surfaced content.

6.2.4 Analytical strategy

The analytical strategy of the study is structured into two complementary sections. The first examines how masculinity and femininity are reproduced through TikTok content recommendations, exploring the structured outcomes of practical digital literacy reflected in algorithmic flows. The second investigates structured practices through user comments, providing insights into how gendered identities are expressed and negotiated in online interactions.
The first section focuses on cultural traits embedded in the code, analysing how gendered patterns emerge in recommended content. This is accomplished through a thematic visual analysis of 64 videos recommended to the male and female personas, considering metadata such as hashtags and platform-assigned categories (Bainotti, 2024a; L. N. Braun & Mateus, 2024). Due to the limited number of videos, the analysis is qualitative, allowing a detailed description of content categories and visual narratives. This approach highlights how TikTok algorithms curate content according to gendered identities, revealing recurring imagery, themes, and visual motifs that reflect structured practices and social expectations associated with masculinity and femininity.
The second analytical section explores structured practices within the comment sections. This is achieved using word embeddings to identify semantic patterns and relationships across large corpora (Boutyline & Arseniev-Koehler, 2025). Dependency-parse trees complement this analysis by revealing grammatical and semantic relationships between words, showing how concepts are framed in context (Costola et al., 2021; Di Caro & Grella,

2013). For example, examining the term "girls" as a central node illuminates how commenters construct and negotiate meanings around femininity.

Over 26,000 TikTok comments were collected from videos recommended to both personas. Comments were preprocessed to remove user tags, emojis, and special characters, followed by tokenisation and filtering of Italian stopwords. Each video was assigned a gender label, and the words from the associated comments were mapped into a semantic space using FastText Italian word vectors (Marulli et al., 2019; Petrolito & Dell'Orletta, 2018; Rollo et al., 2024). This allowed the creation of embedding matrices reflecting the vocabulary associated with male and female video contexts.

Dimensionality reduction techniques were applied to visualise patterns and relationships in the embeddings. t-SNE preserved local word relationships, highlighting subtle semantic clusters (Cai & Ma, 2021). PCA concentrated variance along dominant trends, exposing broad patterns (Musil, 2019; Raunak et al., 2019). UMAP combined local and global structure preservation, revealing intricate groupings and larger associations (Ordun et al., 2020). Interactive 3D scatterplots, colour-coded by video gender, illustrated differences in conceptual associations across comment sections. Nearest-neighbour analyses using cosine similarity further clarified semantic neighbourhoods surrounding key terms.

Beyond embeddings, the comments were parsed for part-of-speech tags, named entities, and dependency relations. These relations capture how words modify or depend on each other, creating a structured network of syntactic links. Bipartite networks were then constructed, linking dependent tokens to their syntactic heads and representing edges based on dependency types, including subjects, objects, and modifiers (Kong et al., 2014; Santagiustina & Warglien, 2022). These networks were transformed into Document-Feature Matrices to examine both individual words and syntactic associations according to video gender.

This approach allows for a detailed exploration of words such as "ragazza" (girl) within their syntactic and semantic neighbourhoods, revealing how commenters engage with and construct meanings related to gendered social media spaces. By combining embedding-based clustering and dependency parsing, the analysis provides a multifaceted understanding of how algorithmically surfaced content shapes and reflects gendered practices, offering insights into both symbolic and thematic dimensions of masculinity and femininity in TikTok interactions.

Figure 1. School fieldwork's methodological workflow

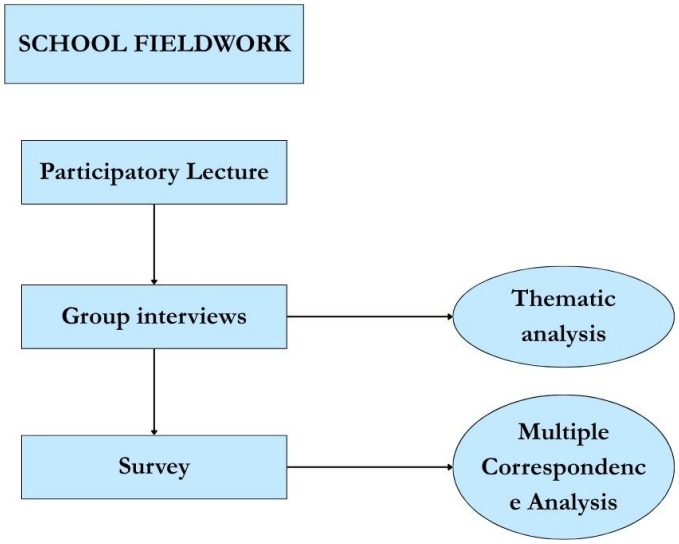
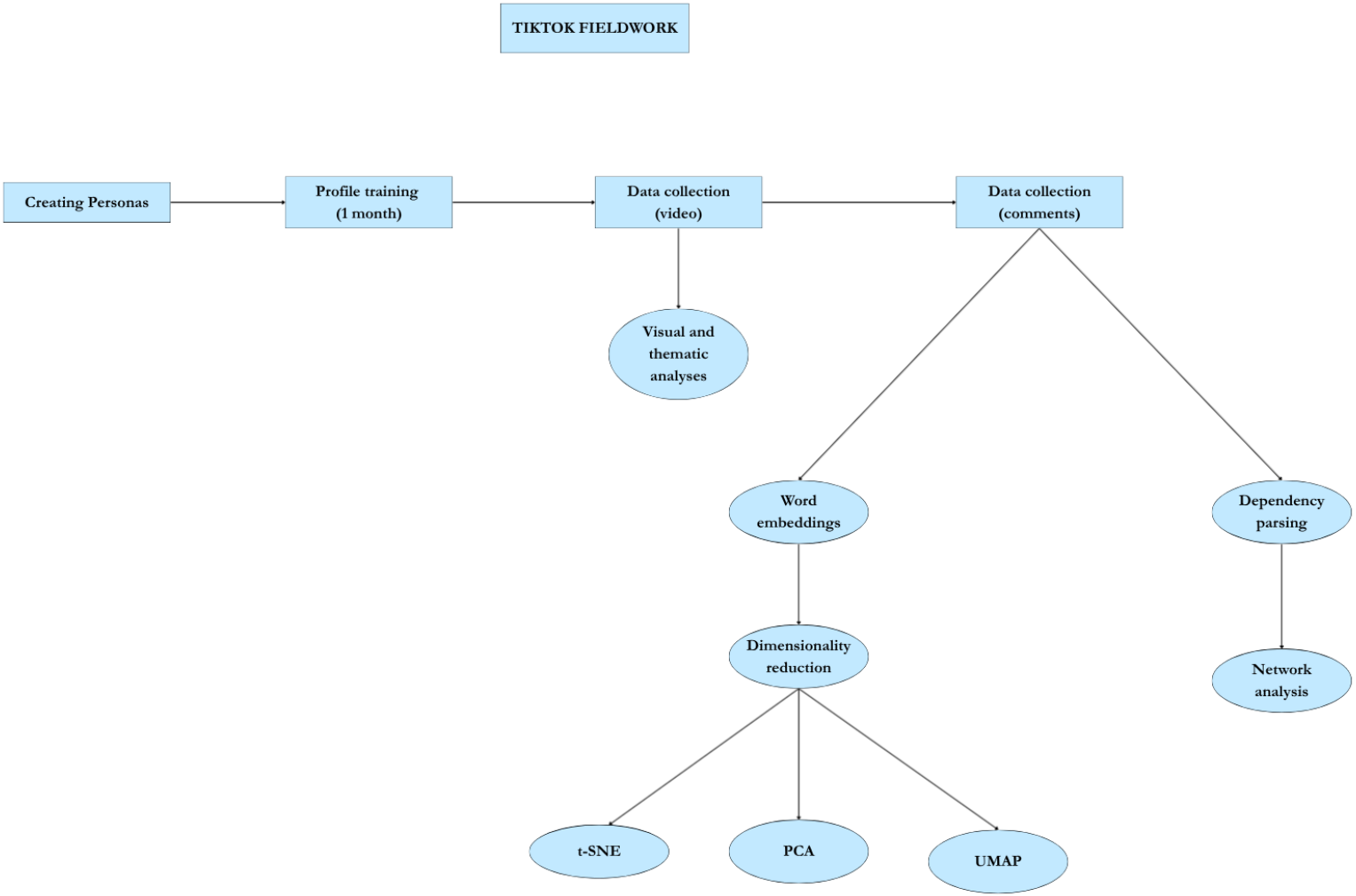


Figure 2. TikTok fielwork's methodological workflow.



6.3 Conclusion

This chapter is dedicated to outlining the empirical strategy designed to explore the multifaceted concept of practical digital literacy. The main aim is to present an empirical approach tailored to the three dimensions of this competence: shared, dispositional, and structured. To operationalise and empirically investigate how practical digital literacy manifests among teenagers, two fieldworks were developed to examine their experiences within the context of social media consumption and engagement with algorithmic recommender systems. The methodological framework thus draws on a multi-method approach, integrating ethnographic inquiries and consumption mapping through various, qualitative, quantitative, and computational techniques. This is meant to capture the nuances of this competence as both a collective and individually structured phenomenon.

The empirical strategy relies on three main cases (i.e. one for each dimension) structured within two primary fieldworks. The first is grounded in an initiative carried out in high schools located in northern Italy. The activities are inspired by the embedded-lesson approach (Dennen & Rutledge, 2018), which combines classroom teaching with embedded research activities. This approach is particularly well-suited to the challenges of researching youth digital practices, as it enables data collection within the naturalistic context of the classroom while simultaneously fostering student reflection on their own digital experiences. The adaptation of this method to a single, extended session, rather than multiple lessons, reflects both practical constraints and the need for flexibility within the Italian educational system, where external activities compete for limited curricular time.

This fieldwork is designed to address the first two dimensions of practical digital literacy (i.e., shared and dispositional). Following a participatory lecture on recent insights in platform studies and the data economy, students were invited to participate in group interviews and survey-based data collection, each targeting a different dimension of practical digital literacy.

The qualitative component, rooted in the traditions of folk theories (Eslami et al., 2016) and algorithmic imaginaries (Bucher, 2017b), employs semi-structured group interviews to elicit students' collective understandings and narratives regarding social media platforms and algorithms. This approach facilitates the exploration of shared meanings, emotional responses, and the tacit knowledge underpinning everyday digital practices. The interviews are carefully designed to probe three key areas: social life on social media, practices of distinction, and algorithmic copiloting. Each area is operationalised through specific activities and prompts, such as ranking exercises and breaching experiments (see e.g. Braswell, 2014; Caron & Mays, 2021; Garfinkel, 1956), intended to surface both explicit and implicit dimensions of digital literacy.

The quantitative strand complements these insights by employing survey data to map the dispositional underpinnings of digital literacy. The use of Multiple Correspondence Analysis (Bourdieu, 1979; Flemmen et al., 2018; Le Roux & Rouanet, 2010) enables the identification of patterns linking sociodemographic variables with digital consumption preferences and practices. This approach is grounded in a robust tradition of research on cultural consumption and taste (see e.g. Budanceva & Svirina, 2023; Peterson & Kern, 1996), extending these frameworks into the digital domain. The survey captures a range of variables, including consumption tastes, social background, and platform preferences, thereby facilitating a nuanced analysis of how individual dispositions and

structural factors intersect in shaping digital engagement.

To explore structured competence in social media practices, this study investigates how gendered performances emerge through algorithmically recommended content and commenting practices on TikTok. Building on computational ethnography (Brooker, 2022) and the methodological logic of "following the algorithm" (Airoldi et al., 2016), the research applies computational mapping of feeds to examine how recommendation systems actively shape youth cultures. The research persona method (Bounegru et al., 2022; Bruschi et al., 2024) is used to simulate gendered users, providing access to personalised feeds and enabling observation of how algorithmic pathways intersect with everyday practices of digital literacy within identity negotiation.

The analytical strategy unfolds in two parts. First, recommended videos are studied through thematic and visual analysis to examine how cultural traits and structured gender norms are embedded in algorithmic flows (Bainotti, 2024a; L. N. Braun & Mateus, 2024). Second, over 26,000 comments are analysed using word embeddings (Boutyline & Arseniev-Koehler, 2025) and dependency parsing (Santagiustina & Warglien, 2022) to trace semantic and syntactic patterns in user interactions. Dimensionality reduction and network analysis reveal how meanings around masculinity and femininity are constructed. This combined approach highlights the co-production of gendered practices by users and recommendation infrastructures.

In summary, this chapter presents the empirical strategy underpinning the investigation of practical digital literacy. By integrating qualitative and quantitative methods within a carefully designed fieldwork framework, this approach offers a robust foundation for addressing the research questions central to this thesis. The chapter demonstrates how shared narratives and individual dispositions are foundational elements shaping young people's digital literacies, and how these processes are embedded within broader social and educational contexts. This foundation sets the stage for the subsequent analysis and interpretation of findings, which will further elucidate the complex interplay between shared meaning-making, individual dispositions, and the evolving landscape of digital media consumption.

Chapter 7. Shared understanding

This chapter explores one of the central dimensions of practical digital literacy: the shared understanding that underpins how teenagers navigate social media platforms. By "shared understanding", I refer to the collectively constructed, often tacit, discursive and practical knowledge that guides what is perceived as appropriate, meaningful, or desirable in digital environments. This includes how content is consumed, what counts as relevant or *cringe*[3], as teenagers put it, how participation is negotiated, and how platform affordances are interpreted and used. These shared logics are not merely individual preferences but socially embedded dispositions that emerge from peer interactions, cultural expectations, and repeated engagements with platform architecture.

Over the past decade, social media has shifted from participatory platforms rooted in peer interaction to flow-based environments driven by algorithmic curation. Platforms like TikTok and Instagram now offer endless, personalised content streams designed to maximise engagement, prompting questions about the role of user agency and participation in digital culture. This chapter investigates how teenagers navigate and make sense of these algorithmically driven flows, focusing on the shared discourses and everyday practices that structure their platform experiences.

Two theoretical frameworks guide this analysis, with the first being about the concept of flow. This concept was initially developed to describe the seamless scheduling of television content (Williams, 1974), however, it has recently been adapted to understand algorithmic content delivery on platforms like TikTok (see e.g. Giuffrè, in press; Siles & Valerio-Alfaro, 2025; Ytre-Arne et al., 2020).

The second framework concerns agency in algorithmic environments. It builds on the distinction between platform grammars, design-imposed structures like algorithms and interfaces (Caliandro & Anselmi, 2021), and platform vernaculars, that is, the emergent user practices that creatively reinterpret those structures (Gibbs et al., 2015; Keller, 2019). Despite not being an expression of resistance, but instead of appropriation, the present chapter builds on the framework developed by Bonini and Treré (2024) which centres these practices as forms of everyday, improvised tactical algorithmic agency aligned with platforms' moral economy, that is, accepting platforms' envisaged rules and expectations.

Teenagers, as the empirical data will show, engage in everyday acts of algorithmic negotiation: skipping content, liking selectively, or resisting overexposure. In other words, they co-produce their content environments. These micro-practices reflect a shared sense of how platforms work and how one should act within them, often articulated through familiar discourses such as what is cringe, relevant, or authentic. This chapter, therefore, positions shared understanding as a foundational pillar of practical digital literacy. This can be understood as a situated, collective

[3] The term refers to a reaction of acute embarrassment or discomfort in response to something perceived as awkward, inauthentic, overly earnest, or socially out of touch. It often evokes a sense of *secondhand shame*, where the viewer or listener feels embarrassed *on behalf of* someone else, even if that person is unaware of how they're being perceived. Though rooted in internet slang, the term has become widely used to describe moments, especially in media, social interactions, or public behaviour, that fail to meet contemporary social or aesthetic norms, often because they appear outdated, forced, or unintentionally humorous.

literacy that emerges from embodied experiences, peer interactions, and negotiation with platform dynamics. Rather than fixed knowledge or technical skill, practical digital literacy is shown to be a dynamic, field-specific "feel for the game" (Bourdieu, 1980) that teenagers develop through lived engagement with social media flows.

7.1 Brief literature overview: the flow and platform vernaculars

Section 2.3 already introduced how societal concerns and media panics drive, if not shape, research on teenagers and social media. Parents, academics, as well as journalists, depicted isolated teenagers since the very beginning of the 2000s: the years of the blossoming of social network websites (Peter & Valkenburg, 2006). However, the vast work conducted by the Digital Youth Project at that time allows contemporary researchers to gain a better grasp of how teenagers were developing increasingly interesting and complex forms of digital youth cultures, shifting part of their socialisation into digital environments (boyd, 2010b; Buckingham, 2008a; Ellison & boyd, 2013; Itō, 2009; Jenkins, 2009; Jenkins et al., 2016).

However, the contemporary social media landscape has changed profoundly since then, with recommender systems being at the centre of these shifts. Today's social media experiences widely rely on the consumption of seemingly infinite flows of content curated by advanced systems of algorithms. The increasing screen time, along with new research on adolescents' mental health (see e.g. Arenz & Schnauber-Stockmann, 2024; D'Arienzo et al., 2019; Tomczyk & Selmanagic-Lizde, 2018) attracted new concerns. Recent accounts of youth life, indeed, depict smartphones as the *root of all evil* (see e.g. Haidt, 2024), albeit further research is needed to find a univocal answer (Pearson, 2025).

In general, this approach to youth cultures mirrors emotionally driven as well as historically consolidated perspectives on youths being an exposed population to be shielded from the technological harms (Buckingham, 2008a). Yet, digital youth cultures profoundly changed in the last 20 years. The advent of algorithmic feeds signalled the transformation from the networked audience, in which the social element matters, to the clustered audiences, whose most common experience is being grouped around algorithmically curated neighbourhoods of interests (Gerbaudo, 2024). Here, the image of the *prosumer* that characterised platform experiences (Kozłowska, 2024; Risi & Pronzato, 2022; Vizcaíno-Verdú et al., 2023; Weeks et al., 2015) is now apparently declining, favouring forms of passive consumption. Young people, for instance, are now much more selective and critical about what to share, preferring a refined selection of images related to exceptional events (Van Der Wal et al., 2024). Hence, is this the end of participation? With this provocative question, I argue that less emphasis has been placed on understanding whether and how participation and agency are reframed within flowing media environments.

Section 4 already introduced how research on platforms already accounted for the centrality of the flow in contemporary social media experiences. In addition to psychosocial interpretations, which consider the flow as the state of optimal experience for consuming media content (Sherry, 2004), recent approaches elaborate on Raymond Williams' notion of television flow (1974) to define the seamless experience of contemporary social media (see e.g. Ytre-Arne et al., 2020). Indeed, whereas in the past television broadcasting offered a seemingly infinite schedule of television programmes to keep the audience tuned in (Kackman, 2011), contemporary platforms, such as TikTok, offer a similar experience, except that the schedule is not pre-determined, but rather constantly tailored

to users' inferred interests (Siles, 2023; Siles & Valerio-Alfaro, 2025). The success of this platform paradigm among younger generations propagated towards other popular platforms, such as Instagram (i.e. *Reels*) and YouTube (i.e. *Shorts*). Hence, I argue that the *TikTokification* of the field of social media consumption (Gerbaudo, 2024) calls for a new interpretation of agency in the context of algorithmic flows, in which the latter represents the space that users aim to appropriate (Giuffrè, in press). To this purpose, I draw upon the consolidated literature that further developed the concept of platform vernaculars in contrast to grammars.

Critical platform studies developed theories that allows to better understand how agency is mutually negotiated between users and platforms. Building on Chomsky's *grammars* as the system of finite rules enabling infinite utterances (Chomsky, 1957), research on platforms interiorises this concept as the distinctive sets of rules, features, and interaction patterns embedded in a digital platform's architecture that shape how users can create, share, and circulate content (Caliandro & Anselmi, 2021). In more traditional sociological terms, platform grammars represent, to a certain extent, the structure that guides potential platform behaviours. Yet, users often negotiate, circumvent, or appropriate the platform environment through more or less aware digital practices to make these experiences felt as personal, meaningful, and socially relevant, that is, platform vernaculars.
Platform vernaculars refer to the emergent, often creative communicative practices that arise from user communities above and beyond the boundaries set by the platforms (Gibbs et al., 2015). These are not static, but evolve as users adapt, repurpose, and even subvert platform affordances, such as the migration of hashtags from Twitter to other platforms, or the emergence of platform-specific memes (see e.g. Burgess, 2006; Trillò, 2024). Vernaculars thus foreground "ordinary" cultural production and highlight the agency of users in shaping meaning, even within structured environments.

Vernaculars thus emerge from repeated, reflexive engagements with algorithmic systems, where practices of liking, commenting, sharing, or remixing become means of tailoring the feed. In this sense, rather than being reduced to passive consumers, teenagers demonstrate how agency materialises in the everyday appropriation of algorithmically mediated content, producing shared cultural forms that can diverge from the platform's pre-intended uses. Interestingly, research on platform vernaculars resonates with studies on critical digital literacy, which offered frameworks to put users' agency at the centre of the negotiation process of digital experiences. For instance, Pangrazio (2016) proposed a model of digital literacy named "critical design literacy" to bridge critical analysis and creative production. In this sense, learners interrogate and redesign digital structures, enhancing agency and critical awareness within contemporary digital environments.

However, how this second generation of social media – whose user experiences rely heavily on algorithmic flows – has fostered new forms of appropriation and platform vernaculars remains underexplored. To address this gap, I developed the concept of *copiloting* the algorithmic flow as a literate shared practice that younger generations take in place to better frame how they appropriate these platforms.

7.1.1 Research question

As anticipated in the previous paragraph, the second generation of social media – whose user experiences rely heavily on algorithmic flows – has fostered new forms of appropriation and platform vernaculars, which are currently rather underexplored. Exploring practical digital literacy is also meant to grant access to these practices, first and foremost through the main, shared discourses that younger generations have internalised, as in a process of platform socialisation. The notion of shared understanding can be approached in Bourdieusian terms as *doxa*: the implicit, taken-for-granted rules of the "social media game" that guide youth cultures within digital environments. Doxa refers to the system of shared assumptions that orient practices, providing young people with a sense of what is possible, appropriate, or legitimate in their everyday engagement with social media (Bourdieu, 1972). In this case, these rules operate within algorithmically curated flows of content, where what counts as valuable or meaningful is constantly produced through the interplay between platform strategies and user practices. Social media thus becomes a space in which cultural norms and digital values are collectively negotiated, while being simultaneously conditioned by infrastructures that prioritise attention, visibility, and engagement.

Understanding social media consumption as a field of practice allows us to grasp how teenagers participate in and sustain their position within these flows. What may appear as "just scrolling" is, in fact, guided by a practical knowledge formed through past experiences, socialisation, and cultural background. These dispositions provide adolescents with a "feel for the game" (Bourdieu, 1996), a tacit sense of how to respond to content, how to follow trends, and how to present themselves in relation to peers. Yet, this field is not solely constituted by human actors. Algorithms function as non-human agents that reproduce platform strategies within what Wacquant (1989) calls a subfield of power. By ranking, curating, and recommending, they shape visibility, amplify certain forms of expression, and legitimise some cultural practices over others. In this way, visibility itself becomes a form of symbolic capital, increasingly mediated through algorithmic processes (Lundahl, 2022).

Understanding such a complex practical mastery is essential for understanding teenagers' lived experience of platforms. They highlight how practical digital literacy extends beyond content consumption to the active appropriation of algorithmic infrastructures. In this sense, scrolling is not passive but an ongoing negotiation of meaning, where teenagers co-shape the flows they inhabit. This article, therefore, asks:

RQ1. What are the main shared discourses and practices characterising teenagers' platform experiences?

7.2 Investigating the shared understanding

My empirical strategy for investigating the "shared" dimension of practical digital literacy, particularly focusing on how digital knowledge and practices are collectively constructed among teenagers, primarily involved class-level group interviews conducted within high schools. This approach was part of the larger scholastic fieldwork introduced in Chapter 5.

To summarise, the fieldwork was conducted across nine upper-secondary schools in northern Italy, primarily in Lombardy. The sample included six lyceums and three technical institutes located in Milan's city centre, suburbs, countryside, and medium-sized cities (Piacenza, Mantua). Data collection occurred through an embedded-lesson approach combining participatory lectures with research activities (Dennen & Rutledge, 2018). The study involved

39 classes with 719 students completing surveys and 161 participants in recorded group interviews. Fieldwork took place during the 2022-2023 academic year, focusing on students aged 14-19 across various educational paths, including linguistics, sciences, social sciences, and technical specialisations. The actual activity comprised a two-hour session: an hour-long participative lecture followed by an hour dedicated to data collection through group interviews. This structure aimed to capture broader shared understandings efficiently within a school setting.

7.2.1 The group interviews

The group interviews followed a semi-structured format, chosen for its ability to integrate pre-defined deductive dimensions while allowing for spontaneous follow-up questions and exploration of emergent themes. This flexibility was crucial for uncovering the "hidden aspects of social life" (Belina, 2023, p. 331) related to teenagers' shared digital experiences.

Interviews were structured around three main sections, each designed to investigate specific dimensions of participants' shared practical digital literacy. The first was centred on early experiences. This theme is aimed at understanding how teenagers access the social media consumption field and develop their "feel for the game," essentially the process of digital enculturation (Lizardo, 2017, 2022). It explored initial popular content categories, how these changed over time, and teenagers' investment in continued engagement with social media flows (i.e. the *illusio* of this specific field). Questions addressed shifts in consumed content, typical times of access, and associated interaction practices (e.g., commenting, liking, sharing). This section was designed to establish a baseline of participants' experiences anchored in their past trajectories, allowing us to trace the temporalities of digital practices and observe how patterns of engagement evolve.

The second section was dedicated to practices of distinction. Drawing on established cultural sociological literature (see e.g. Bourdieu, 1979; Warde, 2016), this theme explored how students perceived and articulated "quality" content on social media. The discussion was prompted by a video from a popular YouTube channel (Geopop) that challenged common perceptions of fast, purposeless content on platforms like TikTok. Students were encouraged to define quality content, identify what deserved attention, and legitimise their tastes by judging others' interests. Screenshots of diverse TikTok videos were used to facilitate discussion, with participants ranking them from most to least favourite. The analytical focus here was on how students justified their selections and reasoned about others' rankings, revealing their processes of classification and legitimation.

The last section was about their relationship with recommender systems. This theme delved into teenagers' shared understandings of their interactions with recommender systems. I asked students to quantify how much of their consumed content was actively searched versus algorithmically recommended. To further probe the affective and embodied relationship users develop with algorithms, the activity drew inspiration from Garfinkel's (1956)'s breaching experiment. Working in pairs, students were instructed to disrupt their partner's social media experience by choosing what they would watch, like, and comment on, thereby intentionally generating disorienting recommendations. This exercise created a temporary rupture in the regular order of interaction with the feed, provoking reactions that revealed the depth of participants' reliance on algorithmic curation. Importantly, such a rupture also allowed tacit, shared understandings of "how things normally work" to surface. By breaking the implicit rules of engagement, the activity foregrounded the common-sense assumptions that underpin teenagers'

practical digital literacy, offering an ethnomethodological entry point into their everyday negotiation with algorithmic flows.

I designed the group interviews to be participatory, encouraging active formulation of the imaginaries and understandings underpinning the research, consistent with participatory research approaches (Dennen & Rutledge, 2018; Risi et al., 2020).

7.2.2 Analytical Strategy: Thematic Analysis

The qualitative data collected from these group interviews were subjected to thematic analysis, following the six-phase approach developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). I chose this method, widely adopted in educational studies, for its flexibility in capturing both common patterns and divergent perspectives within qualitative data, particularly suited for exploring young people's lived experiences, practices, and discourses around social media use.

The analytical process began with iterative familiarisation involving verbatim transcription, anonymisation, and integration of ethnographic observations. An abductive coding approach combined deductive codes based on three key themes – access and enculturation, content consumption, and algorithmic flows experiences – with openness to participants' emic, thus generating inductively derived codes. Coded data were then grouped into broader thematic categories, followed by recursive reviewing to check coherence and relevance. Themes such as habituation to social media practices and flow experiences emerged iteratively. Finally, these themes were defined and synthesised into a coherent narrative, illustrated with representative interview excerpts. For practical application, transcripts were manually coded in Microsoft Word using comments. These comments, structured with broader themes, specific narratives, qualitative observations, and quoted text, were then exported to Excel. This allowed for easier data management, filtering, and descriptive analysis without requiring specialised software, aligning with a cost-effective and accessible approach (Isangula et al., 2024; Ose, 2016).

Throughout the analysis, a reflexive stance was maintained to acknowledge the researcher's positionality and potential influence on the interpretation. The iterative discussion and refinement of themes focused on both the content of what teenagers said and *how* they expressed their understandings, tensions, and agency regarding social media, ultimately bridging individual experiences with broader cultural logics.

7.3 Findings

The following paragraph introduces the main finding of the group interviews about the shared understanding of platform experiences by young people. The structure follows the three separated sections of the interview schedule.

7.3.1 Early platform experiences

Most participants reported accessing social media around the age of 12, with no notable distinction between females and males. Early hours spent in these environments can be summarised as a tension between feeling excited and overwhelmed. Mario and Claudio (16) describe these moments as "the first few hours were like, wow, you felt so cool" and "insane, like a whole other world". However, some of them felt instantly how overwhelming and complicated it was to use social media effectively, especially at the beginning. Sara said

> "For me, it was the opposite. At first, it was boring as hell because I literally had no clue how it worked. And I can't stick with something that I'm not good at using, so I used it for like 10 minutes and then just closed it."

This opened up to the second central tension in accessing such a *new world,* which is related to the driver that led users to adopt social media, namely, social- or individual-centred.

The main driver guiding early social media adoption is peer influence. Despite being a finding instead consolidated in the literature (see e.g. Slagter et al., 2023), what stood out the most was that the first social media platform they adopted was essentially the same, regardless of their individual social and economic backgrounds. From private schools in Milan's historic centre to public institutions on its periphery, the diverse lifestyles encountered during my study were marked by a notable convergence in media consumption practices, both in terms of the content accessed and the platforms used. Peer influence was particularly influential in this setting, with most female participants citing Musical.ly as the first social media platform they used. At the same time, YouTube was predominantly favoured by those identifying as male.

Moreover, social influences emerged in two primary forms: specific individuals who directly impacted the decision to download certain social media apps, and more diffuse groups associated with broader trend-following behaviours. Francesco (18), for instance, showed how accessing the first social media, in his case Instagram, mainly was due to interpersonal relationships:

> "I remember it super clearly because I was up in the mountains skiing with another family and I had a major crush on this girl, and she kept posting stuff on this thing called Instagram, so I was like 'okay I'm gonna download it too'"

In contrast, Alessia (16) offered a different account, more related to the necessity to participate in a broader trend.

> "For me it was because *Musical.ly* was like the big thing and everyone was talking about *Musical.ly*, so I was like 'Mom, can you download it for me so I can use it too?' I downloaded it and started making videos with my sister. We're twins so we would copy the twins that were popular on *Musical.ly* and were like, trending. But we never posted them - we just kept the videos to ourselves."

Such an account has also been chosen to introduce two additional elements in the logic of social influence in social media adoption: early participation experiences and gatekeeping practices by parents.

As introduced in the theoretical framework of the present chapter, typical attitudes towards social networks at the blossoming of their era were grouped around the concept of participatory culture. Most of the participants showed forms of participation, although gender still appeared to be a determining factor. Those who identified as females appeared to be more likely to participate by creating and posting content to take part in broader trends, as in the case of Alessia. In contrast, those who identified differently were inclined to participate by consuming content and engaging through other forms, such as commenting. Simone (17), for instance,

> "I got my first phone in middle school and instantly downloaded Instagram, but I wasn't really active on it. I basically just used it to follow YouTubers who'd post about their new videos and stuff like that. Not for friends or whatever... Plus all the YouTubers would be like 'follow my Insta for updates' so I was like 'bet, I'm following."

The conversations between males about the early years of YouTube often conveyed the fact that this environment was relevant for socialisation. Here, the content consumed and YouTubers followed also represented shared topics

to talk about in person. This illustrates how, even in the platform's early years, social media consumption became intertwined with social life. Content on YouTube helped define the boundaries of subcultural identities, with male participants largely following the same Italian creators (e.g., Cicciogamer, Stepny, and Mates). Engaging with this content, through commenting, sharing inside jokes, or highlighting memorable moments with friends at school, emerged as a key cultural practice. These interactions shaped socialization patterns, showing that online content was not only a source of entertainment but also a framework for communication and bonding among peers

The second significant aspect that emerged from the aforementioned quote by Alessia is the role of parents as gatekeepers. Research approaches towards such a topic are grouped around the concept of internet addiction, and the role of parents in mediating this issue (see e.g. Geurts, 2025; Mekonen et al., 2024; X. Zhu et al., 2023). However, seldom did participants express friction towards the position of parents as gatekeepers. Fabiola (18) even expressed a positive attitude toward their role.

> I got Instagram really late. I think I made it in my second year of high school, and before that I only had WhatsApp because my parents were always really strict about this stuff. But in the end, I get it. So I kind of saw it as a nice bit of freedom after all.

In addition to the social pressure influencing early social media adoption, some participants outlined this process as an outcome of personal interests. For instance, Stefano (17) claimed that "Back in middle school, I had a movie page on Instagram where I reviewed films I'd watched, mainly because not everyone had Instagram at the time". This kind of access is relatively rare; however, it is strictly related to a category of participants who employed social media to pursue creative ends within these platforms. In this regard, it is relevant to note the interaction between the aforementioned participants, Stefano, and his classmate Matteo (17), who answered

> Matteo (17): "I had started a YouTube channel. And that's when I found my passion for graphic design… But when I was 11, I used to record the screen with my phone and upload it straight to YouTube. I'd go to a friend's place, we'd make videos and then post them on YouTube."
>
> Stefano (17): "Like, you know, the classic 'hey what's up guys' kind of thing"
>
> Matteo (17): "Yeah exactly, super cringe".

This introduces another layer of interpretation regarding the shared understanding about how users should behave on social media, as Bourdieu termed it, the *rules of the game*.

Whereas in *Les règles de l'art* (1992) Bourdieu examined artists' struggles for acceptance within the art field, the diachronic perspective that emerged from these conversations revealed underlying, yet commonly shared, norms for determining what is considered appropriate and what should be avoided to prevent coming across as *cringe*. However, these appeared to become stronger as participants grew older. When talking about selfies, for instance, many of them said they used to post lots of content, often without considering the quality of the image.

> Riccardo (18): "It's because you overthink way more now… Like, you take a photo and go, 'I don't like it, I'm not posting this.' When you were younger, you'd take a picture and post the first shot, no second thoughts."
>
> Tommaso (18): "Yeah, back then you had to post something no matter what. Now, when you take a photo, you're like, 'Does it actually look good or not?'"

Federico (19): "It's also because before, you kinda wanted to copy others. There was this pressure to post, to look like someone, or try to be like someone else. And then when you grow up, it flips. You stop liking that stuff, and you start worrying that other people might not like it either."

Hence, early social media experiences were marked by greater participation and a seemingly more relaxed approach to interaction and self-exposure. This concept strongly emerged not only in the case of selfies, which are structured forms that require a certain degree of effort to be accomplished, but also in participants' discussions about the legitimacy, or not, of commenting practices.

Andrea (17): "When I was younger… I'm talking about YouTube again, like, you really wanted to comment on your favourite YouTuber's videos… Like 'Hey Stepny, awesome video!'

The final key aspect of early social media experiences concerns the formation of divisions. In this sense, platforms operate less as neutral repositories of content and more as idiocultures (Fine, 1979; Richards, 2017), where shared expectations, unspoken norms, and peer dynamics shape what is considered appropriate, desirable, or embarrassing to post. Although Instagram was one of the first social media platforms downloaded, YouTube and Musical.ly created the most apparent distinctions, particularly by polarising digital consumption into two separate spheres aligned with female and male identities. Indeed, Federica (16) argued that

"Like, I don't think I ever really used YouTube, and when I did open it, it just felt super weird to me… Like, you can find literally anything on there. So I never really used it because it just seemed like a place for weird people or something… I didn't get why they were even on there. I just couldn't understand what was so great about being on YouTube."

Whereas her classmate Alessandro (17) put the two into a hierarchical order, claiming YouTube as a platform offering more structured content, whereas Musical.ly is purely based on ephemeral and banal content.

"There was this thing, Musical.ly… They were short videos you'd just scroll through… and so yeah, I don't know… On YouTube, you'd find a good video that could last like half an hour, and you'd actually sit there and watch it. People talked about stuff… played video games. You'd spend time there, and the person was really creating something. But on Musical.ly, those tiny videos just weren't for me… My sisters were into it… I'd see them glued to it and be like, 'Damn, you guys are such losers.'"

The gendered approach to platforms was also directly stated during a conversation. During the conversation, the two set clear boundaries around what was acceptable to consume, or else risk being made fun of and being excluded from the group. Hence, each platform is characterised by a symbolic capital that participants fuel under the form of proper symbolic violence, as in the case reported below:

Federica (16): "Also, it has to be said that Musical.ly was way more for girls, and for guys there was YouTube."

Alessandro (17): "Yeah, there weren't many boys on it."

Federica (16): "Also because boys didn't really watch girls doing little dances. It was more for us, because we wanted to copy them."

Alessandro (17): "There was this one guy who watched Musical.ly and he always got made fun of and called gay."

Early experiences with social media were shaped by a mix of excitement, confusion, and strong peer influence, with clear gendered patterns in platform adoption and participation. These early practices were governed by emerging and shared norms about what could be posted, commented on, or consumed without risking social

exclusion. Platforms functioned as idiocultures (Fine, 1979), where symbolic boundaries and expectations reinforced group belonging and identity. As users matured, a growing awareness of these unspoken rules led to more cautious self-presentation and reduced openness. This evolution in attitude sets the stage for exploring how current practices reflect both continuity and change.

7.3.2 Practices of distinction

As emerged in the previous paragraph, what used to be considered valuable and relevant in the context of social media consumption changed profoundly. Participants are inclined to remember what social media was at that time with nostalgia, with the present being more complex and structured. In contrast to early experiences, current practices of consumption are more aligned with traditional Bourdieusian cultural analysis. Hence, the same are characterised by forms of distinction, legitimisation of symbolic boundaries, along with some struggles generated by gendered practices and the shared understanding of the addicting nature of social media platforms.

7.3.2.1 New forms of distinction and symbolic boundaries

One of the primary shifts that characterises current social media practices is the growing emphasis on the concept of relevance. While relevancy also played a role in past experiences, participants described earlier practices as having a more artisanal and home-made quality. For example, watching content from a favourite YouTuber was not about its placement in the feed, but rather about a more intimate and personal form of media consumption. In contrast, today's content is subtly evaluated based on its ability to attract and hold users' attention. When discussing what they now consider high-quality content, participants often referred to either advanced editing and storytelling techniques or a strong sense of perceived authenticity, both of which are seen as key to maintaining relevance in contemporary social media environments.

> Andrea (18): "The video has to leave you with something. A lot of videos just kind of pass by and no one actually remembers them."
>
> Luca (19): "Yeah, it needs to be well edited and have good audio."
>
> Giulio (18): "It has to keep you hooked the whole time."
>
> Matteo (19): "Talking about your own interests is key. Like, something might be interesting to me, but for her it could be something totally different, and that's fine."

To argue this point, many referred to two influencers: Ale della Giusta[4] and Blur[5]. The former is often cited as an example of high-quality content in editing and storytelling, thereby increasing its potential to capture users' attention. The latter is a streamer; therefore, it is not known for the content produced in individual videos. However, his almost always-on livestreams, along with the clips shared in smaller formats (e.g., Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts), are often described as *authentic* and convey a familiar tone.

[4] Content creator and event speaker, who runs an investigative-style YouTube channel where he travels to explore controversial or hidden social environments, such as secret drug labs, urban subcultures, and forbidden zones.
[5] A very famous Twitch streamer that became particularly popular during the Covid 19's pandemic. He is famous for blending gameplay of famous videogames to interactive sessions.

Participants generally acknowledged the evolution of social media, particularly highlighting the growing complexity and variety of content, as well as the widespread presence of companies and their related advertising. This very last aspect generates contrasting approaches well summarised by Giovanni (17):

> "Now we like it way more. There's just so much more to watch. There's also way more money going around. At the same time, it kind of lost its authenticity because now the goal is to make money."

Moreover, the shared understanding that emerged through discourse and became embedded in current practices can be categorised along two key dimensions: forms of distinction through consumption and symbolic boundaries of participation.

In contrast to the platform-based distinctions that shaped early social media experiences, current practices reveal a shift in focus, with content itself playing a more central role in differentiating tastes and preferences. When discussing the notion of quality, intentionally left open to interpretation, participants no longer referred to specific platforms as markers of value. This pattern had emerged clearly in earlier phases. Rather than viewing platforms as fixed environments offering either high- or low-brow content, distinctions today tend to revolve around particular creators or trends that circulate across multiple platforms. This shift may be influenced by the development of platform vernaculars and the way recommendation algorithms operate. Much of the content seen on social media now exists in replicated forms across different spaces, whether as exact duplicates, shortened clips, or curated compilations of popular moments. Scholars such as Giorgi and Gerosa (2024) have described this phenomenon as a content pool from which algorithms repeatedly draw. As a result, platforms no longer serve as the primary frame for setting content expectations. Instead, participants appear to base their judgments on the flow of content itself and the influence of specific personalities within it.

Among said practices of classification, the most prominent has been the distinction between high- and lowbrow consumption. These are traditional categories employed in cultural analysis to distinguish between more sophisticated and popular forms of consumption (see e.g. Bourdieu, 1979). However, in this case, these categories are translated into capital enhancing vis-à-vis light entertainment-oriented consumption practices. Such a polarisation has already emerged in Micheli's work on patterns in online engagement between teenagers from more and less advantaged backgrounds (Micheli, 2015). Here, nonetheless, these practices are actively employed in discourses as forms of distinguishing forms of consumption. For instance, Giorgia (17) and Alessandro (18) outlined this contrast.

> Giorgia (17): "I feel like influencers these days just show you places to travel to. It's all for people who just wanna dream a little. They don't really teach you anything anymore. I mean, it depends on the kind of influencer, but yeah, that's how I see it. A quality post can even be something dumb, but if you read between the lines... you get something out of it. Like, that guy on TikTok who dances dressed like he's from the '60s: there's nothing to take away from that. But there are videos now that actually give you something. Quality content gives you some kind of info."

> Alessandro (18): "Honestly, I think socials are mostly full of crap now. I don't think any of us actually go on there for information, we're mostly just watching dumb stuff. That's what it's become. We already know what we wanna see and we just scroll through that. Sure, there are some videos that help you learn stuff, but most of it is just nonsense… and I watch it too!"

Moreover, various symbolic boundaries emerged, especially related to specific interactions, such as commenting and posting.

The concept of symbolic boundaries, rooted in the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1972, 1979, 1996), refers to the distinctions people make to categorise others, practices, or tastes, which in turn shape social hierarchies and group identities. Bourdieu emphasised that cultural consumption, such as preferences in music, art, or media, serves as a marker of social position and belonging. These boundaries are "symbolic" because they are socially constructed, rather than legally enforced. Yet, they influence inclusion, exclusion, and the ways individuals recognise themselves and others within cultural and social fields.

Participants, indeed, outlined some tacit rules to define what is perceived as appropriate when posting and commenting, with the explicit intent to avoid being perceived as *cringe* - that is, in Goffmanian terms, to 'lose face' (Goffman, 1967). Recent research has already underlined how teenagers carefully manage self-presentation on social media through a complex system of social norms (Taber et al., 2023) and practices (Wunderlich & Zillich, 2025), such as creating multiple profiles to separate the potential audiences (e.g. *finsta*) (Tao & Ellison, 2023). Hence, for youth cultures on social media, sharing is not just about expression, but rather a calculated social act through which they signal intimacy, autonomy, and belonging to their peers. Here, symbolic capital (i.e. reputation) is essential in the complex negotiation and management of privacy and intimacy (Balleys & Coll, 2017).

For instance, in my fieldwork, this is confirmed by the dialogue between Antonio (18) and Federico (17)

> Researcher: "Would you be able to reconstruct what makes a piece of content successful? And if so, what features does content need to have in order to work? So that it's not… cringe?"
>
> Antonio (18): "Put up a good pic with your girlfriend… or just a good photo of yourself."
>
> Federico (17): "It also depends on who's posting it… Like, if you think of Valerio Mazzei, and you try to do that kind of thing…"
>
> Antonio (18): "Yeah no, I would never do that."
>
> Federico (17): "But see, he can do it—he's got the credibility for it."
>
> Researcher: "So it's not just about the features of the content itself, but also about how others perceive you?"
>
> Antonio (18): "Yeah, it's like building your whole life… You show that you go places, you do stuff… It's like a second life. 'Cause if you're famous, you can post certain things, but someone else… can't really."
>
> Federico (17): "It's not that you can't…"
>
> Antonio (18): "Yeah but like, you'd get made fun of."

However, what struck me the most was the emergence of similar symbolic boundaries surrounding commenting practices. These practices have profoundly changed since the early days of social media. As introduced in the previous section, participants were free to write comments below their favourite content creators. Current practices involve commenting in two main ways: as a form of content consumption and as an exposing practice.

On the one hand, comments sections gained centrality as a form of proper content to be consumed. Federico (17) and Giuseppe (17) summarised this in the following manner:

> Federico (17): "Sometimes a video pops up and you're like, "oh yeah this is funny," but then you check the comments and they're even funnier than the video itself. But then you also see people randomly going off on each other, just straight up arguing."
>
> Giuseppe (17): "Instagram is especially savage. It's funny when it's not about you... but low-key sad if you're the one getting dragged. Still, it's kinda hilarious how people just start full-on battles in the comments. They're even fighting each other. TikTok's way more chill now though. It's been pretty moderated for a while."

On the other hand, despite their aforementioned popularity, commenting practices are perceived as exposing users to similar risks to those associated with sharing personal content. Less attention has indeed been placed on how social media self-presentation also involves the practice of commenting. For instance, participants subtly described these symbolic boundaries, thereby facilitating a deeper understanding of how commenting can be further explored as part of managing identity on social media.

> Researcher: "Is commenting cringe?"
>
> Luca (17): "Yeah… Obviously, if you comment something positive like 'Great video, I love how you do things,' that's cringe."
>
> Marco (17): "No, you just can't do that anymore."
>
> Simone (17): "On Twitch streams it's different. Like, during a live, if the streamer says something funny, people in the chat comment right away."

Commenting practices among teenagers on social media have evolved into nuanced and highly regulated forms of self-presentation, operating within symbolic boundaries that govern what is deemed appropriate to avoid social penalties like being perceived as "cringe." Much like posting content, commenting is not a casual act but a carefully managed social performance through which adolescents negotiate their reputation, belonging, and symbolic capital. Teenagers recognise that comments are public-facing expressions that contribute to their digital persona, and thus apply tacit social norms to navigate risks of exposure and social judgment. Moreover, comment sections have become meta-content spaces that teenagers actively consume and engage with, further embedding commenting within their broader identity work online. This complex interplay between content production and interaction reveals that commenting is integral to how youth construct and maintain their social status and authenticity in increasingly sophisticated online environments.

7.3.2.2 #BookTok and traditional cultural capital

Content about novels and books appeared as a relevant category to explore how participants engage with classically conceived cultural capital-enhancing activities. Despite social media content about books impacted the reading culture of teenagers (Kovalova & Shalman, 2024), the literary category emerged as the least popular among the participants of the initiative. Average to passionate book readers occupied, if present, minimal sections of the classes. I therefore asked them questions about their reasoning for people to read, thus trying to expose consolidated legitimisation processes in cultural sociology. However, the outcomes of these attempts yielded a puzzling finding.

Even given the scarce time dedicated to reading, participants' *doxa* was characterised by a certain degree of recognition of classically conceived cultural practices. Recent research on cultural consumption confirmed that the imaginary of privileged classes consuming "snob" forms of arts is today substituted by broader, omnivorous forms of consumption (Atkinson, 2011; Peterson & Kern, 1996; Savage & Gayo, 2011; Wherry & Woodward, 2019). Here, the legitimisation struggles anticipated by Pierre Bourdieu in the lectures at the Collège de France (Bourdieu et al., 2018) might fall short. Early social media brought about a process of democratisation of text, thus flattening forms of distinction through texts (Mauger, 2020). Indeed, when asked what informants think of people attending, for instance, the book-devoted TikTok community named *BookTok*, many answered in supportive ways, despite the lack of time spent reading.

> Luca (18): "Total respect."
>
> Samuele (19): "Joking aside, he's really like that. He's cultured. He likes books, he enjoys reading. He's into stuff most people our age don't care about. He's not like the rest. I mean, compared to what's normal for people our age now. In this class... it's me, him, him, him, we all watch the same stuff. He doesn't."
>
> Andrea (18): "Hey, don't put me in your same group."
>
> Luca (18): "Come on man, it's true. Open my TikTok, open your TikTok: it's all football and hot girls."

