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Introduction

Access to information has never been easier. At any moment, we can access almost anything with just a few taps on a screen.

For younger generations, social media platforms have become a primary gateway to information. On these platforms, journalism appears alongside entertainment, influencer content, advertising, personal opinions, and AI-generated material. Everything blends in a single, continuous flow of content.

According to recent research, 47 percent of young people aged 18 to 24 check a social media platform or messaging app as the first thing they do in the morning, while only 25 percent visit an online news site (Schröder, Blach-Ørsten & Eberholst, 2025 p. 54).

The challenge is not a lack of information. The challenge is making sense of it.

In an environment shaped by algorithms, it becomes more difficult to distinguish between journalism, opinion, commercial content, influencer communication, and AI-generated information. At the same time, many young people are turning away from traditional news media. News avoidance is increasing, and many describe the news as depressing, overwhelming, irrelevant, or simply too difficult to engage with (Palmer og Edgerly, 2024 p.15).

This development raises important questions. If young people primarily encounter information through algorithm-driven platforms, how do they learn to assess credibility? How do they distinguish between facts, opinions, influence, and misinformation? And what role should journalism play in helping them navigate an increasingly complex information environment?

These questions are not only relevant to the future of journalism. They are also relevant to the future of democratic participation. Access to trustworthy information remains a prerequisite for informed public debate and active citizenship.

Local journalism may have a particular role to play in addressing this challenge. Unlike national and global media, local news organizations are closely connected to the communities they cover. They report on issues that directly affect people's everyday lives and have the potential to create relationships between journalists and audiences.

JydskeVestkysten is one such news organization. Every day, it produces journalism about the people, communities, and issues that shape local life across Southern Denmark. Within JydskeVestkysten's coverage area, approximately 55.000 young people between the ages of 16 and 24 live, study, and prepare for their future.

This raises a central question: Can local journalism become a more meaningful part of young people's everyday information environment?

More specifically, the report examines whether the combination of media literacy initiatives, direct contact between journalists and students, and free access to local journalism can create a stronger relationship between young people and journalism, helping them better understand how trustworthy information is produced and how journalism differs from other forms of information they encounter online.

This report explores that question through a study of existing research, interviews with key stakeholders, and an examination of two Norwegian examples: Amedia's youth initiative and Fædrelandsvennen's "FVN Ung" initiative. It also considers the organizational, technological, financial, and editorial conditions that would be necessary if a similar model were to be developed by JydskeVestkysten.

The purpose of this report is not to present a finished solution. Rather, it is to examine whether a model based on education, relationship-building, and free access to local journalism can strengthen young people's understanding of journalism.

What is JydskeVestkysten?

The focal point of this project is the regional newspaper JydskeVestkysten founded in 1991. Today, the newspaper employs 80 editorial staff members and covers the municipalities of Esbjerg, Kolding, Sønderborg, Varde, Aabenraa, Tønder, Vejen, Billund and Fanø. In all municipalities except Fanø, JydskeVestkysten has a local newsroom with journalists dedicated to covering the area. The newspaper's primary focus is to produce local content for jv.dk, while also publishing a printed newspaper seven days a week. Mette Cramon is the editor-in-chief (2026), and JydskeVestkysten is part of the media group JFM (jv.dk 23rd May 2025).

Methodology

The study draws on several different sources of data. First, a literature review was conducted, covering academic research and reports on young people's news consumption and news avoidance.

Second, the report is based on short qualitative interviews with 18 students at Varde Gymnasium. The purpose of these interviews was to explore the students' news habits, their relationship with journalism, and their perceptions of different news sources. All students have been anonymized in the report, as they were under the age of 18 at the time of the interviews.

Third, conversations and written correspondence were conducted with 60 principals, headteachers, and educational leaders from upper secondary and vocational education institutions within JydskeVestkysten's coverage area. The purpose was to investigate how educational institutions perceive students' source criticism skills, news consumption habits, and the need for education in journalism and media literacy. These sources have been anonymized, as they participated for the purpose of discussing a potential project rather than serving as named sources in a public report.

