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## **News Consumption among Chilean Adolescents: Interest, Motivations and Perceptions on the News Agenda**

### **El consumo de noticias de los adolescentes chilenos: intereses, motivaciones y percepciones sobre la agenda informativa**

#### **Abstract**

In today's context of media proliferation and increasing access to diverse media content, it becomes necessary to address young people's motivation to consume information. Researching this age group is relevant given that adolescence is a key period in people's civic socialization. This study explores how 13 to 17 year old Chileans consume news, in a multiple-platform, convergent and mobile media context. There are few studies that focus on the information habits of this particular age group. Using a quantitative self-administered questionnaire applied to 2,273 high school adolescents from four different regions in the country, this paper analyses participants' news consumption habits, their interest in news, their perception about the importance of different topics, and their motivations to being informed. The results show that surveyed teenagers access information mainly via social media like Facebook, to the detriment of traditional media. These adolescents are least interested in traditional politics, but they think this is the most prominent topic in the news. Their motivations to consume news have to do with their wish to be able to defend their points of view and deliver information to others. Also, they think that their portrayal in the news agenda is both inadequate and negative. These findings suggest that the news industry has a pending debt with young audiences.

#### **Resumen**

En un contexto de proliferación de medios y creciente acceso a diversos contenidos mediáticos, se vuelve necesario examinar las motivaciones de las audiencias jóvenes para consumir información. El estudio de este grupo etario es relevante, dado que la adolescencia es un período fundamental en la socialización cívica de las personas. Esta investigación explora cómo chilenos de 13 a 17 años consumen noticias, en un contexto mediático de múltiples soportes, convergencia y cultura móvil. Pocos estudios se centran en los hábitos informativos de este grupo específico. A partir de un cuestionario cuantitativo autoaplicado en 2013 a 2.273 adolescentes en establecimientos educativos de cuatro regiones del país, se analizan sus hábitos de consumo, interés en las noticias, percepción sobre la importancia de los temas de la agenda y motivaciones informativas. Los resultados muestran que los jóvenes encuestados se informan principalmente a través de redes sociales como Facebook, en detrimento de los medios convencionales. El tema que menos les interesa es la política tradicional, que, a su juicio, es el que más aparece en las noticias. Sus motivaciones en el consumo informativo se relacionan con el deseo de defender sus puntos de vista y de trans-

mitir información a otros. Además, estiman que su representación en la agenda informativa es inadecuada y negativa. Estos resultados sugieren una deuda pendiente de la industria informativa con los jóvenes.

### **Keywords / Palabras clave**

Adolescence, quantitative analysis, media consumption, digital context, secondary education, social function, information.

Adolescencia, análisis cuantitativo, consumo de medios, contexto digital, educación secundaria, función social, información.

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## **1. Introduction**

Adolescents' lives are «mediated», since «digital media are a central part of their out-of-school experiences and of their everyday relationships and identities» (Buckingham & Martínez-Rodríguez, 2013: 10). Different authors have become interested in analyzing new communication practices among adolescents beyond the school domain, in a technological environment that is changing, convergent, online (Carlsson, 2011), and increasingly crossed by the communication of mobile culture (Caron & Caronia, 2005). The fact that adolescents have access to media and information and communication technologies goes beyond their constitution in mere «new audiences» (Jenkins & al., 2006): they are immersed in a participatory and expressive culture of media convergence, in which their members are creative participants, believe in the importance of their contribution, and feel a certain degree of connection with each other. Scholars Orozco (2009), and Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010) consider these users as prosumers, that is to say producers and consumers simultaneously, whereas Burns (2010) employs the concept of «produser».

Educational, family, and informative systems participate in the change of media landscape, its cultural industries, and adolescents' communication and media consumption new practices. Casero (2012: 152) underlines the need to know the changes in young audiences' informative habits «to calibrate the scope and effects of digital convergence and their future perspectives». The informative news industry faces the challenge of achieving higher levels of pluralism and freedom of expression. To what degree do journalists –and the information system in general– set their agenda to include pertinent information aimed at adolescents? Regarding that matter, Zaffore (1990) states that every means of communication should contain an accumulation of different opinions and that such diversity is correlative to the increasing complexity of the social framework they must reflect. The task is not easy: the volume of news forces journalism to include, exclude and establish a hierarchy of information (De-Fontcuberta, 2011; Puente & Mujica, 2004). Then it is necessary to know if the multiplication of access to different

communication platforms benefits adolescents and therefore allows them a greater access to a variety of news about their surroundings (Buckingham, 2000).