While algorithmic media platforms tend to flatten cultural hierarchies, diminishing the embodied cultural capital traditionally tied to literary practices, books retain their institutional prestige. Teenagers often express respect for reading, even if they do not engage in it extensively, treating it as a marker of legitimised knowledge. This converts cultural capital into social capital (e.g., intellectual credibility), functioning as an *illusio*, a tacit acceptance of the value of reading that reinforces bourgeois distinctions.

However, one could counter that, within teen social fields, institutionalised forms of cultural capital (e.g., book reading) are often rejected in favour of eclectic styles of consumption. The present research found no clear hierarchy in cultural consumption; instead, teens engaged with a broad spectrum of content, from highbrow to lowbrow, without explicitly legitimising any single form. Position-takings in digital fields operated through *ideocultures,* or shared subcultural meanings within specific audience groups, rather than through fixed hierarchies. For example, individuals often consumed media to align with particular subcultures (e.g., Andrea's statement: *"Hey, don't put me in your same group"*). Content was consumed omnivorously, with no rigid classification, reflecting the fluid, platform-driven nature of cultural valuation in digital spaces.

7.3.2.4 Gender struggles

In line with what emerged in past research, this research confirms that teenagers interact with prevailing gender norms and societal expectations as they strive to present a visually coherent self that aligns with their broader sense of identity (Scarcelli & Farci, 2024). Gendered consumption practices appeared to reproduce broader social norms regarding femininity and masculinity. However, this study also reveals how everyday conversations among teenagers reproduce yet simultaneously challenge traditional gender associations, highlighting the contested nature

of gendered consumption. A clear example emerged during a group discussion on gym workouts, which some participants perceived as inherently masculine:

> Mauro (16): "Yeah but like, the gym's for guys."
>
> Elisabetta (16): "That's not true."
>
> Mauro (16): "You don't do the same workouts guys do."
>
> Elisabetta (16): "Well, if a girl's trained, like a personal trainer, she can do them too."
>
> Alessio (16): "Yeah but it's not the same kind of training."
>
> Mauro (16): "True."

This exchange illustrates how attaching gender labels to practices like fitness training becomes a site of tension and negotiation between male and female participants. While the initial claim that "the gym is for boys" reflects a dominant stereotype, other voices in the conversation resist that framing, suggesting that girls can also train seriously, exceptionally, and professionally. However, the discussion ultimately returns to the idea that male and female workouts are inherently different, reinforcing traditional gender binaries. Such moments underscore how gendered expectations are both challenged and reinforced in peer interactions, reflecting the broader dynamics of identity performance and power struggles in adolescent culture.

Moreover, the second gendered issue that firmly emerged from the interviews is related to the objectification, if not explicit sexualisation, of female content from male participants. When talking about the most common categories of content consumed on platforms, the vast majority of males described their social media feeds as mainly characterised by semi-sexual content.

On the one hand, scholars identified that platforms do have a role in fostering self-sexualisation practices, since they reinforce a narrow definition of attractiveness, equating physical appearance to sexual attractiveness (Ward et al., 2016). For instance, Oosten (2018) noted how social media enables teens, especially girls, to present themselves sexually online, reinforcing pressure to conform to narrow aesthetic standards and perform sexual desirability. Such a flattening of self-esteem is also accompanied by very low engagement in counter-messages, which can resist sexualisation and build resilience (Van Oosten, 2021).

On the other hand, in the past two decades, a growing concern has emerged about young males' rituals to bond on social media and how these might enforce gender norms through masculinity. Scarcelli and Farci (2024) noted how traditional gender norms and stereotypes strongly influence youth self-presentation. Indeed, in their work, masculinity was typically represented in stereotypical forms, such as "street masculinity" (independence, toughness), "men-of-action" (athleticism, adventure), "geek" (tech competence and irony), and "spornosexual" (body-focused metrosexuality) (p. 102).

This is part of a broader research about the effect of media on male adolescents (see e.g. Ging, 2005), which nowadays is further fuelled by the concept of *manosphere*. The term refers to various groups of people who share a collective identity rooted in antifeminism, promoting the idea that men should be liberated from the feminist

delusion (Ging, 2019). Now, the manosphere has been gaining new value with the widespread of content, especially on visual-centred platforms such as YouTube and TikTok. Media and scholars are focusing on people such as Andrew Tate for their role as educational leaders, for their sexist and misogynistic social media content (see e.g. Haslop et al., 2024).

Given this context, the interviews revealed not only implicit but also explicit linguistic practices through which male adolescents reproduce and normalise the objectification and sexualisation of female content. Participants frequently employed blunt, colloquial expressions that directly link female visibility on social media to sexual availability and desirability, reinforcing narrow and reductionist views of femininity. For example, Antonio (17) remarked:

> "That's how it is, bro. Open my TikTok, open yours: it's just football and chicks."

This statement starkly encapsulates how male teens perceive social media feeds as dominated by two contrasting yet gendered categories: sports and sexualised female bodies. Similarly, Federico (19) expressed the idea that physical attractiveness confers significant social advantage:

> "Honestly… if you're a pretty girl, you've already got way more chances. I open my TikTok and it's just full of pussy." (Federico, 19)

Such candid language reveals how objectification is woven into everyday conversations and reflects a pervasive mindset in which female presence online is equated primarily with sexual availability. These excerpts deepen our understanding of how adolescent boys not only consume but also actively verbalise and perpetuate sexualised representations of girls, thus sustaining the gendered power imbalances and pressures highlighted in previous sections.

7.3.2.5 Reasonings about addiction

As introduced in the first chapter, addiction is the main framework to explore the negative consequences of teenagers being on social media. In addition to the psychological literature on addiction, built to be similar to the concept of substance addiction, recent research has set the focus on the specific practices of addiction that people engage in when interacting with platforms (see e.g. for a recent literature review on this topic Bayer et al., 2022). One of the prominent examples in this regard is the habitual social media checking, especially as a response to the massive notifications that users receive daily (H. J. Park, 2025).

Moreover, a parallel branch of research is interested in observing the divide between the objectified and measured addiction, and the one reported by individuals themselves (see e.g. Burnell et al., 2025). Such an approach is crucial to put at the centre not only the potential adverse outcomes related to social media, but also to what extent and how users perceive said addiction. For instance, Adorjan and Ricciardelli (2021) found that many teenagers actively adopt the label "addicted", often using it ironically to describe their pervasive device use. However, despite the ironic embrace, they also express a sense of reduced control, blaming the algorithms and design affordances of platforms for driving their behaviours. This shows how addiction entered the common and shared understanding

of their platform experiences, although with significant individual variability (see e.g. Meier et al., 2023) and tactics to face such issues.

These various research strands were widely echoed in the interviews, even expanding on some nuances. First and foremost, participants deeply talked about how said automaticity manifests in daily life, giving a *quasi-phenomenological* depth to the concept of perceived addiction.

> Jessica (16): "Even if I don't feel like looking at anything, I still open Instagram. It's just automatic."
>
> Fabio (19): "I close Instagram and then open it again for no reason. It's just a habit now."

These statements confirm that repetitive, context-triggered behaviours become automatic and unconscious responses to boredom and stress. They validate addiction as a behavioural loop, where checking social media is done reflexively, not to engage, but as an unconscious gesture. Here addiction is not just about time spent, but the mechanisation of interaction, reinforcing the idea of social media consumption as a reflex.

In addition, informants outlined a tension between perceiving and practically engaging in tactics to limit said addiction. This makes them feel guilty, trying to set timers, or rationalise their behaviour, although many also acknowledge failing to enforce their boundaries. Indeed, various participants discovered built-in ways to limit social media usage, albeit noting its emotional as well as technical shortcomings.

> Luca (18): "So I set this 30-minute timer on Instagram and like, 15 on Pinterest.
>
> Giulia (17): "But wait, like, does the timer actually work?"
>
> Luca (18): "Yeah, it's built into the phone. It's called like… Digital Wellbeing or something. It gives you a heads-up five minutes before time's up, then one more minute, and then it just closes the app."
>
> Giulia (17): "And you can't open it again?"
>
> Luca (18): "I mean… you can go into settings and delete the timer or change the limit, but you feel super guilty if you do. And if you don't change it, the app turns all grey and you literally can't click it anymore."
>
> Matteo (17): "I had one for like three hours on TikTok but… yeah, I just hit 'ignore' and it goes away. You just tap cancel and it lets you right back in."

On the other hand, some participants restrict their own experiences due to the previously mentioned sense of guilt; however, this often backfires and intensifies their feelings of guilt.

> Tommaso (16): "I watch it less than I used to, but now I actually feel guilty about it. Like, I've got so much stuff to do… so I'm like, 'what the heck am I doing?' and I set a timer. But on the weekend? No way. I can't do it. I just turn the timer off."

This reflects a sense of ambivalence: users feel simultaneously aware, responsible, and powerless, expanding the idea that addiction is both experienced and restricted. Control here is technologically embedded, through apps such as the *Benessere digitale* (i.e. digital well-being), yet usually overridden. Addiction in this sense is negotiated, with visible tactics of self-regulation that are symbolically significant even when ineffective.

The third finding on this matter is related to the social dimension of addiction. Sentences, such as the one from Federico (16), "Going 24 hours without socials literally feels like being cut off from the world.", highlight that addiction is not only an issue at the level of individuals. It is also experienced as a threat to social presence and connection. Withdrawal is experienced as a sense of absence from a shared social fabric. This reinforces the notion that digital absence is perceived as a form of social exile.

7.3.3 Algorithmic flow

The third dimension that emerged in the context of the interviews is about the sociotechnical embedding between users and algorithms. More specifically, the last decade has been characterised by a spread of visual-based platforms within different realms of social life (Ilbury, 2022). While Instagram has established itself as the primary platform for monitoring peers' daily activities, TikTok has come to represent a form of entertainment characterised by speed, fluidity, and ephemerality. The conversations were crucial to better disentangle these sociotechnical experiences, between perceiving and actively engaging in the algorithmically curated flow of content.

The starting point of this section is the algorithmic imaginary, a consolidated concept in the literature that effectively situates the dialogue between users and recommender systems. Indeed, as introduced previously, this concept is usually employed to explore anecdotes, beliefs, and assumptions about social media algorithms (Bucher, 2017b; Schulz, 2023). These *folk theories* (Eslami et al., 2015, 2016; Karizat et al., 2021) shape how users experience and interact with digital platforms.

The fact that algorithms sort content on social media is widely consolidated, if not taken for granted, in participants' discourses. When asked about when they noticed recommender systems, most of the accounts were technical, thus confirming their presence being obvious, to a certain extent. Whereas before, especially with older participants, the *folk* understanding behind recommending algorithms partially relied on uncanny experiences (see e.g. Gandini et al., 2023), informants of the present work showed no remarkable surprise. Indeed, most of them immediately turned the discourse towards the technical functioning of said systems, which were shared as a common understanding. Tommaso (17), for instance, said:

> "It happens a lot on Spotify. If I don't pick a specific playlist, it just keeps throwing the same song at me, like over and over. It's totally based on what I've been listening to. Same on TikTok—if I like one football post, suddenly it's *all* football. And that's how it works with every platform, honestly. Once you know how it moves, it's super easy to notice."

In addition, there is a consolidated understanding of how recommender systems work from an advertising and marketing perspective. Such comprehension of these technologies emerged when talking about how content might become *viral* on TikTok. Algorithmic imaginaries, then, expanded towards a quasi-professional grasp of recommender systems, thus suggesting a process of actual habituation and enculturation of their latent mechanisms. Alberto (16) showed this nuance in the following quote:

> "I think a video goes viral when it hits all the marks for the recommendation algorithm. Like on TikTok, I'm pretty sure it's all about how long people watch it. If the app sees people staying on it, it pushes the video more. So the first few seconds *have* to grab your attention 'cause everyone's just scrolling. It's gotta be super catchy right away. Then there's other stuff, like putting 'read the caption' or whatever to boost interaction. It's all part of the strategy."

Past research outlines how users enact processes of anthropomorphisation and mythologisation to make sense of algorithmic functioning, such as the YouTube algorithm. In contrast to this, the simple, yet accurate technical understanding of algorithms is elaborated to an extent that they developed a perceived quality of said systems' recommendations.

> Luca (17): "I feel like TikTok's algorithm is really responsive. Even if I skip a video I've never watched before, it'll show up again pretty soon, but not like other content from the same topic. It adapts really quickly to what I like."
>
> Researcher: "Do you think it actually matches your preferences well?"
>
> Luca (17): "Yeah, definitely. Way more than Instagram. Instagram feels more static… plus, a lot of the videos there are just reposted from TikTok. And honestly, stuff on Instagram feels kind of outdated compared to what's trending on TikTok."

Here, recommender systems are valued for their capacity to adapt to users' interests and correctly infer their tastes. The success or failure of this instance, especially the failure, triggers emotional responses that lead users to close the app, in some cases, or begin interacting with the platform to tailor the flow of content actively. This process has been well summarised by Andrea (16):

> "Yeah, when I started going to the gym, they only showed me gym videos, and I got bored of them. So every time one popped up, I'd just skip it or not like it, and instead I'd like other stuff."

Such an interiorised as well as shared understanding of recommender systems as an intrinsic platform logic allows for better perception of how participants consume content in said environments. This brings to the second main finding of the present section, that is, how the logic of the content flow entered their practices of and reasonings about social media consumption.

In addition, the algorithmic flow entered into participants' discourses as a funding experience of social media consumption. It emerges metaphorically as a dimension with some clear characteristics.

First, the algorithmic flow is always-on and accessible. Claudia (16), for instance, said: "It's just that a lot of times I don't even know what I'm looking for. I open the app and just hope something good pops up". This contrasts with consolidated perceptions of platforms as social environments wherein users, especially teenagers, *participate* to engage with other users or content creators. In algorithmic flow-based social media, access is often driven by entertainment purposes, much like the situation with broadcasting television.

Second, participants perceive said flow as a stream of ephemeral content. Whereas Instagram Stories are meant to disappear after 24 hours, the ephemerality of the content characterising the algorithmic flow is not a platform grammar, but rather a vernacular. Indeed, the content consumed is the one that somehow stands out from the feed, although it often fails to impress the users' memory, especially when it is of the entertaining category. Gianmarco (18) indeed joked about this:

> "Exactly. Lately, I keep seeing these guys who clearly have *issues*, like, you can tell something's off. But, they make me laugh, so I end up watching them. Then three minutes go by and I've already forgotten everything. One video later and it's like the last one never happened. […] But still, you find them, you stick around, and you watch whatever nonsense they're saying. Even if they're complete idiots, you still end up watching."

The ephemerality does not necessarily characterise all the content consumed, since in some cases users actively save the content. However, it might be argued that keeping the content in a separate memory (i.e., the section with all the saved content) confirms that the flow is perceived as ephemeral; thus, the content that impresses users needs to be, metaphorically, transferred out of the flow.

The third feature perceived by the participants is its seamlessness. The recommended flow is perceived as flawless, seemingly naturally adapting to one's interests and inferred taste. That is indeed the most relevant feature determining the perceived quality of the flow, as seen previously. The perceived quality of the algorithmic flow tends to increase in proportion to the minimal effort required by users to manually curate or adjust it. When participants were asked what it means that the algorithm is not functioning correctly, most of them answered that this is the case when you skip most of the content recommended. Although there is a perception that manually adjusting is a simple process to carry out, mainly by *liking* the content, Matteo (18) expressed astonishment in describing how the algorithmic flow tailors to users' interests without them noticing, primarily referring to that of TikTok.

> What's kinda crazy is how it changes with your interests. You don't really notice the shift, but it adapts to you. Like… during that change, it's not like the videos get boring or anything. They just shift with you without you even realising. Say you don't go to the gym… then you start going, and you start liking gym videos or looking stuff up, and suddenly your feed changes too, and you barely notice it.

The last feature is related to the perception of the flow to be inherently *self-defining*, related to and expressing one's identity. This specifically emerged during a breaching experiment proposed during the interviews as a prompt for discussion on algorithmically personalised flow. As mentioned above, students, in pairs, disrupted each other's algorithmic feeds by choosing what their partner would watch, like, and comment on, provoking disorientation and reflection on algorithmic curation. The most relevant interaction that emerged afterwards showed how exposing, if not disrupting, algorithmic flow is perceived as impacting both individual experience on the platform and social recognition among peers.

When asked about the experience, Greta (17) remarked:

> "Not annoyed, no. But I don't love the idea that other people can see what I've liked, especially when I don't want them to."

Greta's comment points to how exposing one's algorithmic flow, especially the visible digital traces, such as the likes, can disrupt what Erving Goffman (1967) termed the *interaction order*, potentially leading to a loss of "face". The feed becomes not just a space of consumption, but a performance of identity. In this context, having one's feed altered or made visible to others risks undermining the carefully curated self-presentation maintained through algorithmic interaction.

This self-defining quality of the flow was reinforced by Martina (17), who shared:

> "I liked one post and suddenly all these dancing goats started showing up—his kind of stuff. He immediately knew she had his phone."

Here, Martina not only recognises how specific content is linked to a peer's identifiable taste but also illustrates how the algorithmic feed becomes legible to others as a kind of digital fingerprint. The ability to identify someone purely through the logic of algorithmic recommendation demonstrates the perceived personalisation and recognisability embedded within the feed.

Beyond social implications, the experiment also revealed strong emotional reactions related to individual experience and autonomy over one's curated space. For many participants, the feed is not just personalised, but rather it is personally meaningful, reflecting ongoing effort to train the algorithm according to one's preferences. When asked about encountering unfamiliar or unwanted content, Federico (17) simply stated:

> "Let's just say: I took my phone back right away."

Similarly, Pietro (18) expressed concern over the consequences of giving misleading signals to the algorithm:

> "It sucks, because then I'm scared I won't get videos I actually like anymore."

These responses highlight a sense of emotional attachment and anxiety tied to algorithmic disruption. Participants fear that even small interferences may destabilise the balance of relevance they've built with the system. The flow is thus experienced as a fragile, yet intimate co-production between user behaviour and algorithmic logic that, once disrupted, might not easily be restored.

In addition to the features mentioned above that characterise the perception of its perception, the algorithmic flow entered into and vastly influenced everyday social media experiences. Most participants agreed that the content they consume on these platforms is, for the vast majority, algorithmically recommended, rather than actively searched for. However, as anticipated in the ephemeral feature, not all of this flow is *watched*.

Indeed, this might not sound surprising if considering the vast literature on the concept of attention economy, which puts attention as a scarce commodity (Davenport & Beck, 2001; Tufekci, 2015; Wu, 2017). In this context, recommender algorithms play a central role in managing which content can be displayed, and to whom. Recent research, indeed, outlined how various actors played the so-called *visibility game* (Cotter, 2019), from social media content creators (Bishop, 2019; DeVito, 2022) to activists (Rega & Medrado, 2023; Uldam, 2018).

Nonetheless, less attention has been paid to how users – especially teenagers – actively participate in shaping visibility by granting attention to individual pieces of content within the algorithmic flow. The psychological literature has long examined the dynamics of attention in digital environments, particularly through concepts such as attention deficit (see e.g. Boer et al., 2020; Ra et al., 2018) and the reduction of attention spans (see e.g. Alaparrthi, 2024; Poles, 2025) in overstimulating media contexts. Sociological research has yet to fully address how these mechanisms manifest and characterise content consumption and social interactions in everyday social media practices. In this regard, my interviews revealed the centrality of what I term *algorithmic standouts*: content that not only appears in the algorithmically curated stream but manages to capture and retain users' attention, often leaving a lasting impression.

This conceptualisation was inspired by a quote of Serena (17), who said

> "Usually, if I watch something, it's because I came across it randomly first."

Such a simple quote offers a relevant insight into how teenagers distinguish between *being exposed* to content and *actually watching* it. In Serena's account, what initially appears as a passive, incidental encounter with content in the algorithmic feed becomes a precondition for active engagement. This suggests that, for users like her, the act of watching, understood as conscious, attentive consumption, is not synonymous with mere exposure. Instead, there is a subtle yet significant cognitive filtering process at play, whereby only certain content within the flow is noticed, mentally registered, and eventually consumed.

Another participant echoed this experiential logic even more explicitly, stating:

> Claudia (16) "It's just that a lot of times I don't even know what I'm looking for. I open the app and just hope something good pops up".

This quote is crucial to highlight further how content consumption does not stem from a clear intentionality but rather from a receptive, open-ended encounter with the algorithmic flow.
In light of this, the algorithmic flow operates more as a background noise, from which selective fragments emerge and catch users' attention. What this reflects is a dual layer of engagement: one where users are continuously exposed to algorithmically recommended content, and another where a much smaller subset of that content is watched, remembered, and, in some cases, defined as worthy of interaction.

However, the logic of algorithmic standouts appeared to be affected, for some, by two main limitations. On the one hand, some participants pointed to the perception of being exposed to a limited pool of content, similar to what has been introduced by Giorgi and Gerosa (2024). For instance, Alessio (16) stated:

> "Yesterday I was watching… and oh my god, it was always the same stuff. The same little song over and over, and I don't even know why… every two seconds it's that same annoying thing. At some point I was like, 'maybe it's just the time I am spending on the content' or something. But seriously, it's *always* the same thing. Same trend, same meme."

Alessio highlights a key limitation of the algorithmic flow: its tendency to overfit users' predicted tastes, which leads to the repeated display of similar content. Much of today's digital media is circulated across multiple platforms. For example, long-form videos on YouTube are often broken into shorter clips and republished as YouTube Shorts, TikTok videos, or Instagram Reels. In some cases, content creators repackage the same material into broader compilations. As a result, the overall content pool becomes saturated with duplicated material. This repetition, driven by prevailing trends, can push algorithms to show users the same or nearly identical content multiple times, limiting the variety in their feeds.

Moreover, algorithmic biases are the second potential limitation on the algorithmic flow experience. For example, Simone (16) struggled in manually tailoring the flow, since the recommender system was constantly suggesting the same category based on an erroneous past interaction and stereotypical assumptions about males being interested in football-related content.

> "I've noticed that if I accidentally like a video of a puppy or something, it keeps showing me that kind of stuff. But it only really happens with animal videos and football. I have to actually make an effort to like and save videos outside of those topics, just to get back to the categories I'm really into. Otherwise, it just locks me into the same ones over and over."

Here, due to both the limitations in content variety and the persistence of algorithmic bias, the experience of the algorithmic flow becomes something that requires ongoing negotiation. For many participants, the feed does not simply reflect who they are or what they like but instead becomes a site of constant interaction. That is, a dynamic space where attention, taste, and identity are continuously adjusted through everyday gestures such as liking, saving, or skipping. This resonates with forms of appropriation of the platform's logic and affordances. Participants do not passively accept the flow. Instead, they constantly engage with it to nudge the experience towards desired outcomes.

This leads us to the final thematic category: copiloting. Copiloting represents the dimension wherein users express their agency at its finest. Early studies on social media and youth cultures envisaged the former as environments wherein they might develop strategies to evade parental oversight. At the time, personalising digital environments was crucial to adapt mere interfaces to tailored profiles to present one's identity, the so-called digital self (Wood et al., 2016). Agency was expressed, for instance, to copy-paste practices aimed at modifying said interface to appropriate it: a phenomenon understood under the term of copy-paste culture (Perkel, 2008).

What emerged in this study expands the notion of agency expressed through appropriation by forms of copilot practices aimed at tailoring the algorithmic flow to enhance its perceived self-defining feature mentioned above. Participants, indeed, expressed agency through tactical, sustained engagement with the algorithm itself. Their goal is not to subvert the platform or resist its logic, but to co-steer their experience by learning how to interact with the system in a way that ensures more relevant and enjoyable content.

In this context, copiloting refers to the everyday practices through which users actively participate in curating and calibrating the algorithmic flow. These practices are subtle yet deliberate. Skipping content, liking certain posts, saving others, or even searching for specific themes, not out of pure interest, but to "teach" the algorithm what they want. In doing so, users aim to embed themselves in the appropriate algorithmic audience, an idioculture that feels familiar, desirable, and aligned with their self-perception.

The interviews point to two primary forms of copiloting, with one being more conscious, purposeful and – to a certain extent – tactical. In contrast, the other is *below threshold*, subliminal, and perceived as automatic.

The most common form of conscious tactical engagement with algorithmic flow is through *likes*. Tommaso (18) stated, "If a rare video comes up, you like it or interact with it to show the algorithm what you are into". Others expand on this copilot approach by using tactical liking to steer the content flow, enabling exposure to information related to their intended travel destination. For instance, Federica (16) remarked:

> "I was going to Barcelona, so I liked and saved as many Barcelona videos as possible so I'd get more of them."

Tactical liking was also described as the inverse; therefore, liking content with the intent of avoiding the content currently recommended. Pietro (17) expanded this approach:

"I started going to the gym and got flooded with gym videos. I got bored, so I stopped liking them and liked other stuff to switch it up."

Tactical liking, therefore, functions both as reinforcement and as correction, with the user consciously navigating the feedback loop.

The second leading conscious copilot practice is related to the active search, especially concerning Pinterest[6]. This platform was perceived as rapidly responsive to users' search behaviour, but also as one that can be easily skewed. A conversation between three classmates was particularly relevant in this instance:

> Arianna (18): "When I'm interested in a topic, I search for it and then Pinterest starts showing me more of that. Like if I'm drawing dinosaurs, I'll start getting only dinosaur content. If I want to switch to birds, I have to search birds."
>
> Carlo (17): "Pinterest is easy to manipulate. But if you click one wrong thing, it ruins your feed."
>
> Elisabetta: "[…] I use a throwaway account for school stuff so it doesn't mess up my main feed. […]"

These practices elicit an advanced understanding of how to manage algorithmic visibility by isolating contexts and using platform features like history and content categorisation.

Despite *skipping* content relevant to the next section of copilot practices, some noted that flagging "I am not interested" is more effective than skipping content to steer recommendations. It is worth mentioning that this requires multiple steps, thus it is a more effortful choice. Davide (19), indeed, claimed

> "One time I kinda tricked it but just to get rid of stuff. I noticed that hitting 'not interested' works better when you just swipe away quickly. So now I mostly do that when videos I don't want show up."

Lastly, a few users mentioned that they let the video play on repeat to boost their weight in the algorithm. Alessia (16) stated:

> "Sometimes I just let the video play. It might repeat like 20 times so it gets recommended to me. I usually do other stuff while the video keeps playing."

The second primary dimension of copilot practices is characterised by a more reflexive than conscious interaction with the recommended flow. First and foremost, the most prominent one on this is what participants called *automated liking*. Several participants, indeed, acknowledged that they like content reflexively, without fully engaging. Antonia (18), for instance, noted while a friend showed her a car-related content:

> "I saw a video, was like 'wow', closed it, and then I only got videos about those cars even though I didn't care at all. And I couldn't change it because I do the automated like thing. I mean, I open the video and instantly like it, then scroll without even thinking… So I couldn't get rid of those car videos."

Federica (18) further expanded this notion by describing how the automated like is the baseline for content interaction. In contrast, the deliberate choice is to undo the like when the content is not of interest.

> "I like everything and then remove the like if I don't actually care."

[6] Pinterest is a visual discovery and social media platform that allows users to find, save, and share ideas and inspiration in the form of images and videos

These behaviours highlight a more subconscious interaction with the algorithm, which still feeds into its learning system, despite the absence of tactical intent. Liking becomes a habitual gesture rather than a deliberate input, yet its algorithmic consequences persist.

Moreover, skipping emerged as a behavioural cue that users believed influenced the algorithm's understanding.

> Federico (16): "TikTok reacts quickly. If I skip something, it learns fast that I don't like it."

Participants perceived this behaviour as a subtle but effective way to signal disinterest. While not always conscious or planned, skipping was seen as a valuable tool to fine-tune the feed, especially when users did not wish to interact more directly.

Participants also indicated that they avoid engaging with sponsored content to prevent their feed from being contaminated.

> Carlo (18): "As long as it doesn't say 'sponsored', it's fine. But if it does, I avoid it."

This avoidance reflects an intuitive awareness of how platform monetisation might influence recommendations. Even in less conscious engagement, users maintained a boundary around commercial influence, treating sponsored content as potentially disruptive to the algorithmic relationship they were trying to maintain.

What emerges from these findings is a nuanced portrait of algorithmic agency not as resistance, but as an everyday negotiation. Copiloting, especially among teens, reveals how users develop a vernacular competence in curating their digital environments. While their actions may not be overtly political, they nonetheless reflect a deeply embedded sense of how the system works and how it should behave. These practices are embedded within the platform's moral economy: users expect fair exchanges for their time and data, and engage tactically to ensure that this exchange feels worthwhile and aligned with their identity.

7.4 Discussion and conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown the first primary dimension of practical digital literacy. Indeed, such a competence is intended to be based on a shared understanding of platforms and their participation logics. Through a qualitative inquiry, based on class-level group interviews conducted in various Italian high schools, the purpose was to explore the main shared discourses and practices regarding platform experiences among teenagers.

Findings show, first, how shared norms govern platform experiences since the early hours spent on them. Participants defined a complex system of rules that characterise specific interactions, such as commenting and posting. Looking back, students described how these practices eventually establish clearer boundaries, making crossing them later seem awkward or cringe-worthy. Moreover, when discussing past experiences, they outline early experiences with social media as more relaxed and participatory, in contrast with contemporary caution and overthinking behind each post. This is strictly bound to the concept of social capital, one of the most relevant resources in the field of social media. In addition to confirming that first access is usually due to peer pressure, the conversations outlined two main nuances of social influence: interpersonal and trend-following. Furthermore, parents emerged as the primary gatekeepers of early platform experiences, largely because access to a personal

account often depended on their permission. Although they could represent a counter-field to platform consumption and potentially impose their own tastes and new rules of engagement, students described their parents' social media gatekeeping as largely frictionless and, surprisingly, even marked by a degree of acceptance. Finally, while not the main focus of this investigation, early platform experiences were deeply shaped by gendered patterns of consumption: YouTube functioned as a space for male socialisation, while Musical.ly featured predominantly female-oriented content. Discussions around these platforms also revealed divisions and symbolic violence, further entrenching boundaries within this subfield.

The second section of the interviews showed how taken-for-granted rules of the platform game changed in the following years. First and foremost, the most evident change in this paradigm was the focus of the distinction process. Whereas in the past, most of the distinctions were at the level of the platform, with, for instance, male users on Musical.ly being perceived as less masculine, contemporary forms of distinction are at the level of the content. Here, students show great attention to the technical and economic functioning of the platforms. Content of quality, therefore, features professional editing, effective storytelling, and aligns with the logic of the platforms, capturing users' attention and following specific trends. Moreover, platform interactions are regulated by a system of untold rules heavily relying on individual reputation (i.e. symbolic capital). For instance, posting and commenting are perceived as risky and exposing practices, part of a broader identity work. Cultural capital emerged as an intriguing resource worthy of further exploration in future research. Students expressed little to no interest in reading books, yet these artefacts continue to be recognised for their crystallised and institutionalised cultural prestige. In this sense, reading retains its institutional value as a means to access highbrow, legitimised knowledge, which translates into intellectual credibility. However, this phenomenon proved puzzling: on one hand, it reproduces traditional bourgeois forms of distinction, yet on the other, it does so without friction or struggle for legitimisation. In other words, classmates who appreciate classically conceived higher cultural productions are not isolated or denigrated; rather, there was a broad acceptance of the value of institutionalised culture, even if it was not actively contested or fought for. Moreover, consumption practices are still influenced by broader social norms and expectations about gender. The polarisation of gendered forms of consumption is at the level of the content, similarly to the other forms of distinction. Fitness-related content, for instance, sparked an interesting friction between the reproduction of masculine norms and the attempt by feminine identities to assert their presence within the social field of gyms. Finally, addiction spontaneously emerged as the main framework through which students address the negative consequences of social media use. Participants described experiencing addiction in a phenomenological depth, with habitual checking being an unconscious reflex. Addiction in this sense emerges as a compulsive behaviour or loops, rather than being related to time spent on the platform. Even Digital Wellbeing-related timers are easily overridden, albeit producing guilt when bypassed. In this sense, what emerges is a sense of powerlessness in which control is offered by platforms themselves.

The third, and last, section of findings is centred on the experiences about and around the algorithmic flow. Students show a notable, widespread, and taken-for-granted grasp of algorithms, contrary to the *uncanny* surprises that characterised past research (see e.g. Bucher, 2017b; Gandini et al., 2023; Swart, 2021). Here, folk theories about algorithmic experiences are technical and pragmatic, showing a shared quasi-technical grasp of the

functioning of recommender systems. Moreover, participants agreed on perceiving social media feeds as algorithmic flows and further elaborated on their nuances. They indeed described its features as always-on, seamless, ephemeral and self-defining (i.e. creating a unique digital "double" for each user). Because of the fluid and continuous flow of content streams, younger generations have developed a distinctive selective attention, which I call "algorithmic standouts." This attention distinguishes between mere exposure and actually watching a smaller, memorable subset of content that they openly acknowledge remembering. Furthermore, platform experiences feature a relationship between users and recommender systems, with the latter often emerging as a "copilot": a social agent that young people rarely resist, in a political sense, but rather co-steer through tactical engagement. These copilot practices operate at both conscious and reflexive levels, encompassing tactical, deliberate interactions as well as habitual ones.

What emerges from the findings is a complex and nuanced shared understanding of platform practices, which is rooted in the earliest hours spent on these environments. The shared dimension of practical digital literacy contributes to a vast number of research fields, some of which are also unexpected.

First, sociocultural perspectives on digital literacy already addressed the relevance of young people's creative interpretation of platform features (see e.g. Pangrazio, 2016; Pangrazio & Selwyn, 2018, 2019; Sefton-Green et al., 2009). Platform studies further elaborated this notion through the concept of platform vernaculars and affordances, meaning that what the platform offers is constantly negotiated through perceptions, attitudes, expectations and ultimately practices (Bucher & Helmond, 2019; Burgess, 2006; Caliandro & Anselmi, 2021; Gibbs et al., 2015; Peeters et al., 2021; Trillò, 2024). The shared understanding bridges this debate by emphasising how the development of a practical mastery emerges as a process of socialisation to platforms, rooted in early experiences and increasing in complexity over the following years. This can be interpreted in light of a consolidated sociological framework of primary and secondary socialisation (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), such that platform socialisation includes a primary phase in which users learn under the gatekeeping of parents, while during secondary school, the secondary socialisation phase occurs, in which users begin to question and challenge what they have previously learned. In this sense, practical digital literacy confirms that digital literacy is more than a discrete set of skills; it is rather a process of platform enculturation, embedded within broader socialisation processes.

Second, the shared aspect of practical digital literacy contributes to the current social understanding of algorithmic media. Users engaging with algorithmic media have long been framed through concepts such as algorithmic imaginaries (Bucher, 2017b; Gandini et al., 2023; Schulz, 2023) to account for how expectations toward recommender systems shape everyday platform interactions, thus experiences. I further expand this notion with the concept of algorithmic copiloting. Students of this study, indeed, displayed a quasi-technical understanding of recommender systems, cultivated through years of constant interactions and lived experience. Far from being truly technical, this nuanced understanding is nonetheless sufficient for them to perceive algorithms as not abstract entities, but rather as *copilots*: close social agents they can tactically engage to effectively personalise algorithmic experiences. Teenagers, therefore, do not consume algorithmic flows passively. They develop practices specifically aimed at tailoring recommendations to better align with their interests. Klug and colleagues (2021) how adolescents deliberately like, share, or skip content to influence what the algorithm suggests, effectively engaging the

recommender system as both a partner and an object of manipulation. The same applies to the so-called literate agents, such as GenAI tools, that participants are increasingly employing to support everyday activities like homework and test preparations (Kalantzis & Cope, 2025a). Moreover, the concept of algorithmic flow functioned as a gateway to further outlining the evolution of the audiences. The concept of shared understanding expanded this debate along two main trajectories: the algorithmic standouts and the algorithmic idiocultures. On the one hand, the concept of flow is increasingly employed to frame platform experiences, especially on TikTok (Gerbaudo, 2024; 2025; Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2021). This chapter contributes to this literature by examining algorithmic flows as perceived objects that shape youth cultures' shared understanding of platforms. Participants viewed these flows not as vague technological features but as tangible co-constructed affordances, with determined characteristics. The concept of algorithmic standouts further reveals a paradigm shift in youth digital consumption. Prior paradigms failed to account for platform consumption experiences due to the traditional boundedness of the *content* as the main analytical object. Whereas for platforms such as YouTube, these framings can be useful for understanding platform practices (see e.g. Airoldi, 2021b; Airoldi et al., 2016; Bishop, 2019), the second generation of social media poses new challenges, since the flow represents its main experiential dimension (Schellewald, 2023). Early research on digital youth cultures defined the "networked audience" to emphasise the social dimensions of social networking sites (boyd, 2008, 2014). Today, this concept has evolved into "clustered audiences," highlighting interest-based neighbourhoods (Gerbaudo, 2024). This chapter expands the latter by employing the concept of idiocultures. Fine (1979) introduced this concept as a system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviours, and customs shared by members of a small interacting group, which they reference and employ as the basis for further interactions. Young people do not passively accept the platform-suggested interest neighbourhoods. Instead, they deploy tactics to personalise algorithmic flows and challenge inferred interests, making "algorithmic idiocultures" a more apt framework: it captures the shared knowledge they develop for interacting with these systems. Here, youths are not isolated within thematic silos; all young people know what circulates across them. These neighbourhoods thus form broader fields of cultural production that they collectively navigate and co-pilot.

Third, my study shows how forms of symbolic boundaries operate within digital youth cultures. Current studies on youth and social media widely explored evident acts like selfies and posting (see e.g. Gorea, 2021; Hernández-Serrano et al., 2022; Kondakciu et al., 2022; Tiidenberg, 2018; Tsaliki, 2022). I shifted this lens towards a more subtle, yet equally structured, forms of symbolic boundary-making and self-presenting practices, such as commenting and the management of algorithmic feeds. More specifically, practices of digital distinction emerged as evolving from early to contemporary platform experiences. In the past, participants used to consider platforms as the distinctive elements. Males used, and still do, de-legitimise those who actively publish or consume content on TikTok and Musically. On the contrary, females pointed at YouTube as a platform metaphorically inhabited by "weird people". According to recent experiences, they apply the same logic, although more related to categories of content, rather than platforms themselves. These findings confirm that digital realms function as Bourdieusian fields where symbolic boundaries are established through practices perceived as legitimate or appropriate. The metaphor of needing to "afford" posting reflects how youth cultures conceptualise symbolic capital as a necessary resource for meaningful participation in digital spaces. This insight reveals the sophisticated understanding young

people possess regarding the social economics of digital participation. Such a Bourdieusian conceptualisation particularly applies to commenting practices. Comment sections are indeed a consolidated topic in the recent literature on news consumption and identity expression (see e.g. Dobber & Hameleers, 2025; Hambali et al., 2024; Sartini & Adrian, 2023); however, current research has not yet disentangled the various roles of comment sections in popular social media, such as Instagram and TikTok. In the last decade, the fact of non-participating in social media groups was defined as *lurking*, that is, only reading the interactions of groups without posting or actively engaging (Sipley, 2024). With this study, I contribute a novel understanding of comment sections that transcends their traditional conceptualisation as simple interactive features. Even discourses about these spaces host conflicting opinions and humorous interactions that become integral elements of content consumption rather than mere appendages to original posts. Comments, therefore, are analytical objects representing sites of meaning-making and social negotiation.

Last, these forms of distinction were also evident in relation to struggles between genders. Whereas research has long documented symbolic violence and gendered dynamics in youth culture (see e.g. Bigler et al., 2019; Mulholland, 2017; Tsaliki, 2015), this empirical case advances the field by foregrounding the sociotechnical mediation of such dynamics. Gender struggles do not only emerge in how individuals behave or are perceived by others, but also in how they are positioned by the algorithmic logic of platforms. The interviews reveal how content becomes a battleground for legitimacy, peer recognition, and value assignment, where posting or consuming the "wrong" type of content risks ridicule or exclusion. This layered interaction between social norms and technological affordances calls for a deeper sociotechnical approach to gender studies in digital youth cultures. The struggles that emerged during conversations align with broader scholarly observations from the early 2010s, when social media began to be recognised as a key arena for negotiating gender among teenagers. In their review, Pujazon-Zazik and Park (2010) highlighted distinct gender differences in adolescents' online behaviours, noting both potentially positive and adverse health outcomes. For example, female adolescents tended to be more active in social communication and photo sharing, yet were also more frequently involved in indirect forms of cyberbullying. In contrast, male adolescents more often engaged in explicit sexual communication, particularly within adult-monitored chat rooms. These patterns underscore how adolescents navigate complex, gendered identities through digital self-presentation. Importantly, such gender constructs are not fixed; instead, they emerge at the intersection of platform-specific interaction styles, cultural norms, and individual agency (Van Oosten et al., 2017). In addition, De Ridder and Van Bauwel (2013) examined the comments section of profile pictures as a space for gendered performance and negotiation. They found that interactions in these spaces often reflected an ongoing tension between biological sex, performative gender, and desired sexualities. While some users subverted dominant norms, resignifying heteronormative discourses, these acts were frequently accompanied by a reaffirmation or recuperation of traditional heteronormativity.

Taken together, these contributions reposition young people not as passive, addicted, or innately competent digital users, but as socially and culturally embedded agents navigating a complex and evolving sociotechnical landscape. Their practices reflect a deep engagement with the moral economy of platforms, a vernacular logic of fairness, relevance, and identity alignment, and highlight the need for scholarship that takes these dimensions seriously. By

shifting the focus from visible participation to the layered, often invisible work of curating feeds, managing peer recognition, and negotiating symbolic value, this research offers a more nuanced and grounded understanding of what digital literacy looks like in practice.

Chapter 8. Dispositional understanding

Over the past decades, the study of youth consumer cultures has been transformed by the rise of digital environments and social media, which now play a central role in the processes of identity formation and social differentiation among young people. Rather than acting as passive recipients of adult expectations, youth actively engage in shaping their identities, cultivating a sense of belonging, and negotiating group boundaries through their practices of digital consumption. These everyday practices, such as fashion choices, gaming preferences, and participation on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, have become crucial sites for the production and interpretation of social meaning (see e.g. Best, 2009; Wallace & Kovacheva, 1996; Wilska et al., 2023).

Foundational sociological theories developed by Pierre Bourdieu continue to offer valuable insight into these processes. Bourdieu's work on habitus and taste demonstrates how preferences are shaped by early socialisation and operate as markers of social distinction (Bourdieu, 1979; Bourdieu et al., 2020). However, recent scholarship shows that the digital context requires rethinking how taste and social positions are produced and reproduced (see e.g. Friedman et al., 2015; Prieur et al., 2023; Savage & Gayo, 2011), as much cultural consumption is now mediated by recommender systems and algorithmic flows (Airoldi, 2021b; Beer, 2022). In these environments, youth frequently encounter content not always by conscious choice but through the flow of algorithmically curated suggestions, a dynamic that reshapes both identity work and symbolic boundaries (Leonhardt & Overå, 2021; Stahl & Literat, 2023).

This chapter integrates research on identity-making through consumption and on social distinction to develop a dispositional approach to practical digital literacy, focusing on how embedded dispositions, formed through different layers of socialisation, shape youth engagement with digital content and platforms. Using survey data collected from Italian youth aged 16 to 19 and analysed through Multiple Correspondence Analysis (Flemmen et al., 2018; Le Roux & Rouanet, 2010), the chapter identifies three principal axes that structure digital consumption. These axes highlight the pursuit of gendered identities, differences between highbrow and lowbrow cultural engagement, and the balance between individual and social forms of participation. Significantly, economic and cultural capitals inherited from parents exert less influence, while generational patterns, educational choices, and preferences for specific digital platforms become the primary sources of symbolic distinction within the field of platform-based consumption. Altogether, the findings illustrate how digital taste acts as both a channel for inclusion and a mechanism of exclusion, contributing to the reproduction and transformation of cultural hierarchies among today's youth.

8.1 Literature review

8.1.1 Understanding digital youth cultures through the lens of consumption

Consumption has long been recognised as a central lens for understanding youth cultures, with scholars emphasising how practices of acquiring, displaying and engaging with goods and media shape young people's identities and social belonging. Between the 1980s and the 1990s, the analysis of youth cultures shifted away from

class to focus on free-floating styles and media images. Youth were predominantly conceptualised as part of a broader consumer culture, in which consumption was read as a set of cultural codes and symbols through which social meanings were produced and interpreted (Wallace & Kovacheva, 1996). Such perspectives framed young people as emblematic consumers of late modernity, whose style, fashion, and popular culture became the dominant languages of expression. However, subsequent research moved beyond this view of youth as undifferentiated cultural consumers, focusing instead on the ways young people actively leverage consumer resources to navigate identity, belonging, and distinction (Pugh, 2011). Youth cultures creatively re-appropriate market logics to mark social positions and articulate belonging within peer groups (Best, 2009). Here consumerism operates not only as a societal ideology, but also as a personal practice (Sassatelli, 1999, 2007).

Over the last two decades, such a rich field has embedded logics emerging from the widespread adoption of social media, which increasingly mediate forms of cultural consumption and identity management (boyd, 2008, 2014). The display of consumption on social media, through the curation of lifestyles, brands, and tastes, functions as a form of identity signalling (Bainotti, 2024b; Wilska et al., 2023). As emerged in the findings of the previous empirical case, youth actively negotiate belonging by aligning themselves with communities of taste and distancing from others, a process that echoes but also intensifies earlier "offline" dynamics of consumption. This is particularly evident, for instance, in the domain of gaming, where the choice of platforms, genres and gaming practices becomes an arena for negotiating identities, friendships, and cultural capital (Leonhardt & Overå, 2021). The role of consumption in identity-making is also especially salient among marginalised groups, such as sexual minorities. Social media platforms allow LGBTQ+ youth to cultivate spaces where consumption of cultural symbols, aesthetics, and narratives becomes a resource for identity affirmation and community building (Craig et al., 2021; Hiebert & Kortes-Miller, 2023). In these contexts, consumption is not only about distinction or belonging but also about survival and resilience in the face of heteronormative pressures. Platforms themselves thus emerge as key cultural realms that mediate youth identities. Here, digital environments offer structured spaces where youth identities are shaped, contested, and legitimised (Stahl & Literat, 2023).

Taken together, this research strand indicates that earlier models of socialisation, which picture youth as passive recipients of adult culture, fail to explain contemporary youth cultures. As contested by Tsaliki (2022), young people are dynamic co-constructors of identity who engage with, reshape, and negotiate meanings in interconnected digital spaces. Consumption, in this sense, functions not merely as a reflection of social structures but as an active terrain where identities are built, contested, and transformed (Sassatelli, 2007). Through everyday practices, ranging from fashion and social media curation to gaming and cultural participation, youth mobilise consumption both as a form of symbolic capital and as a medium for navigating belonging, difference, and recognition in contemporary society.

8.1.2 Sociological approaches to taste, distinction and legitimisation processes

Closely tied to the sociology of cultural consumption is the study of cultural distinctions, that is, how individuals legitimise their tastes and consumption practices. This perspective draws heavily on Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical apparatus, particularly the concepts of *habitus*, already elaborated in Section 5.1, and *taste*. The latter represents a socially conditioned system of preferences rooted in habitus and structured by one's position in the social space

(Bourdieu, 1979). Far from being a matter of individual choice, taste reflects the internalised dispositions of different social groups and the forms of capital they possess. As Bourdieu (1979, p. 6) famously put it, "taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier": what people like or dislike, whether in music, fashion, or digital content, functions as a marker of social distinction. In this sense, taste is a mechanism through which social hierarchies are both expressed and reproduced.

Subsequent studies of cultural consumption have extended this framework (see e.g. Flemmen et al., 2018; Friedman & Reeves, 2020), by also emphasising remarkable transformations. Bourdieu, indeed, reported class as the principal axis of distinction, separating popular and sophisticated, if not snobbish, tastes. In contrast, later research has highlighted the rise of the "cultural omnivore". Peterson and Kern (1996)'s influential work demonstrated how higher-status individuals increasingly cultivate eclectic tastes that span both elite and popular forms, signalling a shift from exclusive "highbrow" preferences toward broader inclusivity. This reconfiguration suggests that cultural hierarchies are now less rigid, with symbolic boundaries drawn around plural and strategically mobilised repertoires of taste, shaped by generational dynamics, aesthetic sensibilities, and emerging elite cultures (Friedman et al., 2015).