In addition, the report draws on desk research of the Norwegian initiatives developed by Amedia and Fædrelandsvennen. Publicly available sources were used, including websites, articles, reports, and presentation materials, as well as conversations with individuals familiar with the initiatives.

As part of the study, preliminary discussions were also held with foundations to explore the possibilities for external funding of a potential project. The purpose was not to secure funding, but rather to assess whether the project idea was considered relevant and realistic from a foundation perspective.

The study should be understood as an analysis of the potential, opportunities, and limitations of a model that combines free access to journalism, educational activities, and relationship-building between young people and journalists.

Throughout this report, the term "project" is used as shorthand for a potential initiative that would combine free access to JydskeVestkysten's journalism with educational activities and direct contact between students and journalists. The project has not been implemented and should therefore be understood as a hypothetical model explored through the analysis presented in this report.

Literature review

The following literature review was compiled as part of the course "Journalistikkens Muligheder og Udfordringer" (cand. public) at Aarhus University, with significant support from Teke Ngomba, PhD and Associate Professor at the Department of Communication and Culture, Media Studies, Aarhus University. Additional literature was identified through presentations and discussions with relevant speakers at Constructive Institute, Aarhus University.

This chapter examines the mechanisms shaping young people's relationship with journalism. The aim is not only to describe why many young people consume fewer news stories than

previous generations, but also to identify the needs and expectations that continue to exist among young media users.

The chapter is structured around three central perspectives.

First, it examines the growing phenomenon of news avoidance. Second, it explores the role of social media as the primary infrastructure for information seeking and news consumption among young people. Finally, it investigates how young audiences continue to value and seek out credible information.

Taken together, the literature suggests that the challenge is not necessarily that young people have lost interest in being informed about society. Rather, the problem appears to be that journalism has become less integrated into their everyday lives and media habits than it was for previous generations.

Avoiding news

The growing phenomenon of news avoidance has now been documented in several studies.

According to the annual Danish News Media Survey, 27 percent of Danes report that they often or sometimes avoid the news. Among the most frequently cited reasons are the negative impact of news on mood, the large volume of coverage devoted to wars and conflicts, and a general feeling of being overwhelmed by the amount of news available. This sense of overload is particularly pronounced among younger age groups. Nearly half of all 18–24-year-olds report feeling overwhelmed by the volume of news, while 14 percent state that they find the news difficult to understand (Schrøder, Blach-Ørsten & Eberholst, 2025, p. 26).

These findings suggest that the challenge is not necessarily a lack of interest in public affairs, but rather how young people encounter, understand, and navigate today's information environment.

Palmer and Edgerly (2024) argue that journalists themselves largely explain news avoidance in terms of the content and form of the news. According to the journalists interviewed in the study, news is often perceived as irrelevant, negative, depressing, or politically biased, causing some citizens to turn away from it. Many news avoiders are described as responding rationally to a news environment they experience as emotionally exhausting or difficult to trust (Palmer & Edgerly, 2024, p. 15).

The journalists further suggest that many citizens perceive news as disconnected from their everyday lives and personal experiences. News may appear difficult to understand, untrustworthy, or lack clear relevance to their own circumstances. This explanation closely

mirrors earlier research, in which news avoiders frequently identify a lack of relevance, negativity, and distrust as key reasons for avoiding the news (Palmer & Edgerly, 2024, p. 3).

However, the authors caution against reducing news avoidance to a question of journalistic quality alone. News avoidance is also linked to a range of structural factors, including life circumstances, social background, education, gender, and social norms. Consequently, initiatives that focus solely on improving journalism are likely to have only a limited effect on long-term news avoidance.