Pluralism is not only expressed in the exercise of «the freedom of expression in the media of different kinds of priority, management, size and editorial direction, so that contents that express social, cultural, gender, geographical, and about original peoples are created» (Fundación Friedrich Ebert, 2013: 1). It is also manifested in the possibility that different kinds of audiences can be informed about the topics that affect and interest them. Adolescents are citizens in the present from multiple perspectives, before the exercise of suffrage (Condeza, 2009), from multiple perspectives, and they are part of a complex media ecology (Ito & al., 2010). Tracing their informative consumption in different media is socially relevant.

In that context, this article analyzes the news consumption habits of 2,273 Chilean adolescents between the ages of 13 and 17, by geographical location, socio-economical status and gender, in different regions of the country. This is the first study of its kind in Chile, funded by the National Commission for Scientific and Technological Research. It was conducted from January through September 2013 to know: a) which media and technologies adolescents use to be informed; b) their motivations to consume news; c) their perception about pluralism and the informative agenda and d) to associate motivations, media consumption, adolescents' attitudes and behaviors toward public affairs.

## **2. Educated to be informed?**

Researchers from different disciplines have underlined the importance of informative consumption in teenagers' lives. Developmental psychology has studied how, in search of their identities, adolescents turn to the media in order to understand what is socially acceptable, how to identify with their peers, express degrees of autonomy regarding adults' preferences or for the need of evasion-introspection (Padilla-Walker, 2007). According to Flanagan and Syvertsen (2006), adolescents symbolize the replacement of older generations in the political and social process. For political science and sociology, the informative habits expressed in news consumption in different media are related to citizenship training, the interest in public affairs, higher rates of civic participation, the exercise of the right to vote, and different forms of activism (McLeod, 2000; Valenzuela, 2013). Thus, news and media are considered to be relevant agents in adolescents' socialization that interact with similar agents, such as the family and educational institutions.

Along these lines, the interdisciplinary area of scientific research in communication and education has emphasized the critical formation on consumption of news, advertising, and fictional content (Aguaded, 2009; Buckingham, 2000; De-Fontcuberta, 2009). This is materialized in different levels and actions of media education related to citizenship training, such as courses of media literacy in Europe, enacted by its Parliament (2009); a state policy, like in Argentina (Morduchowicz, 2009), or a proposal for Chilean teachers training in media literacy (De-Fontcuberta & al., 2006-2008; De Fontcuberta, 2009). Bévort and others (2012) say that the degree of pluralism in the media has an effect on the configuration of debate spaces in the national and international agenda to which citizens have

access, and that massive media education is an essential democratic challenge. For Livingstone (2004), it is crucial for the democratic agenda that consumers create content, which turns them into participative citizens.

When it comes to research into adolescents' news consumption in an online, convergent environment, studies are scarce. Casero (2012) analyzed the consumption habits and perceptions of 549 Spanish youths between 16 and 30 years old with journalistic information. Huang (2009) explored consumption preferences of 28 American college students in different media, from the uses and gratifications approach. In these studies and others, the adolescents tend to get lost within the broader age categories (young, young adult or college students). Recent research on Internet and social media usage habits in adolescents (García & al., 2013), does not consider news consumption among the habits and usage practices analyzed.

In Chile and Latin America the relationship between adolescents and news has been studied from the perspective of the representation journalists make of them (Antezana, 2007; Condeza, 2005a, 2005b; Cytrynblum & Fabbro, 2011; Maronna & Sánchez, 2005; Sánchez, 2007, Túnñez, 2009; Yez, 2007). Some studies that give adolescents a voice in this subject come from UNICEF and the Network of news in infancy for Latin America (Andi, 2013).

Studying the news consumption of Chilean adolescents matters for two reasons: 1) The Chilean population is young, a third is under 18 years old (INE, 2010). 2) During 2006, 2011 and 2012, they were the protagonists of social movements demanding free, good quality education, while some of them criticized the practices of traditional politics (Condeza, 2009; Meunier & Condeza, 2012; Valenzuela, 2013). Little is still known about how this participation is related to the adolescents' news consumption. 3) The current secondary education curriculum does not pair civic education and citizenship training with media literacy or informative consumption.