These debates have subsequently extended into the digital realm. Beer (2007), for instance, examined how online music platforms reinforce distinctions of taste, whereas Paßmann and Schubert (2021) analysed social media practices, showing how users' preferences both reflect and reproduce social positions. The increasing centrality of digital environments in youth cultures has further complicated these dynamics. While Bourdieu's analysis of French society foregrounded economic and cultural capital, more recent research underscores generational differences as a crucial driver of distinction (Prieur et al., 2023). In this respect, the Bourdieusian framework remains valuable, yet requires greater attention to age-related nuances. Moreover, the very definition of cultural capital appears to be shifting, with young people emerging as central agents of transformation. For instance, Micheli (2015) shows that adolescents from privileged backgrounds often employ digital media to cultivate tastes aligned with institutionalised cultural capital. In contrast, those from less advantaged backgrounds engage primarily in peer-oriented, entertainment-driven practices.

This strand of research raises several pressing questions. If youth cultures are increasingly detached from traditional class markers, leading some scholars to posit a "youth classlessness"(see e.g. Jones, 1997; Muggleton, 2005; Mungham & Pearson, 1976; Seehaus & Trappmann, 2023), what, then, explains their consumption practices? Which new resources, whether material or symbolic, underpin these practices and provide them with social meaning?

8.2 Outlining the research question

Taken together, these two strands of scholarship, namely, on youth cultures as consumers and on cultural distinctions through the Bourdieusian framework, offer valuable yet partial insights into how young people engage with digital media. Whereas the first emphasises the role of consumption in identity-making and belonging, showing how youth mobilise consumer practices to negotiate recognition and community in both offline and online contexts. The second demonstrates how dispositions, taste, and cultural capital continue to structure consumption, albeit in increasingly plural and fluid ways shaped by generational and digital dynamics. Nevertheless,

despite their intersections, the dialogue between the two is still capable of producing remarkable outcomes. The former tends to foreground identity and agency, sometimes at the expense of structural dispositions, whereas the latter often privileges class-based explanations without fully accounting for the specificities of youth cultures and digital environments.

Building on this gap, this chapter draws on both perspectives to explore the dispositional dimension of practical digital literacy. As introduced in Section 4.1.2, by dispositional competence I refer to the embedded dispositions, structured through various socialisation processes, that influence how youth cultures engage with digital platforms. Practical digital literacy, in this sense, is not a fixed or universal skillset. Instead, it reflects the interplay between habitus and capital and varies across socio-cultural contexts. This perspective highlights the *how* of digital engagement, namely the implicit logics and routines that guide digital consumption, rather than solely the *what* of digital practices (Jarness, 2015).

Within this framework, taste serves as a valuable proxy for dispositional competence, as it captures how embedded preferences shape adolescents' engagement with digital content. These tastes, conditioned by habitus and forms of capital, inform not only what content is consumed or avoided, but also how digital environments are navigated, interpreted, and legitimised. Examining taste within digital platforms, therefore, provides a productive lens for understanding the socio-cultural dynamics underpinning digital literacy, as well as the unequal access to its resources and rewards.

In line with this perspective, the present chapter addresses the following research question:

RQ2. How does youths' social background interact with social media consumption preferences?

This question, however, raises two key challenges in terms of measurement. First, if social media consumption is understood as a complex, classed expression of taste, how can it be measured within algorithmically curated environments, where content is not always intentionally selected but instead passively encountered through the flow? Second, when examining individual factors, how can we account for the apparent convergence of consumption patterns among participants from diverse social backgrounds? These challenges call for a reconsideration of both how taste is operationalised in flow-based digital environments and how class is understood in the context of youth, where conventional socio-economic indicators may be absent or unreliable.

8.3 Measuring social media consumption: the co-constructed taste

First, as highlighted in the literature, the concept of taste has already been applied to digital environments. However, as shown in the findings discussed in Chapter 6, the shift towards social media flows introduces a new paradigm in content consumption. In this model, users are exposed to a continuous stream of algorithmically curated content, shaped by inferred taste. Recommender systems internalise users' behaviours and choices on the platform. These choices are themselves influenced by deeply embedded dispositions structured by the habitus. What results is an algorithmic flow that reproduces and reinforces users' taste, in the Bourdieusian sense (Airoldi, 2021b; Airoldi & Rokka, 2022).

Consequently, when attempting to measure taste within these environments, we encounter a fundamental difference: content consumption no longer relies on human decisions, such as choosing to attend an opera or a

rock concert. Instead, what users consume is the outcome of partially agentive interactions with the recommender system. These interactions teach the system to offer the content users are likely to appreciate. As discussed in Chapter 6, participants themselves reflect this paradigm shift: most do not actively search for content but instead enter the flow, anticipating that it will present something aligned with their interests.

This shift calls for a reconsideration of how we measure taste in flow-based social media. Traditional Bourdieusian approaches rely on explicit, self-reported preferences, typically measured through multiple-choice questions. For example, in *La distinction* (1979), Bourdieu assessed musical taste by asking respondents to choose among categories like classical, jazz, popular, folk, opera, musette, and avant-garde. These choices were then coded into categories such as "music_classical" or "music_jazz" and analysed through multiple correspondence analyses. Subsequent studies have maintained this method for mapping forms of social distinction within Euclidean social space (see e.g. Flemmen et al., 2018; Hjellbrekke & Jarness, 2022; Roose et al., 2012).

However, this method becomes problematic in the context of algorithm-driven, flow-based environments, where much of the content is not explicitly chosen. As findings suggest, what users recall consuming is often what stands out within the algorithmic flow, thus highlighting a form of attention, not direct selection.

Therefore, in this context, taste may be more appropriately measured through frequencies of exposure rather than through declared preferences. Frequent exposure to a specific category can serve as a proxy for taste, reflecting the co-construction between users' actions and the recommender systems' adjustments. This proxy captures both users' semi-conscious engagements with content and the platforms' dynamic tailoring of the content flow based on inferred interests. Despite not being strictly related to social media analysis, a similar approach has been employed to investigate patterns of cultural consumption in Finland (Kahma & Toikka, 2012) and across the UK (Gayo-Cal et al., 2006). These studies were aimed at classifying cultural activities, such as attending classical music concerts, visiting museums, or watching TV, based not only on whether individuals participate, but on how frequently they do so.

8.4 Measuring class in platformised youth cultures: the stratified socialisation model

Second, the concept of individual factors was operationalised by still adopting Bourdieu's theories of habitus and capital. However, when it comes to measuring these factors, which are often referred to as *class*, recent research has highlighted the importance of understanding class beyond traditional economic indicators. For instance, Flemmen and colleagues (2018) understand class as "the interplay of different forms of capital" (p. 132). Building on the Bourdieusian theoretical architecture, along with the British school in cultural analysis (see e.g. Savage, 2015; Savage et al., 2013; Warde, 2005, 2016), the scholars conceptualise class as a multidimensional social space shaped by varying forms of capital. Class divisions, therefore, reflect more than just income or occupation. They also involve cultural knowledge, education credentials, and social connections.

This approach draws on this perspective; however, youth cultures often lack traditional adult-based socio-economic indicators, such as personal occupation or income. Participants of the present study are aged between 16 and 19 years old, with most of them still under the economic and institutional educational responsibility of their

parents or tutors. Hence, the relational model mentioned above is thereby structured according to a stratified socialisation model, grounded in the well-established sociological approach to primary and secondary socialisation (see e.g. Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Cooley, 1909; Parsons, 1961).

Primary socialisation refers to the initial stage of social learning that takes place within the family and immediate social environment, usually during early childhood. It is through this process that individuals first acquire language, norms, values, and cultural orientations that structure their perception of the world (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Accordingly, the first layer characterising individual factors is composed of *subjective capitals*, that is, economic, cultural, and social resources transmitted through family upbringing. Such resources are not directly material but are inscribed in the body and mind over time, shaping long-term dispositions that later influence how young people interact with social media platforms, interpret content, and develop preferences. To this purpose, the indicators chosen to point at this process were parental education and occupational status, age, gender, and the number of books owned at home. For instance, the presence of books at home or the familiarity with culturally valued practices such as reading or discussing current events are early markers of cultural familiarity and legitimacy.

Secondary socialisation, in contrast, refers to the process by which individuals continue to acquire norms, knowledge, and competencies beyond the family context. This usually happens within institutional structures, such as schools, peer groups, and broader educational environments. Whereas the primary socialisation is typically affective and unconscious, secondary socialisation tends to be more structured and intentional, often tied to explicit curricular expectations and societal norms (Bourdieu, 1979; Ohl & Taks, 2007; Vietze et al., 2019). In the context of this empirical case, these are defined as *objectified capitals*, as the trajectories and access points to cultural and social resources. These were operationalised through the type of school attended and the field of study, to reproduce what Bourdieu defined as institutionalised and objectified cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1979). For example, a student in a classical lyceum may have more access to academic knowledge and cultural legitimacy. In contrast, a student in a technical school may acquire more practical, application-based knowledge.

In addition to the primary and secondary socialisation processes, a third analytical layer is introduced: platform socialisation. This refers to the early acquisition of dispositions, competencies, and platform-specific preferences that are socially shaped and have enduring implications for how individuals engage with digital media and position themselves symbolically within online environments. While distinct from subjective and objectified forms of capital, this process draws on a set of resources conceptualised here as platform capital. The intention is not to propose an entirely new form of capital, but rather to emphasise how early digital experiences, especially during the formative years of primary socialisation. These foster resources later function within secondary socialisation contexts as prerequisites for legitimate participation in platform-based environments.

Platform capital encompasses the implicit know-how and embodied sense of what is considered appropriate, desirable, or legitimate within particular digital fields. For example, as illustrated in the findings of the previous chapter, actions such as excessively enthusiastic commenting or sharing uncurated self-images were often perceived as socially inappropriate or embarrassing, indicating the presence of unspoken norms governing digital behaviour. These early socialised dispositions inform current practices and structure symbolic boundaries within peer networks.

This layer of analysis is operationalised through variables related to participants' social media preferences, both favoured and disfavoured platforms, as well as interactional tendencies, offering insight into the ways digital tastes and embodied platform norms contribute to broader patterns of classed digital engagement.

8.5 Item selection and the sample

To investigate the dispositional dimension of practical digital literacy, I designed and implemented a structured questionnaire within the context of the school-based initiative across nine upper-secondary educational institutes. The survey is part of the school fieldwork already mentioned in Chapter 5.

Following the measurement approaches, the questionnaire focused on mapping students' dispositions and practices related to social media platforms in four main sections, capturing subjective, objectified, and platform capitals, as well as their consumption frequencies.

As per subjective capitals (Table 2), the items characterising this dimension of socialisation are built on well-established, validated questions from the European Social Survey (ESS), a cross-national survey that collects data on attitudes, behaviours, and background variables using harmonised instruments across European countries (see e.g. for application Evans et al., 2010). More specifically, this section captures the employment status of the parents, considering a respondent as having an "employed" or "self-employed" background if at least one parent or guardian is employed or self-employed. Parents' education is recorded with the highest level of education between the two, according to the ISCED levels (S. L. Schneider, 2013). The responses were then grouped into three levels: the first includes up to lower secondary education; the second covers education between lower and upper secondary, including post-secondary non-tertiary qualifications; and the third comprises short-cycle tertiary, Bachelor's, and higher degrees. Gender is expressed through a self-identified approach, offering binary and non-binary options, along with the possibility of not giving any answer. Last, a cultural indicator has been introduced via the number of books owned at home.

The dimension related to objectified capitals (Table 3) encompasses key aspects of formal secondary education as markers of educational capital. The type of school attended is categorised into general academic schools (*Liceo*), technical schools, and vocational schools, reflecting different educational pathways and orientations. The field of study attended within these schools is further specified, capturing a range of disciplines including applied sciences, classics, linguistics, marketing, science, social sciences, sport sciences, construction, and tourism, thereby indicating the academic or vocational focus of the respondent's education. Additionally, the year of attendance is recorded to denote the respondent's stage within the secondary education cycle. Together, these variables offer a detailed representation of the institutional and material dimensions of educational background.

Regarding platform capital (Table 4), this dimension focuses on the respondents' engagement with various social media platforms and their online interaction habits. It includes the preferred social media platform, capturing a range of popular services such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and others, reflecting the digital spaces where respondents are most active. Additionally, the item on the perceived least favourable social media platform gauges respondents' attitudes towards different platforms, offering insight into their social media preferences and aversions. The most frequent online gestures are recorded through two separate measures, detailing the types of

interactions respondents most commonly engage in, such as liking, commenting, direct messaging, saving, sharing, or flagging content. The frequency of posting content is further differentiated by the nature of the content, such as self-produced versus content produced by others. Its permanence is also recorded, distinguishing between ephemeral and permanent posts. Finally, perceived daily hours spent on social media provide a quantitative indicator of overall engagement intensity. Together, these variables offer a comprehensive view of the digital practices and platform-related social capital of respondents in the context of their online social environments.

Last, as introduced in the theoretical foundation of the measurement instrument, taste is mainly captured through exposure frequencies to various categories of content and an expression (Table 5). The variables operationalising taste are constructed based on self-reported exposure frequencies to different categories of content, capturing a range of cultural and leisure preferences. Respondents indicated how often they engage with content related to fun and entertainment, tutorials and instructional material, and news and current affairs, with response categories grouped into low, medium, and, where applicable, high exposure levels. Additionally, cultural interests are represented through reported engagement with arts, music, and sports content. At the same time, more socially-oriented or lifestyle-driven preferences are measured through exposure to content related to friends, video games, and make-up or beauty content. Each variable is treated as ordinal, reflecting increasing frequency of exposure and, by extension, varying orientations toward specific domains of cultural consumption.

In addition to these exposure-based measures, the analysis also incorporates a variable derived from an open-ended question in which participants were asked to indicate what they consider to be *quality content*. This variable captures an expression of taste that goes beyond patterns of passive exposure, instead highlighting what respondents identify as algorithmic standouts within the flow. The rationale was to allow participants more space to articulate what stands out to them as valuable or meaningful, rather than what is merely frequently encountered. Answers were processed through a dictionary method to extract categories from the qualitative material, thus producing a categorical variable that complements the frequency-based measures. By combining both dimensions, namely frequencies of exposure and expressed favourite categories, the analysis accounts for the dual nature of taste formation in flow-based environments: on the one hand, the semi-conscious engagements shaped through repeated exposure, and on the other, the more reflexive attributions of value and quality that respondents actively articulate.

These items serve as active variables in the analysis, aiming to identify patterned differences in taste and media engagement across the sample.

Table 2 - Supplementary variables summary - Subjective capitals

Variable	N	N = 719[1]
Parents' jobs	671	
Employed		471 (70%)
Self-employed		195 (29%)
Unemployed		5 (0.7%)
NA		48
Education Parents	697	
Low		80 (11%)
Mid		328 (47%)
High		289 (41%)
NA		22
Number of books	476	
0-50		135 (28%)
51-100		111 (23%)
100+		230 (48%)
NA		243
Gender	704	
Female		449 (64%)
Male		245 (35%)
Non-binary		10 (1.4%)
NA		15
City of residence	719	
Small		328 (46%)
Medium		157 (22%)
Large		234 (33%)

[1]n (%)

Table 3 - Supplementary variables summary - Objectified capitals

Variable	N	N = 719[1]
School attended	719	
Lyceum		517 (72%)
Technical		201 (28%)
Vocational		1 (0.1%)
Field of study	473	
Applied sciences		27 (5.7%)
Classic		33 (7.0%)
Construction		14 (3.0%)
Linguistic		102 (22%)
Marketing		38 (8.0%)
Science		94 (20%)
Social Sciences		84 (18%)
Sport Sciences		46 (9.7%)
Tourism		35 (7.4%)
NA		246
Year attended	719	
2		1 (0.1%)
3		76 (11%)
4		491 (68%)
5		151 (21%)

[1]n (%)

Table 4 - Supplementary variables summary - Platform capital

Variable	N	N = 719[1]
Preferred social media	719	
BeReal		9 (1.3%)
Discord		4 (0.6%)
Facebook		1 (0.1%)
Instagram		297 (41%)
Pinterest		22 (3.1%)
Reddit		2 (0.3%)
Snapchat		7 (1.0%)
TikTok		245 (34%)
Twitch		13 (1.8%)
Twitter		12 (1.7%)
YouTube		107 (15%)
Least favourite social media	719	
BeReal		77 (11%)
Discord		74 (10%)
Facebook		155 (22%)
Instagram		7 (1.0%)
Pinterest		33 (4.6%)
Reddit		54 (7.5%)
Snapchat		64 (8.9%)
Threads		92 (13%)
TikTok		39 (5.4%)
Twitch		53 (7.4%)
Twitter		68 (9.5%)
YouTube		3 (0.4%)
Interaction practices (first choice)	719	
Commenting		6 (0.8%)
Direct message		165 (23%)
Flag (e.g. I am not interested)		6 (0.8%)

Variable	N	N = 719[1]
Like		411 (57%)
Save		99 (14%)
Share		32 (4.5%)
Interaction practices (second choice)	719	
Comments		16 (2.2%)
Direct message		218 (30%)
Flag		100 (14%)
Like		188 (26%)
Save		144 (20%)
Share		53 (7.4%)
Posting self-produced ephemeral content	719	
Low		323 (45%)
Mid		212 (29%)
High		184 (26%)
Posting ephemeral content produced by others	719	
Low		220 (31%)
Mid		499 (69%)
Posting self-produced permanent content	719	
Low		450 (63%)
Mid		193 (27%)
High		76 (11%)
Posting permanent content produced by others	719	
Low		505 (70%)
Mid		214 (30%)
Perceived daily hours spent on social media	719	
Low		350 (49%)
Mid		265 (37%)
High		104 (14%)

[1]n (%)

Table 5 - Active variables summary - Consumption

Variable	N	N = 719[1]
Fun	719	
Low		464 (65%)
Mid		255 (35%)
Tutorial	719	
Low		56 (7.8%)
Mid		663 (92%)
News	719	
Low		461 (64%)
Mid		186 (26%)
High		72 (10%)
Arts	719	
Low		315 (44%)
Mid		221 (31%)
High		183 (25%)
Sport	719	
Low		269 (37%)
Mid		258 (36%)
High		192 (27%)
Music	719	
Low		425 (59%)
Mid		294 (41%)
Friend	719	
Low		391 (54%)
Mid		328 (46%)
Video games	719	
Low		253 (35%)
Mid		311 (43%)
High		155 (22%)
Make up	719	

Variable	N	N = 719[1]
Low		272 (38%)
Mid		306 (43%)
High		141 (20%)
Favourite category	620	
Animals		7 (1.1%)
Arts		22 (3.5%)
Beauty		69 (11%)
Entertainment		113 (18%)
Food		95 (15%)
Gaming		16 (2.6%)
Girls		6 (1.0%)
Motors		7 (1.1%)
Music		30 (4.8%)
News		38 (6.1%)
Podcast		4 (0.6%)
Science		4 (0.6%)
Sport		170 (27%)
Travel		39 (6.3%)
NA		99

[1]n (%)

The survey was conducted across 39 classrooms, resulting in a total of 719 completed responses. The sample predominantly comprised students attending lyceums (72%), with the remaining attending technical institutes (28%), and a single respondent from a vocational school. The majority of participants were in their fourth year (68%), with additional representation from third (11%) and fifth-year students (21%), and only one second-year student. In terms of gender, female respondents represented 64% of the sample, while males made up 35%, and non-binary individuals 1.4%.

Participants came from a diverse range of educational and social backgrounds. The vast majority of parents were reported as employed, with 29% self-employed, and a small share (0.7%) unemployed. Concerning parental education, 41% held a high level of education, 47% mid-level, and 11% low, suggesting a relatively broad distribution of cultural capital. The number of books owned at home—a proxy for early cultural exposure—revealed that 48% of respondents reported owning more than 100 books, while 23% owned 51–100 books, and 28% had fewer than 50.

City size was taken into account: 46% of participants lived in small towns, 33% in large urban areas, and 22% in medium-sized cities. Educational tracks were varied among those who disclosed this information, including linguistic (22%), scientific (20%), social sciences (18%), sport sciences (9.7%), and other vocational or humanistic paths.

Regarding platform capital, Instagram (41%) and TikTok (34%) emerged as the most commonly preferred platforms, followed by YouTube (15%). Facebook, Reddit, and Discord were among the least preferred platforms, with Facebook disliked by 22% of respondents, followed by Threads (13%) and Snapchat (8.9%). When it comes to interaction practices, the most frequently reported action was "liking" content (57%), followed by direct messaging (23%) and saving posts (14%). Notably, 23% selected direct messaging as their most frequent second gesture as well, indicating its relevance in peer communication.

Concerning the frequency of content posting, 45% reported low engagement with ephemeral self-produced content, with a similar trend for permanent content (63% low). The data also shows that 49% of participants perceived their daily time spent on social media as low, while 37% reported mid-level use, and 14% high use.

In terms of content consumption, the majority of respondents engaged moderately to highly with themes like music (41% mid), friends' content (46% mid), and sports (27% high). Consumption of informational or artistic content, such as news and arts, was more limited: 64% reported low news consumption, and 44% low arts engagement. Only a minority showed high-frequency engagement with tutorials (8%) or news content (10%).

While the sample is not statistically representative of the national population, it captures a heterogeneous cross-section of Italian youth aged approximately 16–19 years, allowing for a robust exploratory analysis of digital consumption practices and their social differentiations.

8.6 Analytical strategy: Multiple correspondence analysis

The analytical approach adopted to examine the survey data is Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA), a method rooted in the relational epistemology of Bourdieu (1979; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). MCA is a statistical technique designed for categorical variables that constructs a geometric space where proximities between points

reflect patterns of similarity or opposition. It is particularly suited to exploring how dispositional variables, such as content tastes, platform preferences, or interaction types, cluster together and differentiate social positions.

In technical terms, MCA begins by transforming categorical variables into a complete disjunctive matrix, calculating chi-square distances between response patterns. These categorical variables are defined as "active" variables since they *actively* shape the outcome of the analysis. Indeed, the analysis constructs latent dimensions (or axes) that maximise explained variance (inertia), with each axis representing an underlying opposition in the data (Le Roux & Rouanet, 2010). The first axis captures the most dominant division, while subsequent axes reflect additional, orthogonal contrasts. These axes are interpreted through the lens of "explicative points", that is, those categories of the active variables that most significantly contribute to the axis, evaluated via their coordinates, contributions, squared cosines, and test-values (ibid.).

Importantly, MCA does not ascribe intrinsic meaning to any single consumption practice or platform preference. Instead, it reveals oppositional structures: for example, a taste for tutorial videos may only become meaningful when contrasted with a rejection of makeup content or the preference for TikTok over Facebook. Thus, the resulting space is fundamentally relational, mapping how practices and preferences cluster across social dispositions and embedded capitals (Flemmen et al., 2018). Once this structure is established, supplementary variables, such as gender, parental background, or educational path, are projected onto the space to explore their alignment with different configurations of digital practice. These supplementary variables do not alter the structure of the space but allow interpretation of how social background corresponds with specific positions in the field.

This analytical strategy is designed first to identify the main polarisation that structures consumption practices, and subsequently to examine how processes of social distinction relate to, influence, and interact with these patterns.

8.7 Findings

To contrast the consumption practices, the analysis relies on a total of ten active variables on consumption frequencies (Q), with 37 possible answers, or categories (K). After handling the missing data, 563 (n) students were included in the analysis. Participants generated 516 response patterns, with the most frequent appearing 6 times.

Three dimensions account for more than 88 per cent of the total variance[7]. As reported in Table 6, Axis 1 is the strongest dimension, nearly summarising 63 per cent. The other two, 16 and 9 per cent, respectively. Contributions of each variable to the composition of the axes are summarised in Table 7.

[7] The mentioned variance refers to the modified rates of variance recommended by Benzécri (1992), then reported by Le Roux and Rouanet (2010). "To better appreciate the importance of the first axes […] Modified rates can be interpreted as an index of the departure of the cloud from sphericity (i.e. all eigenvalues are equal)" (ivi, pp. 40-41).

Table 6 - MCA Summary Statistics

Axis	Eigenvalue	Percentage	Modified Rate	Cum Modified Rate
Dim 1	0.22	10.10	62.71	62.71
Dim 2	0.16	7.38	16.28	79.00
Dim 3	0.15	6.69	9.38	88.38

Table 7 - Variable Contributions to Axes 1–3

Variable	Dim 1 (%)	Dim 2 (%)	Dim 3 (%)
Preferred categories	21,9	23,1	28,8
Make up	27.1	2.9	1.0
Video games	18.4	1.5	20.4
Sport	16.2	6.9	10.3
Tutorial	8.2	1.0	0.1
Friend	7.1	1.6	10.1
Arts	0.8	36.3	0.1
News	0.3	23.9	10.9
Fun	0.0	1.0	0.1
Music	0.0	1.8	18.2
Total	100	100	100

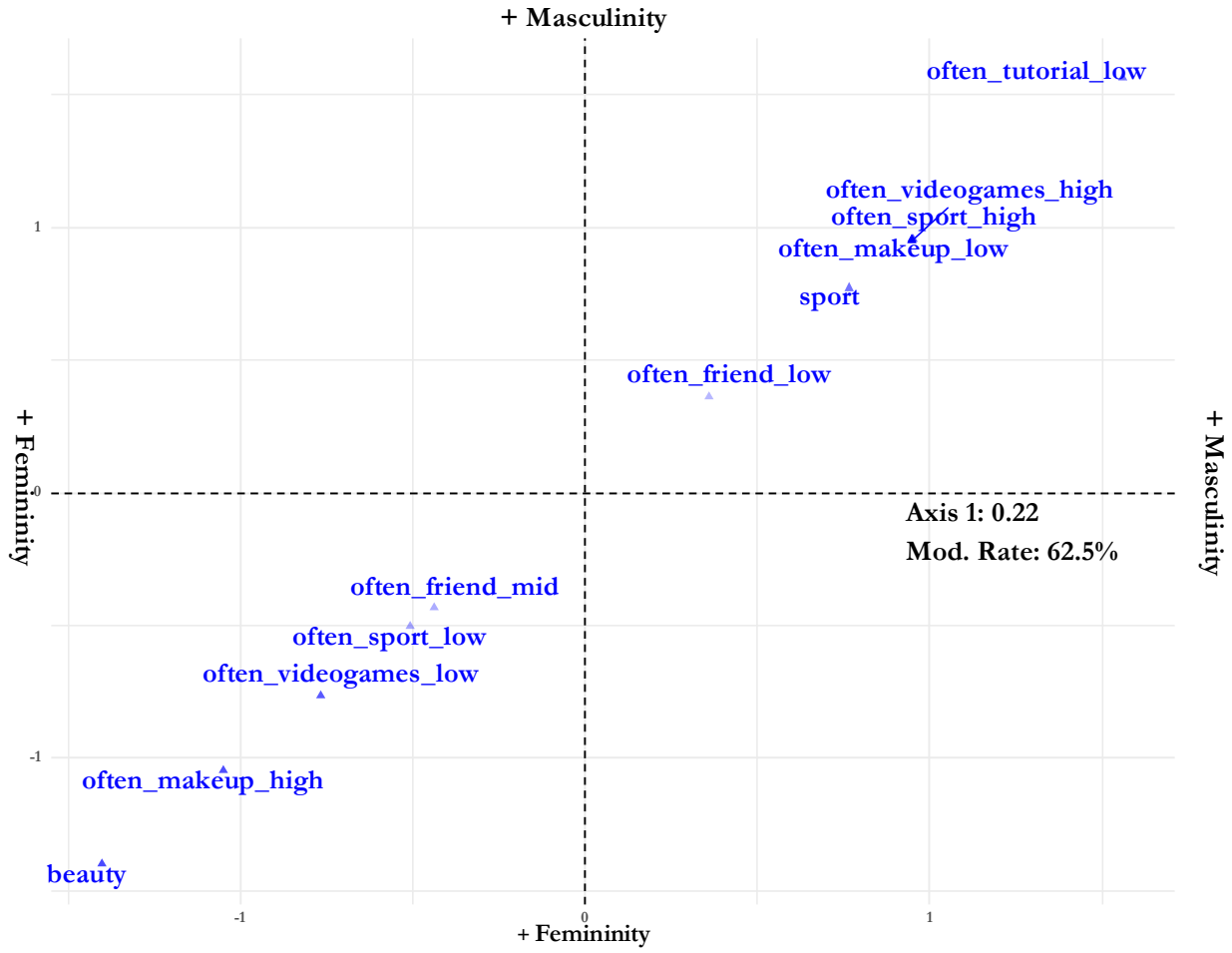
8.7.1 Interpreting the main dimensions

The first axis polarises stereotypically gendered forms of consumption, distinguishing male from female practices. To better appreciate this interpretation, Figure 1 presents the 11 explanatory points that contribute more than the average. The plot is explicitly constructed to show only the first dimension, hence the symmetrical distribution.

On the left side, the displayed categories might be attributed to young female consumption patterns, given the significant contribution of beauty-related preferences and a high frequency of exposure to content related to make-up. Low exposure to sports and video games points also to the role of the recommender system in reifying and reinforcing such a stereotype. Additionally, the relatively frequent exposure to content produced by one's network of friends, albeit only a partial contributor, is in line with the argument that female users are more invested in the relational labour of nurturing and managing social connections via social media (see e.g. Caminhas, 2025; Cirucci, 2018).

On the right side, Axis 1 contrasts more frequent engagement with video games and sports, with sports making a decisive contribution as a declared preferred category. Exposure to make-up is low, and the fact that this category still contributes to Axis 1 suggests that masculine identity is, in part, performed through the rejection of traditionally feminine interests. The same logic applies to tutorials, which, according to the open-ended questions, are perceived as more commonly consumed by "girls". Video games represent an interesting category, as they remain particularly relevant for males even though female gaming continues to grow (more on this in the discussion). This reinforces the interpretation of Axis 1 as reflecting opposing gendered forms of consumption, separating resources mobilised to perform socially recognised identities of masculinity or femininity.

Figure 3. Explicative points for Axis 1



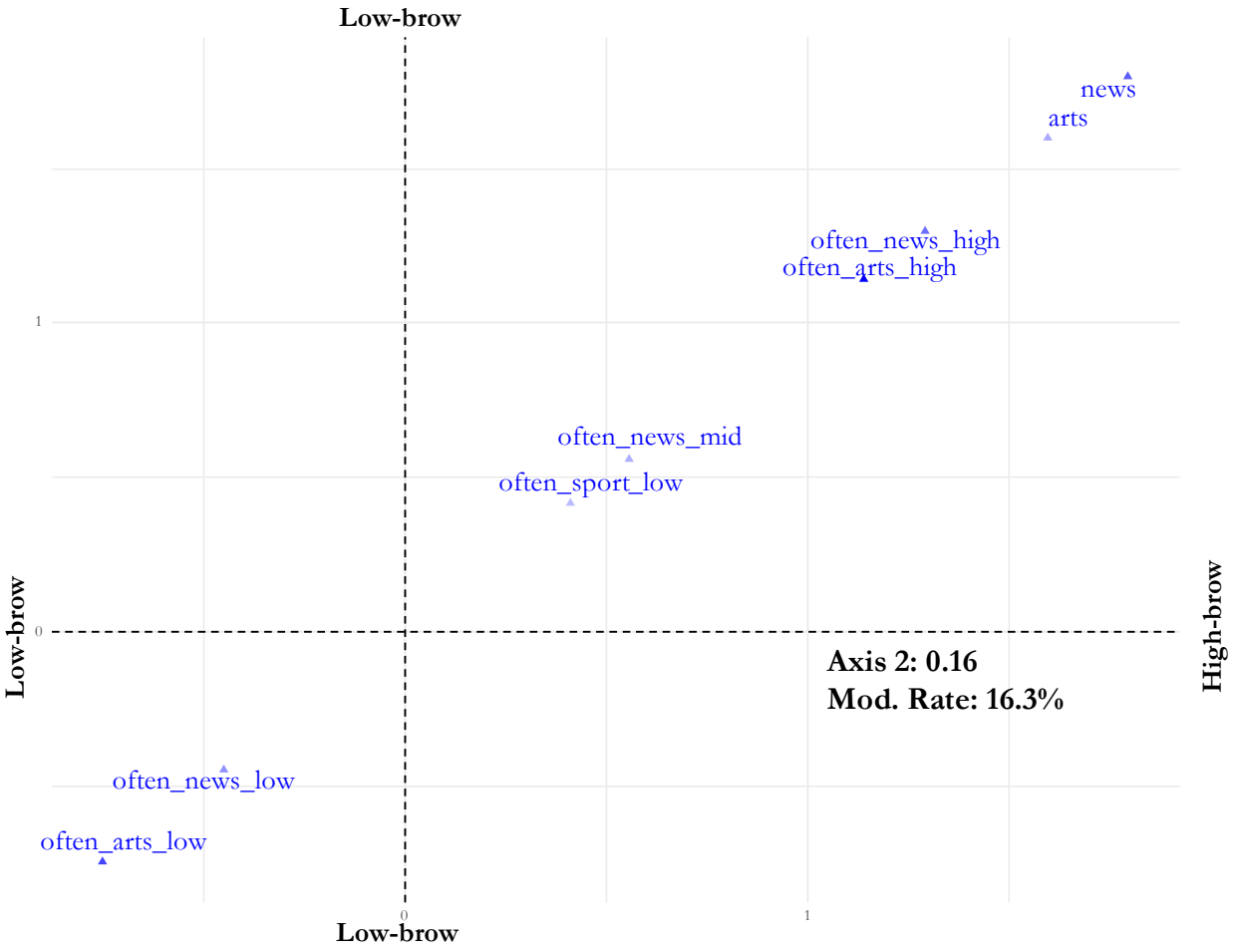
Axis 2 (Figure 2) reflects a more traditional divide in cultural consumption, one that separates traditionally conceived highbrow from lowbrow practices. In other words, what emerges here is the exposure to institutionalised forms of cultural consumption, which function typically as traditional resources for cultural capital. This polarisation is not simply a matter of individual preference, but one that is further shaped by the role of recommender systems. Algorithmic curation can amplify such divides by nudging users toward similar content once an initial preference is expressed, thereby reinforcing higher levels of exposure to certain kinds of cultural goods.

At the left-hand end of the axis are individuals who report infrequent or minimal exposure to news and arts-related content. The "news" category is relatively straightforward, encompassing political, economic, local, national, and international reporting. The "arts" category, however, is broader and includes literature, poetry, history, and painting. The fact that only two content categories define this end of the axis may indicate either that this pole is underrepresented in the data or that the sample as a whole demonstrates at least some regular exposure to these forms of content.

At the right-hand end of the axis, by contrast, we find more regular and intensive engagement with categories traditionally associated with highbrow culture. Here, respondents not only report higher consumption of news and the arts but also declare these as their preferred content areas. Interestingly, this pole is also marked by a relative

absence of sports content, which underscores the persistence of cultural hierarchies: sport consumption is subtly positioned as less legitimate in comparison to news and the arts, thereby reinforcing a distinction between "higher" and "lower" forms of cultural practice, even in an era where omnivorousness is said to prevail.

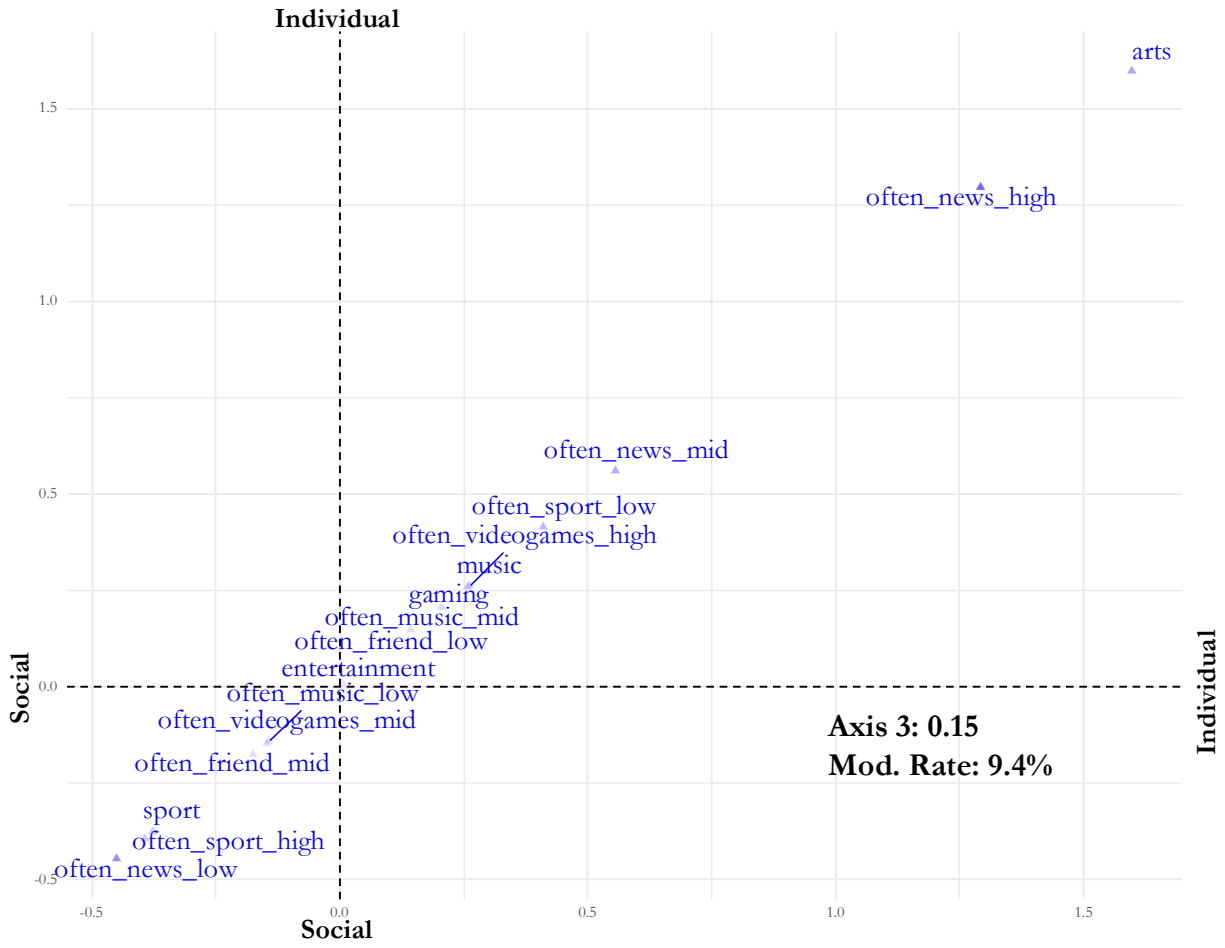
Figure 4. Explicative points for Axis 2



Axis 3 is the most nuanced in terms of explicative points, with a total of 15 categories contributing above the average. The dimension contrasts consumption practices that span from sport- and friends-related content to arts, news, and gaming, therefore suggesting a polarisation between socially and individually relevant activities.

Figure 3 illustrates this division clearly. On the lower-left side of the plane, we find categories such as sport and content related to friends, which are characteristically social in orientation and frequently consumed in group settings or peer interactions. At the opposite extreme, there are categories such as arts, news, and gaming, which lend themselves to more individualised modes of engagement and reflect a consumption pattern that is less tied to immediate social networks. Most striking, however, is the positioning of music. While it is often stereotypically framed as a social practice, whether through concerts or festivals, the analysis situates it firmly among the more individualised forms of consumption. This unexpected outcome reinforces the interpretation of Axis 3 as contrasting not merely different content domains, but rather modes of engagement that oppose socially embedded practices to those carried out in relative isolation. The contribution of music to this latter cluster thus consolidates the idea that this dimension primarily indexes the degree of individualisation in cultural consumption.

Figure 5. Explicative points of Axis 3



In Figures 4 and 5, the dimensions are combined in couples, and each is plotted with the individuals grouped around similar response sets.

Figure 6. Axis 1 and 2, categories and individuals.

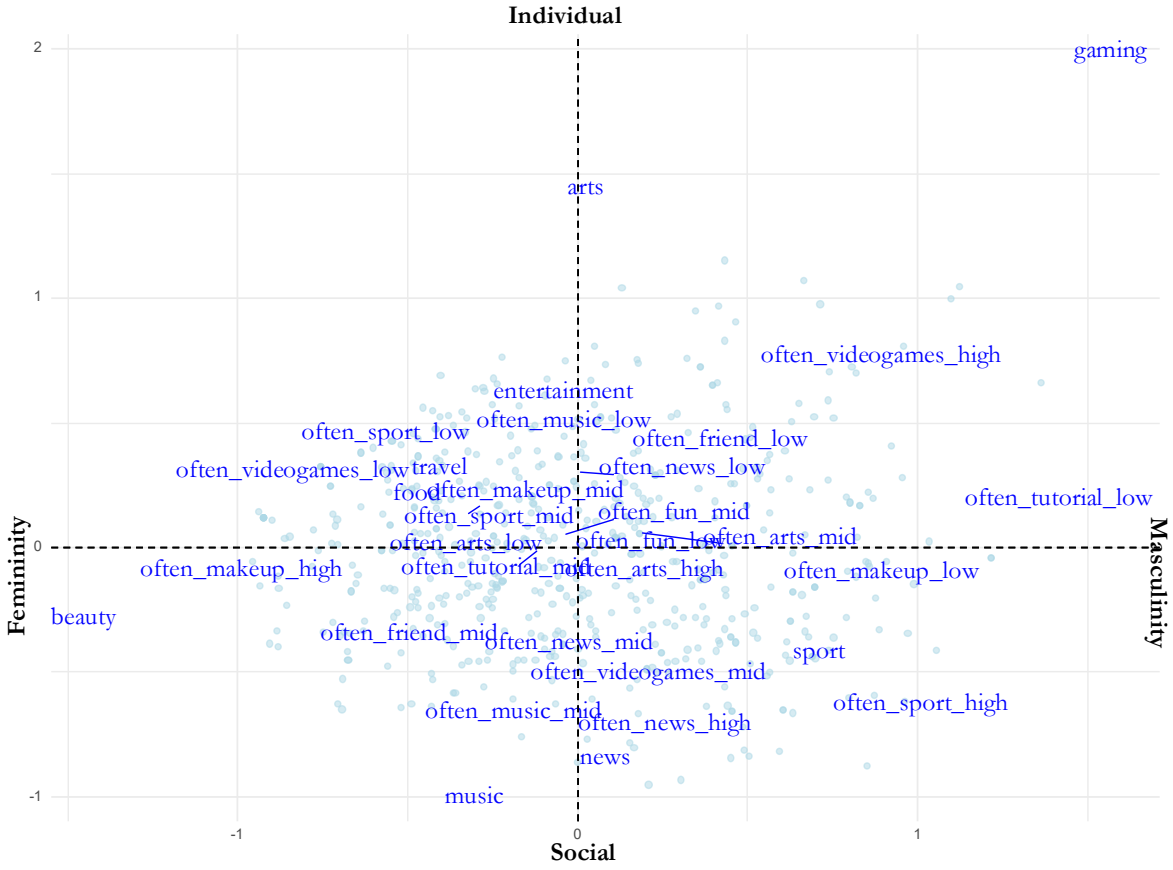
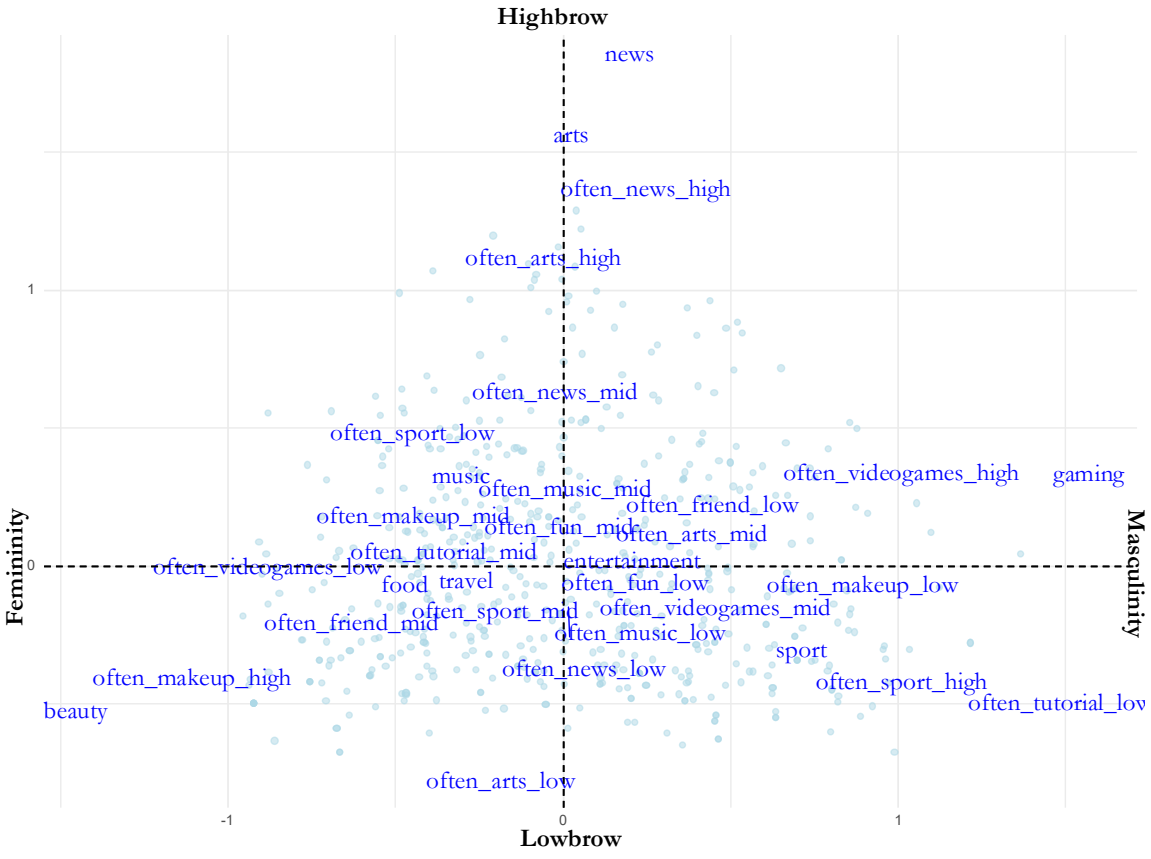


Figure 7. Axis 1 and 3, categories and individuals



8.7.2 Introducing the supplementary variables

This paragraph is dedicated to assessing whether and how these divisions in consumption patterns relate to social divisions by projecting supplementary variables (i.e. subjective, objectified, and platform capitals) onto the space introduced in Figures 4 and 5. As mentioned above, these variables do not contribute to the axes; however, their spatial positioning is helpful to confirm, if not further develop, the interpretation of the outcome. More specifically, the greater the distances between opposing supplementary categories, the more marked is the association between the consumption categories and social divisions (Flemmen et al., 2018). The analysis only includes variables with a standard deviation between the points of at least 0.7, as suggested by Le Roux and Rouanet (2010).

Axis 1, which separates consumption practices according to the pursuit of gendered feminine or masculine identities, is strongly associated, as expected, with gender, showing a standard deviation of 1.5. The second most relevant supplementary variable on this axis is the educational path. Observing the horizontal movement of the categories in Figure 8, we can see that feminine identities are more commonly expressed through fields of study such as classics, social sciences, and tourism. In contrast, masculine identities are more associated with marketing, applied sciences, and sports. The most significant observed distance is between classics and sports, measuring 1.34 SDs. The red arrows in Figure 8 indicate an ordering of categories from the most to the least academically oriented subjects. The "back and forth" pattern of these arrows suggests that Axis 1 is not directly tied to academic orientation. Nonetheless, some fields of study are gendered, reflecting that particular gender identities are more prominent in specific areas.

Beyond individual factors, consumption preferences also relate to Axis 1, particularly regarding favourite (blue dots) and least preferred (red dots) social media, as well as the most frequent forms of interaction (green dots). Figure 9 presents all three groups of categories. Among interactions, the most considerable difference is observed between comments and other forms of interaction, averaging 0.9 SDs. Interestingly, comments are more strongly associated with masculinity. This may seem counterintuitive, given that females often use social media for social purposes. However, these interaction forms are essential on platforms like YouTube and Twitch, which are preferred mainly by users seeking to express masculinity. Twitch, in particular, relies on live interactions between streamers and viewers (see e.g. Hamilton et al., 2014; G. H. Wolff & Shen, 2024).

Axis 1 is also structured around social media preferences. Following the horizontal axis in Figure 9, blue categories indicate connections to gendered identity pursuit. The most considerable observed distance is between Twitch and other platforms, highlighting its predominantly male user base. The same pattern appears among the least-favourite social media, with Pinterest showing the most significant distance at 0.9 SDs. Importantly, by showing the most and least favourite social media, these patterns reflect forms of distinction and the process of legitimisation through cultural choices. According to Pierre Bourdieu, legitimisation in taste occurs when particular cultural preferences are socially recognised as superior, while others are dismissed as inferior (Bourdieu, 1979). The theory of cultural omnivorousness suggests that broader consumption has weakened these distinctions. Nevertheless, this analysis indicates that forms of legitimisation persist at the platform level. For example, Instagram is more strongly associated with users pursuing a feminine identity, who also tend to rate Reddit, Facebook, and Twitch as their

least favourite platforms. Among these least-favourite sites, Twitch stands out as the preferred platform for those seeking a masculine identity, illustrating ongoing forms of distinction.