Particularly relevant is the finding that previous research has shown news avoidance to be more common among groups with weaker connections to the political sphere, including younger people. Solutions to news avoidance therefore cannot be found within journalism alone but must also be understood in the context of broader social and structural conditions (Palmer & Edgerly, 2024, p. 15).

This conclusion is supported by De Bruin et al. (2025), who find that news avoidance is especially prevalent among younger people and individuals with lower levels of education (De Bruin et al., 2025, p. 2). The authors further argue that it is not possible to construct a simple profile of a “news avoider.”

Recent research also suggests that news avoidance does not necessarily mean that people are uninformed. In a digital media environment, information about public affairs can reach citizens through a wide range of channels, while the boundaries between news and other forms of information have become increasingly blurred. Consequently, it is no longer sufficient to measure how much journalism people consume. To understand the implications of news avoidance, it is also necessary to examine who avoids the news, why they do so, and which alternative information sources they use instead (De Bruin et al., 2025, p. 2).

Taken together, the research suggests that news avoidance cannot be explained by a single factor. Explanations range from the content and form of news to broader social and structural conditions. The challenge is therefore not only one of access to news, but also of relevance, comprehension, and the relationship people have with journalism.

Social media as infrastructure

Young people spend a significant part of their daily lives on their smartphones. While they estimate that they spend no more than three hours a day on their phones, the actual figure is closer to four hours and ten minutes (Jørgensen og Müller, 2026, p. 27).

Social media plays a central role in this media consumption. Every young person in the Connect 2026 study reported using at least one social media platform during a typical week

(Jørgensen og Müller, 2026, p. 43). Social media has, in many ways, become the infrastructure through which young people encounter information and news.

According to “Medieudviklingen 2025”, 44 percent of Danes use social media as a source of news. Among 18–24-year-olds, 36 percent identify social media as their most important source of news, while 57 percent use social media for news during a typical week.

Platforms such as TikTok have become particularly important. Research shows that many young people perceive TikTok as providing insight and understanding, while traditional broadcasters such as DR and TV 2 are seen as stronger sources for keeping up with current events and developments.

Taken together, these findings support the view that social media has become a central gateway to news for younger audiences. This presents a significant challenge for traditional news organizations, but it also highlights opportunities to demonstrate the relevance of professional journalism to younger generations.

Another important aspect is the sense of community that social media platforms create. This is particularly evident on TikTok, where users often describe feelings connected to communities and conversations (Medieudviklingen, 2025, p. 74). This raises an interesting question for local news organizations such as JydskeVestkysten: can local journalism create a similar sense of belonging and connection around local issues and communities?

Research from the Netherlands suggests that many young people encounter news passively through social media. Rather than actively seeking out news, they come across it while scrolling, allowing news to “find” them instead (Medieudviklingen, 2025, p. 76).

This observation is supported by the Danish Connect study, which describes social media less as “SoMe” (social media) and more as “FlowMe”, an endless flow of content delivered through algorithmic feeds (Jørgensen og Müller, 2026, p. 50).

These developments may present a challenge for traditional news media, which increasingly need to demonstrate why actively seeking out journalism remains valuable. At the same time, research indicates that young people continue to value fact-based information and recognize the importance of staying informed (Medieudviklingen, 2025, p. 76).

The relationship between young people and social media is also characterized by ambivalence. Many express dissatisfactions with their own media habits and describe feelings of frustration or guilt about the amount of time they spend scrolling (Jørgensen og Müller, 2026, p. 26).

According to Connect 2026, many young people express a desire for greater focus, deeper engagement, slower forms of media consumption, and opportunities to learn new things

(Jørgensen og Müller, 2026, p. 29-30). These findings suggest that local journalism may have the potential to meet needs that are not always fulfilled by social media platforms.

Seeking trust

Trust is a central issue in the contemporary information environment.

According to Connect 2026, 66 percent of young people aged 18–35 are concerned about whether the information and news they encounter is trustworthy (Jørgensen og Müller, 2026, p. 52).