### **3. Methodology**

The data obtained comes from a quantitative questionnaire applied in schools to a representative sample of 60% of the population between 13 and 17 years old, in the main cities of four regions (provinces) of Chile. The sample was stratified by urban center in three stages. Institutions were selected according to their dependence or typology, since there are three types of schools in Chile: municipal, subsidized, and private (municipal schools are managed by each of the local city councils, and are funded by the state. Subsidized schools are owned and managed by private individuals and receive public resources in addition to a copayment from the parents. Finally, private schools are owned and managed privately). Specialists from different disciplines have criticized such conditions, as the schools that are managed in this way would reproduce and even worsen the social stratification in the country (Puga, 2011). The sample was segmented according to the real percentage that each type of school represents of the total student enrollment in those urban centers, through probability sampling proportional to its size (number of students between ninth and eleventh grade, according the yearbook of Chile's Department of Education) (Minedu, 2013). For the next two

stages (grade), simple random sampling was used. This yielded a sample of 163 schools. Between 20 and 30 students per institution were randomly selected to be surveyed. The questionnaire was used with 2.744 youths between 13 and 18 years old, from 105 schools of different types, for a response rate of 64%. This sample was reduced to 2.273 valid cases, as 15% (N=411) was discarded for incorrectly answering a control question to measure attention; and 2.8% (N=77) was 18 years old (adult age). With 2,273 valid cases, under a maximum variance assumption and a confidence level of 95%, the margin of error is  $\pm 2,05\%$ .

Most studies in Chile are carried out in the Metropolitan Region of Santiago and its media. To reduce this bias, schools from the main cities in the regions of Antofagasta (mining zone in the north with a strong economical expansion), Valparaíso (the province where the Congress operates), Biobío (industrial area in the south of the country with high rates of poverty and unemployment) and Santiago (the capital) were selected.

A total of 388 cases (17.1% of the sample) were students from the Region of Antofagasta; 541 cases (23.8%) from the Region of Valparaíso; 530 cases (23.3%) from the Region of Biobío, and 814 cases (35.8%) from the Metropolitan Region of Santiago.

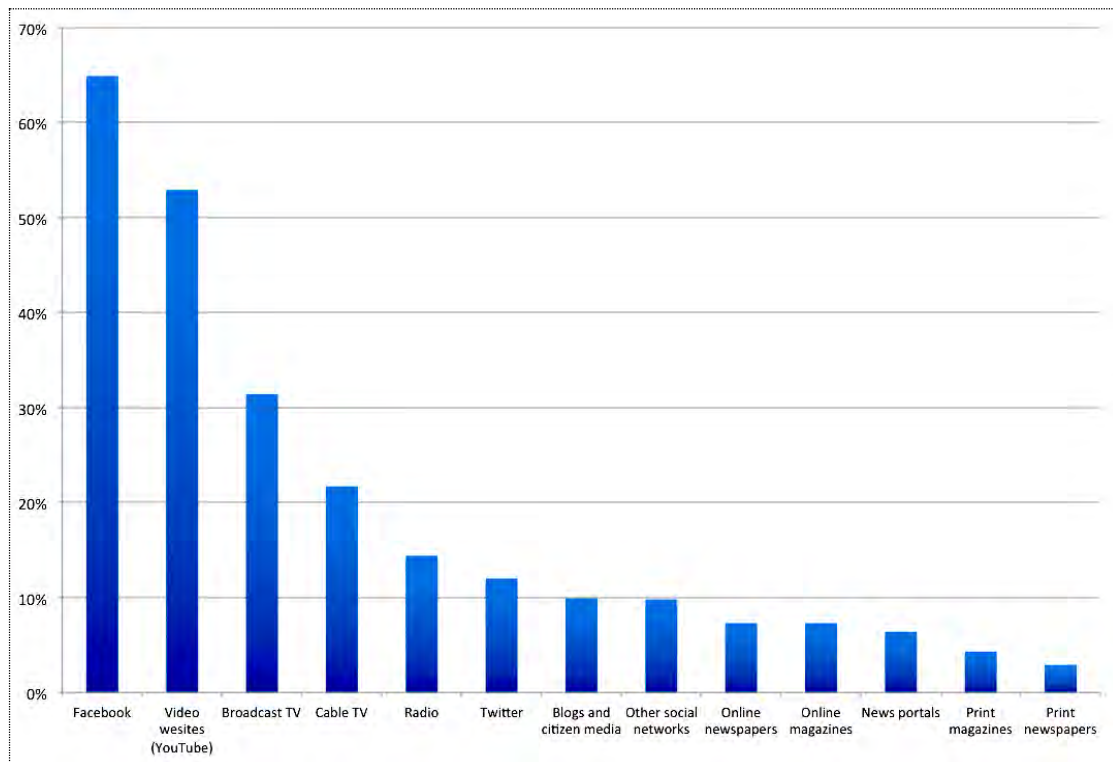
The questionnaire (30 questions, self-administered) was elaborated by the project researchers, from the uses and gratifications perspective (Rubin & al., 2008; Huang, 2009), and based on questions tested in national and international studies, among them, that of professor Edgar Huang from the University of Purdue (Condeza & al., 2013). The questionnaire was piloted in field conditions and adjusted accordingly. Fieldwork, conducted between May and August of 2013, was commissioned to the Institute of Sociology of the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. The Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Communications of the same university authorized the no-objection letters for the participants, and the consent forms for the parents and school directors.