Figure 8. Educational path, factorial plane 1-2

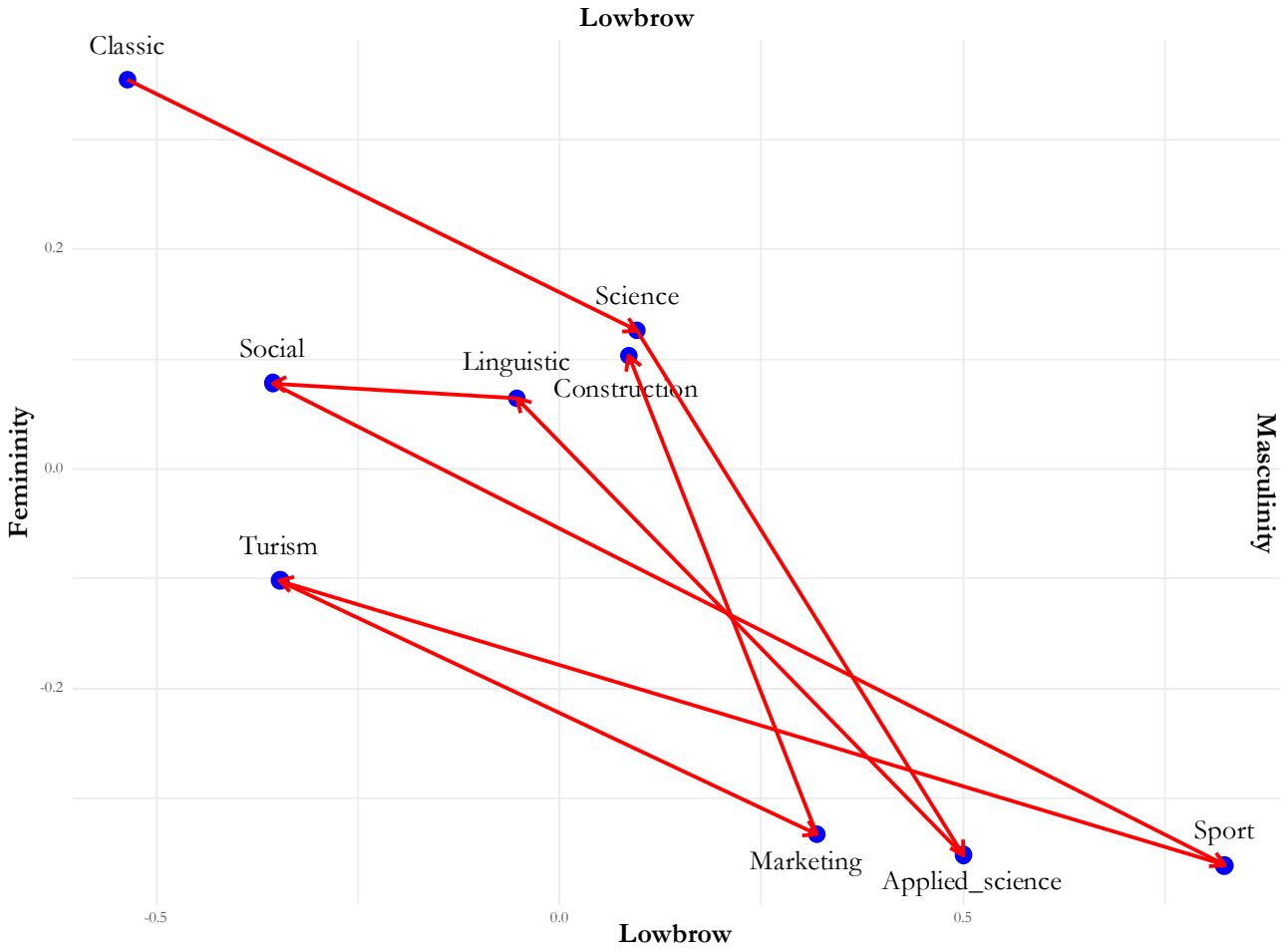
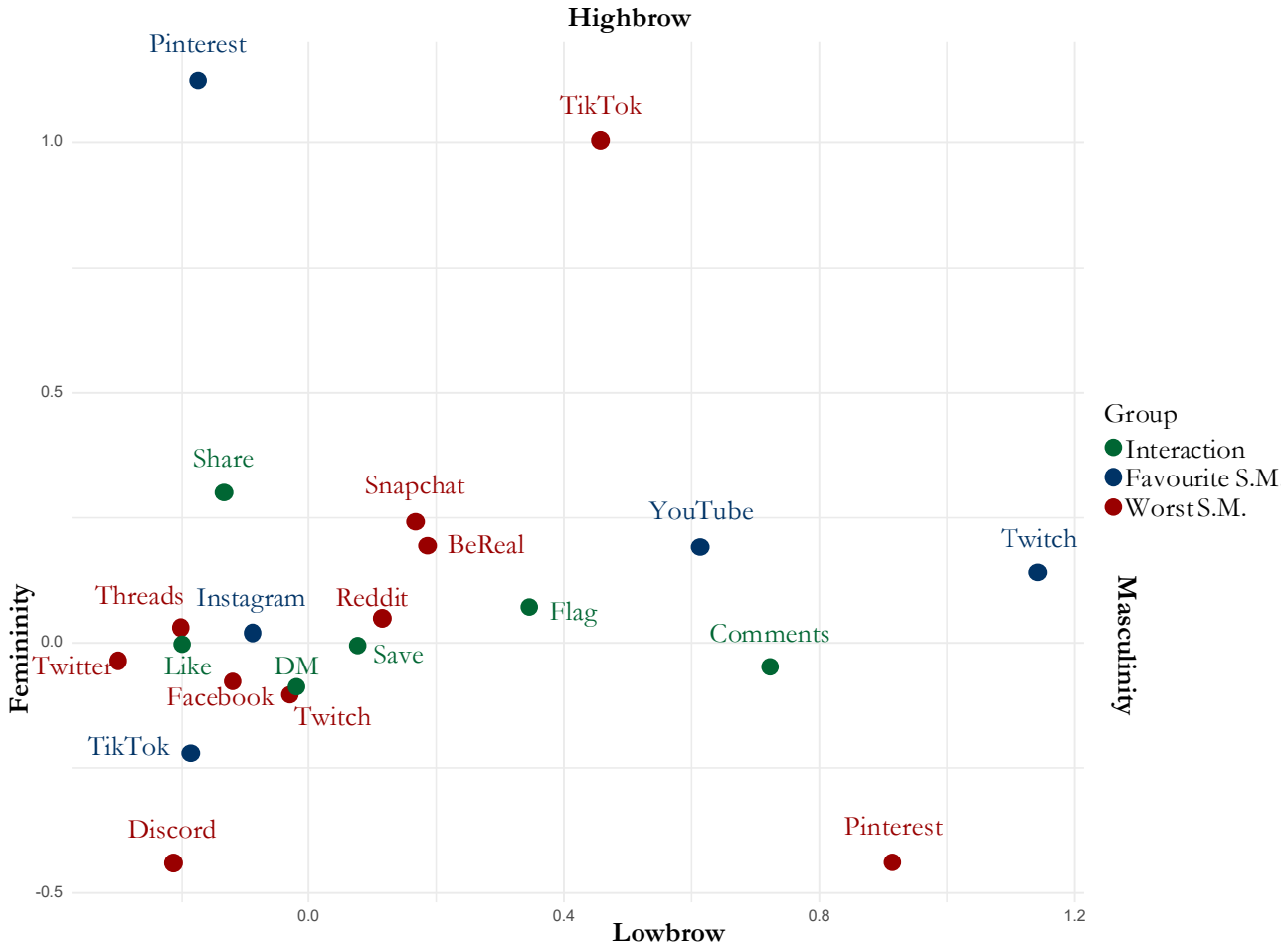


Figure 9. Interaction, favourite and least favourite social media, plane 1-2



Axis 2, which contrasts high versus low exposure to traditionally conceived highbrow categories, is closely tied to respondents' educational paths and, to a lesser extent, their social media preferences. The most notable gap appears between classics and sports, with a distance of 0.71 SDs. Since this axis also highlights the educational path as a key supplementary variable, one interpretation is that these fields of study shape distinct social environments, each functioning as a micro-field with its own rules and legitimised positionings. What is particularly striking is the proximity of marketing, applied sciences, and sports. Although these disciplines are situated at different levels of academic expectation, with applied sciences generally regarded as higher, students in these fields share a similarly low exposure to news and arts-related content (see Figure 8).

Turning to social media preferences, the supplementary categories are less sharply differentiated than in Axis 1, though Pinterest stands out as an exception. Its greater distance from other platforms reflects its strong association with art-related content. This positioning explains its separation from TikTok (1.3 SDs) and Instagram (1.1 SDs), both perceived as less aligned with highbrow domains. In contrast, the least-favourite social media categories play a more prominent role on Axis 2 than they did on Axis 1. As shown in Figure 9, TikTok stands at a significant distance from the other platforms, suggesting that respondents who value highbrow cultural forms often dismiss it as entertaining low quality. Conversely, those with limited exposure to such content are more likely to designate Discord and Pinterest as their least favourite platforms.

Finally, a cross-reading of Axis 1 and Axis 2 reveals meaningful overlaps. Respondents who pursue masculinity through consumption and show little engagement with highbrow culture tend to reject Pinterest. By contrast, those who align with femininity in their consumption patterns often identify Discord as their least favoured platform. These patterns underscore how gendered identity construction intersects with cultural hierarchies and platform-based distinctions.

Axis 3, which contrasts individual-oriented versus socially oriented consumption practices, shows fewer but still notable connections with the supplementary variables. As illustrated in Figure 10, the only significant distance among fields of study lies between applied sciences and marketing (0.85 SDs). This suggests that students enrolled in applied sciences are more inclined toward individual modes of consumption, engaging with content in a more self-directed or solitary manner. By contrast, those in marketing appear more oriented toward socially embedded consumption, where the value of content lies in its circulation, visibility, and recognition within peer networks.
A similar pattern emerges with social media preferences. TikTok stands out as the most closely associated with individual-oriented consumption. Its algorithmic structure, centred on personalised feeds and solitary engagement with short-form content, aligns with a more inward-facing, individualised use of media. Conversely, Twitch occupies the opposite pole of the axis, representing socially oriented practices. Its emphasis on live interaction between streamers and audiences, as well as on communities that form around shared interests, positions it as a paradigmatic example of socially embedded consumption (Figure 9).
Although Axis 3 is less densely connected to supplementary variables than Axes 1 and 2, it nonetheless reveals a crucial dimension of distinction: whether consumption practices are pursued as private, individualised engagements or as socially validated, collective experiences. This axis highlights how both educational trajectories and platform preferences map onto broader cultural logics of distinction, with some groups privileging self-focused consumption and others aligning with peer recognition and shared participation.

A noteworthy "non-finding" of this analysis is the limited influence of subjective and objectified capitals, such as parental education and occupation, on the structuring of the axes. This absence aligns with research on the "classless culture" of youth, which suggests that generational divides increasingly overshadow class inequalities as the primary axis of social differentiation. In this view, cultural boundaries among young people are less shaped by inherited positions and more by peer dynamics, media practices, and generational tastes, marking a symbolic rupture with the dominant adult culture (see e.g. Mungham & Pearson, 1976; Seehaus & Trappmann, 2023).

Figure 10. Educational path, factorial plane 1-3

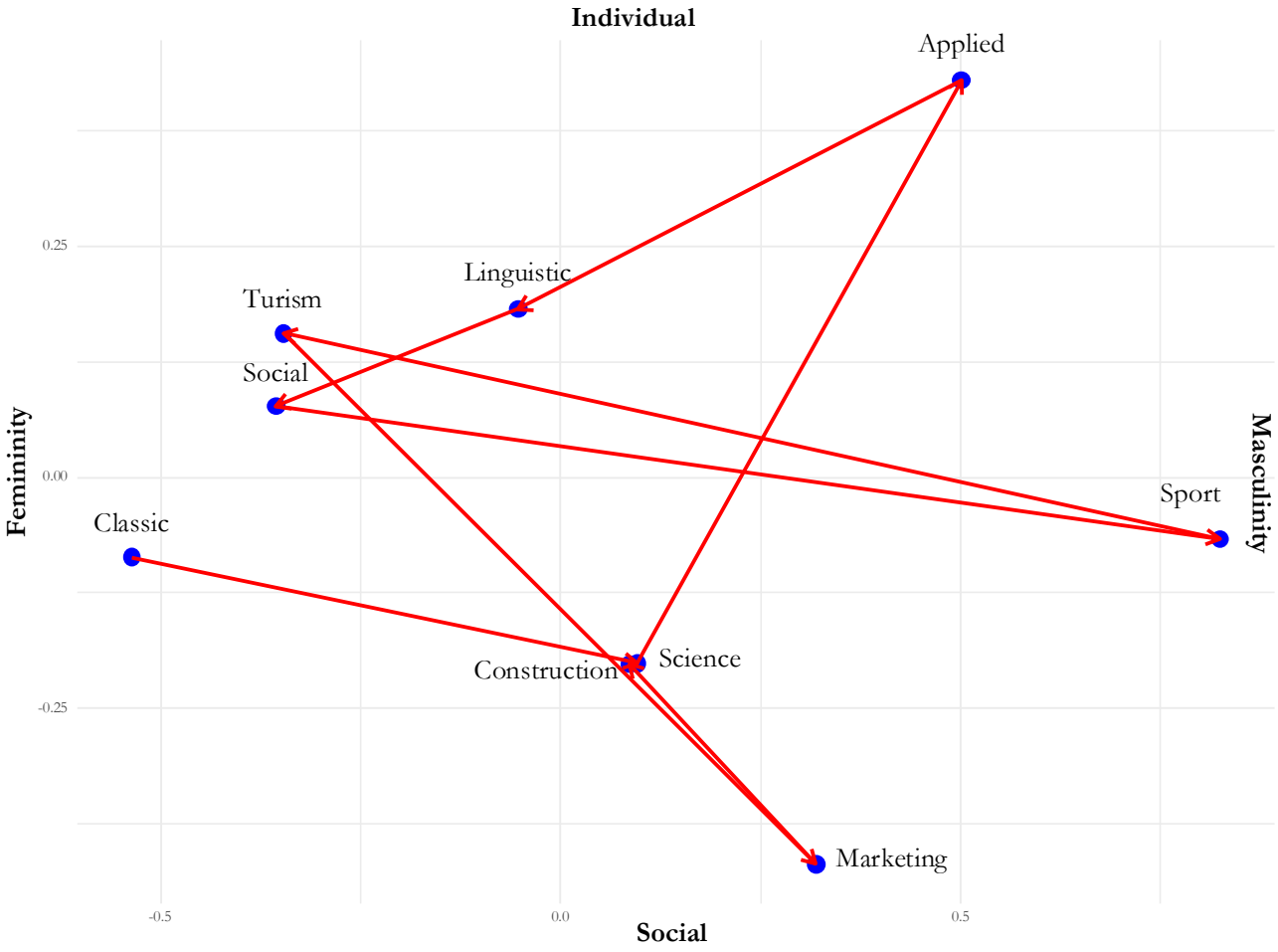
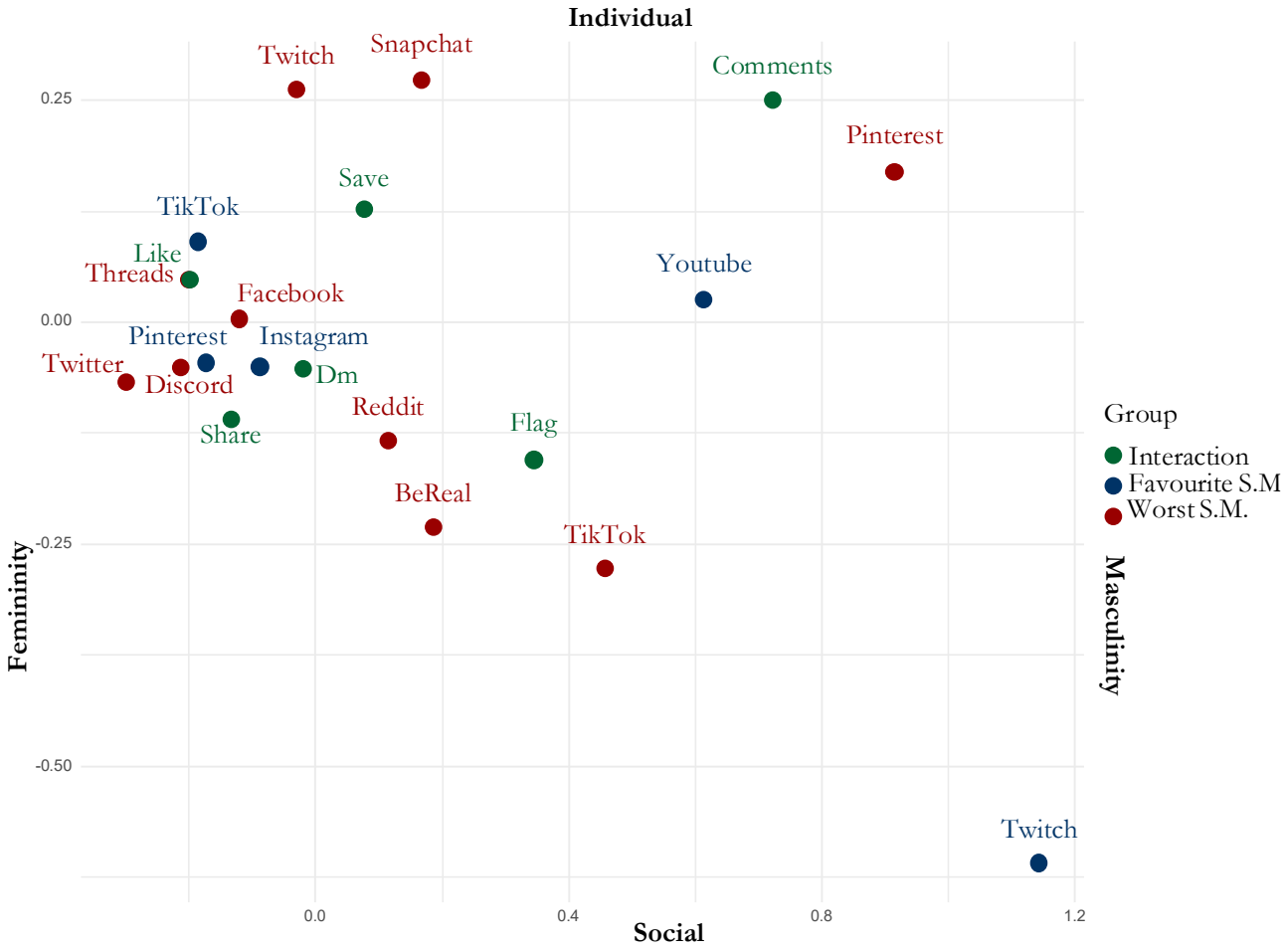


Figure 11. Interaction, favourite, and least favourite social media, plane 1-3



8.8 Discussion and conclusion

The present chapter discusses the dispositional dimension of practical digital literacy. Building on youth consumption studies and established theories of taste as cultural legitimation, this concept extends current scholarship on youth distinction by foregrounding how algorithmic media shapes emergent forms of consumption practices and social differentiation. The empirical strategy is based on a survey on consumption frequencies, subjective and objective capital, and platform capital, collected from a sample of 719 upper-secondary students as part of a broader school-based fieldwork introduced in Section 6.1. Multiple Correspondence Analysis has been employed to map the main drivers of distinctions and how they are shaped by individual and contextual factors.

Findings show three main axes summarising polarised forms of distinction. Axis 1 distinguishes stereotypically feminine from masculine consumption practices, whereas Axis 2 summarises extremes of exposure and preferences towards traditionally conceived cultural goods. Axis 3 contrasts categories of platform consumption that are usually connected to individual or social contexts.

Among the entire set of supplementary variables, only the field of study, the most and least preferred social media and preferred interaction further enrich the interpretation of the analysis. The field of study (e.g. classic, science, marketing or linguistics) relates to Axis 1, suggesting that some educational paths are more connected to feminine

or masculine forms of consumption. The same applies to Axis 2, in which certain fields of study, such as marketing, applied sciences, and sports, show low exposure to news and arts-related content, despite heterogeneous academic expectations. Lastly, Axis 3 suggests that students enrolled in applied sciences or marketing courses exhibit opposite modes of consumption, with the former engaging in interest-driven consumption while the latter evaluate content based on recognition within peer networks.

As per platform preferences, the masculine extreme of Axis 1 showed the greatest distance between Twitch and other platforms, underscoring its relevance among male audiences. Axis 2 is less sharply differentiated than Axis 1, although Pinterest stands out as an exception, with a strong association with students consuming art-related content. In Axis 3, TikTok stands out as the most closely associated with individual-oriented consumption. Albeit this might sound surprising, TikTok's algorithmic structure, centred on personalised feeds and solitary engagement with short-form content, aligns with a more inward-facing, individualised use of media. Conversely, Twitch occupies the opposite pole of the axis, representing socially oriented practices. Its emphasis on live interaction between streamers and audiences, as well as on communities that form around shared interests, positions Twitch as a paradigmatic example of socially embedded consumption.

The findings contribute to a broad array of debates, with the most relevant being scholarship on youth cultural distinctions. More precisely, the results further elaborate on the current understanding of the stakes of cultural capital among youths. Moving beyond the cultural omnivore debate (De Vries & Reeves, 2022; Peterson & Kern, 1996; Warde et al., 2007), traditionally conceived highbrow and lowbrow forms of consumption emerged as one of the main axes characterising the sample. This aligns with Prieur, Savage and Flemmen (2023), who argued that classical high culture (i.e. the "arts" category of Axis 2) has declined in importance but has not disappeared entirely. Yet the present study offers a surprising insight into how these distinctions operate. They are no longer bound to traditional socioeconomic positions but are instead shaped by social contexts, generational logics, gendered performances, and platform-specific norms. The minimal influence of parental cultural and economic capital, albeit partially and indirectly mediated through social context (e.g. privileged school environments), along with the negligible interaction effects of contextual factors such as city size, further underscores the weakening connection between platform consumption and traditional socioeconomic stratification. Similarly, fields of study generate distinct consumption patterns with their own legitimised tastes, operating independently of the traditional academic hierarchies associated with each discipline. The association of certain platforms with specific educational tracks (e.g., classics students favouring Pinterest, applied sciences students preferring individualised consumption) suggests that educational environments function as subfields where particular platforms and tastes become legitimised. This points to multiple subfields of digital youth culture, each with distinct vernacular competencies and exclusionary mechanisms, rather than a monolithic "digital native" generation.

In light of this, categories of consumption must be rethought within algorithmic media. For instance, just as Bourdieu's analysis identified differences between cinema and theatre attendance (Bourdieu, 1979), each platform operates within a complex system of rules, with its own expectations, *illusio*, and *doxa*. Cultural distinctions now operate at the platform level. Indeed, the fact that platforms such as Pinterest are associated with art-related content, whereas TikTok is linked to popular, low-quality entertainment, signals this generational shift. Platform

preferences (e.g. Twitch versus Pinterest, Instagram versus Reddit) have become new markers of belonging or stigma. Here, taste in these digital youth cultures actively produces symbolic boundaries and forms of exclusion, as in those aligning with "highbrow" consumption, dismissing TikTok users as unserious. Exclusionary dynamics demonstrate how digital dispositional competence functions as a new form of stratification, with implications for how young people access legitimacy, recognition, and community. The so-called digital taste (North et al., 2008), therefore, acts simultaneously as a resource for the inclusion and a mechanism for symbolic exclusion, reproducing broader cultural hierarchies in the digital sphere.

This analysis extends Bourdieusian frameworks by demonstrating how symbolic boundaries shift with technological mediation while remaining partially anchored in long-standing hierarchies of legitimacy.

From a methodological standpoint, this chapter demonstrates an innovative approach for the exploration of cultural consumption based on surveys. The tradition, in this sense, vastly relied on self-reporting preferences of pre-classified cultural goods (Bourdieu, 1979; Le Roux & Rouanet, 2010; Tian et al., 2025). This empirical stance tackled such a very specific technique.

Following Bourdieu's empirical school, cultural analysis based on MCA is based on declared preferences towards cultural goods or categories. Yet, in algorithmically crated, flow-based environments, much consumption occurs semi-consciously through exposure rather than deliberate choice. Consumption of cultural goods becomes a co-constructed experience between the user and the algorithmically curated flow (Airoldi & Rokka, 2022). TO capture this flowing essence of platform experiences, the present approach adopts towo main sources of consumption variables: frequency measures and categorical variables generated post hoc from opend-ended questions. This allows us to understand the complexity of content flow, distinguishing between *being exposed* and content that Is perceived as *actually watched*.

First, frequency variables capture perceived exposure. Past research has already adopted frequency variables for cultural consumption (Gayo-Cal et al., 2006; Kahma & Toikka, 2012), although less attention has been paid to the apparently passive consumption practices typical of most contemporary platforms. These experiences are not defined a priori, as in television schedules (Siles & Valerio-Alfaro, 2025), but are shaped by users' interactions (i.e. watch time, likes, comments) and their inferred tastes. Hence, this study employs frequency variables, handled as ordinal categorical variables, to capture this nuance of consumption. Their projection into the Euclidean space generated by the MCA allows us to understand the main axes characterising such predominant categories of exposure.

Second, categories of preferred content capture what is perceived as actually watched. To this end, I avoided pre-defined categories, as used in past research, and instead adopted an inductive approach (Albrecht & Archibold, 2023) due to the vast range of potential categories. Open-ended questions about content preferences were automatically analysed using dictionary-based techniques to extract categories directly from responses (see e.g. Pandey et al., 2023; Popping, 2015). The rationale behind this choice is that the meaning of cultural objects is historically contingent and contextually re-signified, particularly when mediated by algorithmic filtering. Rather than assuming stable categories, this approach demonstrates the need for inductive mapping of tastes that is sensitive to how digital platforms co-construct cultural consumption.

In line with the findings from Chapter 7, this chapter also found gender struggles characterising the main dimension of platform consumption. The polarisation observed in Axis 1 aligns with Bridges' concept of gender capital (Bridges, 2009), framing masculinity as a field-specific form of cultural capital that gains value within particular social contexts. Just as bodybuilders pursue an idealised masculinity valued within their community, platform users perform masculine identity through deliberate content choices, selecting certain categories whilst rejecting those associated with femininity. These user-generated symbolic boundaries are then reified and reproduced by recommender systems, which internalise and amplify gendered logics through content visibility management (see e.g. Rama et al., 2023). IN the case of this chapter, the low exposure to make-up content, despite its continued contribution to Axis 1, suggests that masculine identity is partly constructed through the active rejection of traditionally feminine interests. Moreover, videogames occupy a revealing position here: whilst female gaming is a growing phenomenon that challenges established masculine norms (Austin, 2022; Lopez-Fernandez et al., 2019; Walkerdine, 2006), gaming remains relevant to masculine identity performance within this axis.

Drawing on sociological perspectives on youth cultures, consumption patterns both reflect and reinforce how gender is constructed, performed, and experienced amongst young people in contemporary societies (Deutsch & Theodorou, 2010; Nayak & Kehily, 2013). Accordingly, Axis 1 can be interpreted as opposing two different approaches to pursuing prominent forms of gender[8], rather than representing simple gendered consumption patterns.

Overall, this chapter demonstrates how the dispositional dimension of practical digital literacy in algorithmic environments constitutes a fundamental component of digital competence, one that operates through embodied performances of gender, platform-specific fluencies, and the navigation of algorithmically curated content flows rather than through traditional socioeconomic inheritance alone.

[8] It is relevant to underline that by "prominent forms of gender" I mean that the data enhance stronger, as well as consolidated forms of gender identity. Hence, in the present analysis, non-binary forms are underrepresented.

Chapter 9. Structured understanding

Youth cultures today are inextricably bound up with the digital spaces they inhabit. Platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Twitch are no longer mere media for communication or entertainment; they are dynamic, lived environments where young people forge identities, express politics, and contest social norms. This chapter offers a close exploration of how contemporary Italian teenagers enact and experience their digital lives, with a particular focus on structured competence: a dimension of practical digital literacy that moves beyond individual skills to capture the socially embedded, collectively produced outcomes of routine online engagement. Through a combination of computational ethnography, visual analysis, and advanced linguistic techniques, the chapter maps how the structured dimensions of digital participation, influenced by algorithmic infrastructures, become visible in both the content young people encounter and the ways they interact with it.

The study builds on a growing body at the intersection between youth cultures and media studies, which focuses on the content young people consume (shaping their imaginaries, identities, and political awareness) and the practices they engage in (commenting, meme-making, challenge participation, and content creation). Where earlier research emphasised political mobilisation (Gerodimos, 2008), recent studies foreground ephemeral media, memes, and platform-specific practices (Bainotti, 2024a; Giorgi & Rama, 2024; Kobilke & Markiewitz, 2024), revealing the ever-shifting contours of digital youth cultures.

At the heart of this chapter is Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualisation of habitus as a "structuring structure". This generative matrix of dispositions both shapes and is shaped by the social environment (Bourdieu, 1980, p. 55). Accordingly, by structured competence I refer to the "regulated improvisations" (Bourdieu, 1980, p. 57), which blend creativity with constraint, allowing individuals to navigate digital environments in ways that are at once unique and recognisably patterned. Yet the scope of social media practices that could be analysed in this context is potentially infinite. For the empirical purposes of this chapter, I focus on gendered practices, understood as both the social media practices through which users reproduce gendered structures and the gendered logics that recommender algorithms internalise and manifest through content recommendation. The rationale behind this choice is that platformised gendered practices emerged in both Chapter 7 and 8 as a key site of struggle, with male-identified participants often reinforcing narrow models of masculinity and female participants frequently challenging gendered stereotypes. This guides an in-depth analysis of both algorithmic flows (what is recommended) and user practices (how comments shape and are shaped by engagement). The analysis is organised into two main strands: (1) visual analysis of thumbnail videos to trace gendered themes, narratives, and aesthetic conventions surfaced by TikTok's recommendation algorithms; and (2) computational analysis of comments to explore the linguistic and performative strategies young people use to discuss, critique, or appropriate gendered content.

Methodologically, this chapter employs computational ethnography (Brooker, 2022), a hybrid approach that bridges the traditional depth of ethnographic research in digital environments (Airoldi, 2018; Caliandro, 2018; A. Markham, 2020) with large-scale computational analysis. Data collected via TikTok profiles created ad hoc to mirror youth experiences (Bounegru et al., 2022; Bruschi et al., 2024) is heterogeneous, encompassing both text-

based and visual data points. The analysis therefore merges visual qualitative interpretation with state-of-the-art computational techniques, including word embeddings, t-SNE, PCA, UMAP, and dependency parsing, to reveal semantic, syntactic, and thematic patterns that remain hidden to traditional small-scale approaches.

9.1 Literature review

Further elaborating on the consumer culture perspective introduced in Chapter 7, youth cultures in digital environments have been examined through a dual focus on what young people consume and how they actively participate online. Scholars have observed that both the content circulating across platforms and the practices that structure engagement provide entry points into the dynamics and typical features of youth cultures. While the boundaries between these perspectives are not rigid, distinguishing them helps to clarify the main directions taken by research in this field.

9.1.1 The what: exploring youth cultures through content consumed

Research exploring youth cultures on social media has long relied on the lens of content consumption to map the distinctive features of youth engagement in digital environments. This approach considers what young people watch, follow, and share, and how such choices reveal their cultural logics, values, and even political orientations. Early contributions in this line of inquiry often highlighted how youth exposure to online content could facilitate their political mobilisation and civic participation. For example, Gerodimos' (2008) study on the mobilisation of British youths through websites offers an empirical analysis of how digital platforms functioned as spaces where young users encountered political messages and developed awareness of civic issues. This consumer-oriented perspective suggests that media content shapes not only the scope of political socialisation but also the imaginaries through which young people interpret their roles as citizens.

In more recent years, this content-centred approach has expanded to account for newer formats, particularly those emerging on platforms like TikTok. Scholars have examined, for instance, the popularity of social media challenges as new forms of youth engagement (Kobilke & Markiewitz, 2024). Bainotti's (2024a) analysis of ephemeral content on TikTok demonstrates how temporary visibility and fleeting attention function as platform affordances that shape youth consumption cultures.

Other studies draw attention to the aesthetic and cultural trends popularised by teenage girls during the coronavirus crisis. Kennedy (2020) highlights how the TikTok dance and the so-called *e-girl* aesthetic not only dominated digital spaces but also demonstrated the centrality of gendered identities in shaping contemporary youth cultures. Moreover, parallel concerns emerged in research on hypersexualisation. Soriano-Ayala and colleagues (2023), for instance, explored how minors themselves perceived this process. Findings suggest that, whereas some view their own self-sexualising content as a form of self-empowerment, similar behaviour in others, especially girls, is often stigmatised, seen as objectifying, and linked to bullying or harassment.

These examples illustrate that over the last two decades, research on youth cultures has expanded its scope to encompass cultural artefacts, aesthetic vernacular practices, and the associated risks of this consumption. By analysing what young people engage with, whether political websites, challenges, dance trends, or ephemeral

videos, scholars shed light on how youth cultures are shaped, contested, and circulate within the fluid ecosystem of social media.

9.1.2 The how: exploring youth cultures through social media practices

Another significant stream of research investigates youth cultures through the platform vernacular practices that structure their participation in digital spaces. This approach shifts attention from what is consumed to what young people do on platforms, whether through comments, memes, or self-produced content. More specifically, commenting has been especially valuable, again, for understanding how youth communicate and engage politically. For example, Marquart, Ohme, and Möller (2020) explore how following politicians on social media affects political information, peer communication, and youth engagement, showing that comment threads often operate as arenas for discussion, critique, and informal deliberation. Literat and Kligler-Vilenchik (2019) similarly, emphasise the role of affordances and memetic dimensions in shaping youth collective political expression, pointing to how practices such as remixing or humorous adaptation become means of voicing political views. Sveningsson (2015) adds another layer by examining how young people treat social media as a pastime while still encountering news about public affairs, suggesting that practices of browsing and commenting enable unexpected forms of political awareness.

Beyond politics, research has also highlighted how content production practices serve as vehicles of cultural resistance. Berwick's (2024) study on humour and resistance in school-related TikTok trends demonstrates that young people creatively perform against institutionalised narratives, turning platform grammars into tools of critique and self-expression. A significant development in this practice-focused literature concerns memes, which are increasingly recognised as central to youth cultures. Memes, indeed, reveal how humour and irony are mobilised to mark distinctions between age groups (Giorgi, 2025), but also their contingent nature, strictly bounded to timing and context, highlights their complex, stratified cultural power (Giorgi & Rama, 2024), especially when it comes to teenage discourses.

Together, these studies portray practices as not merely technical interactions with digital environments but as vernacular, symbolic and performative acts that structure youth participation. Through commenting, challenging, and meme-making, young people do not simply consume culture but actively reshape it, creating alternative spaces of political expression, resistance, and generational identity (see e.g. Airoldi, 2022). This research stream underscores how these vernacular practices both respond to and transcend the content available, positioning youth as active agents whose cultural logics are best understood through what they create and perform rather than only through what they consume. By foregrounding practices, scholars can capture the fluidity, inventiveness, and resistance embedded in the everyday platform vernacular practices of youth cultures, showing that the meanings of social media emerge through performance as much as through consumption.

9.1.3 Structured understanding as opus operatum

The purpose of this chapter is to examine how youths' shared and dispositional understandings of digital experiences shape actual, vernacular practices within social media environments. In other words, the structured dimension that is explored in the present chapters is the materialisation in actual practices of the shared and

dispositional competencies that emerged in Chapters 6 and 7, respectively.

In Bourdieusian terms, this involves exploring the practical digital literacy as a competence embedded in the habitus, functioning as a "structuring structure," thereby enhancing its generative nature. Practical digital literacy, indeed, reflects the dynamic nature of habitus, which continuously adapts to new experiences while also reproducing existing social patterns. As a result, it produces behaviours that are at once creative and constrained by historical and social conditions. Bourdieu describes this as the "infinite yet strictly limited generative capacity" (Bourdieu, 1980, p. 55), whereby contextually appropriate practices emerge without conscious planning. Such a "regulated improvisation" (ivi) operates at a pre-reflexive level and resonates with Lizardo's (2017) notion of *nondeclarative culture*, where embodied competence develops through repeated exposure to social patterns, as a form of tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1966).

This chapter also considers the structured outcomes of practical digital literacy, examined through the observable products of vernacular practices. Bourdieu refers to this realm as the *opus operatum*, which, in contrast to the generative schemes (*modus operandi*), represents the "structured products of structuring operations" (Bourdieu, 1972, p. 72). In other words, the vernacular practices analysed here embody the crystallisation of past actions into social order. However, these outcomes are not static. They remain dynamic because they are continually re-enacted, modified, or challenged through new practices. What follows, therefore, is a snapshot of the current structured outcomes that shape youth cultures in their engagement with social media and their grammars.

Moreover, due to the intrinsic sociotechnical nature of social media experiences, as broadly confirmed in past empirical cases, the present chapter considers how the development of these shared and dispositional competences is also integrated into algorithmic systems. This builds on the concept of *machine socialisation* by Airoldi (2021a). This concept captures the process through which algorithms acquire culturally meaningful capacities and become active participants in social life. Drawing an analogy with human socialisation, he argues that algorithms are not simply neutral technical artefacts but systems that gradually internalise social patterns and dispositions, thereby contributing to the reproduction and transformation of culture. Human socialisation, in classical sociology, refers to the way individuals internalise norms, values, and rules to act competently within society (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Bourdieu, 1979). Airoldi adapts this idea to algorithms, suggesting that they too undergo a trajectory that moves from abstract design to embedded participation in social practices.

This process begins with what he calls the *deus in machina* stage (Airoldi, 2021a), in which algorithms are programmed and designed by engineers with specific grammars and function. At this point, the system's architecture reflects not only technical decisions but also the institutional and cultural contexts in which it was produced. The second stage involves exposure to large, generalised datasets, through which algorithms acquire a form of "global socialisation." Much like the acquisition of broad societal norms during human development, algorithms internalise cultural regularities, distinctions, and classifications embedded in data, a dynamic that Airoldi frames as culture in the code. Finally, in the stage of "local socialisation," algorithms are deployed in specific contexts where they interact with particular users and fields of practice. Here, they adapt to localised expectations and behaviours through mechanisms such as personalisation and recommendation. This last phase enables them to generate outputs that are perceived as relevant and culturally intelligible, thereby embedding them within

everyday practices.

Machine socialisation, therefore, emphasises that algorithms are not fixed or merely technical entities, but dynamic systems shaped by, and shaping, their environment. By internalising vernacular patterns at both a global and local level, algorithms acquire dispositions that guide their operations in ways comparable to Bourdieu's notion of habitus. In turn, once socialised, they begin to influence cultural reproduction by filtering, categorising, and structuring information flows, a process that Airoldi identifies as code in the culture. In this sense, the concept of machine socialisation offers a crucial theoretical framework for understanding algorithms as social actors situated within a continuous feedback loop between technological design, cultural data, and everyday practices.

To this end, the present chapter draws on an empirical case to examine how a specific aspect of practical digital literacy, such as performing gender, is both reflected in commenting practices and internalised by the recommender algorithm, thereby reproducing this cultural practice through the recommendation process.

RQ3. How does youths' practical understanding of platforms guide their social media practices?

9.2 Methodology

My empirical strategy builds on a case study selected as an entry point to examine more closely the structured and visible dimensions of practical digital literacy. The methodological stance is therefore oriented toward investigating how youth cultures enact and negotiate masculinity and femininity.

Across Chapters 7 and 8, gender consistently emerged as a central axis shaping youth consumer cultures in social media environments. In group interviews, gender surfaced as a recurring site of struggle, marked by negotiation, resistance, and the reproduction of stereotypes. Male-identified participants frequently objectified content perceived as feminine and reinforced narrow models of masculinity, whereas female participants challenged gendered norms, revealing dynamic tensions in digital identity and power relations.

This dynamic was also evident in the mapping of social space, where the first principal axis contrasting forms of consumption was structured around stereotypical, gendered practices. Beauty and relational content were associated with the performance of feminine identities, whereas sports and video games were associated with the performance of masculine ones. These polarised patterns represent distinct forms of gender capital, that is, resources mobilised by youth to perform and validate gender identities within both social and digital contexts (Bridges, 2009).

Such processes unfold simultaneously "in the culture," through everyday social media practices, and "in the code," through algorithmic infrastructures that recommend, amplify, and organise cultural expressions. To account for this dual dimension, the study employs a computational ethnography approach. This method enables a critical engagement with both the lived practices of users and the systemic dynamics of platforms, examining how cultural categories are enacted in interactions while also being reproduced through algorithmic logics (Brooker, 2022).

9.2.1 Computational ethnography

The concept of computational ethnography builds on traditions of digital ethnography, which have demonstrated the value of integrating online interactions into broader social ecologies (Caliandro, 2016; Lingel, 2017; A.

Markham, 2020; Orgad, 2010). Digital ethnography has expanded the scope of ethnographic inquiry by recognising that digital environments are not detached spaces but deeply entangled with offline practices, identities, and communities. It provides tools for examining how digital and physical domains co-constitute cultural realities.

Digital ethnography approaches are part of a broader system of ethnography approaches to explore digital realms. For example, Caliandro (2016) disentangled digital ethnography from netnography and the ethnography of virtual worlds. *Netnography* adapts traditional ethnographic techniques to online communities, with particular attention to forums, social media groups, and other forms of digital gatherings. Ethnography of Virtual Worlds focuses on immersive, multi-user environments, such as MMORPGs or virtual reality platforms. Researchers using this approach study user behaviours, social interactions, and cultural artefacts within these virtual spaces, treating them as fully-fledged social worlds where norms, practices, and identities are co-constructed by participants. Digital Ethnography examines the traces that users leave across various online platforms, including social media, blogs, and collaborative environments (Airoldi, 2018). This method emphasises both observational and analytical strategies to study online interactions, digital identities, and the circulation of cultural content.

Computational ethnography extends these traditions by adopting computational techniques that allow researchers to trace patterns across large datasets while maintaining sensitivity to context and meaning (Marres, 2012; Marres & Gerlitz, 2016). Whereas digital ethnography has primarily foregrounded immersion, participation, and situated observation, computational ethnography incorporates analyses of algorithmically mediated content flows, such as platform recommendations. As Brooker (2022) observes, users themselves already participate in methodological acts: they experiment with algorithms, interpret recommendation sequences, and make sense of platform logics, as it was for ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1984). What ethnomethodology did for everyday practices, that is, revealing how ordinary people construct and sustain social order, computational ethnography does for digital environments: observing how users, in interaction with data infrastructures, produce cultural order.

Hence, drawing on Brooker (2022) the emphasis on computational ethnography in this chapter is motivated by three interrelated considerations. First, studying youth culture today demands attention not only to what users post, share, and perform, but also to how algorithmic systems structure these practices. A crucial methodological necessity is to treat the recommendation flow itself as a source of data. Indeed, by observing what is surfaced, prioritised, and circulated, one can document how gender performances are co-produced by both human actors and algorithmic processes.

Second, traditional ethnographic observation privileges depth over scale. Computational tools allow this empirical case to explore broader datasets, such as text corpora, and to discern patterns of gendered representation that might remain invisible at the level of individual interaction. For instance, text mining techniques can reveal recurring themes or discursive framing across thousands of comments, without losing sight of the cultural contexts in which they appear.

Third, one of the promises of computational ethnography lies in its contribution to methodological rigour. By documenting data collection protocols, coding processes, and computational techniques, the study enhances its transparency and facilitates the replication of its findings. Standardised computational methods further allow for triangulation between qualitative interpretation and quantitative modelling, thereby reinforcing both internal

validity (the trustworthiness of analysis within the case) and external validity (the relevance beyond the immediate case).

Building on this approach, the study engages more directly with the lived experiences of teenagers and their gendered practices, both in their everyday interactions and in the ways stereotypical gendered assumptions shape algorithmic flows. To access this field, the research adopts the so-called persona method (Bounegru et al., 2022).

Due to the increasingly personalised media ecosystem, heavily relying on the circulation of behavioural data fed into recommender algorithms, Bounegru and colleagues (2022) noted that the current analytical approaches are inclined to capture either the *view from above*, that is, the computational, large-scale tracking of information (see e.g. Airoldi, 2018), or the *view from within*, characterised by ethnographic, lived accounts of user experiences (see e,g, Pink et al., 2016). Drawing on digital methods (Rogers, 2013), ethnography and participatory design (Boellstorff et al., 2012; Marshall et al., 2020), and speculative methods (Wilkie et al., 2015), the research persona method solves this tension by employing *personas* as a sociotechnical device to study how personalisation is produced, encountered, and experienced. By personas, this approach refers to fictional profiles created and inhabited by researchers, which are activated within digital platforms to probe how personalisation flows produce content experiences. These profiles are used to simulate subject positions and platform vernaculars, enabling access to personalised feeds, algorithmic recommendations, and back-end data that would otherwise be difficult to study.

In the present empirical case, the type of research persona adopted is speculative. As Bounegru and colleagues (2022) explain, speculative personas draw on detailed character-building techniques informed by theatre practices and socio-cultural knowledge to probe the affective and cognitive resonances of algorithmic recommendations. Rama and colleagues (2023) adopted a similar approach by creating 10 user accounts on Pornhub, with different self-declared gender identities to investigate heteronormative assumptions in the sign-up procedure.

This approach resonates to a certain extent with the so-called sock puppet method (Boellstorff, 2015; Hine, 2015), retaining its key advantages: manual platform exploration and focus on actual human experiences. However, it expands its scope and boundaries by including a large-scale analysis of data collected during the exploration of the various personas. The persona method also allows the researcher to account for both how recommender algorithms mirror platform structures and norms, and how users are exposed and make sense of these processes.

The following section, therefore, introduces two personas (Federico and Sara) that guide access to the field: one representing a self-identified male and the other a self-identified female. The two personas are inspired by actual participants from the school fieldwork. They are not representations of specific individuals, but rather characters constructed based on the principal categories that emerged from the MCA analysis and the most commonly consumed content identified during the discussions. In other words, these personas reflect a stereotypical characterisation, chosen deliberately to focus the analysis on the most prominent patterns in the data. While the study could be expanded to include a broader range of more nuanced personas, doing so would have required significantly more time, resources, and computational effort.

9.2.2 Outlining two gendered personas

The male persona is modelled on Federico, an 18-year-old football player. He is sociable and often cracks jokes during class, though without being disruptive. Teachers sometimes laugh along with him, and he is perceived not as a problematic student but as an energetic and lively presence.

Federico's main passion is football. He plays for a local amateur team and spends much of his free time either training or discussing the sport. He supports *AC Milan*, follows the club's official profiles on Instagram, and frequently watches match highlights on TikTok, which he considers a quicker and more entertaining source than traditional media. For him, football is not only a hobby but also a central theme in his conversations with peers.

In terms of friendships, he is particularly close to Alessandro and Carlo, classmates with whom he often exchanges remarks during lessons and who share his humorous and extroverted nature. Socialising plays a central role in his identity: he enjoys hanging out at the bar near school for quick snacks, playing five-a-side football matches in the evening, and spending weekends at pizzerias or fast-food restaurants with friends.

When it comes to digital practices, Federico embodies a typical teenager's hybrid consumption. He follows several Twitch streamers, although he rarely attends live sessions; instead, he prefers the short compilations and clips that surface in his TikTok feed. His favourite streamers include Blur and Marzone[9]. Federico also uses Instagram, but more for maintaining his social presence through photos and stories, while TikTok is the platform where he actively discovers trends, memes, and sports-related content.

His style combines sporty and casual elements, with sneakers, hoodies, and branded sportswear dominating his wardrobe. He is attentive to trends launched by influencers, especially those connected to football or streetwear culture. While not overtly rebellious, Federico values independence, jokes about school rules, and navigates between conforming to expectations and asserting his youthful liveliness.

The female profile is built around Sara, a 17-year-old student. She is sociable and enjoys being part of the group, though her liveliness is expressed in different ways. She is known for her sharp remarks about classmates, small bits of gossip, and observations about school life.

Her main interests revolve around beauty, fashion, and lifestyle. She frequently watches TikTok videos about makeup routines, skincare tips, and everyday school-related jokes. Gossip content also captures her attention, especially short clips about celebrities, influencers, or popular dramas circulating among Italian teenagers. For Sara, TikTok is both a source of entertainment and a way to stay updated with trends and conversations that she and her friends later discuss at school.