At the same time, the study shows that young people continue to value the idea of being informed citizens. Many believe that individuals have a personal responsibility to stay informed about society and public affairs (Jørgensen & Müller, 2026, p. 52). Following reliable news sources remains an important part of fulfilling that responsibility (Jørgensen & Müller, 2026, p. 53).

This is supported by Cheng et al. (2025), who examine how TikTok users experience and evaluate news on the platform. Young people use TikTok for entertainment, but they still expect news to be based on credibility, facts, and journalistic standards (Cheng et al., 2025, p. 1612).

The study therefore does not suggest that young people have turned their backs on journalism. Rather, it suggests that they encounter journalism through different formats and different relationships than previous generations. These findings suggest that the challenge may not be a lack of interest in journalism itself, but rather how journalism is made available and relevant to younger audiences.

The platforms can offer something that traditional media cannot:

“Traditional media outlets are valued for accuracy and neutrality, but their lack of adaptation to TikTok reduces their impact on platform users. Conversely, influencers are appreciated for their authentic and personalized delivery.” (Cheng et al., 2025, p.1608).

However, the idea of more authentic influencers on TikTok is not only positive. It can be seen as a direct challenge to journalism’s traditional self-understanding as authentic, objective, and, not least, fact-based.

This may present a challenge for journalism if younger audiences increasingly prefer influencers as sources of information despite continuing to regard journalism as more trustworthy.

Peters et al. (2021) point out, however, that young people still attach a particular value to journalism (Peters et al., 2021, p. 76).

Credibility is therefore important, and traditional media are still valued for this. However, credibility is not found only on platforms, but also in other relationships.

Family and friends can in many ways be understood as informal gatekeepers who help young people identify what is relevant and worth paying attention to (Peters et al., 2021, p. 72).

This once again presents journalism with a challenge: to remain relevant in the future, when young people no longer necessarily have parents or other close adults to tell them what is relevant in society.

In relation to relevance, representation is particularly interesting, as several studies show that readers seek out media in which they can see themselves reflected and avoid media in which they are not represented (Armstrong & Collins, 2009, p. 111). Although the study by Armstrong and Collins is now several years old, it can still be assumed to be relevant, especially considering young people's use of TikTok, where young users themselves also produce and share content. What is particularly interesting about Armstrong and Collins' study is that, based on a comparison between local journalism and a campus newspaper, it supports the argument that free access to a media outlet is not enough in itself to attract younger readers if they simply cannot see themselves in the content the newspaper provides (Armstrong & Collins, 2009, pp. 110–111).

In addition, other research shows that users increasingly assess local news according to personal relevance rather than the geographical coverage area of the media outlet. For users, it is not necessarily important whether a story comes from a local media outlet, but whether it feels relevant to their own lives and experiences (Gulyas et al., 2019, p. 1859).

Across literature, young people do not appear to have lost interest in information or public affairs. They continue to value credibility, relevance, and trustworthy information. The challenge is that journalism is no longer as deeply embedded in relationships, communities, and everyday media practices through which young people encounter and evaluate information.

Looking to Norway

Having examined young people's news consumption, the report now shifts its focus from the problem to a potential solution.

This chapter explores FVN Ung and Amedia's work with providing young people free access to journalism. The purpose is not only to describe these models, but also to understand the mechanisms that make them relevant and potentially transferable to a Danish context.

The chapter begins with a brief factual presentation of FVN Ung and Amedia. It then analyses why the model appears to be effective. Attention is given to the combination of free access, physical presence, journalistic explanation, and the relationship between young people and journalists.

Finally, the chapter addresses the limitations of the models. This is important because the Norwegian initiatives cannot simply be copied and implemented elsewhere. They require substantial resources, external funding, and strong organizational support. At the same time, it remains uncertain whether free access and relationship-building can, over time, be translated into lasting news habits or paying users.

Amedia

Reaching younger audiences has long been a challenge for traditional news organizations. Finding a sustainable business model that supports such efforts has proven equally difficult.