The students' average age is 15 years old. 52% were male and 47.9% were female, divided homogeneously across the three course levels examined. When breaking the sample down by educational type of school, 39.9% of the cases were municipal institutions; 48.7% were subsidized schools, and 11.5% were private, paid establishments.

## **4. Result analysis**

### **4.1. Frequency of media usage and daily information technologies**

Traditional media have a minor presence in the informative diet of the surveyed adolescents, whereas the social network Facebook is the medium they use the most to be informed. 64.9% use it more than one hour a day, followed by websites like YouTube (52.9%) and, to a lesser degree, broadcast television (31.4%). The least used media are news websites (7.3%), print magazines and newspapers (4.3% and 2.9% respectively; see graph 1):



Graph 1: News consumption by type of medium (in %).

Women consume more news on Twitter and print magazines, while men prefer Facebook and video websites. There are significant differences by type of school across all the media analyzed. Students from municipal schools consume more news on Facebook, broadcast TV, cable and radio. Those from private institutions consume significantly fewer news through these media. The students from subsidized schools use more website videos, like YouTube, at similar levels as students from municipal schools. The private school students' informative diet is significantly more varied (Twitter, blogs, other social media, online newspapers and magazines, news websites, and print newspapers and magazines).

The main medium used to access news on the surveyed adolescents' own city, country, and the world is broadcast television, followed by Facebook, although some differences are observed depending on the geographical focus (city, country, world). Broadcast television is the most consumed medium in the case of national news, and it decreases in the case of international ones. For international news, the use of cable television increases up to the same level as Facebook.

When analyzing the most consulted medium to look for information about the country, municipal schools' students are the ones who most use broadcast television and Facebook, while students from private schools are the ones who use news websites the most.

When it comes to main activities carried out on the Internet, the list is topped by Wikipedia queries (49.8%) and information searches related to their studies (48%). Next is the use of the instant messaging service Whatsapp (45.9%) and online games (38.8%). The frequency of activities related to the web's expressive

power and participants' producer condition in the informative domain –that is to say, creating content, collaborating with a medium or writing on a blog– is quite moderated.