Sara's closest friends are Giulia and Martina, with whom she shares inside jokes. Their afternoons often involve studying together, scrolling TikTok side by side, and commenting on gossip about classmates or online personalities.

In terms of platform use, Sara maintains an Instagram account where she posts curated photos of outings or selfies with friends, but she considers TikTok the real space of fun and community. Her algorithm pushes school-related

[9] Blur and Marzone are figures in the Italian digital entertainment scene, particularly known for their activities on platforms like Twitch and YouTube.

skits, trending dances, and lifestyle micro-influencers. For her, following creators is less about deep engagement and more about keeping up with relatable or amusing content that sparks conversation with peers.
Her style reflects the influence of TikTok trends: crop tops, oversized sweatshirts, and sneakers are staples, often mixed with accessories that echo popular aesthetics like "clean girl" or "soft girl." While not rebellious, Sara enjoys experimenting with looks, makeup, and filters to showcase her identity.

9.2.3 Stage 1: Access and immersion in the algorithmic flow

Once the personas were defined, TikTok was selected as the platform for conducting the computational ethnography. Although teenagers today consume content across a variety of platforms, often engaging in processes of legitimisation or contestation with respect to these environments (as discussed in Chapter 7), TikTok remains a shared reference point for the vast majority of adolescents encountered during the scholastic fieldwork. While the platform is no longer used exclusively by teenagers, it continues to function as one of their primary spaces for content consumption and interaction, consistently emerging across the profiles of the young people involved in the study.
The fieldwork began with the creation of two TikTok profiles based on the previously described personas. During the sign-up process, TikTok requires users to select their preferred categories of content to initiate the recommendation flow. For each profile, these categories were chosen based on responses to the open-ended survey question, "Which are your favourite categories of content?". Answers were filtered by gender and analysed using a dictionary-based method, and the most frequently mentioned categories were assigned to the corresponding persona.
Once the profiles were created, the next step was to follow accounts. Here, the choices were guided by another open-ended survey question, "What are your favourite profiles on social media?". The most frequently mentioned accounts were systematically followed by the personas to establish a baseline network of content sources.
After completing this initial setup, both profiles were gradually introduced to TikTok's algorithmic flow. For one month, the accounts were used to scroll through the feed, with activity deliberately oriented toward consuming the predefined categories of interest. Interaction with content was facilitated through extended watch time, liking, and saving, in order to reinforce the visibility of these themes and align the algorithmic recommendations with the personas' identities.

9.2.4 Stage 2: data collection through digital methods

Once the profiles were sufficiently calibrated, I initiated the data collection. The process followed two complementary dimensions, corresponding to exploring the gendered dimension of the code through the algorithmic flow and of the culture, via the structured practices.
The first step involved reaching the point of saturation, a well-established threshold according to which additional data would introduce little, if any, additional information in the development of the ethnographic categories (see e.g. DiStefano & Yang, 2024; Glaser & Strauss, 2017; Gold, 1997). After a sustained period of interaction, the majority of content recommended by the algorithm aligned with the expectations derived from the personas' descriptions. At this stage, the profiles consistently received videos that reflected their predefined categories of

interest, providing a reliable basis for systematic data collection.

The second step involved exploring the algorithmically curated flow. For each profile, thirty videos were retrieved using Zeeschuimer, a browser extension developed by the Digital Methods Initiative that enables data collection during social media browsing (Bainotti & Rogers, 2022; Peeters, 2023). Thumbnail images were then extracted from each video, generating a dataset that captured a visual snapshot of the recommendation flow associated with each persona. This dataset enabled assessment of the algorithmic distribution of content categories and provided a comparative view of how gendered preferences materialised in the feed.

The last step directed attention towards the discursive practices accompanying recommended content. For each retrieved video, the complete set of comments was collected through Zeeschuimer again. These comments were examined as instances of structured practices, illustrating how users interact with and negotiate meanings around the algorithmically surfaced content. The analysis of these interactions allows us to access what boyd (2010a, 2014) defined as networked publics, that is, socially constructed digital spaces wherein users constantly negotiate relationships, engage with culture, and, more broadly, construct identity. In other words, these are environments hosting various social processes, and in which youth cultures are active agents (Gerrard, 2025)

9.2.5 Stage 3: Analytical strategy

The analytical strategy is organised into two main sections. The first focuses on how masculinity and femininity are reproduced through content recommendations, examining the structured outcomes of practical digital literacy as reflected in algorithmic flows. In parallel, these structured practices are analysed through the comments, allowing for a deeper understanding of how gendered identities are expressed and negotiated within the comment sections. It is important to note that the empirical case of gendered identities allows us to observe how shared and dispositional understanding (the first two pillars of practical digital literacy) are reproduced in action. The analytical strategy is divided into two main sections, each following a different agent: the recommender system and the user. Both sections draw on the digital methods tradition (Caliandro, 2018; Rogers, 2013). Nonetheless, on the one hand, exploring the structured logics behind recommender algorithms is inspired by an approach termed "follow the algorithm" (Airoldi et al., 2016). Such an empirical stance relies on tracing the outputs of the algorithm to understand how cultural flows are shaped. Here, the algorithm is not a neutral technical tool but an active cultural agent that organises visibility, genres, and trends.

On the other hand, tracing data generated by users (i.e. comments) is linked to an epistemological lens defined as "follow the user" (Caliandro, 2024), which is centred on reconstructing meanings, practices, and cultural logics based on online traces, behaviours and practices, which represent primary data.

First, the analysis focuses on exploring cultural traits embedded in the code, specifically how masculinity and femininity are reproduced through content recommendations. This is addressed through a thematic visual analysis (Bainotti, 2024a; L. N. Braun & Mateus, 2024) of the 64 recommended videos, which allows for an examination of the types of content to which each persona is exposed. Metadata, including hashtags and automatically assigned categories, is also considered to support the interpretation. Given the relatively small number of videos in the sample, the analysis was conducted entirely qualitatively, allowing for a rich and detailed description of the content

categories. Due to the limited amount of content, this phase was conducted qualitatively. The purpose of this approach is to observe how the algorithm curates and structures content consumption through the lens of two distinct gendered identities, highlighting patterns in imagery, themes, and visual narratives that reflect gendered practices.

The second analytical section focuses on exploring structured practices on TikTok, with particular attention to commenting behaviours. This is achieved by examining differences in word usage through the analysis of word embeddings. This technique represents words as vectors in a high-dimensional space, allowing the identification of patterns and relationships between terms across large corpora (Boutyline & Arseniev-Koehler, 2025). In addition, dependency-parse trees are employed to investigate the grammatical and semantic relationships surrounding specific words, capturing the contextual "neighbourhood" of meaning and revealing how concepts are framed in relation to others (see e.g. Costola et al., 2021; Di Caro & Grella, 2013). For example, the term *"girls"* serves as a central node, enabling an exploration of how different genders construct and negotiate meanings around this concept.

To operationalise this approach, more than 26,000 TikTok comments were collected from videos recommended to both male and female personas and subjected to extensive preprocessing. This included the removal of user tags, emojis, and special characters, followed by tokenisation and filtering for Italian stopwords. The gender assignment of each video grouped words from these comments, then mapped them into a semantic space using *FastText* Italian word vectors (Marulli et al., 2019; Petrolito & Dell'Orletta, 2018; Rollo et al., 2024). This allowed the construction of embedding matrices tailored to reflect the vocabularies associated with each gender context.

The data were then projected into three dimensions using three complementary dimensionality reduction techniques. t-SNE (t-distributed Stochastic Neighbour Embedding) was employed to preserve local word relationships, ensuring that words with similar meanings or contextual usage appear near each other and allowing subtle semantic clusters to be visualised (Cai & Ma, 2021). PCA (Principal Component Analysis) provided a linear transformation that concentrates variance in fewer dimensions, exposing dominant trends and broad patterns in the word embeddings (Musil, 2019; Raunak et al., 2019). UMAP (Uniform Manifold Approximation and Projection) integrated both local and global structural preservation, helping to detect intricate groupings and broader associations within the comment corpus (Ordun et al., 2020).

Interactive 3D scatter plots of these reduced embeddings, colored according to video gender, helped visualise how commenting practices and conceptual associations differ across audiences. Further, nearest-neighbour analyses based on cosine similarity illuminated the semantic neighbourhoods surrounding key terms, demonstrating how meanings are constructed and negotiated based on the gendered context of algorithmic video recommendation.

In addition to word embeddings, the corpus has been parsed to extract part-of-speech tags, named entities, and dependency relations. These relations identify how tokens (in simple terms, words) depend on and modify one another within sentences, generating a structured network of grammatical links that captures the role and context of each word in detail.

From these parsed outputs, bipartite networks were constructed where source nodes represent dependent tokens (e.g., adjectives modifying nouns) and target nodes represent their syntactic heads, forming edges based on

dependency types (such as subject, object, or modifier) (see e.g. Kong et al., 2014; Santagiustina & Warglien, 2022). After filtering and cleaning, these networks were transformed into Document-Feature Matrices (DFMs) representing both single words and dependency-based word associations across comments grouped by video gender.

This approach allows the exploration of how specific words, such as "ragazza" (girl), function within their syntactic neighbourhoods, illuminating the logical and semantic frames that surround them in the comment sections. Using interactive egocentric graph visualisations of these dependency networks facilitates a qualitative interpretation of how commenters engage with and construct meanings related to the social media worlds associated with femininity and masculinity. Rather than analysing gendered practices of the users themselves, since user gender is not known, this method examines how the thematic and symbolic dimensions of femininity and masculinity, as represented by the videos, are reflected and negotiated through language in the comments.

Together, the embedding-based clustering and dependency parsing provide a multifaceted view of language use that integrates statistical patterns and explicit syntactic relationships, enabling a deeper understanding of how the "girl" and "boy" social media worlds are commended upon and meaningfully constructed in these online spaces.

9.3 Findings

Findings are grouped around the visual analysis for Federico and Sara's respective accounts. Then, the last section explores structured practices in the comments.

9.3.1 Structured masculinity in the flow

The analysis of the collected thumbnails reveals a rich and structured set of visual and thematic patterns that embody contemporary youth masculinity in TikTok's algorithmic flows[10].

[10] Most of the images shown are either blurred or stylised in cartoon form to safeguard the anonymity of content creators. All thumbnails are taken from public profiles, and when the subject appears in the image, it is from accounts that collaborate with brands, thus demonstrating an intention to be publicly visible. Nevertheless, since some of these creators are relatively small influencers, I chose to apply stylisation to minimise the risk of unwanted exposure.

Distinct levels of entertainment and thematic focus organise the most prominent categories in the analysed TikTok thumbnails. Scripted entertainment frequently appears in meme-like formats featuring green screens, filters, and in-image texts, with content mostly centring on the school experiences, but also on broader issues. These are often playful and ironic, including parodies of travel bloggers that subvert expectations. For instance, the content creator *Taver Nello* does the same by suggesting coffee shops for cannabis in Amsterdam rather than typical tourist destinations. Street interviews and social experiments contribute to a lighthearted and interactive dimension. More specifically, memes form another dominant category, especially those manipulating video contexts, sometimes isolating faces and applying different backgrounds, thereby shifting the meaning.

Figure 12. Collection of images exemplifying scripted entertainment (left and centre) and memes (right)

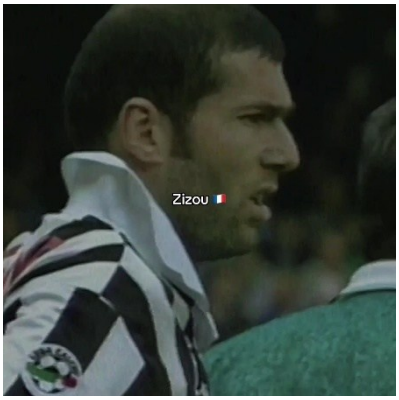
Unscripted entertainment includes in-person meme icons. For instance, Andrea Dipré, whose exaggerated persona references well-known "trashy" online culture from YouTube in Italy. Moreover, the "clips" genre features short,

Figure 13. Collection of images exemplifying unscripted entertainment (left) and clips (right)

humorous or intense edits primarily sourced from Twitch lives, presenting streamers in moments of anger, gossip, and sometimes violence.

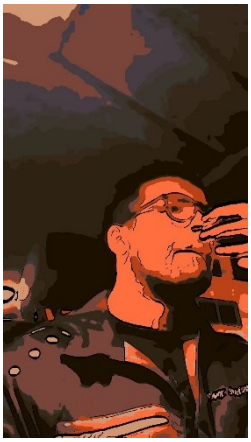
Social issues content, such as that produced by Geopop, stands out for its educational value, offering accessible explanations of various phenomena from a scientific perspective. Sports content is pervasive, mostly devoted to football and coverage of celebrated teams and streamer-led championships. Humour connected to sports at school, physical education challenges, and freestyle juggling further reinforce this theme. Sports videos alternate between group representations, thus highlighting camaraderie and belonging, and individual scenes that evoke a sense of heroism.

Figure 14. Collection of images exemplifying social issues (left) and sports-related content (right)



Car and motors content provides a mix of serious reviews and humorous takes, such as playful examinations of the Citroen "Ami". Lifestyle content features everyday manual activities like gardening and construction, grounding the feed in practical, relatable experiences. Motivational content is structured around "alpha" moments, pairing admissions of vulnerability with energic calls to discipline and self-improvement, typically delivered through enthusiastic vocal performances.

Figure 15. Collection of images exemplifying lifestyle (left), motivational (centre), and car-related content (right)



Noticeably absent in the feed are references to makeup, beauty routines, and gossip about celebrities or influencers, underscoring a distinct gendered curation. There is an underlying tension throughout the sampled content between chillness and exaggerated gestures, embodied by personalities like Blur, an Italian Twitch streamer who blends humorous screaming with relaced detachment, and others amplify motivation with intense outbursts. The prevalence of streetwear styles further signals cool detachment.

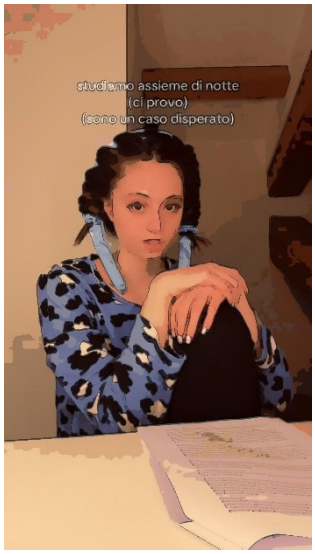
Content oscillates between solitary performances, favouring scripted humour and introspective emotion, and social group dynamics, where teamwork and relaxed improvisation prevail. Even when a video features only one individual, the sense of group production is maintained through camera work and off-screen contributions. Live interactions exemplify a feeling of brotherhood among participants.

TikTok's meme logic remains central, favouring video-based humour such as manipulated clips and context swaps rather than static images. Drama and gossip are present in two primary forms: one exemplifying camaraderie, as when a streamer stands up for a friend, and another fostering intimacy through direct address to the virtual audience. Masculinity is visually encoded as a balance of informality, chill group belonging, and energic gestural display, most commonly situated in everyday, informal environments such as bedrooms.

9.3.2 Structured femininity in the flow

The analysis of the female persona's TikTok feed reveals several distinctive features that set it apart from the male persona's stream. Notably, there is a presence of videos featuring male individuals, which contrasts with the previous examples (Section 9.3.1). The content primarily consists of solitary performances and shows a more complex and layered engagement with school-related themes, including videos set within school, discussions about exams and teachers, as well as study-related interactions outside of school.

Figure 16. Collection of images exemplifying solitary performances

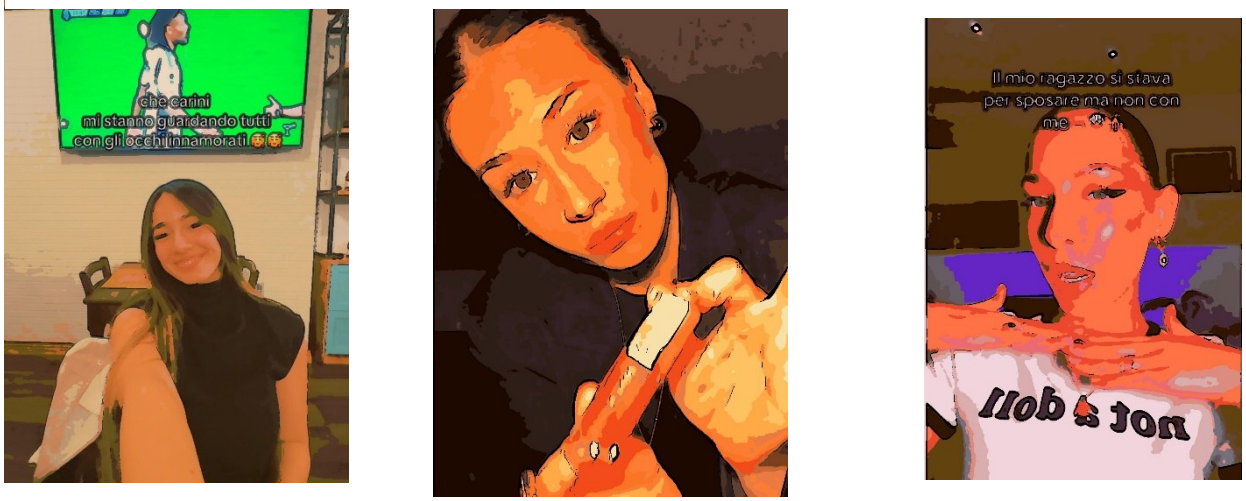


Politics-related content is present, broadening the thematic scope beyond what was observed in the male feed. Artistic interests are also more prominent, with references to television programs about dance (i.e. *Amici*), literature (e.g. *My Brilliant Friend*), and podcasts that focus on true crime. While entertaining content remains highly prevalent, the gossip tends towards lighter, less confrontational topics rather than aggressive themes.

Figure 17. Collection of images exemplifying podcasts (left), and other artistic interests (centre and right)

Other common formats include unboxing videos and personal storytelling, which often recount everyday life experiences. Irony exists but is delivered in a calmer, less exaggerated manner than in the male persona's feed. Sports content is minimal or absent, marking a clear difference in cultural focus.

Figure 18. Collection of images exemplifying everyday life storytelling



Like the male feed, the female feed also promotes a sense of parasocial relationship. According to psychological research, parasocial relationships refer to nonreciprocal socio-emotional connections with media figures such as celebrities or influencers (Bond, 2016; Chung & Cho, 2017; Hoffner & Bond, 2022). However, a key distinction exists between the two feeds. The female feed features everyday events and themes that closely reflect the experiences of the average teenage girl, fostering a connection not through active involvement in a social group but as part of a broader community sharing similar feelings and behaviours. Indeed, the overall tone emphasises horizontality and normalisation, with emotional vulnerability presented as a taken-for-granted part of everyday life,

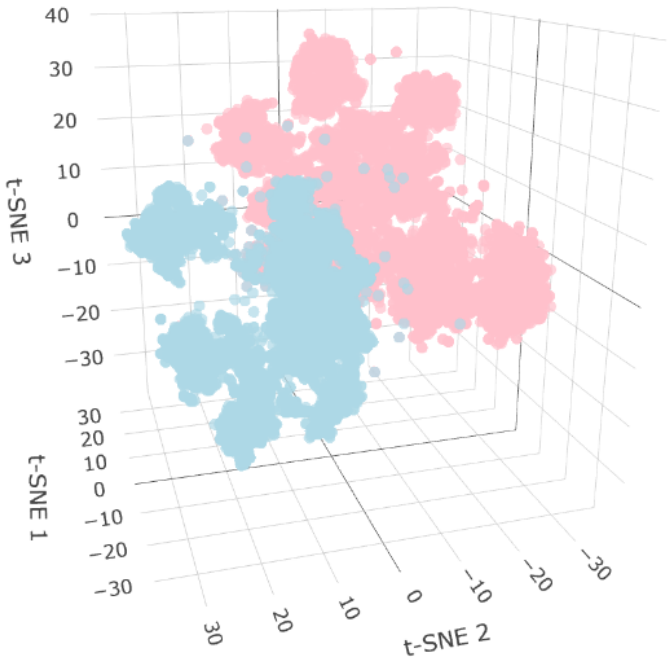
rather than dramatised or mystified. In contrast to the male feed, where parasocial bonds arise from idealising social groups and collective identities, the female feed centres on idealising the individual persona, encouraging viewers to relate to or look up to the featured person. Therefore, while the male feed cultivates parasocial engagement driven by a desire for group belonging, the female feed builds parasociality through a sense of friendship or identification with the individual in the content.

This diversity in content and presentation reflects a feed that encourages openness and everyday sharing of emotions, contrasting with the heightened performativity and collective dynamics noted for the male persona.

9.3.3 Structured practices in the comments

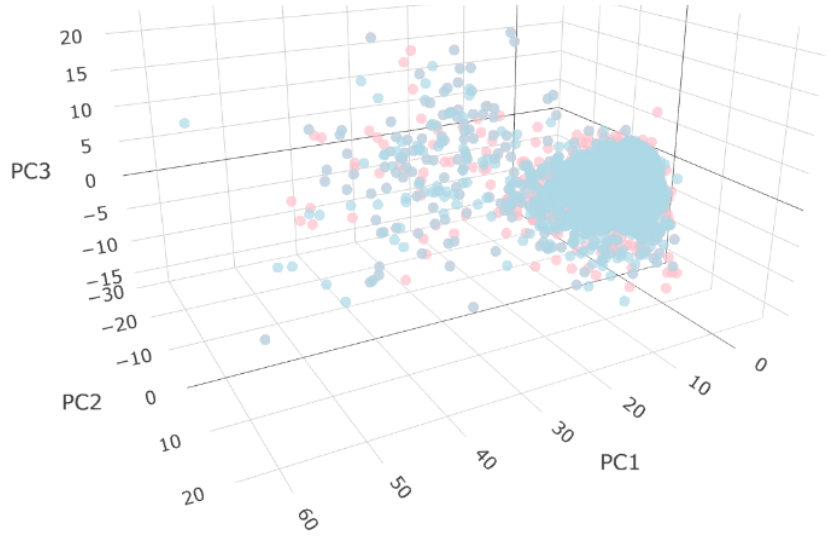
The 3D t-SNE visualisation of the TikTok comments reveals groups of embeddings within comments of respectively male and female feeds. In the girl-labelled clusters, words like "mancanze" (shortcomings/lack), "presunzione" (arrogance), and "pressione" (pressure) appear, reflecting a discourse oriented toward self-evaluation, emotion, and social commentary. Male-labelled clusters, by contrast, contain terms such as "abbandona" (he/she/it abandons), "pratico" (practical), and "preciso" (precise), suggesting a more action-oriented and pragmatic vocabulary. Areas of overlap show shared tokens like "scuola" (school) and "prof" (informal diminutive for professor), pointing to common ground in the teenage experience. However, as Jeon and colleagues (2025) remember, these apparent separations should not be read as direct semantic distances, but rather as exploratory views that flag neighbourhoods of gender-specific language realms, later validated with PCA, UMAP, and syntactic analysis.

Figure 19. 3D t-SNE of word embeddings coloured by video gender (male in blue, female in pink)



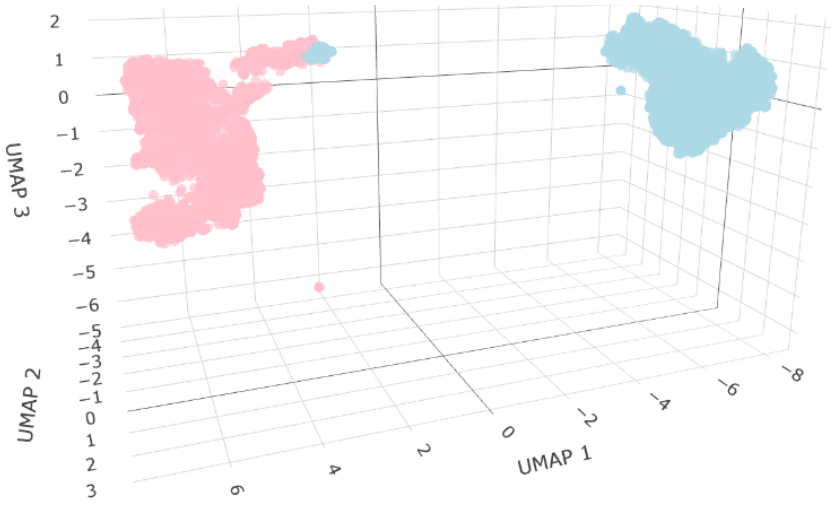
The PCA projection emphasises the broad variance in the commenting practices between masculine and feminine realms, resulting in two clouds of points that partly overlap but remain distinguishable. Within the female cloud, vocabulary such as "prestazione" (performance) and "mancanze" (shortcomings/lack) signals an orientation towards authority, judgement, and relational concerns. On the male side, terms like "preferito" (favourite), "preferisco" (I prefer), and "practica" (practice) highlight choice, preference, and competitive stance. The overlap regions contain neutral everyday tokens, such as "classe" (classroom) and "scuola" (school), which serve as linguistic bridges across the recommendation streams. Because PCA preserves global distances more faithfully than t-SNE, this map further confirm the two distinguished semantic spaces introduced by the t-SNE, although there are a great area of intersecting vocabularies.

Figure 20. 3D PCA of word embeddings coloured by video gender (male in blue, female in pink)



The UMAP projection reveals the clearest fragmentation into gender-specific islands of vocabulary. Female-associated islands include the exact words introduced in the previous dimensionality reduction techniques (e.g. "mancanze", "presunzione", "pressione"), which cluster around themes of emotional expression, evaluation, and social critique. Male islands, by contrast, are populated by "preferito" (favourite), "preciso" (precise), and "pratico" (practical), signalling a lexicon of pragmatic action. The presence of mixed neighbourhoods confirms the presence of shared teenage experiences cutting across algorithmic bubbles. Unlike PCA, which emphasises global variance, or t-SNE, which stresses local neighbourhoods, UMAP balances both, producing compact clusters that expose sub-communities of discourse shaped by the gendered recommendation pathways.

Figure 21. 3D UMAP of word embeddings coloured by video gender (male in blue, female in pink)



9.3.3.1 Dual semantic meanings behind structured practices

The dimensionality reduction techniques revealed overlapping yet distinct semantic worlds derived from structured commenting practices on TikTok. However, this approach outlines broader patterns of embeddings, and dependency parses are employed to investigate specific syntactic word contexts. The use of *bridge* tokens, as in the case of "scuola" (school) and "preferisco" (I prefer), provides a starting point. These terms are indeed appearing in both the male and female algorithmically curated flows, yet their roles and resonances differ significantly in each context. To better understand these differences, the analysis shifts from merely identifying word frequencies to examining each term's function within entire sentences, as mapped by dependency parse trees.

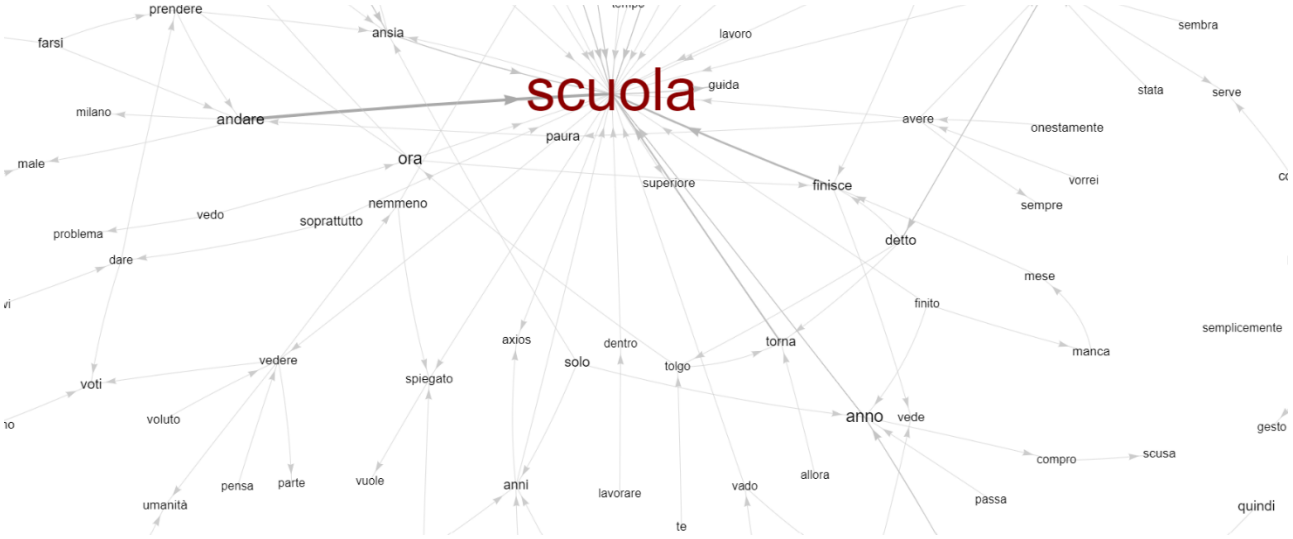
By parsing the syntactic structure of comments containing *bridge* tokens, it becomes evident that the same word can occupy different semantic and relational positions in male- and female-associated content. Due to the inability to incorporate an interactive network, this section will present two prominent examples that emerged most strongly from the numerous bridge tokens: "scuola" and "preferisco". The selection of the two terms is intentional, since they are rooted in both their lexical prevalence across both algorithmic flows and their potential to reveal deeper distinctions.

"Scuola" stands out for its frequency and affective charge shared in both streams, directly reflecting a central site of teenage life. By choosing a word so deeply embedded in the daily experience of both female and male users, the analysis avoids artificial or niche vocabulary, instead capturing an effective common ground.

This term enabled examination of how the same referent is semantically framed differently depending on the gendered context of the recommendation. In female flow, dependency parse trees show "scuola" frequently associated with verbs and adjectives expressing emotion, relationality, and evaluation. Note how the term is closely

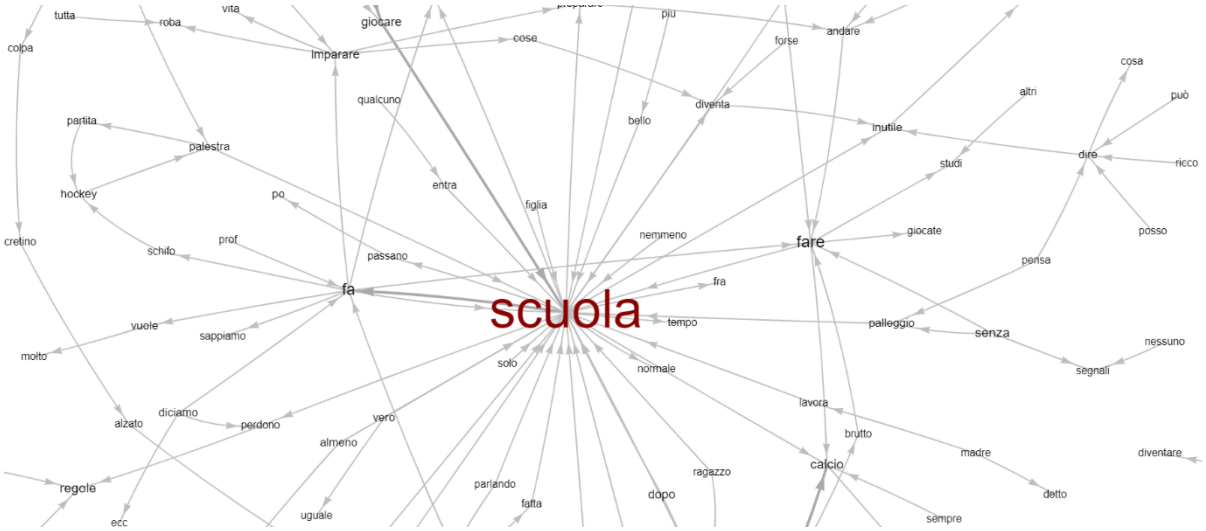
related to "paura" (fear/worry) and "ansia" (anxiety) in Figure 15. These syntactical patterns indicate a discursive world where school is framed as a site of emotional labour, interpersonal judgment, and performance anxiety.

Figure 22. Words association network for *scuola* in female-recommended content



In the boy-related flow of content (Figure 16), by contrast, "scuola" more often links to verbs of action, participation, and competition, suggesting a pragmatically oriented, activity-centred engagement with the same institution. Given the semantic environment's greater focus on action, the school becomes a space for practices, competitions, and group dynamics, reinforcing a pragmatic orientation. The pointed term indeed relates to verbs such as "fare" (to do), names of sports – for instance, "calcio" (soccer) – and other sport-related actions, as in "palleggio" (juggling a ball).

Figure 23. Words association network for *scuola* in male-recommended content



The second bridge token is "preferisco" (I prefer/like), which serves a strategic purpose given its syntactic flexibility and capacity to illuminate differences in both the objects of preference and modes of expression. As a performative verb, "preferisco" reveals not only what is preferred but also how preferences are linguistically realised and toward whom or what they are directed.

In comments from the female persona, this verb often takes people's personal experiences or affective states as its objects ("preferisco" → "vinca" → "Alessia", as in I prefer Alessia to win), underscoring a relational and subjective orientation. Moreover, the same is often linked to personal experiences, as in the case of "preferisco" → "puntura" → "tatuaggio" (i.e. I prefer the sting of the tattoo). This anchors the presence in affective dispositions and personal taste, confirming a subjectivity that is both relational and introspective.

Figure 24. Words association network for *preferisco* in female-recommended content

In male-centred comments, "preferisco" is more typically paired with objects, activities, or pragmatic scenarios. For instance, the chain "preferisco" → "macchina" → "usata" → "10k" (i.e. I prefer buying a second-hand car for 10,000 euros) foregrounds an instrumental reasoning and choice, confirming the pragmatic nature introduced in the previous term. This syntactical distinction, revealed by dependency analysis, demonstrates how the algorithmic environment may predispose users to express preferences in ways that align with broader, gender-linked communicative styles.

Figure 25. Words association network for *preferisco* in male-recommended content

However, while the preceding analysis illustrates clear gendered distinctions in commenting practices shaped by TikTok's recommendation algorithms, it is important to recognise that these boundaries are not impermeable. Occasionally, content achieves such virality, or algorithmic ambiguity, that it crosses over and engages both female- and male-targeted audiences within the same comment section. This dynamic was vividly apparent in the ethnographic observation of a video featuring teenage girls filming themselves at school, where the accidental visibility of the shape of a nipple under a dress became the focal point for a surge of public commentary[11]. Here, the conversation exhibited a revealing collision of discursive styles: comments oscillated between irony and playful banter, often echoing norms associated with male user communities. At the same time, other remarks adopted a more critical or protective tone.

This convergence is not merely anecdotal, since it is also reflected in the syntactic analysis. Dependency parse trees of comments containing the word "capezzolo" (nipple) reveal how the same content elicits structurally and semantically distinct responses from different audiences. While the recommender system generally segments users into distinct echo chambers by tailoring flows to specific gender identities, highly visible or controversial content can temporarily dissolve these partitions, drawing in multiple audiences. When this occurs, each group interprets and comments on the content through the lens of its own structured practices and expectations, highlighting different aspects, concerns, or forms of engagement.

[11] Image is not provided to guarantee the anonymity of the content. The video was produced by a non-verified, thus non-professional account.

Figure 26. Words association network for *capezzoli* in female-recommended content

Such episodes underscore that, although algorithmic curation tends to reinforce gendered discursive worlds, moments of crossover expose both the flexibility and the friction of these boundaries. They demonstrate that structured commenting practices are not rigidly confined by algorithmic logic but are occasionally reconfigured when different audiences are unexpectedly brought together around the same viral phenomenon.

9.4 Discussion and conclusions

The present chapter develops the last pillars of practical digital literacy, namely, structured competence. Such a nuance of digital competence draws on Bourdieu's notion of habitus as a structuring force. Here, practical digital literacy is explored through actual practices, structured as the opus operatum according to individual habitus and the sense of the rules of the fields (Bourdieu, 1980). The approach engages with a broad debate about digital youth cultures, which is summarised into two main trajectories for the sake of this Chapter. On the one hand, scholars

have explored what young people watch, follow, and share to understand their broader cultural logics, values, and political orientations. (see e.g. Bainotti, 2024a; Gerodimos, 2008; Kobilke & Markiewitz, 2024). On the other hand, scholars have centred their understanding of digital youth cultures on practices and cultural production, which together generate a complex system of platform vernaculars at the heart of their platformised everyday lives (see e.g. Giorgi, 2025; Giorgi & Rama, 2024), which are interiorised and reproduced through recommended content by platform algorithms (Airoldi, 2021b).

To this end, the methodological strategy relied on a computational ethnography (Brooker, 2022) based on two TikTok profiles constructed from the findings of Chapters 7 and 8, each reproducing a stereotypical gendered persona: Federico and Sara (Bounegru et al., 2022; Bruschi et al., 2024). This approach allowed, first, the qualitative analysis of visual content to explore how structured forms of consumption are embedded in algorithmic recommendations. Second, the vast amount of comments retrieved from each video was mapped through word embedding and dependency parsing trees, offering macro and micro perspectives on structured practices behind comments. Moreover, due to the marked emergence of gender as the main driver for youth cultural distinctions (see Sections 7.3.2.4 and 8.7), the analysis also focuses on how gender identities are sociotechnically constituted and negotated through platform practices.

Findings reveal that TikTok thumbnails from Federico's and Sara's feeds reveal distinct yet overlapping patterns of gendered content curation, reflecting structured youth masculinities and femininities within algorithmic flows. Federico's masculine feed features a rich array of categories, including scripted and unscripted entertainment like memes, street interviews, and Twitch clips; educational social issues from creators like Geopop; pervasive sports content evoking heroism, camaraderie, and school challenges; car reviews; lifestyle tasks such as gardening; and motivational "alpha" moments blending vulnerability with energetic self-improvement. These exhibit patterned aesthetics, including exaggerated gestures, chill streetwear, and a balance between solitary introspective performances and group dynamics that emphasise brotherhood, all situated in informal settings like bedrooms, with a complete absence of makeup, beauty routines, or celebrity gossip.

In contrast, Sara's feminine feed, while dominated by entertainment, introduces greater nuance and seriousness, particularly in complex school-related themes encompassing exams, teachers, emotions, and study interactions, alongside politics, arts references like Amici dance shows or My Brilliant Friend literature, unboxing videos, and personal storytelling. Sports are minimal or absent, irony remains calmer without loud reactions, and emotional openness prevails through normalised vulnerability and horizontality, fostering parasocial relationships via individual relatability and friendship rather than the male feed's group idealisation, though both cultivate intimacy through relatable cues.

Commenting practices further delineate these gendered realms, as dimensionality reduction techniques confirm. 3D t-SNE visualisations cluster feminine embeddings around self-evaluation, emotion, and social commentary (e.g., "mancanze," "presunzione," "pressione"), while masculine ones emphasise action-oriented pragmatism ("abbandona," "pratico," "preciso"), with overlaps on shared teen tokens like "scuola" and "prof." PCA reinforces two distinguishable semantic spaces, feminine oriented toward relational judgment ("prestazione," "mancanze") and masculine toward preference and competition ("preferito," "practica"), intersected by common vocabulary,

while UMAP sharpens fragmentation into gender-specific islands balanced by mixed neighbourhoods of shared experiences.

Dependency parsing of bridge tokens like "scuola" and "preferisco" elucidates syntactic nuances: in feminine contexts, "scuola" links to emotional terms ("paura," "ansia"), framing it as a site of labor and anxiety, whereas masculine uses tie it to action and sports ("fare," "calcio," "palleggio"), positioning school for competitions and groups; similarly, feminine "preferisco" targets relational or introspective objects (e.g., people or affective states), while masculine preferences favor pragmatic scenarios (e.g., "macchina usata 10k"). Viral crossovers, such as comments on "capezzolo" in school videos, expose porous boundaries, blending male irony with female critique and revealing algorithmic flexibility amid reinforced gendered discursive worlds.

The concept of structured practices contributes to a broad array of literature. In the field of digital literacy studies, this chapter introduces a dimension of practical digital literacy grounded in its structured dimensions, that is, the patterned practices shaped by interiorised dispositions towards platform experiences. This approach enriches ongoing debates within digital literacy studies, particularly the emerging discussions around AI literacy and engagement with algorithmic media. While recent scholarship has addressed the growing presence of AI-based tools across various social domains, notably education (see e.g. Ciampa et al., 2023; Huang & Derakhshan, 2025; Kalantzis & Cope, 2025a, 2025b), sociocultural and critical perspectives on user interaction with algorithmically curated environments remain comparatively underexplored (Atias & Mawasi, 2025). Here, the notion of structured practices of practical digital literacy offers an ontological lens for examining how users' dispositions are enacted through everyday engagements with platform infrastructures, and reciprocally, how these systems learn, embed, and mirror such dispositions. The visual analysis of recommended content presented in this study reinforces this argument by revealing how algorithms reproduce interiorised forms of gender distinction, one of the main structuring forces behind youth cultural consumption (further discussed in Chapters 7 and 8). Moreover, framing digital competence as a patterned social action highlights its continuous reproduction through situated platform uses. This expands established approaches in digital literacy research, which often rely on self-reported survey scales (Peng & Yu, 2022), discourse-based analysis (A. Markham, 2022), or educational interventions (Wuyckens et al., 2022). In contrast, the concept of structured practices foregrounds contextualised and spontaneous forms of digital competence as they naturally unfold within specific sociotechnical settings of youth culture. It thus provides a practice-theoretical understanding of digital competence that links skills and knowledge to the concrete, routinised interactions constituting participation in algorithmic platform ecologies.

This chapter also advances epistemological and methodological innovations by further developing the literature that employs persona methods within digital inquiries (Bounegru et al., 2022; Bruschi et al., 2024; Marshall et al., 2020). It elaborates an overarching framework that enables the adaptation of previous chapters' findings into new studies grounded on two personas, which grants access to a broad spectrum of data. The resulting framework underpins a flexible form of computational ethnography (Brooker, 2022) capable of addressing a range of issues, including users' identity management, collective platform rituals, and algorithmic logics. Here, data collection within this framework is scalable, ranging from small-scale, explorative qualitative inquiries, as seen in the visual analysis, up to advanced large-scale analysis, increasingly consolidating in the platform and critical algorithm

literatures (see e.g. Airoldi et al., 2016; Caliandro et al., 2024b; Rama et al., 2023). More precisely, rather than employing computational techniques simply as measurement instruments for pattern consolidation, this chapter uses them as exploratory tools by leveraging the flexibility of word embeddings (Boutyline & Arseniev-Koehler, 2025). On one hand, embeddings are essential for calculating semantic distances within a multidimensional co-occurrence matrix; on the other hand, they can be projected in ways that enable more qualitative and exploratory forms of inquiry. The present chapter offers a dual perspective, covering both macro and micro levels. More precisely, exploration at the macro level of the embedding can be carried out through visualisations generated by dimensionality reduction techniques (see e.g. Cavallo & Demiralp, 2018; Liu et al., 2018). Due to the high dimensionality of the aforementioned embedding matrix, these techniques are algorithms that transform these vectors into lower-dimensional spaces, while preserving as much meaningful structure as possible. Moreover, the micro level is approached through dependency parsing trees (see e.g. Costola et al., 2021; Di Caro & Grella, 2013; Kong et al., 2014; Santagiustina & Warglien, 2022), a technique not yet widely used in this research area, but showed significant potential. While embeddings capture relational distance between words, they often lose syntactic context. Dependency parsing addresses this limitation by assigning each token its grammatical role within a sentence. Mapping these parsed sentences allows the identification of common linguistic constructs that reflect shared habits of expression. When the dataset is further divided by variables (i.e., gender, in this case, due to the two datasets generated for each persona), this method enables comparison of syntactic compositions across structured practices within platformised environments. Such an approach opens up a wide range of possibilities for future research.

In addition to the contributions that target specific literatures through the lens of the present work, this chapter also contributes to broader literatures, with media studies being the first. In particular, investigating structured platformised practices allows us to engage with the debate around the concept of clustered audiences (Gerbaudo, 2024) or, in general, how contemporary algorithmic media shape audiences (see e.g. Airoldi, 2023; Bainotti, 2024a; Caliandro et al., 2024b; Lin & Siles, 2026; Siles et al., 2019, 2024). The notion of clustered audiences, in fact, offers one of the most fitting descriptions of audience formations in the current generation of platforms. While the social dimension of audience activity appears to recede in favour of fragmented neighbourhoods of interest, such clusters, I argue, are far from being purely algorithmic artefacts. What has received insufficient attention is the social and cultural process through which these neighbourhoods become entrenched: users do not merely occupy algorithmically defined clusters but actively invest them with particular social meanings and expectations. For instance, when individuals share content about their classmates, as in the case reported in the previous Section 9.3.3, they imagine it as an inside joke targeted at a limited circle of peers. Yet, recommendation algorithms redistribute this content to unintended audiences, thereby collapsing boundaries between distinct neighbourhoods. This disjunction can generate discomfort or even conflict, revealing how algorithmic clustering and social interpretations intersect. Consequently, clustered audiences are not merely technical formations but sociotechnical constructions that blend boyd's notion of networked audiences (boyd, 2014) with Gerbaudo's conception of clustered publics. They emerge through a dynamic process in which codified users and socialised algorithms co-produce cultural boundaries and audience meanings.

As emerged in Chapters 7 and 8, this research contributes to gender literature. Gender, here, emerges as a sociotechnical performance that is continuously enacted and negotiated through digital consumption practices. Such a conceptualisation heavily draws on the performative role of gender (see e.g. inter alia Butler, 1990; Jurik & Siemsen, 2009; West & Zimmerman, 1987), which has recently been expanded towards the digital realm (see e.g. Andreevskikh & Muravyeva, 2021; V. Arvidsson & Foka, 2015; Gurrieri & Drenten, 2019). According to what emerged in this chapter, gender is expressed through acts of consumption and is reified through algorithmic recommendation systems, which encode and circulate gendered logics. In this sense, recommender algorithms do not operate in a culturally neutral manner; rather, they reproduce and reinforce gender distinctions by promoting certain categories while intentionally neglecting others. This selective visibility (Gruszka & Böhm, 2022) constitutes a form of boundary work, through which algorithmic systems contribute to the stabilisation of gendered norms. At the same time, individuals perform gender through the consumption choices they make and the aesthetic sensibilities attached to them (C.-P. Chen, 2016; Thornham, 2019). Each gender expectation in contemporary culture corresponds to distinctive categories, practices, and platform vernaculars. Examining these dynamics offers a more nuanced understanding of gender struggles in youth cultures, where a single cultural category may carry multiple aesthetic meanings and support different forms of gender performance. Youths thus mobilise digital consumption practices to position themselves within, or against, culturally dominant forms of masculinity and femininity, as seen in other contexts (see e.g. Deutsch & Theodorou, 2010; Duffy, 2012). Together, these dimensions highlight that gendered practices are embedded within broader processes through which digital platforms are appropriated for identity management. Even within algorithmic environments that may appear as passive or automated, toung users actively negotiate and reinterpret gendered categories. Unlike the more overt self-presentation strategies that defined early social networking sites, today's algorithmically mediated platforms give rise to subtler but more complex forms of negotiation. These structured practices serve the ongoing process of boundary work and identity construction, as the platform's logics are internalised and expressed through the circulation and consumption of recommended content.

Despite these contributions, the chapter is not without limitations. Most notably, the analysis relies on a limited set of personas, modelled after the three principal components identified in Chapter 7. While this allows for depth and comparability, it inevitably overlooks nuances associated with less dominant or intersectional identities (e.g., non-binary, queer, or culturally hybrid youth). Future research should expand the spectrum of personas to capture a fuller range of digital subject positions and cultural repertoires. Additionally, while visual saturation was achieved for the sampled feeds, a larger corpus of videos and comments would likely reveal further subtleties, especially in the discursive negotiation of gender across diverse content categories. The current study's focus on TikTok, while justified by its centrality in Italian youth culture, also invites comparative analyses across platforms with different affordances and user demographics.

In sum, this chapter demonstrates that structured competence, the practical, embodied, and socially embedded dimension of digital literacy, is a vital lens for understanding youth cultures in the age of algorithmic media. Examining the co-production of cultural practices by users and machines reveals how digital environments are both sites of cultural reproduction and arenas for identity struggle. The chapter's theoretical and methodological

innovations lay the groundwork for future research that is attentive to the fluidity, infrastructure, and power dynamics of social media as lived experience. By taking the "structured outcomes" of practical digital literacy seriously, scholars can better capture the complex, evolving realities of youth participation in digital public spheres. These realities are as much about coded infrastructures as they are about lived culture. This perspective not only enriches our understanding of contemporary youth but also offers critical insights for platform designers, educators, and policymakers seeking to navigate the challenges and possibilities of algorithmic socialisation in the 21st century.