Looking to Norway, however, there may be a model that could potentially be adapted to the Danish media market. It is no secret that Danish media companies have, for years, looked with some envy at their Norwegian counterparts. Norwegian media groups have managed to remain financially strong while continuing to grow.

In 2025, JFM entered a partnership with the Norwegian media group Amedia. Under the agreement, JFM acquired a 30 percent stake in Berlingske Media, while Amedia acquired a 30 percent stake in JFM (jv.dk, 15th October 2025). Just four months later, several initiatives inspired by Norwegian practices had already appeared in Denmark. One example was the “+ Alt” subscription package, which allows users access to all local media outlets while also providing access to the national newspaper Berlingske. Similarly, JFM's local sports streaming service, previously known as JFM Play, was renamed Sport Direkte – the same name used by Amedia's local sports streaming service in Norway.

Amedia is Norway's largest publisher of editor-led journalism. The company owns 107 media titles and provides editorial coverage across most of the country (Amedia.no, 14th October 2025).

Since JydskeVestkysten is part of JFM, it is relevant to examine developments within Amedia. It can reasonably be assumed that initiatives developed within the Amedia group may be easier for JydskeVestkysten to adopt in the future, as the two organizations are already collaborating and are expected to share knowledge, systems, and other resources over time.

When it comes to younger audiences, Amedia introduced a significant initiative in 2025.

The company granted all young people aged 15 to 20 free access to every local news outlet within the Amedia network. The only requirement was that users register with a Norwegian Bank ID to gain access.

The stated objective was to help young people develop healthy media habits while ensuring access to fact-checked content they could trust (Journalisten.no, 23rd June 2025).

The business model behind the initiative is foundation funding through Amedia's own foundation, Amediastiftelsen. According to an Amedia project manager interviewed for this report, the foundation covers the costs associated with providing the free subscriptions.

As part of the launch campaign, several Amedia titles published promotional videos on platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, often featuring young people themselves as ambassadors for the initiative. The strategy appeared to be successful.

Three months after launch, more than 50,000 young people had registered for access to Amedia's local news outlets. Given that approximately 400,000 young people live within Amedia's coverage area, this corresponds to roughly one in eight eligible users (MediaWatch, 19th September 2025; Journalisten.no, 23rd June 2025).

At first glance, these results may appear to support the argument that free access alone can encourage young people to engage with journalism

However, it is difficult to determine how much of the effect can be attributed to free access alone. Registration figures do not necessarily reveal why young people choose to sign up. It is equally possible that many already had a relationship with their local news outlet or were familiar with local news brands. In that case, free access would not be the cause of the relationship, but rather an opportunity to activate a relationship that already existed.

According to the project manager, Amedia's vision is that the journalism itself should be strong enough to attract and retain young audiences. The financial barrier is removed, and the content is then expected to motivate users to return.

This model depends on substantial financial support. In Norway, the initiative is funded by Amediastiftelsen, which covers the costs of the free subscriptions. Transferred to a JyskeVestkysten context, a similar model would require external funding and a clearly defined democratic purpose to be attractive to foundations and other potential contributors. Unlike Amedia, JyskeVestkysten does not have a foundation behind it, but an ownership structure.

Amedia therefore primarily demonstrates that free access can persuade large numbers of young people to register. Whether the model, over the longer term, creates stronger relationships with journalism, increased news consumption, and future paying subscribers' remains an open question. Answering that question would require a closer examination of

how individual Amedia titles engage with younger audiences and whether they actively build relationships beyond providing access to content.

Fædrelandsvennen

Fædrelandsvennen (FVN) is a regional newspaper based in Kristiansand and covers the whole of Southern Norway. The newspaper was founded in 1875 and is also published as a print edition. Since 2019, it has been owned by Polaris Media. According to the Norwegian Media Businesses' Association, Fædrelandsvennen had an average of 95,435 daily readers across print and digital platforms in the fourth quarter of 2023 (snl.no/Fædrelandsvennen).