#### **4.2. Adolescents' interests and motivations to consume news**

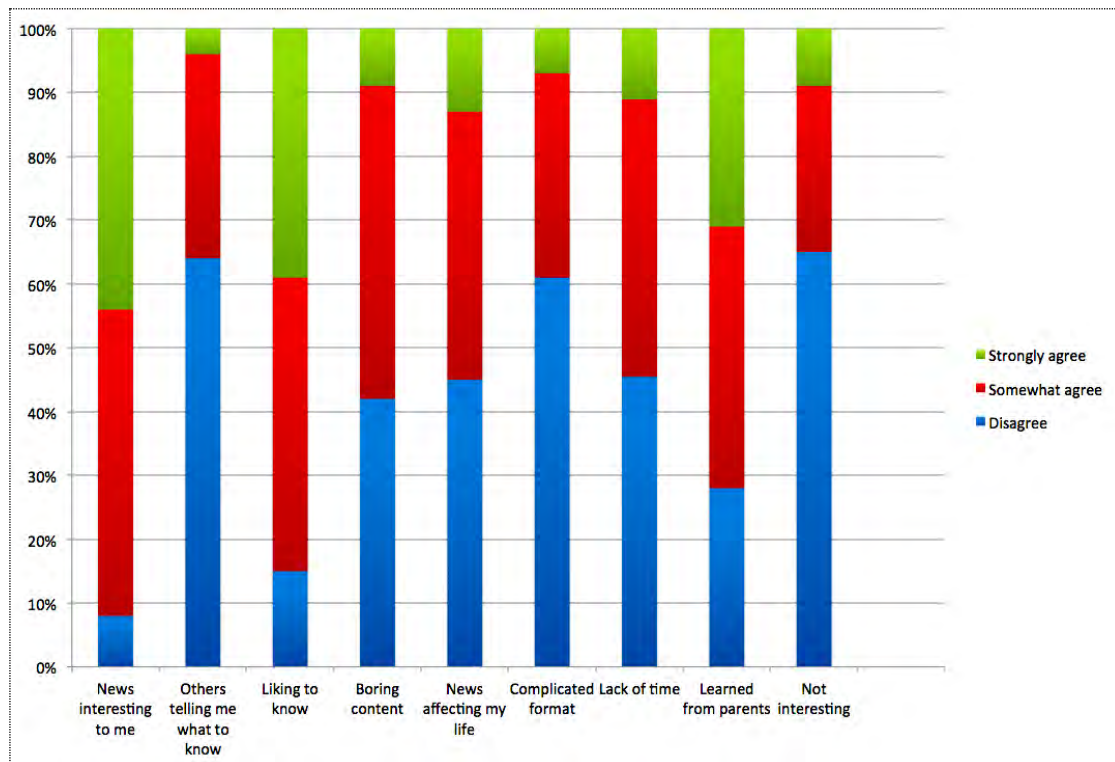
Adolescents were asked about their attention to different types of news: crime; sports; politics and elections; environment; economy; education; health; show business; their own schools; the student movement, and science and technology. Over 70% report paying attention to news about education, health, crime, the student movement, science and technology, and environment. The least popular topics are economy (41%) and politics and elections (32.9%).

Significant differences are observed by genre in nine of the eleven topics. Women pay more attention to education, health, politics, student movement, environment, their schools, and show business; and men to science and technology, and sports. When considering regional variety, only crime showed a statistically significant difference: 80.3% of the surveyed participants from the Region of Antofagasta reported paying attention to this type of news, 78.1% from the Region of Valparaíso, 76.2% from Region of Biobío, and 69.5% from the Metropolitan Region of Santiago.

Significant differences were also found by type of school in four topics: crime (students from municipal and subsidized schools are more attentive than the ones from private institutions), student movement (youths from municipal schools declare to be more attentive), environment (youths from subsidized schools declare to be more interested), and politics and elections (the only topic that students from private schools declare to be more attentive about than the rest of the adolescents). Still, in general politics and elections seem less interesting to them, regardless of other variables.

While 65% of the surveyed individuals show an interest in news, 63% disagree with others telling them what news to pay attention to (see graph 2). This could be an expression of their autonomy and independence perception (Padilla-Walker, 2007) and underlines a distance between normative aspects and news consumption. The adolescents declare they somewhat agree (47,6%) or strongly agree (44,1%) with only consuming news that they are really interested in . 85% demonstrate agreement with the idea of learning something new through the news, while most of them do not consider news affects their lives in an important way (44.9% does not agree).

The latter could be related to the news value that they add to informative content, or how significant, close, and pertinent are the news items they have access to. There is a consensus about the role parents play in the news consumption habit, since 71.4% report (41.4% somewhat agrees and 31% strongly agree) having inherited it from them. Regarding news, adolescents do not consider its format to be complicated nor do they think news to be entertaining in general.



Graph 2. Interest in news (in %).