Chapter 10. Concluding remarks

This dissertation has shed light on how young people practically understand their experiences with social media platforms. By bridging youth perspectives into dialogue with digital literacy and platform studies, I introduced the concept of practical digital literacy. I defined this as a shared and dispositional understanding, expressed through structured practices and discourses, that youth cultures use to navigate social media. Rather than seeing digital literacy as a set of discrete skills that can be measured and reduced, I argue it should be understood as an ongoing process of enculturation.

Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's practice theory (Bourdieu, 1972, 1980, 1996), I conceptualise social media practices as rooted in a practical, often tacit knowledge: a *sense for the game*. Digital literacy, indeed, unfolds through a complex web of competencies that are at once technical and social, often overlapping rather than neatly divided (Weninger, 2022). Some of these competencies are explicit, such as an awareness of technical measures to prevent or address potential harms, while others remain implicit, embedded in everyday practice and below the threshold of awareness. These are also shaped through a tension between platform strategies and habitual forms of appropriation (Bonini & Treré, 2024). In today's media ecology, where social media deeply intersects with identity-making and relationship management, digital literacy becomes the practical sense of what feels appropriate when moving through digital spaces. This process of enculturation is inseparable from the influence of recommender algorithms, which play an active role in shaping platform experiences (Airoldi & Rokka, 2022). Their role highlights the sociotechnical nature of platforms and is especially relevant in the so-called second generation of social media, where user experience is driven by an algorithmically curated flow of content (Gerbaudo, 2024).

The methodology is based on the three dimensions of practical literacy: shared, dispositional, and structured. Shared and dispositional dimensions are addressed through a fieldwork involving a sample of Italian high schools to examine how teenagers collectively understand and negotiate the concept of social media and how individual dispositions shape distinctions in use. This fieldwork took the form of embedded lessons (Dennen & Rutledge, 2018), combining lectures on life on social media with group interviews (to capture discourses) and a survey (to capture dispositions). I then explored the structured dimension, which emerges from the interaction of the other two dimensions in actual social media practices. To this purpose, the analysis relies on two TikTok profiles based on male and female adolescent personas (Bounegru et al., 2022; Bruschi et al., 2024) that reflected the most common traits identified in earlier phases of research. After aligning the recommender algorithms to selected content categories, thirty videos from each profile's feed were collected to examine how recommendation systems reproduce enculturation processes. I also collected comments from each video to map patterns across the two recommendation flows, one oriented toward masculine-inferred and the other towards feminine-inferred content.

The first empirical chapter (Chapter 6) shows how practical digital literacy emerges as a shared competence among Italian teenagers through their discourses about social media experiences. This chapter builds on the qualitative analysis of the group interviews and observations conducted within the school fieldwork.

The analysis uncovered sophisticated forms of early, primary platform enculturation, where teenagers develop

collective knowledge through peer-mediated learning processes. Participants demonstrated a nuanced understanding of platform-specific rules, social norms, and participation expectations, which emerged through ongoing social negotiation and information exchange. This enculturation process revealed itself as fundamentally social, challenging individualistic conceptions of digital skill acquisition.

Moreover, the chapter explores the complex, current practices of distinction that operate as forms of digital cultural capital within peer cultures. Teenagers deployed evaluative frameworks for assessing content quality, distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate forms of participation, and maintaining symbolic boundaries around appropriate platform behaviours. These practices revealed how traditional Bourdieuian concepts of taste and distinction manifest in digital environments, with participants demonstrating awareness of what constitutes *good* versus *bad* content across different platform contexts.

Lastly, findings outlined a nuanced relationship with recommender systems within algorithmically curated flows of content. Two main paradigms emerged from this analysis. On the one hand, the content consumed is the one that somehow *stands out* from the flow of content, thus going beyond the threshold of attention. These are what I call *algorithmic standouts* and represent the primary form of consumption with regard to the aforementioned second generation of platforms. On the other hand, this chapter introduces the concept of algorithmic *copiloting*, that is, the practices of appropriation through which participants engage with recommender systems to shape their content experiences. Rather than passive consumption, therefore, students enact practices such as tactical liking, searching, content flagging, and automated behavioural responses to train algorithms according to their preferences. These practices revealed two distinct modes of engagement: conscious tactical interactions aimed at steering algorithmic recommendations, and more reflexive, habituated responses that nonetheless influenced algorithmic learning processes.

This chapter fundamentally challenges media concerns about and around young people being passive users of algorithmic media (see e.g. Brand et al., 2024; Jovicic, 2020). By introducing the concept of *algorithmic copiloting*, the research demonstrates how teenagers exercise forms of agency through appropriation practices within platform constraints, actively collaborating with algorithmic systems rather than simply consuming their outputs.

The theoretical contribution extends the concept of digital literacy by adopting a Bourdieusian lens. Understanding these competencies as a *feel for the game* showed how shared digital literacies emerge through peer cultures and everyday platform engagement, providing empirical evidence for bottom-up approaches to digital competence that prioritise lived experience over deficit-oriented skill frameworks.

Methodologically, the chapter contributes by demonstrating how traditional ethnographic approaches can be adapted to capture the sociotechnical nature of contemporary platform experiences. The integration of group interviews within educational settings provided access to collective sense-making processes while avoiding the artificial isolation of individual digital practices from their social contexts.

The second empirical chapter (Chapter 7) explores the dispositional dimension of practical digital literacy. Here, the aim is to highlight how individual dispositions and social background structure patterns of social media consumption among the participants of the school fieldwork. Through Multiple Correspondence Analysis of survey data (see e.g. Flemmen et al., 2018; Glevarec & Cibois, 2021; Le Roux & Rouanet, 2010), the research

mapped the main axes or factors contrasting social media consumption, therefore allowing us to understand how social distinctions manifest within digital fields.

The analysis revealed that consumption practices are organised along defined axes, with the primary dimension (accounting for 63% of the variance) structured around gendered content preferences. This neat polarisation is demonstrated by patterns where beauty, lifestyle, and relational content are aligned with feminine performances, while sports, gaming, and technical content are associated with masculine ones. The analysis revealed this gendering as deeply embedded rather than superficial, structuring not just content choices but entire modes of platform engagement. Moreover, the MCA demonstrated how various scholastic contexts, functioning as social environments, translate into distinct platform participation strategies. Students attending classic studies, for instance, showed preferences for content and activities that enhanced their cultural distinction, such as engaging with artistic or news-related content. In contrast, participants attending scientific studies prioritised peer-oriented consumption practices focused on social connection, entertainment, and community building.

This approach revealed how habitus operated in digital environments, showing that seemingly individual platform preferences actually reflect deeper dispositional orientations acquired through various stages of socialisation.

This chapter makes three main contributions. First, it adapts Bourdieu's analysis of cultural taste to digital environments, demonstrating how established sociological frameworks remain relevant for understanding contemporary media practices. The research shows that digital consumption practices can be understood as expressions of shared generational and socio-cultural dispositions, with taste operating as a form of symbolic capital in digital fields. Second, the chapter advances scholarly understanding of digital inequality by moving beyond simple access-based explanations to examine how different social groups deploy digital technologies in qualitatively different ways. The study reveals that digital divides operate not just through differential access to technology but through differential modes of cultural engagement that reproduce existing social hierarchies. This challenges celebratory accounts of digital democracy while providing empirical evidence for how social reproduction occurs in platform societies. Third, methodologically, the chapter demonstrates the efficacy of Multiple Correspondence Analysis for investigating the role of social background in digital consumer cultures. The research extends established quantitative approaches from offline cultural consumption to digital environments, providing a rigorous framework for mapping complex relationships between social position, cultural capital, and digital consumption patterns. This offers a replicable approach for comparative research across different contexts and platforms.

The third empirical chapter (Chapter 8) explored how the shared and dispositional dimensions of practical digital literacy manifest in actual platform practices through a computational ethnography of TikTok. using research personas (Bounegru et al., 2022; Bruschi et al., 2024), namely Federico and Sara, based on findings from earlier chapters, I collected 60 videos and over 26,000 comments to examine how gendered practices are co-produced through the interaction of algorithmic recommendations and user practices. The choice of this empirical case has been motivated to centre the focus on the main dimension characterising practical digital literacy in previous empirical chapters. This also represents a proxy to understand broader forms of structured practices that characterise youth cultures' social media experience, along with their power dynamics.

The visual analysis of algorithmic flows revealed systematic content segmentation along gender lines that operated across multiple levels. Federico's masculine-oriented feeds emphasised sports content, meme culture, gaming references, and group-oriented activities. Sara's feminine-oriented feeds focused on beauty tutorials, lifestyle content, relationship narratives, and an emergent property of the interaction between user behaviours and algorithmic categorisation systems, with certain content types virtually absent from one feed while dominant in the other.

Computational analysis of commenting practices confirmed and extended these findings through word embedding techniques, dependency parsing, and network analysis. The chapter, therefore, revealed distinct semantic clusters where feminine-associated comments centred on evaluation, emotional expression, and relational critique, while masculine-associated comments emphasised pragmatic, action-oriented language. Even shared terms like "school" carried different semantic valences across gendered contexts, thus evoking anxiety and performance pressure in feminine contexts versus activity, competition, and peer dynamics in masculine ones.

This empirical chapter demonstrated how algorithmic systems and user practices co-construct gendered digital environments through ongoing feedback loops. Users' commenting behaviours provided signals that algorithms incorporated into their recommendation processes, while algorithmic content curation shaped the contexts within which users expressed gendered identities. This co-construction process revealed both the re-production of gender binaries and moments of crossover where viral content temporarily bridged gendered enclaves.

The last empirical chapter further advances theoretical and methodological horizons. First, theoretically, it elaborates critical algorithm studies by demonstrating how structured practices both shape and are shaped by algorithmic audience construction. The research reveals algorithmic recommendation systems as active participants in cultural reproduction rather than neutral reflectors of existing social divisions. The findings echo the notions of mutual domestication (Siles et al., 2019), wherein users and algorithms co-adapt over time, each reinforcing the other's expectations and boundaries through feedback loops between human practice and machine logic. Second, the chapter makes significant methodological advances by embedding the persona method within computational ethnography, offering a replicable protocol for transitioning from traditional in-person fieldwork to digital environments. This hybrid approach captures both the lived experience of users and the infrastructural logic of platforms, enabling researchers to move beyond either pure "big data" analytics or purely ethnographic immersion to achieve a synthetic, multi-perspectival understanding of digital culture. The integration of visual analysis, computational linguistics, and network analysis provides a comprehensive framework for analysing the multi-dimensional nature of digital cultural practices. Third, the research contributes to understanding contemporary youth cultures by revealing how gender performances are negotiated within and across algorithmic boundaries. The study shows how platform infrastructure becomes a site of ongoing cultural negotiation, where traditional gender categories are simultaneously reinforced and contested through everyday digital practices. The chapter advocates for open exploration of youth content consumption, moving beyond analysis of specific viral trends to consider the broader flow of cultural categories that constitute teenagers' everyday digital experiences. This shifts attention from static cultural objects to the dynamic, sociotechnical infrastructure of social media as a site of continuous cultural production and socialisation.

This research has several implications for the study of teenagers and social media. First and foremost, the main contribution is towards the understanding of the phenomenon toay. What made the work of danah boyd groundbreaking nearly fifteen years ago (2008, 2014; boyd & Ellison, 2007) was indeed her ability to enter into the actual social processes enacted by teenagers within social networking websites. From a historical perspective, fifteen years is a very short span of time, yet the phenomenon of digital youth cultures has already changed in multiple ways. Although more recent studies have replicated a similar academic endeavour (see e.g. Gerrard, 2025), my research further contributes to this direction through some innovative dimensions.

First, I have sought to provide a nuanced and structured exploration of youth cultures within social media environments by putting at the centre their own bottom-up understandings of these experiences. Previous work has already emphasised the importance of these perceptions (Gerrard, 2025; Pangrazio & Selwyn, 2018; Weninger, 2022), although what I propose is to bring together different lenses to explore this phenomenon via various, complementary approaches, namely, through discourses, embedded dispositions, and actual practices. In doing so, I argue that practical digital literacy should be understood as a multidimensional lens through which the experiences of digital youth can be explored, offering opportunities for diverse readings and further development.

Second, the approach developed throughout this dissertation expands on boyd's original exploration of digital youth cultures by paying closer attention to the sociotechnical logics that underpin platform experiences. In a media ecology increasingly characterised by algorithmically curated, seemingly infinite flows of content, recommender systems are central to the tension between what platforms want users to do and how users appropriate these spaces of action to make their experiences feel individually and socially meaningful. Despite a growing body of literature on youth perceptions of algorithms (see e.g. Kotilainen et al., 2020; Wiard et al., 2022), current approaches often underestimate the extent to which adolescents have already developed a deep, technically informed understanding of these systems and have incorporated them into the fabric of everyday life. What I aimed to highlight with this dissertation is that teenagers have entered into a relationship with algorithms as actants in their social worlds (Latour, 1987). Rather than treating them as abstract entities, they approach them as forces that shape their experiences, and in turn, they develop practical, shared knowledge that allows them to play with and appropriate platform spaces. This is a crucial step in understanding how youth cultures interact with digital environments today.

Third, this dissertation also contributes to overcoming the still-present prejudice that adolescents are passive users of social media, supposedly rendered addicted and *zombified* by deterministic technologies (Owens, 2025). It is not my intention to dismiss the work on social media addiction: platforms do embed addictive features (Schüll, 2014), foster addictive dynamics among specific populations (D'Arienzo et al., 2019), and are often perceived as addictive by young people themselves, as mentioned in Chapter 6. Yet, contemporary public discourse is strongly influenced by a unilateral perception of social media as inherently harmful to adolescents. Such a framing only tells part of the story. It risks reproducing historically consolidated views of adolescence as a stage of risk that must be shielded from digital environments, leading to conservative stances toward technology (Buckingham, 2008a; Buckingham & Jensen, 2012). Yet digital youth cultures are generating new and vibrant practices that cannot simply be turned off by restricting smartphone use or deleting social media accounts. During this research, I observed shy students

who, struggling to share their niche hobbies offline, found meaningful communities on social media. Platform-based sentimental relationships are also emerging in novel ways (Broeker, 2023; Miguel, 2018). Moreover, I noted how political involvement is being reshaped by social media, bridging entire classrooms into public spaces. At the time of writing, the genocide of Palestinians enacted by Israel has sparked widespread strikes across major Italian cities. In Milan, I personally witnessed thousands of upper-secondary students actively demonstrating, holding banners with hashtags and slogans, and demanding an end to violence. This illustrates how digital competencies extend far beyond the basic ability to use social media safely, linking these skills to wider cultural practices that intersect with social and political events.

Finally, this dissertation points to the importance of not underestimating the way youth cultures internalise social media experiences into broader cultural processes when discussing digital literacy. It is certainly useful to define digital literacy as a system of competencies for positive engagement with digital technologies, especially for large-scale measurement projects or when mapping grassroots practices in specific contexts, as mentioned in Chapter 2. However, the exploration of practical digital literacy shows that young people's understandings and practices are deeply embedded in broader social and cultural dynamics, including power relations (such as gender struggles), cultural distinctions, and the reciprocal shaping of agency between humans and non-human agents, such as recommender systems. Recognising these systemic processes is essential for capturing the full complexity of how social media are integrated into youth cultures.

This dissertation also contributes to the various strands of literature employed to develop the concept of practical digital literacy.

A first point concerns the field of digital literacies studies. In the literature review in Chapter 2, I outlined the historical development of this research branch to show how it has progressively diversified. Whereas top-down and bottom-up approaches had already been identified (Sefton-Green et al., 2009), I situate these research directions within their historical contexts, clarifying how broader perspectives on digital technologies have shaped the way we build conceptual and methodological tools to investigate digital knowledge. Building on this background, the concept of practical digital literacy proposed in this dissertation advances the field in two main directions. On the one hand, it introduces consolidated sociological frameworks, such as that of the theory of practice by Pierre Bourdieu, to analyse digital practices not only as socially situated (Weninger, 2022), but also as part of a wider process of enculturation (Lizardo, 2017, 2022), whereby social media experiences become embedded within individual dispositions. On the other hand, although there is a consolidated understanding of how algorithms shape youth cultures' digital experiences (A. Markham, 2022; Pangrazio & Selwyn, 2018), this dissertation expands this perspective by developing the notion of algorithms as *copilots*. This concept highlights the co-construction of agency within digital environments, where user practices and platform recommender systems intersect. Furthermore, it stresses the specificity of algorithmically curated content flows, which today define much of adolescents' media ecology, with TikTok representing the most emblematic case.

A second point relates to the understanding of digital youth cultures through the lens of platform studies and algorithmic agency. The concepts developed in this dissertation, such as algorithmic standouts and copilot practices (Chapter 6), describe a landscape in which young people have deeply internalised algorithmic logics to appropriate

their platform experiences. In the early 2000s, youth agency was expressed through practices like customising MySpace profiles with HTML code (boyd, 2008; Perkel, 2008). Today, similar forms of creativity and agency are enacted at the level of the algorithmic flow. This expands the notion of algorithmic agency as developed by Bonini and Treré (2024) by showing how young people's practices are not primarily about resisting algorithmic power in a political sense, but rather about appropriating platform spaces through vernacular logics. These practices are crucial for understanding the everyday realities of digital youth cultures.

Finally, this dissertation contributes to the cultural analysis of digital youth cultures, particularly in relation to algorithmically curated flows. Chapter 7 shows how the paradigm shift from a *searching-for-content* logic to one based on exposure through algorithmic recommendation reshapes consumption, revealing new tensions, forms of legitimisation, and power dynamics within the social fields of digital platforms. First, it re-engages with the highbrow-lowbrow model, which had been expected to give way to omnivorous consumption (De Vries & Reeves, 2022; Peterson & Kern, 1996; Savage & Gayo, 2011; Warde et al., 2007). According to this model, participants with higher cultural capital should have displayed more omnivorous patterns. However, the findings suggest otherwise: educational trajectories continue to structure contrasts between so-called sophisticated and popular forms of cultural consumption. In addition, the pursuit of gender identity introduces further distinctions, where masculine and feminine orientations are associated with different modes of consumption. These insights highlight the role of symbolic boundaries, not only in terms of cultural capital but also along gendered lines, in shaping how digital youth cultures engage with platform-based content.

This dissertation also contributes methodologically, particularly by addressing how research on youth and social media can benefit from moving beyond traditional divides between qualitative and quantitative strategies.

Through the concept of practical digital literacy, indeed, I developed an epistemological lens that foregrounds the advantages of a multi-method perspective. By bridging different methods, the research offered an understanding of the practical knowledge guiding social media experiences, providing a nuanced description of what happens when young people engage with digital contexts. While the first two pillars of practical digital literacy (i.e. the shared and dispositional understandings), were investigated through more established methods, such as surveys and group interviews, the structured dimension introduced a more innovative empirical lens.

The adoption of computational ethnography made it possible to access the complex and often hidden worlds behind digital practices. First, persona methods functioned as a gateway into the actual lived realms of digital youth cultures on TikTok. Second, once the access was established, I developed a methodological framework to focus on how practical digital literacy is enacted through actual practices and how the same is simultaneously mirrored through recommender actants that curate the flow of content. This dualism is fundamental for understanding, on the one hand, how non-human agents enact platform strategies and internalise cultural traits within the datasets feeding algorithmic recommendations and, on the other hand, how these traits are reflected in youths' cultural practices. Moreover, these cultural traits, reproduced through digital practices, can be explored through computational mapping. Techniques such as dimensionality reduction of word embeddings, along with dependency parsing, proved to be successful empirical approaches for uncovering the broader social and cultural dynamics that underpin digital practices.

A final methodological contribution relates again to the cultural analysis of youths' platform consumption. The paradigm shift from *searching-for-content* to *being-exposed-to-content* needs to be considered when mapping the social space of digital youth cultures. Accordingly, measuring media practices through frequency rather than fixed consumption categories better captures how adolescents actually navigate and interpret a media landscape increasingly shaped by algorithm-driven content flows.

In addition to its academic contributions, the present dissertation offers meaningful insights for several non-academic realms, with the first being school contexts. The educational landscape that emerged in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic called upon the educational workforce to develop new skills for engaging with the generations that came of age during this global disruption (Imran et al., 2025; Pathiranage & Karunaratne, 2023). This broader transformation requires teachers not only to understand and integrate platforms into their pedagogical practice, but also to embrace new techno-social approaches to education itself, a need that has increasingly led educators to adopt social media as a resource for professional learning (Carpenter et al., 2025; Hashim & Carpenter, 2019; Van Den Beemt et al., 2020). These same platforms have simultaneously been discovered and appropriated by younger generations, who have relocated significant portions of their socialisation processes within these environments, a shift that accelerated markedly during the pandemic. This has prompted several schools, struggling to contend with these emergent forms of socialisation, to adopt anti-smartphone policies, which inevitably reflect broader media panics and imagined futures projected onto young people (Robards et al., 2025). Within this debate, practical digital literacy can serve two distinct yet complementary purposes. On the one hand, it functions as an ontological lens for understanding what young people actually do on these platforms and what role those practices play in their social lives. The tacit yet socially meaningful rules they employ to navigate platform experiences are crucial for understanding how platformised youth cultures operate (Pangrazio, 2019) and how educational systems might intervene accordingly. On the other hand, the empirical strategies discussed in this dissertation, particularly those presented in Chapter 7, offer practical tools for educators seeking to investigate students' platform imaginaries, their shared understandings, and how they challenge the consolidated norms embedded within platforms. The embedded lesson approach (Dennen & Rutledge, 2018) is central to this purpose, as it enables researchers and educators to capture these understandings whilst delivering instruction, for instance, within the context of media education.

Findings from this dissertation also engage with the popular debate surrounding youth cultures and platforms. The ban of smartphones in schools is not merely an educational matter but equally involves the public perception of these devices by news media and parents (Clarke, 2026; Jahangir & Cunliffe, 2025). Given its grassroots, socially embedded nature, practical digital literacy can contribute to a better understanding of both how these environments are perceived and lived by younger generations, and how they are not static but dynamic, reactive environments, whose apparent features act as social agents mediating social life in a non-neutral manner. How young people appropriate these environments has long been a source of concern, mirroring broader media panics in civil society. Yet, despite the acknowledged addictive potential of these platforms (see Section 2.3.1), they nonetheless remain crucial spaces for the management and development of youth social identity. As seen in copulating practices (Section 7.3.3), the manipulation of the algorithmic feed transforms itself into something deeply personal, a

medium through which young people present themselves to others. Surgically removing platforms from their lives may therefore not address the underlying dynamics at stake. This is precisely where the popular debate stands to benefit from the concept of practical digital literacy: it encompasses not only the logics and social norms underpinning platform practices, but also how those norms are learned and internalised through engagement with algorithmic media. Despite a vast literature on algorithms as social agents (see Section 4.2), public debate still struggles to account for their role in mediating social processes. Exploring the tacit rules co-designed between users' appropriation and platform design (Pangrazio, 2016, 2019) can offer a more nuanced understanding of why platforms occupy such a central place in contemporary youth cultures.

More broadly, the concept of practical digital literacy can further advance our understanding of youth cultures, and of platformised youth cultures in particular, by offering a framework capable of bridging this field of inquiry with broader and adjacent literatures. Section 2.2 reports how research on digital youth culture tends to separate the technical frame from the use frame, to borrow a distinction from STS scholarship (Flichy, 1991). Accordingly, platform experiences are understood as either driven by the platform's expectations, grammar, and features or as the political form of appropriation occurring through vernaculars and other users' practices. The exploration of practical digital literacy contributes to this debate along two main trajectories. On the one hand, drawing on the critical literature about algorithms, the present research showed how platforms, through the employment of recommender systems, have become active and dynamic environments that constantly adapt to surprising forms of users' appropriation, meaning that these features both partially shape users' experiences and are in turn shaped by users themselves. On the other hand, it is worth stressing how youth cultures have internalised platform logics, developing new and peculiar forms of appropriation, despite a contemporary platform ecology that appears to be premised on passive experiences alone. Through the concept of flows and the relative forms of copiloting practices, the platform competence of contemporary youths encompasses algorithmic functioning and an awareness of how platforms react to their interactions. This allows us to move beyond the imaginary of youth cultures as merely pervaded by technologies (Pangrazio, 2019), and to recognise instead that the appropriation of these environments has become a fundamental aspect of contemporary platformised youth cultures, much as happened in the early 2000s with the copy-paste culture (Perkel, 2008), during which users actively personalised a static environment that would otherwise have remained standardised for everyone.

Last, the knowledge developed in the context of this dissertation can also prove crucial for policymakers. Taking the EU Digital Services Act (DSA) (Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 (Digital Services Act), 2022) as a reference point, Articles 34 and 35 require platform providers to assess any systemic risks, without, however, operationalising what such risks entail in practice. This research, alongside an extensive body of scholarship on the matter (see inter alia Noble, 2018; Pasquale, 2015; Rama et al., 2023; Zajko, 2022; Zuboff, 2019), further confirms that the algorithms governing platforms are not neutral tools. Beyond a purely functional perspective, these systems must be understood as embedded social agents in contemporary society, whose systemic risks should equally be operationalised as the reproduction of dispositional norms – as illustrated by the case of gendered behavioural patterns inscribed into recommendation logics discussed in Chapter 9.

A similar argument applies to the DigComp framework (European Commission. Joint Research Centre., 2022),

which plays a central role in providing a standardised approach for assessing and promoting digital wellbeing across countries, yet remains limited in its conception of digital competence as an individual, rather than relational literacy. Despite a consolidated and still growing body of literature that embraces sociocultural lenses to understand digital competences as socially situated knowledge (see Section 3.3), DigComp has yet to fully incorporate these insights. The concept of practical digital literacy can address this gap precisely, as it introduces a peer and contextual dimension to frame how competence is co-produced within social groups, rather than exercised solely at the individual level.

This dissertation presents several limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the reliance on schools as the primary field site introduces a contextual constraint. While schools are consolidated environments for researching youth cultures and transmitting academic knowledge through practice-oriented activities, they remain formal educational contexts, with their own privileges. By centring the investigation within the school, this study potentially overlooks digital practices that emerge in non-formal educational settings or purely domestic environments, where peer dynamics and institutional oversight differ significantly.

Second, the qualitative data collection faced constraints related to the depths of individual engagement. The decision to conduct class-level interviews, while necessary to capture group dynamics, limited the granularity of the analysis. The simultaneous presence of numerous participants inevitably constrained the possibility of exploring each student's voice in depth, potentially obscuring more subtle and individualised expressions of the habitus. A more longitudinal or individual interview approach might have offered a more finely grained characterisation of these dispositions.

Third, the investigation into the TikTok environment presents specific limitations regarding scale. While the analysis of 26,000 comments and 60 recommended videos provided rich material for examining the structured aspects of practical digital literacy, these figures remain modest relative to the scale of the platform's broader ecosystem. A larger set of algorithmic personalisations and a more expansive dataset would have enabled a more comprehensive mapping of how gendered norms are reproduced. The current dataset captures a snapshot of the embedded structured competence within TikTok, but it cannot claim to fully exhaust the complexity of the platform's recommender logic.

Finally, the sample collected during the school fieldwork is culturally and geographically specific. The students involved are primarily situated in the Lombardy region of Italy, and the findings therefore reflect a particular socioeconomic and cultural milieu that inevitably shapes the dispositions and digital practices observed. This raises important questions regarding the universality of the concept of practical digital literacy proposed here. Nonetheless, the theoretical mechanisms underpinning the framework, namely, that practical competence is dispositional and socially shared, retain distinct analytical value. Recent research on social media use has outlined the extent to which these practices are tied to generational dispositions (see e.g. Fu & Cook, 2021; Giorgi, 2025; Stahl & Literat, 2023). By generational disposition, I refer to Bolin's concept of media generations, a perspective that moves beyond generational labels such as millennials, Gen Z, or boomers, to consider the totality of the media landscape as a contextual structure that, together with age and life-course factors, shapes worldviews and guides the actions of media users (Bolin, 2017). Here, the exploration of practical digital literacy within a specific age

cluster is therefore crucial for establishing the system of tacit rules of a particularly sensitive population, such as adolescents, for whom the social dimension is quite significant. This, in turn, allows the same framework to be applied to other media generations and supports comparability across future research endeavours.

In conclusion, this research offered the opportunity not only to explore youth cultures in an increasingly mediated social life but also to do so through three main perspectives: shared discourses, individual dispositions, and actual platform practices. This approach allows us to understand digital competencies as a complex cultural and sociotechnical process, which encompasses not only knowledge of how to use social media but, more importantly, how this knowledge is constantly questioned, challenged, and appropriated. Practical digital literacy, therefore, represents the ongoing negotiation of platform experiences and how youth cultures strive to make these experiences feel personal and expressive of their identities. This cultural perspective underscores the inherently unstable and dynamic nature of social media in the fabric of youths' everyday lives.

References

Acilar, A., & Sæbø, Ø. (2023). Towards understanding the gender digital divide: A systematic literature review. *Global Knowledge, Memory and Communication*, *72*(3), 233–249. https://doi.org/10.1108/GKMC-09-2021-0147

Adams, M. (2006). Hybridizing Habitus and Reflexivity: Towards an Understanding of Contemporary Identity? *Sociology*, *40*(3), 511–528. https://doi.org/10.1177/003803850663672

Adorjan, M., & Ricciardelli, R. (2021). Smartphone and social media addiction: Exploring the perceptions and experiences of Canadian teenagers. *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue Canadienne de Sociologie*, *58*(1), 45–64. https://doi.org/10.1111/cars.12319

Agar, J. (2013). *Constant Touch: A Brief History of the Mobile Phone*. Icon Books.

Ahonen, A. K., & Kinnunen, P. (2015). How Do Students Value the Importance of Twenty-first Century Skills? *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, *59*(4), 395–412. https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2014.904423

Airoldi, M. (2018). Ethnography and the digital fields of social media. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, *21*(6), 661–673. https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2018.1465622

Airoldi, M. (2021a). *Machine habitus: Toward a sociology of algorithms*. Polity press.

Airoldi, M. (2021b). The techno-social reproduction of taste boundaries on digital platforms: The case of music on YouTube. *Poetics*, *89*, 101563. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2021.101563

Airoldi, M. (2022). "This is NOT Rap". In K. Hoskins, C. Genova, & N. Crowe (Eds), *Digital Youth Subcultures: Performing 'Transgressive' Identities in Digital Social Spaces* (1st edn, p. 22). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003129684

Airoldi, M. (2023). Computational Authority in Platform Society: Dimensions of Power in Machine Learning. In C. Borch & J. P. Pardo-Guerra (Eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Machine Learning* (1st edn, pp. 697–714). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197653609.013.40

Airoldi, M., Beraldo, D., & Gandini, A. (2016). Follow the algorithm: An exploratory investigation of music on YouTube. *Poetics*, *57*, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2016.05.001

Airoldi, M., & Rokka, J. (2022). Algorithmic consumer culture. *Consumption Markets & Culture*, *25*(5), 411–428. https://doi.org/10.1080/10253866.2022.2084726

Alaparrthi, K. (2024). *Technology and Digital Media's Impact on Attention Span in Teenagers and Young Adults*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4872178

Albrecht, K., & Archibold, E. (2023). Inductive Survey Research. In L. Ford & T. A., *The SAGE Handbook of Survey Development and Application* (pp. 93–108). SAGE Publications Ltd. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529617757.n7

Albright, J., & Luke, A. (Eds). (2008). *Pierre Bourdieu and literacy education*. Routledge.

Andreassen, C. S., Billieux, J., Griffiths, M. D., Kuss, D. J., Demetrovics, Z., Mazzoni, E., & Pallesen, S. (2016). The relationship between addictive use of social media and video games and symptoms of psychiatric disorders: A large-scale cross-sectional study. *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors*, *30*(2), 252–262. https://doi.org/10.1037/adb0000160

Andreevskikh, O., & Muravyeva, M. (2021). Doing Gender Online: Digital Spaces for Identity Politics. In D. Gritsenko, M. Wijermars, & M. Kopotev (Eds), *The Palgrave Handbook of Digital Russia Studies* (pp. 205–219). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-42855-6_12

Anshari, M., Alas, Y., Hardaker, G., Jaidin, J. H., Smith, M., & Ahad, A. D. (2016). Smartphone habit and behavior in Brunei: Personalization, gender, and generation gap. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *64*, 719–727. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.07.063

Antonelli, F. (2021). Le disuguali dimensioni dell'adolescenza. Una analisi attraverso la lente della classe sociale. *Encyclopaideia*, 3-14 Pages. https://doi.org/10.6092/ISSN.1825-8670/12503

Antonio, A., & Tuffley, D. (2014). The Gender Digital Divide in Developing Countries. *Future Internet*, *6*(4), 673–687. https://doi.org/10.3390/fi6040673

Appadurai, A., & Breckenridge, C. A. (1998). Public modernity in India. In C. A. Breckenridge, *Consuming modernity: Public culture in a south Asian world* (pp. 1–20). University of Minnesota Press.

Arenz, A., & Schnauber-Stockmann, A. (2024). Who "phubs"? A systematic meta-analytic review of phubbing predictors. *Mobile Media & Communication*, *12*(3), 637–661. https://doi.org/10.1177/20501579231215678

Arroyo, L. (2020). Implications of Digital Inclusion: Digitalization in Terms of Time Use from a Gender Perspective. *Social Inclusion*, *8*(2), 180–189. https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v8i2.2546

Arvidsson, A., Caliandro, A., Airoldi, M., & Barina, S. (2016). Crowds and value. Italian Directioners on Twitter. *Information, Communication & Society*, *19*(7), 921–939. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1064462

Arvidsson, V., & Foka, A. (2015). Digital gender: Perspective, phenomena, practice. *First Monday*. https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v20i4.5930

Atias, O., & Mawasi, A. (2025). Conceptualizing AI literacies for children and youth: A systematic review on the design of AI literacy educational programs. *Computers and Education: Artificial Intelligence*, *9*, 100491. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.caeai.2025.100491

Atkinson, W. (2011). The context and genesis of musical tastes: Omnivorousness debunked, Bourdieu buttressed. *Poetics*, *39*(3), 169–186. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2011.03.002

Attewell, P. (2001). Comment: The First and Second Digital Divides. *Sociology of Education*, *74*(3), 252. https://doi.org/10.2307/2673277

Aufderheide, P. (1992). *Media Literacy: A Report of the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy*. Aspen Institute. http://www.medialit.org/reading_room/article356.html

Austin, J. (2022). "I suppose I'll be patching you up, as usual": Women's roles and normative femininity in a team-based video game. *New Media & Society*, *24*(5), 1116–1132. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820972396

Baack, S. (2015). Datafication and empowerment: How the open data movement re-articulates notions of democracy, participation, and journalism. *Big Data & Society*, *2*(2), 2053951715594634. https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951715594634

Bacalja, A., Aguilera, E., & Castrillòn-Angel, E. F. (2021). Critical Digital Literacy. In J. Z. Pandya, R. A. Mora, J. H. Alford, N. A. Golden, & R. S. De Roock (Eds), *The Handbook of Critical Literacies* (1st edn). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003023425

Bainotti, L. (2024a). Ephemeral Content and Ephemeral Consumption on TikTok. In A. Caliandro, A. Gandini, & G. Anselmi, *The Platformisation of Consumer Culture: A Digital Methods Guide* (pp. 207–230). Amsterdam University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.14443784

Bainotti, L. (2024b). How conspicuousness becomes productive on social media. *Marketing Theory*, *24*(2), 339–356. https://doi.org/10.1177/14705931231202435

Bainotti, L., Caliandro, A., & Gandini, A. (2021). From archive cultures to ephemeral content, and back: Studying Instagram Stories with digital methods. *New Media & Society*, *23*(12), 3656–3676. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820960071

Bainotti, L., & Rogers, R. (2022). *How to Use Visual Media Analysis for Social Media Research*. SAGE Publications, Ltd. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529608687

Balleys, C., & Coll, S. (2017). Being publicly intimate: Teenagers managing online privacy. *Media, Culture & Society*, *39*(6), 885–901. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443716679033

Barbrook, R., & Cameron, A. (1996). The Californian ideology. *Science as Culture*, *6*(1), 44–72. https://doi.org/10.1080/09505439609526455

Barton, D., Ivan, R., & Hamilton, M. (1999). *Situated Literacies: Theorising Reading and Writing in Context*. Routledge.

Basilotta-Gómez-Pablos, V., Matarranz, M., Casado-Aranda, L.-A., & Otto, A. (2022). Teachers' digital competencies in higher education: A systematic literature review. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, *19*(1), 8. https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-021-00312-8

Bawden, D. (2001). Information and digital literacies: A review of concepts. *Journal of Documentation*, *57*(2), 218–259. https://doi.org/10.1108/EUM0000000007083

Bawden, D. (2008). Origins and Concepts of Digital Literacy. In C. Lankshear & M. Knobel (Eds), *Digital literacies: Concepts, policies and practices* (Vol. 30, pp. 17–32). P. Lang.

Bayer, J. B., Anderson, I. A., & Tokunaga, R. S. (2022). Building and breaking social media habits. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, *45*, 101303. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2022.101303

Beer, D. (2007). TUNE OUT: MUSIC, SOUNDSCAPES AND THE URBAN *MISE-EN-SCÈNE*. *Information, Communication & Society*, *10*(6), 846–866. https://doi.org/10.1080/13691180701751031

Beer, D. (2009). Power through the algorithm? Participatory web cultures and the technological unconscious. *New Media & Society*, *11*(6), 985–1002. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444809336551

Beer, D. (Ed.). (2019). *The Social Power of Algorithms* (1st edn). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351200677

Beer, D. (2022). The problem of researching a recursive society: Algorithms, data coils and the looping of the social. *Big Data & Society*, *9*(2), 20539517221104997. https://doi.org/10.1177/20539517221104997

Belina, A. (2023). Semi-structured interviewing as a tool for understanding informal civil society. *Voluntary Sector Review*, *14*(2), 331–347. https://doi.org/10.1332/204080522X16454629995872

Benzécri, J.-P. (1992). *Correspondence analysis handbook*. Marcel Dekker.

Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. Anchor Books.

Berne, S., Frisén, A., Schultze-Krumbholz, A., Scheithauer, H., Naruskov, K., Luik, P., Katzer, C., Erentaite, R., & Zukauskiene, R. (2013). Cyberbullying assessment instruments: A systematic review. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, *18*(2), 320–334. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2012.11.022

Berwick, C. (2024). Social media performance in school: Youth practice of humor and resistance through TikTok trends. *E-Learning and Digital Media*, 20427530241241766. https://doi.org/10.1177/20427530241241766

Best, A., L. (2009). Youth and consumption. In A. Furlong (Ed.), *Handbook of Youth and Young Adulthood* (0 edn, p. Chap. 31). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203881965

Beyens, I., Pouwels, J. L., Van Driel, I. I., Keijsers, L., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2020). The effect of social media on well-being differs from adolescent to adolescent. *Scientific Reports*, *10*(1), 10763. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-020-67727-7

Bhatt, I. (2023). Postdigital Literacies. In P. Jandrić (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Postdigital Science and Education* (pp. 1–5). Springer Nature Switzerland. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-35469-4_15-1

Bigler, R. S., Tomasetto, C., & McKenney, S. (2019). Sexualization and youth: Concepts, theories, and models. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, *43*(6), 530–540. https://doi.org/10.1177/0165025419870611

Bishop, S. (2019). Managing visibility on YouTube through algorithmic gossip. *New Media & Society*, *21*(11–12), 2589–2606. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819854731

Blank, G., & Groselj, D. (2014). Dimensions of Internet use: Amount, variety, and types. *Information, Communication & Society*, *17*(4), 417–435. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2014.889189

Blank, T. J. (2013). Hybridizing Folk Culture: Toward a Theory of New Media and Vernacular Discourse. *Western Folklore*, *72*(2), 105–130. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24551663

Bloemen, N., & De Coninck, D. (2020). Social Media and Fear of Missing Out in Adolescents: The Role of Family Characteristics. *Social Media + Society*, *6*(4), 2056305120965517. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120965517

Boellstorff, T. (2015). *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*. Princeton University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400874101

Boellstorff, T., Nardi, B., Pearce, C., & Taylor, T. L. (2012). *Ethnography and virtual worlds: A handbook of method*. Princeton University Press.

Boer, M., Stevens, G., Finkenauer, C., & Van Den Eijnden, R. (2020). Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder-Symptoms, Social Media Use Intensity, and Social Media Use Problems in Adolescents: Investigating Directionality. *Child Development*, *91*(4). https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.13334

Bolin, G. (2017). *Media generations: Experience, identity and mediatised social change*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Bond, B. J. (2016). Following Your "Friend": Social Media and the Strength of Adolescents' Parasocial Relationships with Media Personae. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, *19*(11), 656–660. https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2016.0355

Bonini, T., & Gandini, A. (2019). "First Week Is Editorial, Second Week Is Algorithmic": Platform Gatekeepers and the Platformization of Music Curation. *Social Media + Society*, *5*(4), 2056305119880006. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305119880006

Bonini, T., & Treré, E. (2024). Algorithms of Resistance: The Everyday Fight against Platform Power. In *Algorithms of Resistance* (pp. i–x). The MIT Press. https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/14329.003.0001

Bounegru, L., Devries, M., & Weltevrede, E. (2022). The Research Persona Method: Figuring and Reconfiguring Personalised Information Flows. In C. Lury, W. Viney, & S. Wark (Eds), *Figure* (pp. 77–104). Springer Nature Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-2476-7_5

Bourdieu, P. (1972). *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique précédé de Trois études d'ethnologie kabyle*. Droz. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511812507

Bourdieu, P. (1979). *La distinction: Critique sociale du jugement*. Éditions de Minuit.

Bourdieu, P. (1980). *Le Sens pratique*. Les Éditions de minuit.

Bourdieu, P. (1992). *Les règles de l'art: Genèse et structure du champ littéraire*. Seuil.

Bourdieu, P. (1996). *Raisons pratiques: Sur la théorie de l'action*. Ed. du Seuil.

Bourdieu, P. (with Collier, P.). (2007). *Homo academicus*. Stanford University Press. (Original work published 1984)

Bourdieu, P. (2021). *Forms of capital: Lectures at the Collège de France (1983-1984)* (P. Champagne, J. Duval, F. Poupeau, & M.-C. Rivière, Eds; P. Collier, Trans.). Polity.

Bourdieu, P., Champagne, P., Duval, J., Poupeau, F., Rivière, M.-C., & Bourdieu, P. (2018). *Classification struggles: Lectures at the Collège de France (1981-1982)* (P. Collier, Trans.). Polity.

Bourdieu, P., Champagne, P., Duval, J., Poupeau, F., Rivière, M.-C., & Bourdieu, P. (2020). *Habitus and field: Lectures at the Collège de France (1982-1983)* (P. Collier, Trans.). polity.

Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J.-C. (1987). *La reproduction: Éléments pour une théorie du système d'enseignement*. Ed. de Minuit.

Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J.-C. (1994). *Les héritiers: Les étudiants et la culture* (Repr). Éd. de Minuit.

Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. J. D. (1992). *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. University of Chicago Press.

Boutyline, A., & Arseniev-Koehler, A. (2025). Meaning in Hyperspace: Word Embeddings as Tools for Cultural Measurement. *Annual Review of Sociology*. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-090324-024027

boyd, danah. (2008). Why Youth <3 Social Network Sites: The Role of Networked Publics in Teenage Social Life. In D. Buckingham (Ed.), *YOUTH, IDENTITY, AND DIGITAL MEDIA*. The MIT Press. https://ssrn.com/abstract=1518924

boyd, danah. (2010a). Social Network Sites as Networked Publics. In Z. Papacharissi (Ed.), *A Networked Self* (0 edn, pp. 39–58). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203876527

boyd, danah. (2010b). Streams of Content, Limited Attention: The Flow of Information through Social Media. *Educational Review*, *45*, 26–28.

boyd, danah. (2014). *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*. Yale University Press. https://doi.org/10.12987/9780300166439

boyd, danah, & Ellison, N. B. (2007). Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *13*(1), 210–230. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00393.x

Brand, C., Fochesatto, C. F., Gaya, A. R., Schuch, F. B., & Lòpez-Gil, J. F. (2024). Scrolling through adolescence: Unveiling the relationship of the use of social networks and its addictive behavior with psychosocial health. *Child Adolesc Psychiatry Ment Health*, *18*(107). https://doi.org/10.1186/s13034-024-00805-0

Braswell, M. (2014). Once More unto the Breaching Experiment: Reconsidering a Popular Pedagogical Tool. *Teaching Sociology*, *42*(2), 161–167. https://doi.org/10.1177/0092055X14521021

Braun, L. N., & Mateus, A. M. V. (2024). Contemporary Ethnographic Aesthetics: The TikTok Turn. *Visual Anthropology*, *37*(3), 195–211. https://doi.org/10.1080/08949468.2024.2330268

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Bridges, T. S. (2009). Gender Capital and Male Bodybuilders. *Body & Society*, *15*(1), 83–107. https://doi.org/10.1177/1357034X08100148

Broeker, F. (2023). *Love and Technology: An Ethnography of Dating App Users in Berlin* (1st edn). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003411635

Brooker, P. (2022). Computational ethnography: A view from sociology. *Big Data & Society*, *9*(1), 20539517211069892. https://doi.org/10.1177/20539517211069892

Bruns, A. (2019). *Are filter bubbles real?* Polity Press.

Bruschi, L., Gandini, A., Giorgi, G., & Gerosa, A. (2024). Un approccio metodologico allo studio degli algoritmi di personalizzazione su TikTok. *SOCIOLOGIA ITALIANA*, *26*, 193. https://doi.org/10.1485/2281-2652-202426-10

Bucher, T. (2012). Want to be on the top? Algorithmic power and the threat of invisibility on Facebook. *New Media & Society*, *14*(7), 1164–1180. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444812440159

Bucher, T. (2017a). 'Machines don't have instincts': Articulating the computational in journalism. *New Media & Society*, *19*(6), 918–933. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444815624182

Bucher, T. (2017b). The algorithmic imaginary: Exploring the ordinary affects of Facebook algorithms. *Information, Communication & Society*, *20*(1), 30–44. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1154086

Bucher, T. (2018). *If...then: Algorithmic power and politics*. Oxford University Press.

Bucher, T., & Helmond, A. (2019). The Affordances of Social Media Platforms. In J. Burgess, A. E. Marwick, & T. Poell (Eds), *The SAGE handbook of social media* (Paperback edition, pp. 233–253). Sage reference.

Bucholtz, M. (2002). Youth and Cultural Practice. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *31*(1), 525–552. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.31.040402.085443

Buckingham, D. (2003). *Media education: Literacy, learning, and contemporary culture* (Repr). Polity Press.

Buckingham, D. (2007). Media education goes digital: An introduction. *Learning, Media and Technology*, *32*(2), 111–119. https://doi.org/10.1080/17439880701343006

Buckingham, D. (2008a). Introducing Identity. In D. Buckingham (Ed.), *Youth, Identity, and Digital Media* (pp. 1–24). The MIT Press. doi: 10.1162/dmal.9780262524834.001

Buckingham, D. (2008b). *Media education: Literacy, learning, and contemporary culture* (Repr). Polity Press.

Buckingham, D. (Ed.). (2008c). *Youth, identity, and digital media*. MIT Press.

Buckingham, D. (2019). *The media education manifesto*. Polity Press.

Buckingham, D., & Jensen, H. S. (2012). Beyond "Media Panics": Reconceptualising public debates about children and media. *Journal of Children and Media*, *6*(4), 413–429. https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2012.740415

Budanceva, J., & Svirina, A. (2023). Consumption of Cultural Content in the Digital Environment in the Post-Pandemic Latvia. *Economics and Culture*, *20*(2), 76–87. https://doi.org/10.2478/jec-2023-0017

Burgess, J. (2006). Hearing Ordinary Voices: Cultural Studies, Vernacular Creativity and Digital Storytelling. *Continuum*, *20*(2), 201–214. https://doi.org/10.1080/10304310600641737

Burke, R., Felfernig, A., & Göker, M. H. (2011). Recommender Systems: An Overview. *AI Magazine*, *32*(3), 13–18. https://doi.org/10.1609/aimag.v32i3.2361

Burnell, K., Flannery, J. S., Fox, K. A., Prinstein, M. J., & Telzer, E. H. (2025). U.S. adolescents' daily social media use and well-being: Exploring the role of addiction-like social media use. *Journal of Children and Media*, *19*(1), 194–212. https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2024.2402272

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.