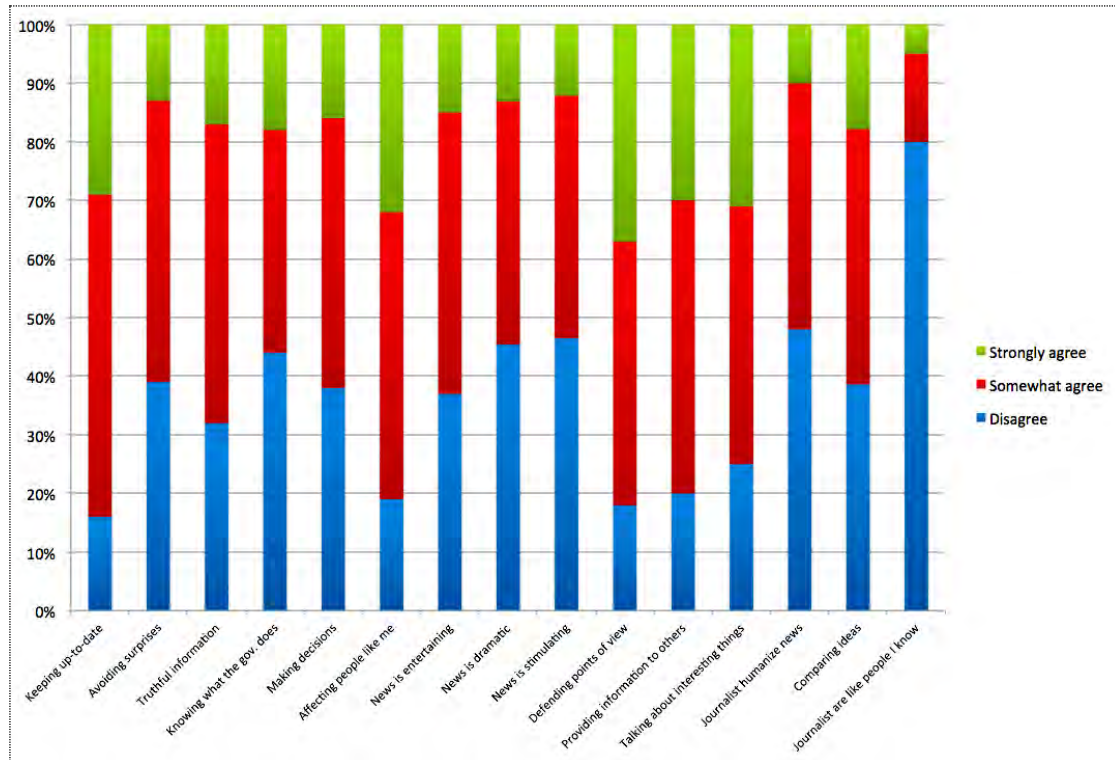
There are no statistically significant differences by gender (except that women report not having enough time to follow the news), grade or region. But there are differences by type of school: students from private schools accept more that other people tell them what news to follow. Adolescents from public and subsidized schools show less interest in news.

Motivations to consume news were grouped in three categories according to the uses and gratifications approach (Katz & al., 1974; Rubin & al., 2008): current affairs monitoring 1) surveillance; 2) entertainment and 3) social utility. Adolescents agree on the importance of being aware of current affairs (54.6% somewhat agree and 29.3% strongly agree). They would consume news mainly to be aware of the problems that affect people like them (49.5% somewhat agree) and 31.7% strongly agree). A lower percentage considers consuming news to decide on the important topics of the day (46.5% somewhat agree and 37.7% do not agree). Knowing what the government does is less prominent (43.7% do not agree, 37.8% somewhat agree, 18.5% strongly agree).

The surveyed individuals do not agree, however, on the fact that news is consumed because it is entertaining, dramatic, or stimulating. Among the social utility factors they consider being informed is important in defending their point of view to other people (49.8% somewhat agree and 29.8% strongly agree). Being informed allows them to talk about interesting things with others (43.6% somewhat agree and 31.5% strongly agree). Also, giving other people information (49.8% somewhat agree and 31.5% strongly agree). They do not perceive journalists as approachable people (to 79.9% of surveyed participants journalists do not



seem like people they know). Commentators are not their referent when it comes to comparing ideas (38.6% do not agree and 43.8% somewhat agree). What is more, 48.1% disagree with the idea that journalists humanize the news.



Graph 3: Motivations for news consumption (in %).

There are substantial differences by type of school. The adolescents from subsidized and private schools report being significantly more motivated to consume news to be aware of current events and to talk about relevant things than those who attend public schools. For students who attend subsidized schools it is more important to be informed to defend their points of view.