Cai, T. T., & Ma, R. (2021). *Theoretical Foundations of t-SNE for Visualizing High-Dimensional Clustered Data* (Version 4). arXiv. https://doi.org/10.48550/ARXIV.2105.07536

Calderón Gómez, D. (2019). Technological capital and digital divide among young people: An intersectional approach. *Journal of Youth Studies*, *22*(7), 941–958. https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2018.1559283

Calderón Gómez, D. (2021). The third digital divide and Bourdieu: Bidirectional conversion of economic, cultural, and social capital to (and from) digital capital among young people in Madrid. *New Media & Society*, *23*(9), 2534–2553. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820933252

Caliandro, A. (2016). Ethnography in Digital Spaces: Ethnography of Virtual Worlds, Netnography, & Digital Ethnography. In R. M. Denny (Ed.), *Handbook of Anthropology in Business* (1st edn, p. 22). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315427850

Caliandro, A. (2018). Digital Methods for Ethnography: Analytical Concepts for Ethnographers Exploring Social Media Environments. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *47*(5), 551–578. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241617702960

Caliandro, A. (2024). Follow the user: Taking advantage of Internet users as methodological resources. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 13548565241307569. https://doi.org/10.1177/13548565241307569

Caliandro, A., & Anselmi, G. (2021). Affordances-Based Brand Relations: An Inquire on Memetic Brands on Instagram. *Social Media + Society*, *7*(2), 20563051211021367. https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051211021367

Caliandro, A., Gandini, A., Bainotti, L., & Anselmi, G. (2024a). Introduction. In *The Platformisation of Consumer Culture: A Digital Methods Guide* (pp. 7–28). Amsterdam University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.14443784

Caliandro, A., Gandini, A., Bainotti, L., & Anselmi, G. (2024b). *The Platformisation of Consumer Culture: A Digital Methods Guide*. Amsterdam University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.14443784

Caminhas, L. (2025). Dimensions of recognition through relational labour in erotic content creation in Brazil. *New Media & Society*, 14614448251336439. https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448251336439

Cardon, D. (2018). Le pouvoir des algorithmes: *Pouvoirs*, *N° 164*(1), 63–73. https://doi.org/10.3917/pouv.164.0063

Caron, A. H., & Mays, K. K. (2021). Breaching perpetual contact: Withdrawing from mobile and social media use in everyday life. *First Monday*. https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v26i8.11652

Carpenter, J. P., Rimmereide, H. E., & Turvey, K. (2025). Exploring and comparing teachers' X/Twitter use in three countries: Purposes, benefits, challenges and changes. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, *56*(4), 1593–1611. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.13538

Cavallo, M., & Demiralp, Ç. (2018). A Visual Interaction Framework for Dimensionality Reduction Based Data Exploration. *Proceedings of the 2018 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1145/3173574.3174209

Chandler-Olcott, K. (2015). Anime and Manga Fandom: Young People's Multiliteracies Made Visible. In D. Lapp, J. Flood, S. B. Heath, & International Reading Association (Eds), *Handbook of research on teaching literacy through the communicative and visual arts: Volume II* (pp. 247–257). Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Charteris, J., Gregory, S., & Masters, Y. (2018). 'Snapchat', youth subjectivities and sexuality: Disappearing media and the discourse of youth innocence. *Gender and Education*, *30*(2), 205–221. https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2016.1188198

Chase, Z., & Laufenberg, D. (2011). Embracing the Squishiness of Digital Literacy. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *54*(7), 535–537. https://doi.org/10.1598/JAAL.54.7.7

Chen, C.-P. (2016). Playing with digital gender identity and cultural value. *Gender, Place & Culture*, *23*(4), 521–536. https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2015.1013455

Chen, X., Hedman, A., Distler, V., & Koenig, V. (2023). Do persuasive designs make smartphones more addictive? - A mixed-methods study on Chinese university students. *Computers in Human Behavior Reports*, *10*, 100299. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chbr.2023.100299

Chetty, K., Qigui, L., Gcora, N., Josie, J., Wenwei, L., & Fang, C. (2018). Bridging the digital divide: Measuring digital literacy. *Economics*, *12*(1), 20180023. https://doi.org/10.5018/economics-ejournal.ja.2018-23

Choi, E. Y., Kanthawala, S., Kim, Y. S., & Lee, H. Y. (2022). Urban/Rural Digital Divide Exists in Older Adults: Does It Vary by Racial/Ethnic Groups? *Journal of Applied Gerontology*, *41*(5), 1348–1356. https://doi.org/10.1177/07334648211073605

Chomsky, N. (1957). *Syntactic Structures*. Mouton & Co.

Chotpitayasunondh, V., & Douglas, K. M. (2016). How "phubbing" becomes the norm: The antecedents and consequences of snubbing via smartphone. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *63*, 9–18. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.05.018

Chotpitayasunondh, V., & Douglas, K. M. (2018). Measuring phone snubbing behavior: Development and validation of the Generic Scale of Phubbing (GSP) and the Generic Scale of Being Phubbed (GSBP). *Computers in Human Behavior*, *88*, 5–17. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2018.06.020

Chou, C., Condron, L., & Belland, J. C. (2005). A Review of the Research on Internet Addiction. *Educational Psychology Review*, *17*(4), 363–388. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-005-8138-1

Choudhary, H., & Bansal, N. (2022). Addressing Digital Divide through Digital Literacy Training Programs: A Systematic Literature Review. *Digital Education Review*, (41), 224–248.

Chun, J., Lee, J., Kim, J., & Lee, S. (2020). An international systematic review of cyberbullying measurements. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *113*, 106485. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2020.106485

Chung, S., & Cho, H. (2017). Fostering Parasocial Relationships with Celebrities on Social Media: Implications for Celebrity Endorsement. *Psychology & Marketing*, *34*(4), 481–495. https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21001

Ciampa, K., Wolfe, Z. M., & Bronstein, B. (2023). CHATGPT in education: Transforming digital literacy practices. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *67*(3), 186–195. https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.1310

Cirucci, A. M. (2018). A New Women's Work: Digital Interactions, Gender, and Social Network Sites. *International Journal of Communication*, *12*, 2948–2970.

Clarke, V. (2026, January 31). Parents want to ban smartphones in schools, but there's one reason they're worried. *BBC News*. https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c3edydz7deyo

Collins, J. (2000). Bernstein, Bourdieu and the New Literacy Studies. *Linguistics and Education*, *11*(1), 65–78. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0898-5898(99)00018-2

Cooley, C. H. (1909). *Social Organization: A Study of the Larger Mind*. Charles Scribner's Sons.

Cooper, J. (2006). The digital divide: The special case of gender. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, *22*(5), 320–334. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2729.2006.00185.x

Cooren, F. (2010). *Action and agency in dialogue: Passion, incarnation and ventriloquism*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Costa, E. (2018). Affordances-in-practice: An ethnographic critique of social media logic and context collapse. *New Media & Society*, *20*(10), 3641–3656. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818756290

Costola, M., Iacopini, M., & Santagiustina, C. R. M. A. (2021). Google search volumes and the financial markets during the COVID-19 outbreak. *Finance Research Letters*, *42*, 101884. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.frl.2020.101884

Cotter, K. (2019). Playing the visibility game: How digital influencers and algorithms negotiate influence on Instagram. *New Media & Society*, *21*(4), 895–913. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818815684

Couldry, N., & Mejias, U. A. (2019). *The costs of connection: How data is colonizing human life and appropriating it for capitalism*. Stanford University Press.

Couldry, N., & Powell, A. (2014). Big Data from the bottom up. *Big Data & Society*, *1*(2), 2053951714539277. https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951714539277

Craig, S. L., Eaton, A. D., McInroy, L. B., Leung, V. W. Y., & Krishnan, S. (2021). Can Social Media Participation Enhance LGBTQ+ Youth Well-Being? Development of the Social Media Benefits Scale. *Social Media + Society*, *7*(1), 2056305121988931. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305121988931

Csibi, S., Griffiths, M. D., Cook, B., Demetrovics, Z., & Szabo, A. (2018). The Psychometric Properties of the Smartphone Application-Based Addiction Scale (SABAS). *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, *16*(2), 393–403. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-017-9787-2

Cullen, R. (2001). Addressing the digital divide. *Online Information Review*, *25*(5), 311–320. https://doi.org/10.1108/14684520110410517

Culpepper, M. K., & Gauntlett, D. (2024). The construction of everyday creative identity. *Journal of Creativity*, *34*(2), 100085. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.yjoc.2024.100085

Currie, D. H., & Kelly, D. M. (2012). Group interviews: Understanding shared meaning and meaning-making. In S. Delamont (Ed.), *Handbook of qualitative research in education* (pp. 405–414). Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd.

D'Arienzo, M. C., Boursier, V., & Griffiths, M. D. (2019). Addiction to Social Media and Attachment Styles: A Systematic Literature Review. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, *17*(4), 1094–1118. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-019-00082-5

Davenport, T. H., & Beck, J. C. (2001). *The attention economy: Understanding the new currency of business*. Harvard Business School Press.

Davidov, E., Schmidt, P., & Schwartz, S. H. (2008). Bringing Values Back In: The Adequacy of the European Social Survey to Measure Values in 20 Countries. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *72*(3), 420–445. https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfn035

Davies, B., & Bansel, P. (2007). Neoliberalism and education. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *20*(3), 247–259. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390701281751

de Certeau, M. (1984). *The Practice of Everyday Life*. University of California Press.

De Ridder, S., & Van Bauwel, S. (2013). Commenting on pictures: Teens negotiating gender and sexualities on social networking sites. *Sexualities*, *16*(5–6), 565–586. https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460713487369

De Vries, R., & Reeves, A. (2022). What Does it Mean to be a Cultural Omnivore? Conflicting Visions of Omnivorousness in Empirical Research. *Sociological Research Online*, *27*(2), 292–312. https://doi.org/10.1177/13607804211006109

Dennen, V. P., & Rutledge, S. A. (2018). The Embedded Lesson Approach to Social Media Research: Researching Online Phenomena in an Authentic Offline Setting. *TechTrends*, *62*(5), 483–491. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11528-018-0315-4

Deutsch, N. L., & Theodorou, E. (2010). Aspiring, Consuming, Becoming: Youth Identity in a Culture of Consumption. *Youth & Society*, *42*(2), 229–254. https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X09351279

DeVito, M. A. (2022). How Transfeminine TikTok Creators Navigate the Algorithmic Trap of Visibility Via Folk Theorization. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, *6*(CSCW2), 1–31. https://doi.org/10.1145/3555105

Di Caro, L., & Grella, M. (2013). Sentiment analysis via dependency parsing. *Computer Standards & Interfaces*, *35*(5), 442–453. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.csi.2012.10.005

DiStefano, A. S., & Yang, J. S. (2024). Sample Size and Saturation: A Three-phase Method for Ethnographic Research with Multiple Qualitative Data Sources. *Field Methods*, *36*(2), 145–159. https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X231194515

Dobber, T., & Hameleers, M. (2025). The Social Media Comment Section as an Unruly Public Arena: How Comment Reading Erodes Trust in News Media. *Electronic News*, *19*(1), 3–18. https://doi.org/10.1177/19312431241268011

Dogruel, L. (2021). *What is Algorithm Literacy?: A Conceptualization and Challenges Regarding its Empirical Measurement*. Freie Universität Berlin. https://doi.org/10.48541/DCR.V9.3

Dogruel, L., Masur, P., & Joeckel, S. (2022). Development and Validation of an Algorithm Literacy Scale for Internet Users. *Communication Methods and Measures*, *16*(2), 115–133. https://doi.org/10.1080/19312458.2021.1968361

Drucker, P. F. (1969). *The age of discontinuity: Guidelines to our changing society*. Heinemann.

Duffy, D. (2012). Traversing the Matriarch's Domain: How Young Men Negotiate the Feminized Space of Fashion Consumption and Self-Presentation. In R. W. Belk, S. Askegaard, & L. Scott (Eds), *Research in Consumer Behavior* (Vol. 14, pp. 69–87). Emerald Group Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/S0885-2111(2012)0000014008

Eckert, P. (1989). *Jocks and burnouts: Social categories and identity in the high school*. Teachers College Press.

Eglash, R., Croissant, J., Chiro, G. D., & Fouché, R. (Eds). (2004). *Appropriating technology: Vernacular science and social power*. University of Minnesota Press.

Ellison, N. B., & boyd, danah M. (2013). Sociality Through Social Network Sites. In W. H. Dutton (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Internet Studies* (Vol. 1, pp. 151–172). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199589074.013.0008

Emirbayer, M., & Mische, A. (1998). What Is Agency? *American Journal of Sociology*, *103*(4), 962–1023. https://doi.org/10.1086/231294

Englander, E., Donnerstein, E., Kowalski, R., Lin, C. A., & Parti, K. (2017). Defining Cyberbullying. *Pediatrics*, *140*(Supplement_2), S148–S151. https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2016-1758U

Eslami, M., Karahalios, K., Sandvig, C., Vaccaro, K., Rickman, A., Hamilton, K., & Kirlik, A. (2016). First I 'like' it, then I hide it: Folk Theories of Social Feeds. *Proceedings of the 2016 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 2371–2382. https://doi.org/10.1145/2858036.2858494

Eslami, M., Rickman, A., Vaccaro, K., Aleyasen, A., Vuong, A., Karahalios, K., Hamilton, K., & Sandvig, C. (2015). 'I always assumed that I wasn't really that close to [her]': Reasoning about Invisible Algorithms in News Feeds. *Proceedings of the 33rd Annual ACM Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 153–162. https://doi.org/10.1145/2702123.2702556

European Commission. (2019). *Key competences for lifelong learning.* Publications Office. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/569540

European Commission. Joint Research Centre. (2022). *DigComp 2.2, The Digital Competence framework for citizens: With new examples of knowledge, skills and attitudes.* Publications Office. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/115376

European Council. (2000). *LISBON EUROPEAN COUNCIL 23 AND 24 MARCH 2000 PRESIDENCY CONCLUSIONS*. Europena Parliament. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/lis1_en.htm

Evans, M. D. R., Kelley, J., Sikora, J., & Treiman, D. J. (2010). Family scholarly culture and educational success: Books and schooling in 27 nations. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, *28*(2), 171–197. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rssm.2010.01.002

Ferrari, A. (2012). *Digital competence in practice: An analysis of frameworks*. JCR IPTS. https://ifap.ru/library/book522.pdf

Fine, G. A. (1979). Small Groups and Culture Creation: The Idioculture of Little League Baseball Teams. *American Sociological Review*, *44*(5), 733. https://doi.org/10.2307/2094525

Flemmen, M. (2013). Putting Bourdieu to work for class analysis: Reflections on some recent contributions. *The British Journal of Sociology*, *64*(2), 325–343. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12020

Flemmen, M., Hjellbrekke, Johs., & Jarness, V. (2018). Class, Culture and Culinary Tastes: Cultural Distinctions and Social Class Divisions in Contemporary Norway. *Sociology*, *52*(1), 128–149. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038516673528

Flensburg, S., & Lomborg, S. (2023). Datafication research: Mapping the field for a future agenda. *New Media & Society*, *25*(6), 1451–1469. https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211046616

Flichy, P. (1991). *Une histoire de la communication moderne: Espace public et vie privée*. Éd. la Découverte.

Frank, M., Walker, J., Attard, J., & Tygel, A. (2016). Data Literacy—What is it and how can we make it happen? *The Journal of Community Informatics*, *12*(3). https://doi.org/10.15353/joci.v12i3.3274

Freyne, J., Berkovsky, S., Daly, E. M., & Geyer, W. (2010). Social networking feeds: Recommending items of interest. *Proceedings of the Fourth ACM Conference on Recommender Systems*, 277–280. https://doi.org/10.1145/1864708.1864766

Friedman, S., & Reeves, A. (2020). From Aristocratic to Ordinary: Shifting Modes of Elite Distinction. *American Sociological Review*, *85*(2), 323–350. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122420912941

Friedman, S., Savage, M., Hanquinet, L., & Miles, A. (2015). Cultural sociology and new forms of distinction. *Poetics*, *53*, 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2015.10.002

Friemel, T. N. (2016). The digital divide has grown old: Determinants of a digital divide among seniors. *New Media & Society*, *18*(2), 313–331. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814538648

Fu, J., & Cook, J. (2021). Everyday social media use of young Australian adults. *Journal of Youth Studies*, *24*(9), 1234–1250. https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2020.1828843

Fuchs, C. (2009). The Role of Income Inequality in a Multivariate Cross-National Analysis of the Digital Divide. *Social Science Computer Review*, *27*(1), 41–58. https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439308321628

Gajdics, J., & Jagodics, B. (2022). Mobile Phones in Schools: With or Without you? Comparison of Students' Anxiety Level and Class Engagement After Regular and Mobile-Free School Days. *Technology, Knowledge and Learning*, *27*(4), 1095–1113. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10758-021-09539-w

Gandini, A., Gerosa, A., Giuffrè, L., & Keeling, S. (2023). Subjectivity and algorithmic imaginaries: The algorithmic other. *Subjectivity*, *30*(4), 417–434. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41286-023-00171-w

Gao, Q., Yan, Z., Zhao, C., Pan, Y., & Mo, L. (2014). To ban or not to ban: Differences in mobile phone policies at elementary, middle, and high schools. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *38*, 25–32. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.05.011

Garfinkel, H. (1956). Conditions of Successful Degradation Ceremonies. *American Journal of Sociology*, *61*(5), 420–424.

Garfinkel, H. (1984). *Studies in ethnomethodology*. Polity Press.

Gauntlett, D. (2018). *Making is connecting: The social power of creativity, from craft and knitting to digital everything* (Second expanded edition). Polity Press.

Gaver, W. W. (1991). Technology affordances. *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems Reaching through Technology - CHI '91*, 79–84. https://doi.org/10.1145/108844.108856

Gayo-Cal, M., Savage, M., & Warde, A. (2006). A cultural map of the United Kingdom, 2003. *Cultural Trends*, *15*(2–3), 213–237. https://doi.org/10.1080/09548963.2006.10384444

Gebre, E. (2022). Conceptions and perspectives of data literacy in secondary education. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, *53*(5), 1080–1095. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.13246

Gee, J. P. (1987). What is Literacy? *Journal of Teaching and Learning*, *2*(1), Article 2.

Gee, J. P. (2012). *Situated Language and Learning: A Critique of Traditional Schooling* (1st edn). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203594216

Gee, J. P. (2023). Discourse and 'the New Literacy Studies'. In M. Handford & J. P. Gee (Eds), *The Routledge handbook of discourse analysis* (Second edition, pp. 371–382). Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003035244

Gelles-Watnick, R. (2022). *Explicit content, time-wasting are key social media worries for parents of U.S. teens*. PewResearchCenter. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/12/15/explicit-content-time-wasting-are-key-social-media-worries-for-parents-of-u-s-teens/

Gerbaudo, P. (2024). TikTok and the algorithmic transformation of social media publics: From social networks to social interest clusters. *New Media & Society*, 14614448241304106. https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448241304106

Gerodimos, R. (2008). MOBILISING YOUNG CITIZENS IN THE UK: A content analysis of youth and issue websites. *Information, Communication & Society*, *11*(7), 964–988. https://doi.org/10.1080/13691180802109014

Gerosa, T., Losi, L., & Gui, M. (2024). The Age of the Smartphone: An Analysis of Social Predictors of Children's Age of Access and Potential Consequences Over Time. *Youth & Society*, *56*(6), 1117–1143. https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X231223218

Gerrard, Y. (2025). *The Kids Are Online: Confronting the Myths and Realities of Young Digital Life*. University of California press.

Geurts, S. M. (2025). *From controlling to connecting: The role of parents in adolescents' problematic social media use* [Dr., Utrecht University]. https://doi.org/10.33540/2757

Gibbons, S. (2007). *Redefining the roles of Information professionals in Higher education to Engage the Net Generation*. EDUCAUSE 2007. http://www.caudit.edu.au/educauseaustralasia07/authors_papers/Gibbons2.pdf

Gibbs, M., Meese, J., Arnold, M., Nansen, B., & Carter, M. (2015). # Funeral and Instagram: Death, social media, and platform vernacular. *Information, Communication & Society*, *18*(3), 255–268. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2014.987152

Gibson, J. J. (1979). *The ecological approach to visual perception*. Houghton Mifflin.

Giddens, A. (1984). *The constitution of society*. Polity.

Gillespie, T. (2010). The politics of 'platforms'. *New Media & Society*, *12*(3), 347–364. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444809342738

Gillespie, T. (2014). The Relevance of Algorithms. In T. Gillespie, P. J. Boczkowski, & K. A. Foot (Eds), *Media Technologies* (pp. 167–194). The MIT Press. https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/9042.003.0013

Gillespie, T. (2024). Generative AI and the politics of visibility. *Big Data & Society*, *11*(2), 20539517241252131. https://doi.org/10.1177/20539517241252131

Gillespie, T., & Seaver, N. (2016). *Critical algorithm studies: A reading list*. O'Reilly Blog. https://socialmediacollective.org/reading-lists/critical-algorithm-studies/

Gilster, P. (1997). *Digital literacy*. Wiley Computer Pub.

Ging, D. (2005). A 'Manual on Masculinity'? The Consumption and Use of Mediated Images of Masculinity among Teenage Boys in Ireland. *Irish Journal of Sociology*, *14*(2), 29–52. https://doi.org/10.1177/079160350501400203

Ging, D. (2019). Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere. *Men and Masculinities*, *22*(4), 638–657. https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X17706401

Giorgi, G. (2025). Exploring generational othering through Internet memes. *The Sociological Review*, 00380261251314555. https://doi.org/10.1177/00380261251314555

Giorgi, G., & Gerosa, A. (2024). The Loop of Loops: The Recursive Dynamics of Videos on Social Media. *Lo Squaderno*, *68*, 19–23.

Giorgi, G., & Rama, I. (2024). The contingent macro: The ephemerality of memes as discursive devices. *Journal of Digital Social Research*, *6*(1). https://doi.org/10.33621/jdsr.v6i1.202

Giuffrè, L. (in press). Youth Experiencing the Algorithmic Flow: The shared understanding of contemporary social media consumption. *Italian Sociological Review*, *Manuscript submitted for publication*.

Giumetti, G. W., & Kowalski, R. M. (2022). Cyberbullying via social media and well-being. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, *45*, 101314. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2022.101314

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (2017). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Routledge.

Glevarec, H., & Cibois, P. (2021). Structure and Historicity of Cultural Tastes. Uses of Multiple Correspondence Analysis and Sociological Theory on Age: The Case of Music and Movies. *Cultural Sociology*, *15*(2), 271–291. https://doi.org/10.1177/1749975520947590

Goffman, E. (1967). *Interaction ritual: Essays on face-to-face behavior*. Anchor Books.

Gold, R. L. (1997). The Ethnographic Method in Sociology. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *3*(4), 388–402. https://doi.org/10.1177/107780049700300402

Gonzales, A. (2016). The contemporary US digital divide: From initial access to technology maintenance. *Information, Communication & Society*, *19*(2), 234–248. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1050438

Gorea, M. (2021). Becoming Your "Authentic" Self: How Social Media Influences Youth's Visual Transitions. *Social Media + Society*, *7*(3), 20563051211047875. https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051211047875

Gramsci, A. (1985). *Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (Q. Hoare, Ed.; 8. pr). International Publ.

Green, B. (1988). Subject-Specific Literacy and School Learning: A Focus on Writing. *Australian Journal of Education*, *32*(2), 156–179. https://doi.org/10.1177/000494418803200203

Grenfell, M., Bloome, D., Hardy, C., Pahl, K., Rowsell, J., & Street, B. V. (2013). *Language, Ethnography, and Education* (0 edn). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203836057

Gruszka, K., & Böhm, M. (2022). Out of sight, out of mind? (In)visibility of/in platform-mediated work. *New Media & Society*, *24*(8), 1852–1871. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820977209

Guerzoni, C., & Matuk, V. L. T. (2022). Profili e (s)-oggettività della generazione Z. Etnografia di TikTok. *Rivista di antropologia contemporanea*, (1), 119–138. https://doi.org/10.48272/105187

Gui, M., Gerosa, T., Garavaglia, A., Petti, L., & Fasoli, M. (2018). *Digital well-being. Validation of a digital media education programme in high schools* (pp. 1–34). University of Milan-Bicocca. https://hdl.handle.net/10281/285392

Gupta, M., & Sharma, A. (2021). Fear of missing out: A brief overview of origin, theoretical underpinnings and relationship with mental health. *World Journal of Clinical Cases*, *9*(19), 4881–4889. https://doi.org/10.12998/wjcc.v9.i19.4881

Gurrieri, L., & Drenten, J. (2019). The hashtaggable body: Negotiating gender performance in social media. In S. Dobscha (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Gender and Marketing*. Edward Elgar Publishing. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781788115384.00010

Haase Svendsen, G. L., Kjeldsen, C., & Noe, E. (2010). How do private entrepreneurs transform local social capital into economic capital? Four case studies from rural Denmark. *The Journal of Socio-Economics*, *39*(6), 631–644. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socec.2010.06.012

Hafkin, N. J., & Taggart, N. (2001). *Gender, Information Technology, and Developing Countries: An Analytic Study*. the Office of Women in Development, Bureau for Global Programs, Field Support and Research, United States Agency for International Development.

Haidt, J. (2024, March 13). End the Phone-Based Childhood Now: The environment in which kids grow up today is hostile to human development. *The Atlantic*. https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2024/03/teen-childhood-smartphone-use-mental-health-effects/677722/

Hall, S., & Jefferson, T. (Eds). (1976). *Resistance Through Rituals* (0 edn). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203357057

Hambali, A. J., Risdianto, F., & Rahma, S. S. (2024). Rethinking on Expressive Speech Act Realization in The Comments Section on YouTube Channel. *Journal of Pragmatics Research*, *6*(1), 52–73. https://doi.org/10.18326/jopr.v6i1.52-73

Hamilton, W. A., Garretson, O., & Kerne, A. (2014). Streaming on twitch: Fostering participatory communities of play within live mixed media. *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 1315–1324. https://doi.org/10.1145/2556288.2557048

Hargittai, E. (2001). *Second-Level Digital Divide: Mapping Differences in People's Online Skills* (Version 1). arXiv. https://doi.org/10.48550/ARXIV.CS/0109068

Hargittai, E., Piper, A. M., & Morris, M. R. (2019). From internet access to internet skills: Digital inequality among older adults. *Universal Access in the Information Society*, *18*(4), 881–890. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10209-018-0617-5

Hasan, R. (1998). The disempowerment game: Bourdieu and language in literacy. *Linguistics and Education*, *10*(1), 25–87. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0898-5898(99)80104-1

Hashim, A. K., & Carpenter, J. P. (2019). A Conceptual Framework of Teacher Motivation for Social Media Use. *Teachers College Record: The Voice of Scholarship in Education*, *121*(14), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811912101405

Haslop, C., Ringrose, J., Cambazoglu, I., & Milne, B. (2024). Mainstreaming the Manosphere's Misogyny Through Affective Homosocial Currencies: Exploring How Teen Boys Navigate the Andrew Tate Effect. *Social Media + Society*, *10*(1), 20563051241228811. https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051241228811

Helmond, A. (2015). The Platformization of the Web: Making Web Data Platform Ready. *Social Media + Society*, *1*(2), 2056305115603080. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305115603080

Helsper, E. J., & Eynon, R. (2010). Digital natives: Where is the evidence? *British Educational Research Journal*, *36*(3), 503–520. https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920902989227

Hendry, N. A. (2024). Knowing young people and social media: Platforms, everyday cultures, risk and datafication. In J. Bessant, P. Collin, & P. O'Keeffe (Eds), *Research Handbook on the Sociology of Youth* (pp. 172–185). Edward Elgar Publishing. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781803921808.00024

Hernández-Serrano, M. J., Jones, B., Renés-Arellano, P., & Ortuño, R. A. C. (2022). Analysis of Digital Self-Presentation Practices and Profiles of Spanish Adolescents on Instagram and TikTok. *Journal of New Approaches in Educational Research*, *11*(1), 49–63. https://doi.org/10.7821/naer.2022.1.797

Hiebert, A., & Kortes-Miller, K. (2023). Finding home in online community: Exploring TikTok as a support for gender and sexual minority youth throughout COVID-19. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, *20*(4), 800–817. https://doi.org/10.1080/19361653.2021.2009953

Hilbert, M. (2011). Digital gender divide or technologically empowered women in developing countries? A typical case of lies, damned lies, and statistics. *Women's Studies International Forum*, *34*(6), 479–489. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2011.07.001

Hine, C. (2015). *Ethnography for the Internet: Embedded, embodied and everyday*. Bloomsbury Academic, An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

Hinrichsen, J., & Coombs, A. (2014). The five resources of critical digital literacy: A framework for curriculum integration. *Research in Learning Technology*, *21*. https://doi.org/10.3402/rlt.v21.21334

Hjellbrekke, J., & Jarness, V. (2022). Cultural divisions and time: Mapping diachronic homologies using class-specific MCA (CSA). *Bulletin of Sociological Methodology/Bulletin de Méthodologie Sociologique*, *155*(1), 136–158. https://doi.org/10.1177/07591063221102259

Hobbs, R. (1998). The Seven Great Debates in the Media Literacy Movement. *Journal of Communication*, *48*(1), 16–32. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1998.tb02734.x

Hobbs, R. (2010). *Digital and Media Literacy: A Plan of Action*. The Aspen Institute.

Hobbs, R., Drotner, K., & Livingstone, S. (2008). Debates and challenges facing new literacies in the 21st century. In *International handbook of children, media and culture* (pp. 431–447). Sage.

Hoffman, D. L., Novak, T. P., & Schlosser, A. (2006). The Evolution of the Digital Divide: How Gaps in Internet Access May Impact Electronic Commerce. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *5*(3), 0–0. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2000.tb00341.x

Hoffner, C. A., & Bond, B. J. (2022). Parasocial relationships, social media, & well-being. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, *45*, 101306. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2022.101306

Horton, F. W. (2006). *UNESCO Report on media education: A kit for teachers, students, parents and professionals*. UNESCO Report on media education: A kit for teachers, students, parents and professionals

Howard, R. G. (2008). The Vernacular Web of Participatory Media. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, *25*(5), 490–513. https://doi.org/10.1080/15295030802468065

Huang, F., & Derakhshan, A. (2025). Learning Motivation and Digital Literacy in AI Adoption for Self-Regulated English Learning. *European Journal of Education*, *60*(4), e70254. https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.70254

Hundley, H. L., & Shyles, L. (2010). US teenagers' perceptions and awareness of digital technology: A focus group approach. *New Media & Society*, *12*(3), 417–433. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444809342558

Hutchby, I. (2001). Technologies, Texts and Affordances. *Sociology*, *35*(2), 441–456. https://doi.org/10.1177/S0038038501000219

Hutson, E., Kelly, S., & Militello, L. K. (2018). Systematic Review of Cyberbullying Interventions for Youth and Parents With Implications for Evidence-Based Practice. *Worldviews on Evidence-Based Nursing*, *15*(1), 72–79. https://doi.org/10.1111/wvn.12257

Ignatow, G., & Robinson, L. (2017). Pierre Bourdieu: Theorizing the digital. *Information, Communication & Society*, *20*(7), 950–966. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2017.1301519

Il Sole 24 Ore. (2025). Lombardia: Internet e social media, con ministero Salute per uso consapevole giovani. *Radiocor*. https://www.ilsole24ore.com/radiocor/nRC_19.05.2025_15.47_492

Ilbury, C. (2022). Discourses of social media amongst youth: An ethnographic perspective. *Discourse, Context & Media*, *48*, 100625. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2022.100625

Imran, M., Almusharraf, N., & Abbasova, M. Y. (2025). Digital learning transformation: A study of teachers' post-Covid-19 experiences. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, *11*, 101228. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2024.101228

Instagram Blog. (2016, August 2). *Introducing Instagram Stories*. https://about.instagram.com/blog/announcements/introducing-instagram-stories

Isangula, K. G., Kelly, S., & Wamoyi, J. (2024). Manual Qualitative Data Coding Using MS Word for Students and Early Career Researchers in Resource-Constrained Settings. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *23*, 16094069241299223. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069241299223

ISTAT. (2024). *Multiscopo sulle famiglie: Aspetti della vita quotidiana*. ISTAT. https://www.istat.it/informazioni-sulla-rilevazione/aspetti-della-vita-quotidiana-informazioni-sulla-rilevazione-anno-2013/

Italian Ministry of Education and Merit. (2024, August 9). Nelle scuole italiane 914.860 alunni stranieri, più dell'11% del totale. *Integrazione Migranti*. https://integrazionemigranti.gov.it/it-it/Ricerca-news/Dettaglio-news/id/3923

Itō, M. (Ed.). (2009). *Living and learning with new media: Summary of findings from the digital youth project*. MIT Press.

Itō, M., Baumer, S., & Bittanti, M. (2009). *Hanging out, messing around, and geeking out: Kids living and learning with new media*. The MIT Press.

Ito, M., Candice, O., Schueller, S., Cabrera, J., Conaway, E., Cross, R., & Hernandez, M. (2020). *Social Media and Youth Wellbeing: What We Know and Where We Could Go*. Connected Learning Alliance.

Jahangir, R., & Cunliffe, P. (2025, June 15). School smartphone bans—Are they effective? *BBC News*. https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cj6rljz5w0zo

Jandrić, P., Knox, J., Besley, T., Ryberg, T., Suoranta, J., & Hayes, S. (2018). Postdigital science and education. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *50*(10), 893–899. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2018.1454000

Jarness, V. (2015). Modes of consumption: From 'what' to 'how' in cultural stratification research. *Poetics*, *53*, 65–79. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2015.08.002

Jenkins, H. (2009). *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century*. The MIT Press.

Jenkins, H., Ito, M., & boyd, danah. (2016). *Participatory culture in a networked era: A conversation on youth, learning, commerce, and politics*. Polity.

Jeon, H., Park, J., Shin, S., & Seo, J. (2025). *Stop Misusing t-SNE and UMAP for Visual Analytics* (Version 1). arXiv. https://doi.org/10.48550/ARXIV.2506.08725

Jiang, J., & Vetter, M. A. (2020). The Good, the Bot, and the Ugly: Problematic Information and Critical Media Literacy in the Postdigital Era. *Postdigital Science and Education*, *2*(1), 78–94. https://doi.org/10.1007/s42438-019-00069-4

Jones, H. (1997). *Towards a classless society ?* Routledge.

Jovicic, S. (2020). Scrolling and the In-Between Spaces of Boredom: Marginalized Youths on the Periphery of Vienna. *Ethos*, *48*(4), 498–516. https://doi.org/10.1111/etho.12294

Julien, C. (2015). Bourdieu, Social Capital and Online Interaction. *Sociology*, *49*(2), 356–373. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038514535862

Jurik, N. C., & Siemsen, C. (2009). "Doing Gender" as Canon or Agenda: A Symposium on West and Zimmerman. *Gender & Society*, *23*(1), 72–75. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243208326677

Kackman, M. (2011). *Flow TV: Television in the age of media convegence*. Routledge Taylor 惻ancis [distributor].

Kahma, N., & Toikka, A. (2012). Cultural map of Finland 2007: Analysing cultural differences using multiple correspondence analysis. *Cultural Trends*, *21*(2), 113–131. https://doi.org/10.1080/09548963.2012.674751

Kain, C., Koschmieder, C., Matischek-Jauk, M., & Bergner, S. (2024). Mapping the landscape: A scoping review of 21st century skills literature in secondary education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *151*, 104739. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2024.104739

Kalantzis, M., & Cope, B. (2025a). Literacy in the Time of Artificial Intelligence. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *60*(1), e591. https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.591

Kalantzis, M., & Cope, B. (2025b). Multiliteracies Since Social Media and Artificial Intelligence. *Harvard Educational Review*, *95*(1), 135–151. https://doi.org/10.17763/1943-5045-95.1.135

Kale, S. (2020, April 26). How coronavirus helped TikTok find its voice. *The Observer*.

Karizat, N., Delmonaco, D., Eslami, M., & Andalibi, N. (2021). Algorithmic Folk Theories and Identity: How TikTok Users Co-Produce Knowledge of Identity and Engage in Algorithmic Resistance. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, *5*(CSCW2), 1–44. https://doi.org/10.1145/3476046

Kebede, A. S. (2011). Habitus. In K. Dowding, *Encyclopedia of Power*. SAGE Publications, Inc. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412994088.n168

Keller, J. (2019). "Oh, She's a Tumblr Feminist": Exploring the Platform Vernacular of Girls' Social Media Feminisms. *Social Media + Society*, *5*(3), 2056305119867442. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305119867442

Kellner, D., & Share, J. (2005). Toward Critical Media Literacy: Core concepts, debates, organizations, and policy. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, *26*(3), 369–386. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596300500200169

Kellner, D., Share, J., & Luke, A. (2019). *The critical media literacy guide: Engaging media and transforming education*. Brill Sense.

Kennedy, M. (2020). 'If the rise of the TikTok dance and e-girl aesthetic has taught us anything, it's that teenage girls rule the internet right now': TikTok celebrity, girls and the Coronavirus crisis. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, *23*(6), 1069–1076. https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549420945341

Klug, D., Qin, Y., Evans, M., & Kaufman, G. (2021). Trick and Please. A Mixed-Method Study On User Assumptions About the TikTok Algorithm. *13th ACM Web Science Conference 2021*, 84–92. https://doi.org/10.1145/3447535.3462512

Klug, D., Steen, E., & Yurechko, K. (2023). How Algorithm Awareness Impacts Algospeak Use on TikTok. *Companion Proceedings of the ACM Web Conference 2023*, 234–237. https://doi.org/10.1145/3543873.3587355

Kobilke, L., & Markiewitz, A. (2024). Understanding youth participation in social media challenges: A scoping review of definitions, typologies, and theoretical perspectives. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *157*, 108265. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2024.108265

Koltay, T. (2011). The media and the literacies: Media literacy, information literacy, digital literacy. *Media, Culture & Society*, *33*(2), 211–221. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443710393382

Kondakciu, K., Souto, M., & Zayer, L. T. (2022). Self-presentation and gender on social media: An exploration of the expression of "authentic selves". *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, *25*(1), 80–99. https://doi.org/10.1108/QMR-03-2021-0039

Kong, L., Schneider, N., Swayamdipta, S., Bhatia, A., Dyer, C., & Smith, N. A. (2014). A Dependency Parser for Tweets. *Proceedings of the 2014 Conference on Empirical Methods in Natural Language Processing (EMNLP)*, 1001–1012. https://doi.org/10.3115/v1/D14-1108

Kotilainen, S., Okkonen, J., Vuorio, J., & Leisti, K. (2020). Youth Media Education in the Age of Algorithm-Driven Social Media. In D. Frau-Meigs, S. Kotilainen, M. Pathak-Shelat, M. Hoechsmann, & S. R. Poyntz (Eds), *The Handbook of Media Education Research* (1st edn, pp. 131–139). Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119166900.ch10

Kovalova, O., & Shalman, T. (2024). Reading Culture of Teenagers in Social Media: A Study of Reading Habits and Perception of Online Literary and Educational Content by Teenagers. *Studies in Media and Communication*, *12*(2), 26. https://doi.org/10.11114/smc.v12i2.6720

Kozłowska, A. M. (2024). Prosumer: The slow decline of the active Internet consumer? *Rozprawy Społeczne*, *18*(1), 249–268. https://doi.org/10.29316/rs/185630

Kress, G. R. (2007). *Literacy in the new media age* (Reprinted). Routledge.

Kress, G. R. (2010). *Multimodality: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*. Routledge.

Kubrusly, A., Marôpo, L., & Batista, S. (2024). Big data literacy for youth: An intervention agenda. *Kubrusly*, *Ana*, 60 (2024). ISSN: 21837198. https://doi.org/10.34619/JVDA-WGVE

Lankshear, C., & Knobel, M. (2008). *Digital literacies: Concepts, policies and practices*. P. Lang.

Lantis, M. (1960). Vernacular culture. *American Anthropologist*, *62*(2), 202–216. http://www.jstor.org/stable/667896

Lapa, T., & Cardoso, G. (2013). What 'Digital Divide' between Generations? A Cross-National Analysis Using Data from the World Internet Project. In C. Stephanidis & M. Antona (Eds), *Universal Access in Human-Computer Interaction. User and Context Diversity* (Vol. 8010, pp. 113–122). Springer Berlin Heidelberg. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-39191-0_13

Larrañaga, E., Yubero, S., Ovejero, A., & Navarro, R. (2016). Loneliness, parent-child communication and cyberbullying victimization among Spanish youths. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *65*, 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.08.015

Latour, B. (1987). *Science in action: How to follow scientists and engineers through society*. Harvard University Press.

Le Roux, B., & Rouanet, H. (2010). *Multiple Correspondence Analysis*. SAGE Publications, Inc. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412993906

Lee, L., Chen, D.-T., Li, J.-Y., & Lin, T.-B. (2015). Understanding new media literacy: The development of a measuring instrument. *Computers & Education*, *85*, 84–93. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2015.02.006

Leonhardt, M., & Overå, S. (2021). Are There Differences in Video Gaming and Use of Social Media among Boys and Girls?—A Mixed Methods Approach. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *18*(11), 6085. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18116085

Leung, H., Pakpour, A. H., Strong, C., Lin, Y.-C., Tsai, M.-C., Griffiths, M. D., Lin, C.-Y., & Chen, I.-H. (2020). Measurement invariance across young adults from Hong Kong and Taiwan among three internet-related addiction scales: Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS), Smartphone Application-Based Addiction Scale (SABAS), and Internet Gaming Disorder Scale-Short Form (IGDS-SF9) (Study Part A). *Addictive Behaviors*, *101*, 105969. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2019.04.027

Leung, M. M., Green, M. C., Tate, D. F., Cai, J., Wyka, K., & Ammerman, A. S. (2017). *Fight for Your Right to Fruit*: Psychosocial Outcomes of a *Manga* Comic Promoting Fruit Consumption in Middle-School Youth. *Health Communication*, *32*(5), 533–540. https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2016.1211074

Li, M., & Yu, Z. (2022). Teachers' Satisfaction, Role, and Digital Literacy during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Sustainability*, *14*(3), 1121. https://doi.org/10.3390/su14031121

Li, Q. (2007). Bullying in the new playground: Research into cyberbullying and cyber victimisation. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, *23*(4). https://doi.org/10.14742/ajet.1245

Li, S., Pöysä-Tarhonen, J., & Häkkinen, P. (2023). Students' collaboration dispositions across diverse skills of collaborative problem solving in a computer-based assessment environment. *Computers in Human Behavior Reports*, *11*, 100312. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chbr.2023.100312

Light, J. (2001). Rethinking the Digital Divide. *Harvard Educational Review*, *71*(4), 709–734. https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.71.4.342x36742j2w4q82

Lin, H., & Siles, I. (2026). Resisting by being invisible: Theorising infrapolitical algorithmic actions on Douyin (Chinese TikTok). *New Media & Society*, 14614448251414151. https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448251414151

Lindell, J. (2017). Bringing Field Theory to Social Media, and Vice-Versa: Network-Crawling an Economy of Recognition on Facebook. *Social Media + Society*, *3*(4), 205630511773575. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305117735752

Lingel, J. (2017). *Digital countercultures and the struggle for community*. MIT Press.

Liotino, M., Costa, J. P., Bicalho, D. R., da Cruz, L., & Hassinger, H. (2023). Digital Competence Development in Higher Education: Political Influence and Student Experiences in Portugal and Italy. In L. Breitschwerdt, J. Schwarz, & S. Schmidt-Lauff (Eds), *Comparative Research in Adult Education* (Vol. 51, pp. 143–162). wbv Publikation.

Literat, I., & Kligler-Vilenchik, N. (2019). Youth collective political expression on social media: The role of affordances and memetic dimensions for voicing political views. *New Media & Society*, *21*(9), 1988–2009. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819837571

Liu, S., Bremer, P.-T., Thiagarajan, J. J., Srikumar, V., Wang, B., Livnat, Y., & Pascucci, V. (2018). Visual Exploration of Semantic Relationships in Neural Word Embeddings. *IEEE Transactions on Visualization and Computer Graphics*, *24*(1), 553–562. https://doi.org/10.1109/TVCG.2017.2745141

Livingstone, S. (2004a). Media Literacy and the Challenge of New Information and Communication Technologies. *The Communication Review*, *7*(1), 3–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/10714420490280152

Livingstone, S. (2004b). What is media literacy? *Intermedia*, *32*(3), 18–20.

Livingstone, S. (2008). *Internet Literacy: Young People's Negotiation of New Online Opportunities.* (T. McPherson, Ed.; pp. 101–122). The MIT Press. doi: 10.1162/dmal.9780262633598.101

Livingstone, S. (2014). Developing social media literacy: How children learn to interpret risky opportunities on social network sites. *Communications*, *39*(3). https://doi.org/10.1515/commun-2014-0113

Livingstone, S., & Helsper, E. (2007). Gradations in digital inclusion: Children, young people and the digital divide. *New Media & Society*, *9*(4), 671–696. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444807080335

Livingstone, S., Stoilova, M., & Nandagiri, R. (2020). Data and Privacy Literacy: The Role of the School in Educating Children in a Datafied Society. In D. Frau-Meigs, S. Kotilainen, M. Pathak-Shelat, M. Hoechsmann, & S. R. Poyntz (Eds), *The Handbook of Media Education Research* (1st edn, pp. 413–425). Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119166900.ch38

Lizardo, O. (2017). Improving Cultural Analysis: Considering Personal Culture in its Declarative and Nondeclarative Modes. *American Sociological Review*, *82*(1), 88–115. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122416675175

Lizardo, O. (2022). What is implicit culture? *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, *52*(3), 412–437. https://doi.org/10.1111/jtsb.12333

Loh, C. E. (2024). What Makes adolescents *want* to read? Examining adolescents' contemporary print and new media (fiction) leisure reading through mobile ethnography. *Language and Education*, *38*(4), 596–616. https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2024.2326099

Lohnes Watulak, S. (2016). Reflection in action: Using inquiry groups to explore critical digital literacy with pre-service teachers. *Educational Action Research*, *24*(4), 503–518. https://doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2015.1106957

Lopez-Fernandez, O., Williams, A. J., Griffiths, M. D., & Kuss, D. J. (2019). Female Gaming, Gaming Addiction, and the Role of Women Within Gaming Culture: A Narrative Literature Review. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, *10*, 454. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2019.00454

Low, B., Ehret, C., & Hagh, A. (2023). Algorithmic imaginings and critical digital literacy on #BookTok. *New Media & Society*, 14614448231206466. https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448231206466

Lugaro, G., Di Bari, C., & Ferro, J. (2023). Orientarsi nel digitale e comprendere i social media, tra percezioni e uso reale. Una ricerca-azione nel savonese per l'educazione digitale nelle scuole secondarie di secondo grado. *Media Education*, *14*(2), 71–84. https://doi.org/10.36253/me-14889

Luke, A. (2000). Critical Literacy in Australia: A Matter of Context and Standpoint. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *43*(5), 448–461.

Luke, C. (Ed.). (1989). *Pedagogy, printing, and Protestantism: The discourse on childhood*. State University of New York Press.

Lundahl, O. (2022). Algorithmic meta-capital: Bourdieusian analysis of social power through algorithms in media consumption. *Information, Communication & Society*, *25*(10), 1440–1455. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118x.2020.1864006

Lundvall, B.-Å., & Lorenz, E. (2011). From the Lisbon Strategy to EUROPE 2020. In N. Morel, B. Palier, & J. Palme (Eds), *Towards a Social Investment Welfare State?* (pp. 333–352). Policy Press. https://doi.org/10.51952/9781847429261.ch013

Lycett, M. (2013). 'Datafication': Making sense of (big) data in a complex world. *European Journal of Information Systems*, *22*(4), 381–386. https://doi.org/10.1057/ejis.2013.10

Lythreatis, S., Singh, S. K., & El-Kassar, A.-N. (2022). The digital divide: A review and future research agenda. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, *175*, 121359. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2021.121359

Mandinach, E. B., & Gummer, E. S. (2013). A Systemic View of Implementing Data Literacy in Educator Preparation. *Educational Researcher*, *42*(1), 30–37. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X12459803

Markham, A. (2020). *Doing ethnographic research in the digital age*. https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/hqm4g

Markham, A. (2022, November 19). Youth + Digital Literacy + Algorithmic Relations: A ten year pedagogical model - Annette Markham | social media, methods, and ethics. *Annette Markham*. https://annettemarkham.com/2022/11/digital-literacy-ten-year-pedagogy/

Markham, A. N. (2019). Critical Pedagogy as a Response to Datafication. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *25*(8), 754–760. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800418809470

Markham, A., & Pronzato, R. (2024). A critical (theory) data literacy: Tales from the field. *Information and Learning Sciences*, *125*(5/6), 293–320. https://doi.org/10.1108/ILS-06-2023-0087

Marquart, F., Ohme, J., & Möller, J. (2020). Following Politicians on Social Media: Effects for Political Information, Peer Communication, and Youth Engagement. *Media and Communication*, *8*(2), 197–207. https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v8i2.2764

Márquez, I., Lanzeni, D., & Masanet, M.-J. (2023). Teenagers as curators: Digitally mediated curation of the self on Instagram. *Journal of Youth Studies*, *26*(7), 907–924. https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2022.2053670

Marres, N. (2012). The Redistribution of Methods: On Intervention in Digital Social Research, Broadly Conceived. *The Sociological Review*, *60*(1_suppl), 139–165. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.2012.02121.x

Marres, N., & Gerlitz, C. (2016). Interface Methods: Renegotiating Relations between Digital Social Research, STS and Sociology. *The Sociological Review*, *64*(1), 21–46. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954X.12314

Marshall, P. D., Moore, C., & Barbour, K. (2020). *Persona studies: An introduction*. Wiley Blackwell.