### 4.3. Talking with others about the news

Talking about current affairs in different spheres and with different actors spurs a dialogue and interest in civic affairs. The parents are the most frequent interlocutors of the surveyed adolescents, followed by their friends. Nearly half of the sample reports talking about news once a month or less often with their teachers. This suggests that current affairs are not a discussion topic in the classroom. Their discussion networks are rather homogenous: low frequency of conversation with other people with a different ideology or social background.

**Table 1: Frequency of conversation about news with other people**

How often do you comment the news with the following people?	Once a month	2-3 times a month	Once a week	2-6 times a week	Every day
Parents	19.0%	11.9%	17.8%	24.5%	27.1%
Siblings	43.3%	13.5%	17.8%	14.0%	11.4%
Other relatives	42.1%	20.6%	21.4%	9.9%	6.0%
Friends	27.4%	29.3%	22.7%	19.6%	19.9%
Classmates	30.2%	20.6%	20.9%	17.9%	10.5%
Teachers	47.5%	19.6%	18.3%	11%	3.7%
People with ideas different to mine	46.3%	20.1%	16.6%	9.9%	7.1%
People with a different social level to mine	56.0%	17.0%	12.9%	8.2%	5.7%

Students who attend private schools talk with their family and their peers (friends and classmates) significantly more frequently than with their teachers. While 52.2% of the surveyed adolescents from public schools talk about current affairs with their teachers once a month, 47.3% of the students attending private institutions do so at least once a week. Their home, their school, and social media are the three places where the students talk about the news with the highest frequency.

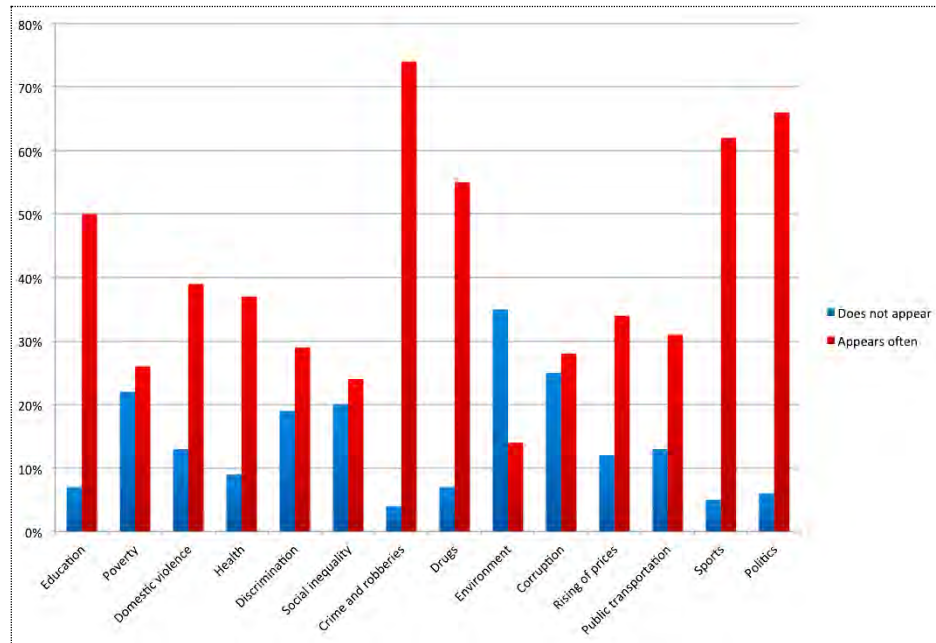
#### **4.4. Assessment of topics and evaluation of their appearance in the agenda**

Adolescents were asked about the importance of 17 topics. Education (77.3%), poverty (76.8%), domestic violence (76.6%), health (76.2%) and discrimination (76.1%) are the topics considered very important with the highest frequency. Next as very important are social inequality (68%), crime, muggings and robberies (67%), drugs (65.5%), environment (64.4%), and corruption or influence peddling (62.9%). Rising prices as well as public transportation seem very relevant to adolescents, though in 51.2% and 48.2% respectively. Politics are the topic about which students show least interest.

If students' valuations of important topics are compared to the perception they have of their appearance frequency in the news, an opposite relation can be observed. The five most frequently topics evaluated as appearing often are social inequality (76.4%), crime, muggings and robberies (74.4%), politics (66.5%), sports (62.5%) and drugs (55.4%). On the other hand, the most invisible topics for students are the environment (35.5%), corruption or influence peddling (25.2%) and poverty (22.4%).

This assessment varies again by type of school. In subsidized schools students qualify topics as very important with a higher frequency, followed by municipal and private institutions. Education matters more to students who attend subsidized (80%) and public (76.5%) schools. The same happens with work related topics, which are very important for students who attend subsidized and municipal schools (66.6% and 64.4% respectively, while 56% in private schools). Sports, on the other hand, is valued as very important with a higher frequency in the case of students who belong to municipal schools (45.4%), in contrast to 38.7% in the case of adolescents from subsidized schools and 35% private ones. Adolescents from private schools assign politics a high importance with a higher frequency (35.4%) than students from subsidized (30.3%) and municipal (28.2%) schools. A

third of the surveyed students from municipal schools (33.38%) qualified politics as not important.



Graph 4: Topic prominence in the media (in %)

Likewise, students –regardless of their gender or type of school they attend– consider that journalists do not include young people’s opinions and say false things about them. When asking them about the social function of journalists some of them consider that the news media show deficiencies when giving truthful information or a diversity of points of view. Something similar happens when evaluating the coverage given to their respective cities and regions, and the rest of the country.

## 5. Conclusions and projections

This work represents an advance in the study of the informative habits of a relevant group of the population, which has not been addressed on a large scale in Chile so far. This is particularly important since it is in this life period that media consumption habits are developed, alongside civic-politic ones. In other studies, adolescents are usually considered indistinctly within the category of «youths», together with college students or professionals.

In terms of frequency of media use to be informed daily, results show the importance Facebook has for teenagers against traditional media, except television. The news diet presents differences according to the type of school. This confirms the presence of economic biases in the news consumption by these adolescents.

Regarding interests in news, the main topics are education, health, crime, and the student movement. The topics that are least interesting for adolescents are politics and economics. This could be interpreted as a lack of interest in tradi-

tional politics, but not necessarily as indifference towards civic or political action, precisely because of the interest in topics related to the public sphere.

In addition, the data reveals that topic interest depends on the type of institution. Thus, this study proposes a new angle for debate over economic, educational, and informative segregation in Chile, which will be discussed in later works by the research team.

When comparing these results with the news agenda in Chilean media (Mujica & Bachmann, 2013) it is possible to detect a gap between the interests of adolescents and what news media offer. This study may help the news industry plan editorial strategies that offer a greater range and diversity of topics for these groups. For adolescents, the main motivations to consume news are linked to their social utility over their informative value. This suggests boosting news for this kind of use (addressing topics which interest them, allowing to share and comment news, among others).

It is possible to project new studies to deepen the understanding of adolescents' motivations and explore the content in the news agenda they criticize. Some of the correlations currently under study examine variables such as talking about news with parents, the inheritance of this habit, motivations for news consumption, interest in public and political affairs, and the impact of the type of school in the information gap, as well as topics of interest. Likewise, they observe the role of parents and teachers in promoting an interest in consuming news and talking about it, and citizenship training through this process.

A greater challenge for researchers is the divesting of epistemological and theoretical frameworks as well as the traditional analysis of what is news. What is more, the challenge of divesting of what scholars consider desirable for the students to deem of informative value in order to observe adolescents' interests with more freedom –and less oriented to regulate teenagers' behaviors and habits. If Facebook and YouTube are the media to which adolescents dedicate more time daily, it is necessary to know the habits and content of consumption on those platforms. There are spaces clearly identified as news-related on social media. What is news for adolescents then? What is news for them on a social network, on which they exchange personal and group information as well as information about public affairs? Is it that informative consumption is the product of a comment by one or more peers about a piece of news previously seen in another media or format? Does their perception of news respond to journalistic criteria? What kind of news makes students circulate on social media or «self-broadcasting» platforms?

There is also the risk of replicating ideas about the unilateral power of technologies in the socialization of adolescents. As this study shows, they are interested in what occurs around them. They need the news to assert opinions and talk with others. An important finding –and a ground wire MEANING?– is the fact that the type of school is an informative inequality factor which generates greater differences in news consumption by type of medium, attention and interest in news, conversation with others and public affairs interest. It is possible to identify consumption patterns and to characterize the surveyed individuals' news diet based on the type of school they attend. Is an unequal social stratification being formed

in Chile based on the type of school, which deepens social segregation (Puga, 2011) in relation to the informative domain?

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