Martínez Bravo, M. C., Sádaba Chalezquer, C., & Serrano-Puche, J. (2021). Meta-framework of digital literacy: A comparative analysis of 21st-century skills frameworks. *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, (79), 76–110. https://doi.org/10.4185/RLCS-2021-1508

Marulli, F., Pota, M., & Esposito, M. (2019). A Comparison of Character and Word Embeddings in Bidirectional LSTMs for POS Tagging in Italian. In G. De Pietro, L. Gallo, R. J. Howlett, L. C. Jain, & L. Vlacic (Eds), *Intelligent Interactive Multimedia Systems and Services* (Vol. 98, pp. 14–23). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-92231-7_2

Marwick, A. E., & boyd, danah. (2011). I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience. *New Media & Society*, *13*(1), 114–133. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444810365313

Mauger, G. (2020). Digital Media: A Revolution in Reading Practices?: Investigating Avid Readers (A. Simaku, Trans.). *Biens Symboliques / Symbolic Goods*, *7*. https://doi.org/10.4000/bssg.481

Mayer-Schönberger, V., & Cukier, K. (2013). *Big data: A revolution that will transform how we live, work, and think*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

McDougall, J., Brites, M.-J., Couto, M.-J., & Lucas, C. (2019). Digital literacy, fake news and education / Alfabetización digital, fake news y educación. *Cultura y Educación*, *31*(2), 203–212. https://doi.org/10.1080/11356405.2019.1603632

McGinnis, P. (2023, May). How FOMO Became a Fixture. *Harvard Business School Alumni Stories*. https://www.alumni.hbs.edu/stories/Pages/story-bulletin.aspx?num=9169

McLuhan, M. (1964). *Understanding media: The extensions of man*. The New American Library.

McRoberts, S., Ma, H., Hall, A., & Yarosh, S. (2017). Share First, Save Later: Performance of Self through Snapchat Stories. *Proceedings of the 2017 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 6902–6911. https://doi.org/10.1145/3025453.3025771

McVeigh-Schultz, J., & Baym, N. K. (2015). Thinking of You: Vernacular Affordance in the Context of the Microsocial Relationship App, Couple. *Social Media + Society*, *1*(2), 2056305115604649. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305115604649

Mead, M. (1928). *Coming of age in Samoa: A psychological study of primitive youth for western civilization.* Morrow.

Mehra, B., Merkel, C., & Bishop, A. P. (2004). The internet for empowerment of minority and marginalized users. *New Media & Society*, *6*(6), 781–802. https://doi.org/10.1177/146144804047513

Meier, A., Beyens, I., Siebers, T., Pouwels, J. L., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2023). Habitual social media and smartphone use are linked to task delay for some, but not all, adolescents. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *28*(3), zmad008. https://doi.org/10.1093/jcmc/zmad008

Mejias, U. A., & Couldry, N. (2019). Datafication. *Internet Policy Review*, *8*(4). https://doi.org/10.14763/2019.4.1428

Mekonen, L. D., Kumsa, D. M., & Adamu Amanu, A. (2024). Social media use, effects, and parental mediation among school adolescents in a developing country. *Heliyon*, *10*(6), e27855. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e27855

Merisalo, M. (2016). *Electronic capital: Economic and social geographies of digitalization* [Academic Dissertation, Department of Geosciences and Geography A43]. https://helda.helsinki.fi/server/api/core/bitstreams/0d611ccb-eceb-4c13-8438-883e5479afbc/content

Merisalo, M., & Makkonen, T. (2022). Bourdieusian e-capital perspective enhancing digital capital discussion in the realm of third level digital divide. *Information Technology & People*, *35*(8), 231–252. https://doi.org/10.1108/ITP-08-2021-0594

Meyrowitz, J. (1998). Multiple Media Literacies. *Journal of Communication*, *48*(1), 96–108. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1998.tb02740.x

Micheli, M. (2015). What is New in the Digital Divide? Understanding Internet Use by Teenagers from Different Social Backgrounds. In L. Robinson, S. R. Cotten, J. Schulz, T. M. Hale, & A. Williams (Eds), *Studies in Media and Communications* (Vol. 10, pp. 55–87). Emerald Group Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/S2050-206020150000010003

Michel-Villarreal, R., Vilalta-Perdomo, E., Salinas-Navarro, D. E., Thierry-Aguilera, R., & Gerardou, F. S. (2023). Challenges and Opportunities of Generative AI for Higher Education as Explained by ChatGPT. *Education Sciences*, *13*(9), 856. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13090856

Miguel, C. (2018). *Personal Relationships and Intimacy in the Age of Social Media*. Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-02062-0

Mills, K. A. (2010). A Review of the "Digital Turn" in the New Literacy Studies. *Review of Educational Research*, *80*(2), 246–271. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654310364401

Montag, C., Demetrovics, Z., Elhai, J. D., Grant, D., Koning, I., Rumpf, H.-J., M. Spada, M., Throuvala, M., & Van Den Eijnden, R. (2024). Problematic social media use in childhood and adolescence. *Addictive Behaviors*, *153*, 107980. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2024.107980

Morgan, E. L. (1998). Computer literacy for librarians. *Computers in Libraries*, *18*(1), 39–40.

Mossberger, K., Tolbert, C. J., & Stansbury, M. (2003). *Virtual inequality: Beyond the digital divide*. Georgetown Univ. Press.

Muggleton, D. (2005). From classlessness to clubculture: A genealogy of post-war British youth cultural analysis. *YOUNG*, *13*(2), 205–219. https://doi.org/10.1177/1103308805051322

Mujica, A., Crowell, C., Villano, M., & Uddin, K. (2022). ADDICTION BY DESIGN: Some Dimensions and Challenges of Excessive Social Media Use. *Medical Research Archives*, *10*(2). https://doi.org/10.18103/mra.v10i2.2677

Mukhra, R., Baryah, N., Krishan, K., & Kanchan, T. (2019). 'Blue Whale Challenge': A Game or Crime? *Science and Engineering Ethics*, *25*(1), 285–291. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11948-017-0004-2

Mulholland, M. (2017). 'When Difference Gets in the Way': Young People, Whiteness and Sexualisation. *Sexuality & Culture*, *21*(2), 593–612. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-016-9406-6

Mungham, G., & Pearson, G. (Eds). (1976). *Working class youth culture*. Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Musil, T. (2019). Examining Structure of Word Embeddings with PCA. In K. Ekštein (Ed.), *Text, Speech, and Dialogue* (Vol. 11697, pp. 211–223). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-27947-9_18

Nagy, P., & Neff, G. (2015). Imagined Affordance: Reconstructing a Keyword for Communication Theory. *Social Media + Society*, *1*(2), 2056305115603385. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305115603385

Natale, S. (2021). *Deceitful media: Artificial intelligence and social life after the Turing test*. Oxford University Press.

Nayak, A., & Kehily, M. J. (2013). *Gender, Youth and Culture: Young Masculinities and Femininities* (1st ed). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-32893-9

Nehring, J. H., Charner-Laird, M., & Szczesiul, S. A. (2019). Redefining Excellence: Teaching in Transition, From Test Performance to 21st Century Skills. *NASSP Bulletin*, *103*(1), 5–31. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192636519830772

Nguyen, L. A. T., & Habók, A. (2024). Tools for assessing teacher digital literacy: A review. *Journal of Computers in Education*, *11*(1), 305–346. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40692-022-00257-5

Nichols, T. P., & Stornaiuolo, A. (2019). Assembling "Digital Literacies": Contingent Pasts, Possible Futures. *Media and Communication*, *7*(2), 14–24. https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v7i2.1946

Nilan, P., Burgess, H., Hobbs, M., Threadgold, S., & Alexander, W. (2015). Youth, Social Media, and Cyberbullying Among Australian Youth: "Sick Friends". *Social Media + Society*, *1*(2), 2056305115604848. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305115604848

Noble, S. U. (2018). *Algorithms of oppression: How search engines reinforce racism*. New York university press.

Noë, B., Turner, L. D., Linden, D. E. J., Allen, S. M., Winkens, B., & Whitaker, R. M. (2019). Identifying Indicators of Smartphone Addiction Through User-App Interaction. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *99*, 56–65. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2019.04.023

Norman, D. A. (1988). *The Design of Everyday Things*. Doubleday Business.

North, S., Snyder, I., & Bulfin, S. (2008). DIGITAL TASTES: Social class and young people's technology use. *Information, Communication & Society*, *11*(7), 895–911. https://doi.org/10.1080/13691180802109006

Oberst, U., Wegmann, E., Stodt, B., Brand, M., & Chamarro, A. (2017). Negative consequences from heavy social networking in adolescents: The mediating role of fear of missing out. *Journal of Adolescence*, *55*(1), 51–60. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2016.12.008

OECD. (2019). *OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030: OECD Learning Compass 2030 A Series of Concept Note*. https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/about/projects/edu/education-2040/1-1-learning-compass/OECD_Learning_Compass_2030_Concept_Note_Series.pdf

Ohl, F., & Taks, M. (2007). Secondary socialisation and the consumption of sporting goods: Cross cultural dimensions. *International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing*, *2*(1/2), 160. https://doi.org/10.1504/IJSMM.2007.011406

Ongardwanich, N., Kanjanawasee, S., & Tuipae, C. (2015). Development of 21st Century Skill Scales as Perceived by Students. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *191*, 737–741. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.04.716

Oosten, J. M. F. V. (2018). "Sexy Selfies". The Role of Social Media in Adolescents' (Self-) Sexualization. In S. E. Baumgartner, M. Hofer, T. Koch, & R. Kühne (Eds), *Youth and Media* (pp. 187–202). Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG. https://doi.org/10.5771/9783845280455-187

Ordun, C., Purushotham, S., & Raff, E. (2020). *Exploratory Analysis of Covid-19 Tweets using Topic Modeling, UMAP, and DiGraphs*. https://doi.org/10.48550/ARXIV.2005.03082

Orgad, S. (2010). How can researchers make sense of the issues involved in collecting and interpreting online and offline data? In A. N. Markham & N. K. Baym (Eds), *Internet inquiry: Conversations about method* (pp. 33–53). Sage Publications.

Ose, S. O. (2016). Using Excel and Word to Structure Qualitative Data. *Journal of Applied Social Science*, *10*(2), 147–162. https://doi.org/10.1177/1936724416664948

Owens, E. (2025). 'It speaks to me in brain rot': Theorising 'brain rot' as a genre of participation among teenagers. *New Media & Society*. https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448251351527

Pandey, S., Arnesen, L., & Pandey, S. K. (2023). Computerized Textual Analysis of Open-Ended Survey Responses: A Review and Future Directions. In L. Ford & T. A., *The SAGE Handbook of Survey Development and Application* (pp. 354–367). SAGE Publications Ltd. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529617757.n27

Pangrazio, L. (2016). Reconceptualising critical digital literacy. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, *37*(2), 163–174. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2014.942836

Pangrazio, L. (2019). Technologically situated: The tacit rules of platform participation. *Journal of Youth Studies*, *22*(10), 1308–1326. https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2019.1575345

Pangrazio, L., & Sefton-Green, J. (2020). The social utility of 'data literacy'. *Learning, Media and Technology*, *45*(2), 208–220. https://doi.org/10.1080/17439884.2020.1707223

Pangrazio, L., & Sefton-Green, J. (2022). Learning to live well with datafication. In L. Pangrazio & J. Sefton-Green (Eds), *Learning to Live with Datafication: Educational Case Studies and Initiatives from Across the World* (1st edn, pp. 1–16). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003136842

Pangrazio, L., & Selwyn, N. (2018). "It's Not Like It's Life or Death or Whatever": Young People's Understandings of Social Media Data. *Social Media + Society*, *4*(3), 2056305118787808. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118787808

Pangrazio, L., & Selwyn, N. (2019). 'Personal data literacies': A critical literacies approach to enhancing understandings of personal digital data. *New Media & Society*, *21*(2), 419–437. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818799523

Pangrazio, L., & Selwyn, N. (2023). *Critical Data Literacies: Rethinking Data and Everyday Life*. The MIT Press. https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/14155.001.0001

Park, H. J. (2025). Serial mediation effects of ubiquity and notification on the relationship between habitual social media checking behaviors and self-control failures. *New Media & Society*, *27*(3), 1829–1848. https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448241231223

Park, S., & Chun, D. (2024). Comparative analysis of third-level digital divide among Korean older adults: Capital-based approach. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, *204*, 123381. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2024.123381

Parsons, T. (1961). The school class as a social system: Some of its functions in American society. In A. Halsey, J. Floud, & C. Anderson (Eds), *Education, Economy and Society*. The Free Press of Glencoe.

Pasquale, F. (2015). *The Black Box Society: The Secret Algorithms That Control Money and Information*. Harvard University Press. https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674736061

Paßmann, J., & Schubert, C. (2021). Liking as taste making: Social media practices as generators of aesthetic valuation and distinction. *New Media & Society*, *23*(10), 2947–2963. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820939458

Pasta, S. (2019). Conversazioni via social network con giovani autori di performances d'odio. *Pedagogia Oggi*, (2). https://doi.org/10.7346/PO-022019-25

Pathak, S. (2013, October 7). McCann Melbourne Made Up a Word to Sell a Print Dictionary: New Campaign For Macquarie Birthed 'Phubbing'. *AdAge*. https://adage.com/article/news/mccann-melbourne-made-a-word-sell-a-dictionary/244595

Pathiranage, A., & Karunaratne, T. (2023). Teachers' Agency in Technology for Education in Pre- and Post-COVID-19 Periods: A Systematic Literature Review. *Education Sciences*, *13*(9), 917. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13090917

Paul, G., & Stegbauer, C. (2005). Is the digital divide between young and elderly people increasing? *First Monday*. https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v10i10.1286

Pearson, H. (2025). Do smartphones and social media really harm teens' mental health? *Nature*, *640*(8057), 26–28. https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-025-00933-3

Peeters, S. (2023). *Zeeschuimer* (Version v1.4) [Computer software]. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.7525702

Peeters, S., Tuters, M., Willaert, T., & De Zeeuw, D. (2021). On the Vernacular Language Games of an Antagonistic Online Subculture. *Frontiers in Big Data*, *4*, 718368. https://doi.org/10.3389/fdata.2021.718368

Peng, D., & Yu, Z. (2022). A Literature Review of Digital Literacy over Two Decades. *Education Research International*, *2022*, 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/2533413

Perkel, D. (2008). Copy and Paste Literacy? Literacy Practices in the Production of a MySpace Profile. *Global Media Journal-Persian Edition*, *3*(1).

Peter, J., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2006). Adolescents' internet use: Testing the "disappearing digital divide" versus the "emerging digital differentiation" approach. *Poetics*, *34*(4–5), 293–305. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2006.05.005

Peterson, R. A., & Kern, R. M. (1996). Changing Highbrow Taste: From Snob to Omnivore. *American Sociological Review*, *61*(5), 900. https://doi.org/10.2307/2096460

Petrolito, R., & Dell'Orletta, F. (2018). Word Embeddings in Sentiment Analysis. In E. Cabrio, A. Mazzei, & F. Tamburini (Eds), *Proceedings of the Fifth Italian Conference on Computational Linguistics CLiC-it 2018* (pp. 330–334). Accademia University Press. https://doi.org/10.4000/books.aaccademia.3589

Pew Research Center. (2023). *Teens, Social Media and Technology 2023*. https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2023/12/11/teens-social-media-and-technology-2023/

Phippen, A. (2025). Online Harms Moral Panics, the Last Five Years. In A. Phippen, *Policy and Rights Challenges in Children's Online Behaviour and Safety, 2017–2023* (pp. 47–70). Springer Nature Switzerland. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-80286-7_3

Pink, S., Horst, H. A., Postill, J., Hjorth, L., Lewis, T., & Tacchi, J. (2016). *Digital ethnography: Principles and practice*. SAGE.

Poell, T., Nieborg, D., & Van Dijck, J. (2019). Platformisation. *Internet Policy Review*, *8*(4). https://doi.org/10.14763/2019.4.1425

Polanyi, M. (1966). *The Tacit Dimension*. University of Chicago Press.

Poles, A. (2025). Impact of Social Media Usage on Attention Spans. *Psychology*, *16*(06), 760–772. https://doi.org/10.4236/psych.2025.166042

Pollock, P. H., Hamann, K., & Wilson, B. M. (2011). Learning Through Discussions: Comparing the Benefits of Small-Group and Large-Class Settings. *Journal of Political Science Education*, *7*(1), 48–64. https://doi.org/10.1080/15512169.2011.539913

Popping, R. (2015). Analyzing Open-ended Questions by Means of Text Analysis Procedures. *Bulletin of Sociological Methodology/Bulletin de Méthodologie Sociologique*, *128*(1), 23–39. https://doi.org/10.1177/0759106315597389

Potter, R. H., & Potter, L. A. (2001). The internet, cyberporn, and sexual exploitation of children: Media moral panics and urban myths for middle-class parents? *Sexuality and Culture*, *5*(3), 31–48. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-001-1029-9

Powell, W. W., & Snellman, K. (2004). The Knowledge Economy. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *30*(1), 199–220. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.29.010202.100037

Prensky, M. (2001). Digital natives, digital immigrants. *On the Horizon*, *9*(5), 1–6.

Prieur, A., Savage, M., & Flemmen, M. P. (2023). Distinctions in the making: A theoretical discussion of youth and cultural capital. *The British Journal of Sociology*, *74*(3), 360–375. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.13002

Przybylski, A. K., Murayama, K., DeHaan, C. R., & Gladwell, V. (2013). Motivational, emotional, and behavioral correlates of fear of missing out. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *29*(4), 1841–1848. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2013.02.014

Pugh, A. J. (2011). Distinction, boundaries or bridges?: Children, inequality and the uses of consumer culture. *Poetics*, *39*(1), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2010.10.002

Pujazon-Zazik, M., & Park, M. J. (2010). To Tweet, or Not to Tweet: Gender Differences and Potential Positive and Negative Health Outcomes of Adolescents' Social Internet Use. *American Journal of Men's Health*, *4*(1), 77–85. https://doi.org/10.1177/1557988309360819

Pukdeewut, A., & Setthasuravich, P. (2024). Bridging the Third-Level Digital Divide: Socio-Demographic Determinants of theDigital Outcomes in Thailand. *FWU Journal of Social Sciences*, 19–39. https://doi.org/10.51709/19951272/Winter2024/2

Pybus, J., & Coté, M. (2024). Super SDKs: Tracking personal data and platform monopolies in the mobile. *Big Data & Society*, *11*(1), 20539517241231270. https://doi.org/10.1177/20539517241231270

Ra, C. K., Cho, J., Stone, M. D., De La Cerda, J., Goldenson, N. I., Moroney, E., Tung, I., Lee, S. S., & Leventhal, A. M. (2018). Association of Digital Media Use With Subsequent Symptoms of Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder Among Adolescents. *JAMA*, *320*(3), 255. https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2018.8931

Ragnedda, M. (2017). *The Third Digital Divide: A Weberian Approach to Digital Inequalities* (1st edn). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315606002

Ragnedda, M. (2018). Conceptualizing digital capital. *Telematics and Informatics*, *35*(8), 2366–2375. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2018.10.006

Rama, I., Bainotti, L., Gandini, A., Giorgi, G., Semenzin, S., Agosti, C., Corona, G., & Romano, S. (2023). The platformization of gender and sexual identities: An algorithmic analysis of Pornhub. *Porn Studies*, *10*(2), 154–173. https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2022.2066566

Ratan, Z., Parrish, A.-M., Zaman, S., Alotaibi, M., & Hosseinzadeh, H. (2021). Smartphone Addiction and Associated Health Outcomes in Adult Populations: A Systematic Review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *18*(22), 12257. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph182212257

Raunak, V., Gupta, V., & Metze, F. (2019). Effective Dimensionality Reduction for Word Embeddings. *Proceedings of the 4th Workshop on Representation Learning for NLP (RepL4NLP-2019)*, 235–243. https://doi.org/10.18653/v1/W19-4328

Reay, D. (2004). 'It's all becoming a habitus': Beyond the habitual use of habitus in educational research. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *25*(4), 431–444. https://doi.org/10.1080/0142569042000236934

Rega, I., & Medrado, A. (2023). The Stepping into Visibility Model: Reflecting on consequences of social media visibility – a Global South perspective. *Information, Communication & Society*, *26*(2), 405–424. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2021.1954228

Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 (Digital Services Act), Official Journal of the European Union (2022). https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32022R2065

Richards, P. (2017). *Facebook Idio-Culture: How Personalisation Puts the Me in Social Media*. https://doi.org/10.34737/Q430X

Risi, E., Bonini, T., & Pronzato, R. (2020). Algorithmic media in everyday life. An experience with auto-ethnographic student diaries. *Etnografia e ricerca qualitativa*, (3), 407–422. https://doi.org/10.3240/99552

Risi, E., & Pronzato, R. (2022). Algorithmic prosumers. In E. Armano, M. Briziarelli, & E. Risi (Eds), *Digital platforms and algorithmic subjectivities* (pp. 149–166). University of Westminister Press.

Rivas, A. (2023). The platformization of education. In C. Cobo Romaní & A. Rivas (Eds), *The new digital education policy landscape: From education systems to platforms* (p. chap. 10). Routledge, Taylor & Fracis Group.

Robards, B., Goring, J., & Hendry, N. A. (2025). Guiding young people's social media use in school policies: Opportunities, risks, moral panics, and imagined futures. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2025.2468477

RobbGrieco, M. (2014). Why History Matters for Media Literacy Education. *Journal of Media Literacy Education*, *6*(2). https://doi.org/10.23860/jmle-6-2-2

Rodgers, R. F., & Rousseau, A. (2022). Social media and body image: Modulating effects of social identities and user characteristics. *Body Image*, *41*, 284–291. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2022.02.009

Rogers, R. (2013). *Digital methods*. Mit Press.

Rogers, R., & Giorgi, G. (2024). What is a meme, technically speaking? *Information, Communication & Society*, *27*(1), 73–91. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2023.2174790

Rollo, F., Bonisoli, G., & Po, L. (2024). A Comparative Analysis of Word Embeddings Techniques for Italian News Categorization. *IEEE Access*, *12*, 25536–25552. https://doi.org/10.1109/ACCESS.2024.3367246

Romero, M., & Margolis, E. (Eds). (2005). *The Blackwell Companion to Social Inequalities: Romero/The Blackwell*. Blackwell Publishing Ltd. https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470996973

Romito, M., & Antonelli, F. (2018). Per un'etnografia dei processi di istruzione. Culture, disuguaglianze, dispositivi. *Etnografia e ricerca qualitativa*, (2), 205–224. https://doi.org/10.3240/90879

Roose, H., Van Eijck, K., & Lievens, J. (2012). Culture of distinction or culture of openness? Using a social space approach to analyze the social structuring of lifestyles. *Poetics*, *40*(6), 491–513. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2012.08.001

Sadowski, J. (2019). When data is capital: Datafication, accumulation, and extraction. *Big Data & Society*, *6*(1), 2053951718820549. https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951718820549

Sander, I. (2024). Critical datafication literacy – a framework for educating about datafication. *Information and Learning Sciences*, *125*(3/4), 270–292. https://doi.org/10.1108/ILS-06-2023-0064

Santagiustina, C. R. M. A., & Warglien, M. (2022). The architecture of partisan debates: The online controversy on the no-deal Brexit. *PLOS ONE*, *17*(6), e0270236. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0270236

Sartini, N. W., & Adrian, D. (2023). Symbolic violence and discrimination in a social media comment section: A study on discriminatory discursive strategies targeting non-binary gender identity in the context of Indonesia. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, *10*(2). https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2023.2270287

Sassatelli, R. (1999). Interaction Order and Beyond: A Field Analysis of Body Culture Within Fitness Gyms. *Body & Society*, *5*(2–3), 227–248. https://doi.org/10.1177/1357034X99005002013

Sassatelli, R. (2007). *Consumer Culture: History, Theory and Politics*. Sage Publications Ltd.

Savage, M. (2015). *Social class in the 21st century*. Pelican, an imprint of Penguin Books.

Savage, M., Devine, F., Cunningham, N., Taylor, M., Li, Y., Hjellbrekke, J., Le Roux, B., Friedman, S., & Miles, A. (2013). A New Model of Social Class? Findings from the BBC's Great British Class Survey Experiment. *Sociology*, *47*(2), 219–250. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038513481128

Savage, M., & Gayo, M. (2011). Unravelling the omnivore: A field analysis of contemporary musical taste in the United Kingdom. *Poetics*, *39*(5), 337–357. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2011.07.001

Savage, M., Warde, A., & Devine, F. (2005). Capitals, assets, and resources: Some critical issues[1]. *The British Journal of Sociology*, *56*(1), 31–47. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-4446.2005.00045.x

Scarcelli, C. M., & Farci, M. (2024). Negotiating Gender in the Digital Age: Young People and the Representation of Femininity and Masculinity on Social Media. *Italian Sociological Review*, 93-113 Pages. https://doi.org/10.13136/ISR.V14I1.645

Scheerder, A., Van Deursen, A., & Van Dijk, J. (2017). Determinants of Internet skills, uses and outcomes. A systematic review of the second- and third-level digital divide. *Telematics and Informatics*, *34*(8), 1607–1624. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2017.07.007

Scheithauer, H., Schultze-Krumbholz, A., Pfetsch, J., & Hess, M. (2021). Types of Cyberbullying. In P. K. Smith & J. O' Higgins Norman (Eds), *The Wiley Blackwell handbook of bullying: A comprehensive and international review of research and intervention 1* (1st edn, pp. 120–138). John Wiley & Sons.

Schellewald, A. (2023). Understanding the popularity and affordances of TikTok through user experiences. *Media, Culture & Society*, *45*(8), 1568–1582. https://doi.org/10.1177/01634437221144562

Schneider, R. (2013). Research Data Literacy. In S. Kurbanoğlu, E. Grassian, D. Mizrachi, R. Catts, & S. Špiranec (Eds), *Worldwide Commonalities and Challenges in Information Literacy Research and Practice* (Vol. 397, pp. 134–140). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-03919-0_16

Schneider, S. L. (2013). The International Standard Classification of Education 2011. In G. Elisabeth Birkelund (Ed.), *Comparative Social Research* (Vol. 30, pp. 365–379). Emerald Group Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/S0195-6310(2013)0000030017

Schüll, N. D. (2014). *Addiction by design: Machine gambling in Las Vegas*. Princeton university press.

Schulz, C. (2023). A new algorithmic imaginary. *Media, Culture & Society*, *45*(3), 646–655. https://doi.org/10.1177/01634437221136014

Schwartz, G., & Merten, D. (1967). The Language of Adolescence: An Anthropological Approach to the Youth Culture. *American Journal of Sociology*, *72*(5), 453–468. https://doi.org/10.1086/224376

Seehaus, A., & Trappmann, V. (2023). The Middle as a Classless Place? How Young People Moralise and Justify Precarisation. In S. Joller & M. Stanisavljević (Eds), *Moral Collectives* (pp. 139–163). Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-40147-4_9

Sefton-Green, J., Nixon, H., & Erstad, O. (2009). Reviewing Approaches and Perspectives on "Digital Literacy". *Pedagogies: An International Journal*, *4*(2), 107–125. https://doi.org/10.1080/15544800902741556

Shankleman, M., Hammond, L., & Jones, F. W. (2021). Adolescent Social Media Use and Well-Being: A Systematic Review and Thematic Meta-synthesis. *Adolescent Research Review*, *6*(4), 471–492. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40894-021-00154-5

Shannon, H., Bush, K., Villeneuve, P. J., Hellemans, K. G., & Guimond, S. (2022). Problematic Social Media Use in Adolescents and Young Adults: Systematic Review and Meta-analysis. *JMIR Mental Health*, *9*(4), e33450. https://doi.org/10.2196/33450

Sharma, P. S. (2020). A systematic review on page ranking algorithms. *International Journal of Information Technology*, *12*, 329–337. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41870-020-00439-3

Sheridan, M. P., & Rowsell, J. (2010). *Design literacies: Learning from a digital environment* (1. ed). Routledge.

Sherry, J. L. (2004). Flow and Media Enjoyment. *Communication Theory*, *14*(4), 328–347. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2004.tb00318.x

Siles, I. (2023). *Living with algorithms: Agency and user culture in Costa Rica*. The MIT Press.

Siles, I., Espinoza-Rojas, J., Naranjo, A., & Tristán, M. F. (2019). The Mutual Domestication of Users and Algorithmic Recommendations on Netflix. *Communication, Culture and Critique*, tcz025. https://doi.org/10.1093/ccc/tcz025

Siles, I., Gómez-Cruz, E., & Ricaurte, P. (2024). Fluid agency in relation to algorithms: Tensions, mediations, and transversalities. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, *30*(3), 1025–1040. https://doi.org/10.1177/13548565231174586

Siles, I., Segura-Castillo, A., Solís, R., & Sancho, M. (2020). Folk theories of algorithmic recommendations on Spotify: Enacting data assemblages in the global South. *Big Data & Society*, *7*(1), 205395172092337. https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951720923377

Siles, I., & Valerio-Alfaro, L. (2025). From Feed to Flow: Watching Television on TikTok. *Television & New Media*, 15274764251334576. https://doi.org/10.1177/15274764251334576

Sillat, L. H., Tammets, K., & Laanpere, M. (2021). Digital Competence Assessment Methods in Higher Education: A Systematic Literature Review. *Education Sciences*, *11*(8), 402. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11080402

Sipley, G. (2024). *Just Here for the Comments: Lurking as Digital Literacy Practice*. Bristol University Press. https://doi.org/10.51952/9781529227307

Slagter, S. K., Gradassi, A., Van Duijvenvoorde, A. C. K., & Van Den Bos, W. (2023). Identifying who adolescents prefer as source of information within their social network. *Scientific Reports*, *13*(1). https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-46994-0

Soriano-Ayala, E., Bonillo Díaz, M., & Cala, V. C. (2023). TikTok and Child Hypersexualization: Analysis of Videos and Narratives of Minors. *American Journal of Sexuality Education*, *18*(2), 210–230. https://doi.org/10.1080/15546128.2022.2096734

Southerton, C., & Taylor, E. (2021). Dataveillance and the Dividuated Self: The Everyday Digital Surveillance of Young People. In C. Southerton & E. Taylor, *The Pre-Crime Society* (pp. 249–268). Policy Press. https://doi.org/10.1332/policypress/9781529205251.003.0012

Srnicek, N., & De Sutter, L. (2017). *Platform capitalism*. Polity.

Stahl, C. C., & Literat, I. (2023). #GenZ on TikTok: The collective online self-Portrait of the social media generation. *Journal of Youth Studies*, *26*(7), 925–946. https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2022.2053671

Steen, E., Yurechko, K., & Klug, D. (2023). You Can (Not) Say What You Want: Using Algospeak to Contest and Evade Algorithmic Content Moderation on TikTok. *Social Media + Society*, *9*(3), 20563051231194586. https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051231194586

Steinkuehler, C. (2010). Video Games and Digital Literacies. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *54*(1), 61–63. https://doi.org/10.1598/JAAL.54.1.7

Straubhaar, J., Tufekci, Z., Spence, J., & Rojas, V. (2012). Chapter 1. Digital Inequity in the Austin Technopolis: An Introduction. In J. Straubhaar, J. Spence, Z. Tufekci, & R. G. Lentz (Eds), *Inequity in the Technopolis* (pp. 1–32). University of Texas Press. https://doi.org/10.7560/728714-002

Street, B. V. (1984). *Literacy in theory and practice*. Cambridge University Press.

Sveningsson, M. (2015). "It's Only a Pastime, Really": Young People's Experiences of Social Media as a Source of News about Public Affairs. *Social Media + Society*, *1*(2), 2056305115604855. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305115604855

Swart, J. (2021). Experiencing Algorithms: How Young People Understand, Feel About, and Engage With Algorithmic News Selection on Social Media. *Social Media + Society*, *7*(2), 20563051211008828. https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051211008828

Taber, L., Dominguez, S., & Whittaker, S. (2023). Ignore the Affordances; It's the Social Norms: How Millennials and Gen-Z Think About Where to Make a Post on Social Media. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, *7*(CSCW2), 1–26. https://doi.org/10.1145/3610102

Tao, M., & Ellison, N. B. (2023). "It's Your Finsta at the End of the Day . . . Kind of": Understanding Emerging Adults' Self-Presentational Changes on Secondary Accounts. *Social Media + Society*, *9*(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051231152812

Tapscott, D. (1999). *Growing up digital: The rise of the Net generation*. McGraw-Hill.

Taylor, R. S. (1986). *Value-added processes in information systems*. Ablex Publ. Corp.

Techataweewan, W., & Prasertsin, U. (2018). Development of digital literacy indicators for Thai undergraduate students using mixed method research. *Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences*, *39*(2), 215–221. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.kjss.2017.07.001

The New London Group. (1996). A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures. *Harvard Educational Review*, *66*(1), 60–93. https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.66.1.17370n67v22j160u

Thimm, C. (2018). Media Technology and Media Logic(s): The Media Grammar Approach. In C. Thimm, M. Anastasiadis, & J. Einspänner-Pflock (Eds), *Media Logic(s) Revisited* (pp. 111–132). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65756-1_6

Thompson, C. J. (2019). The 'big data' myth and the pitfalls of 'thick data' opportunism: On the need for a different ontology of markets and consumption. *Journal of Marketing Management*, *35*(3–4), 207–230. https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2019.1579751

Thompson, E. P. (1971). THE MORAL ECONOMY OF THE ENGLISH CROWD IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY. *Past and Present*, *50*(1), 76–136. https://doi.org/10.1093/past/50.1.76

Thomson, P. (2008). Field. In M. Grenfell (Ed.), *Pierre Bourdieu* (1st edn, pp. 67–82). Acumen Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1017/UPO9781844654031.007

Thorne, S. L. (2013). Digital Literacies. In M. R. Hawkins (Ed.), *Framing languages and literacies: Socially situated views and perspectives* (pp. 213–240). Routledge.

Thornham, H. (2019). *Gender and digital culture: Between irreconcilability and the datalogical*. Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group.

Tian, Y., Kamran, Q., & Henseler, J. (2025). Sustainability in marketing: A review using multiple correspondence analysis. *Cogent Business & Management*, *12*(1), 2493389. https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2025.2493389

Tiidenberg, K. (2018). *Selfies: Why we love (and hate) them*. Emerald publishing.

Tinmaz, H., Lee, Y.-T., Fanea-Ivanovici, M., & Baber, H. (2022). A systematic review on digital literacy. *Smart Learning Environments*, *9*(1), 21. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40561-022-00204-y

Tomczyk, Ł., & Selmanagic-Lizde, E. (2018). Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) among youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina—Scale and selected mechanisms. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *88*, 541–549. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.03.048

Trillò, T. (2024). "PoV: You are reading an academic article." The memetic performance of affiliation in TikTok's platform vernacular. *New Media & Society*, 14614448241290234. https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448241290234

Tsaliki, L. (2015). Popular culture and moral panics about 'children at risk': Revisiting the sexualisation-of-young-girls debate. *Sex Education*, *15*(5), 500–514. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2015.1022893

Tsaliki, L. (2022). Constructing young selves in a digital media ecology: Youth cultures, practices and identity. *Information, Communication & Society*, *25*(4), 477–484. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2022.2039747

Tufekci, Z. (2015). Algorithmic harms beyond Facebook and google: Emergent challenges of computational agency. *Colorado Technology Law Journal*, *13*(203).

Turner, F. (2008). *From counterculture to cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the rise of digital utopianism*. University of Chicago Press.

Uldam, J. (2018). Social media visibility: Challenges to activism. *Media, Culture & Society*, *40*(1), 41–58. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443717704997

Valkenburg, P. M., & Peter, J. (2009). Social Consequences of the Internet for Adolescents: A Decade of Research. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *18*(1), 1–5. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8721.2009.01595.x

Van Den Beemt, A., Thurlings, M., & Willems, M. (2020). Towards an understanding of social media use in the classroom: A literature review. *Technology, Pedagogy and Education*, *29*(1), 35–55. https://doi.org/10.1080/1475939X.2019.1695657

Van Der Wal, A., Valkenburg, P. M., & Van Driel, I. I. (2024). In Their Own Words: How Adolescents Use Social Media and How It Affects Them. *Social Media + Society*, *10*(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051241248591

Van Deursen, A. J. A. M., Helsper, E., Eynon, R., & van Dijk, J. A. G. M. (2017). The compoundness and sequentiality of digital inequality. *International Journal of Communication*, *11*, 452–473.

Van Deursen, A. J. A. M., & Helsper, E. J. (2015). The Third-Level Digital Divide: Who Benefits Most from Being Online? In L. Robinson, S. R. Cotten, J. Schulz, T. M. Hale, & A. Williams (Eds), *Studies in Media and Communications* (Vol. 10, pp. 29–52). Emerald Group Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/S2050-206020150000010002

Van Deursen, A. J. A. M., Helsper, E. J., & Eynon, R. (2016). Development and validation of the Internet Skills Scale (ISS). *Information, Communication & Society*, *19*(6), 804–823. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1078834

Van Deursen, A. J., & Van Dijk, J. A. (2019). The first-level digital divide shifts from inequalities in physical access to inequalities in material access. *New Media & Society*, *21*(2), 354–375. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818797082

Van Dijck, J. (2013). *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199970773.001.0001

Van Dijck, J. (2014). Datafication, dataism and dataveillance: Big Data between scientific paradigm and ideology. *Surveillance & Society*, *12*(2), 197–208. https://doi.org/10.24908/ss.v12i2.4776

Van Dijck, J., Nieborg, D., & Poell, T. (2019). Reframing platform power. *Internet Policy Review*, *8*(2). https://doi.org/10.14763/2019.2.1414

Van Dijk, J. (2005). *The Deepening Divide: Inequality in the Information Society*. SAGE Publications, Inc. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452229812

Van Dijk, J. A. G. M. (2006). Digital divide research, achievements and shortcomings. *Poetics*, *34*(4–5), 221–235. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2006.05.004

Van Laar, E., Van Deursen, A. J. A. M., Van Dijk, J. A. G. M., & De Haan, J. (2017). The relation between 21st-century skills and digital skills: A systematic literature review. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *72*, 577–588. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.03.010

Van Oosten, J. M. F. (2021). Adolescent girls' use of social media for challenging sexualization. *Gender, Technology and Development*, *25*(1), 22–42. https://doi.org/10.1080/09718524.2021.1880039

Van Oosten, J. M. F., Vandenbosch, L., & Peter, J. (2017). Gender roles on social networking sites: Investigating reciprocal relationships between Dutch adolescents' hypermasculinity and hyperfemininity and sexy online self-presentations. *Journal of Children and Media*, *11*(2), 147–166. https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2017.1304970

Vercruyssen, A., Schirmer, W., Geerts, N., & Mortelmans, D. (2023). How "basic" is basic digital literacy for older adults? Insights from digital skills instructors. *Frontiers in Education*, *8*, 1231701. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2023.1231701

Vietze, J., Juang, L. P., & Schachner, M. K. (2019). Peer cultural socialisation: A resource for minority students' cultural identity, life satisfaction, and school values. *Intercultural Education*, *30*(5), 579–598. https://doi.org/10.1080/14675986.2019.1586213

Vismara, M., Girone, N., Conti, D., Nicolini, G., & Dell'Osso, B. (2022). The current status of Cyberbullying research: A short review of the literature. *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences*, *46*, 101152. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cobeha.2022.101152

Vizcaíno-Verdú, A., De-Casas-Moreno, P., & Tirocchi, S. (2023). Online prosumer convergence: Listening, creating and sharing music on YouTube and TikTok. *Communication & Society*, *36*(1), 151–166. https://doi.org/10.15581/003.36.1.151-166

Voogt, J., & Roblin, N. P. (2012). A comparative analysis of international frameworks for 21st century competences: Implications for national curriculum policies. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, *44*(3), 299–321. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2012.668938

Vraga, E. K., & Tully, M. (2021). News literacy, social media behaviors, and skepticism toward information on social media. *Information, Communication & Society*, *24*(2), 150–166. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2019.1637445

Vygotskij, L. S., & Cole, M. (1981). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes* (Nachdr.). Harvard Univ. Press.

Wacquant, L. J. D. (1989). Towards a Reflexive Sociology: A Workshop with Pierre Bourdieu. *Sociological Theory*, *7*(1), 26. https://doi.org/10.2307/202061

Wacquant, L. J. D. (2004). *Body & soul: Notebooks of an apprentice boxer*. Oxford University Press.

Walkerdine, V. (2006). Playing The Game: Young girls performing femininity in video game play. *Feminist Media Studies*, *6*(4), 519–537. https://doi.org/10.1080/14680770600990036

Wallace, C., & Kovacheva, S. (1996). Youth Cultures and Consumption in Eastern and Western Europe: An Overview. *Youth & Society*, *28*(2), 189–214. https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X96028002003

Ward, L. M., Seabrook, R. C., Manago, A., & Reed, L. (2016). Contributions of Diverse Media to Self-Sexualization among Undergraduate Women and Men. *Sex Roles*, *74*(1–2), 12–23. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-015-0548-z

Warde, A. (2005). Consumption and Theories of Practice. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, *5*(2), 131–153. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540505053090

Warde, A. (2016). *The practice of eating*. Polity press.

Warde, A., Wright, D., & Gayo-Cal, M. (2007). Understanding Cultural Omnivorousness: Or, the Myth of the Cultural Omnivore. *Cultural Sociology*, *1*(2), 143–164. https://doi.org/10.1177/1749975507078185

We Are Social, DataReportal, & Meltwater. (2024). *Digital 2024: April Global Statshot Report*. https://datareportal.com/?utm_source=Statista&utm_medium=Data_Citation_Hyperlink&utm_campaign=Data_Partners&utm_content=Statista_Data_Citation

Weeks, B. E., Ardèvol-Abreu, A., & Gil De Zúñiga, H. (2015). Online Influence? Social Media Use, Opinion Leadership, and Political Persuasion. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, edv050. https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/edv050

Wei, K.-K., Teo, H.-H., Chan, H. C., & Tan, B. C. Y. (2011). Conceptualizing and Testing a Social Cognitive Model of the Digital Divide. *Information Systems Research*, *22*(1), 170–187. https://doi.org/10.1287/isre.1090.0273

Weninger, C. (2022). Skill versus Social Practice? Some Challenges in Teaching Digital Literacy in the University Classroom. *TESOL Quarterly*, *56*(3), 1016–1028. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.3134

Weninger, C. (2023). Digital literacy as ideological practice. *ELT Journal*, *77*(2), 197–206. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccad001

West, C., & Zimmerman, D. H. (1987). Doing Gender. *Gender & Society*, *1*(2), 125–151. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243287001002002

Wherry, F. F., & Woodward, I. (Eds). (2019). Omnivorousness, Distinction, or Both? In J. Johnston, S. Baumann, & M. Oleschuk, *The Oxford Handbook of Consumption* (pp. 359–380). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190695583.013.19

Wiard, V., Lits, B., & Dufrasne, M. (2022). "The Spy Who Loved Me": A Qualitative Exploratory Analysis of the Relationship Between Youth and Algorithms. *Frontiers in Communication*, *7*, 778273. https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2022.778273

Widyanto, L., & Griffiths, M. (2006). 'Internet Addiction': A Critical Review. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, *4*(1), 31–51. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-006-9009-9

Wilkie, A., Michael, M., & Plummer-Fernandez, M. (2015). Speculative Method and Twitter: Bots, Energy and Three Conceptual Characters. *The Sociological Review*, *63*(1), 79–101. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954X.12168

Williams, R. (1974). *Television: Technology and cultural form*. Routledge.

Willis, P. (1977). *Learning to Labour* (0 edn). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351218788

Wilska, T.-A., Holkkola, M., & Tuominen, J. (2023). The Role of Social Media in the Creation of Young People's Consumer Identities. *Sage Open*, *13*(2), 21582440231177030. https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440231177030

Withagen, R., De Poel, H. J., Araújo, D., & Pepping, G.-J. (2012). Affordances can invite behavior: Reconsidering the relationship between affordances and agency. *New Ideas in Psychology*, *30*(2), 250–258. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.newideapsych.2011.12.003

Witte, J. C., & Mannon, S. E. (2010). *The Internet and Social Inequalities* (0 edn). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203861639

Wolff, A., Gooch, D., Cavero Montaner, J. J., Rashid, U., & Kortuem, G. (2016). Creating an Understanding of Data Literacy for a Data-driven Society. *The Journal of Community Informatics*, *12*(3). https://doi.org/10.15353/joci.v12i3.3275

Wolff, G. H., & Shen, C. (2024). Audience size, moderator activity, gender, and content diversity: Exploring user participation and financial commitment on Twitch.tv. *New Media & Society*, *26*(2), 859–881. https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211069996

Wolniewicz, C. A., Tiamiyu, M. F., Weeks, J. W., & Elhai, J. D. (2018). Problematic smartphone use and relations with negative affect, fear of missing out, and fear of negative and positive evaluation. *Psychiatry Research*, *262*, 618–623. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2017.09.058

Wood, M. A., Bukowski, W. M., & Lis, E. (2016). The Digital Self: How Social Media Serves as a Setting that Shapes Youth's Emotional Experiences. *Adolescent Research Review*, *1*(2), 163–173. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40894-015-0014-8

Woods, C., & Scott, M. (2025). *Digital Symbolic Capital and legitimacy in platformised fields of cultural production*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5050302

Wu, T. (2017). *The attention merchants: The epic struggle to get inside our heads* (Paperback edition). Atlantic Books.

Wunderlich, A., & Zillich, A. F. (2025). Multilayered social media self-presentation practices: How German adolescents present themselves on Instagram and Snapchat. *Journal of Children and Media*, 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2025.2455583

Wuyckens, G., Landry, N., & Fastrez, P. (2022). Untangling media literacy, information literacy, and digital literacy: A systematic meta-review of core concepts in media education. *Journal of Media Literacy Education*, *14*(1), 168–182. https://doi.org/10.23860/JMLE-2022-14-1-12

Xu, W., & Zammit, K. (2020). Applying Thematic Analysis to Education: A Hybrid Approach to Interpreting Data in Practitioner Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *19*, 1609406920918810. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406920918810

Yildiz, M. N., & Keengwe, J. (Eds). (2016). *Handbook of Research on Media Literacy in the Digital Age:* IGI Global. https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-4666-9667-9

Yoon, H., Jang, Y., Vaughan, P. W., & Garcia, M. (2020). Older Adults' Internet Use for Health Information: Digital Divide by Race/Ethnicity and Socioeconomic Status. *Journal of Applied Gerontology*, *39*(1), 105–110. https://doi.org/10.1177/0733464818770772

Young, K. (1996, August). Internet addiction: The emergence of a new clinical disorder. *Poster Presented at the 104th American Psychological Association Annual Convention*. 104th American Psychological Association Annual Convention.

Young, K. (1998). Internet Addiction: The Emergence of a New Clinical Disorder. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, *1*(3), 237–244. https://doi.org/10.1089/cpb.1998.1.237

Ytre-Arne, B., & Moe, H. (2021). Folk theories of algorithms: Understanding digital irritation. *Media, Culture & Society*, *43*(5), 807–824. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443720972314

Ytre-Arne, B., Syvertsen, T., Moe, H., & Karlsen, F. (2020). Temporal ambivalences in smartphone use: Conflicting flows, conflicting responsibilities. *New Media & Society*, *22*(9), 1715–1732. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820913561

Yu, Z., Treré, E., & Bonini, T. (2022). The emergence of algorithmic solidarity: Unveiling mutual aid practices and resistance among Chinese delivery workers. *Media International Australia*, *183*(1), 107–123. https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X221074793

Zajko, M. (2022). Artificial intelligence, algorithms, and social inequality: Sociological contributions to contemporary debates. *Sociology Compass*, *16*(3), e12962. https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12962

Zhu, C., Huang, S., Evans, R., & Zhang, W. (2021). Cyberbullying Among Adolescents and Children: A Comprehensive Review of the Global Situation, Risk Factors, and Preventive Measures. *Frontiers in Public Health*, *9*, 634909. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2021.634909

Zhu, X., Deng, C., & Bai, W. (2023). Parental control and adolescent internet addiction: The moderating effect of parent-child relationships. *Frontiers in Public Health*, *11*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2023.1190534

Zuboff, S. (2019). *The age of surveillance capitalism: The fight for a human future at the new frontier of power*. Profile books.