In 2023, Fædrelandsvennen launched the project FVN Ung. The project is aimed at students in upper secondary school and seeks to strengthen young people's understanding of journalism, democracy, press ethics, and source criticism, as well as to increase their participation in public debate.

The project is anchored in the Norwegian curriculum's objective that young people should learn about democracy and citizenship. Through FVN Ung, students at schools in FVN's coverage area receive free access to fvn.no. At the same time, a dedicated team of younger journalists visits schools and works with teaching, dialogue, and journalistic production aimed at young people (fvn.no).

The journalists also produce journalism and content for both fvn.no/ung and social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, based on topics and issues that young people themselves help define. Young people are not only the target group of the project, but are also involved as sources, debate contributors, and participants in public conversation. From 2023 to 2025, for example, Fædrelandsvennen received 160 opinion pieces from young people under the age of 20 (cultiva.no/prosjekter/fvn-ung).

FVN Ung is organized as a non-profit project and is funded through external support from foundations and partners, including Amediastiftelsen, Cultiva, Sparebankstiftelsen Sparebanken Norge, Sør-fondet, and Å Energi. The project is based on a combination of free access to journalism, school visits, teaching, and continuous contact between journalists and young people (fvn.no).

Where Amedia has primarily chosen a model based on free access to journalism, FVN Ung combines access with teaching, dialogue, and the active involvement of young people in journalism.

FVN Ung can be interpreted as an argument that the relationship between young people and journalism can be actively created through school visits, teaching, and participation. Whereas Amedia's model is based to a greater extent on young people finding their own way to the content, FVN Ung attempts to bring journalism out to young people and make it concrete, personal, and understandable.

This makes the model particularly interesting in a Danish local media context. If the challenge is not only a lack of access, but also a lack of familiarity with and connection to journalism, FVN Ung points to a more active path. Here, journalism is made available. It is explained, discussed, and connected to young people's everyday lives.

At the same time, FVN Ung also shows why such a model is difficult to copy directly. It requires journalists, time, teaching skills, school contact, editorial prioritization, and external funding. Relationships do not emerge automatically. They must be built, maintained, and repeated.

FVN Ung therefore primarily demonstrates that local journalism can actively work with relationships, trust, and democratic participation. Whether the model will, over time, create lasting news habits or future paying users remains to be seen.

Analysis

This chapter brings together insights from interviews and correspondence with educational leaders, upper secondary school students from Varde Gymnasium, and researchers to examine whether there is a need for greater media literacy among young people.

The chapter also investigates the economic and technological conditions required to make a project in which students are taught by professional journalists feasible in practice.

Students' media habits

As the literature also suggests, the attitude of "the news will find me" appears to characterize the way upper secondary students consume news. Algorithms are not the only gatekeepers in young people's news use. The interviews indicate that family members and social relationships continue to function as important gateways to news. Several students encounter news through their parents or through conversations with others, underlining that news consumption remains, to a considerable extent, a social phenomenon.

"I don't avoid the news, but I feel that it will find me if it is relevant enough."

Na, 17 years old

"I get news from television. It's my parents who turn on the TV."

Ma, 16 years old

"I get news from DR, television, and my parents."

Si, 17 years old

Most of the students were familiar with JydskeVestkysten as a news outlet, but very few had any active relationship with it. The newspaper exists in their awareness, but it is not a natural part of their daily search for information. This is noteworthy because JydskeVestkysten covers the area where the students live. Awareness of the outlet is therefore present, but awareness alone does not appear to lead to use.

“I know about JydskeVestkysten, but I don’t really have any relationship with it.”

Mi, 16 years old

One student, however, expressed frustration with the newspaper’s paywall, which she felt prevented her from using the outlet.

“I avoid JydskeVestkysten because it costs money.”

An, 17 years old

The most striking finding was that students rarely visited news websites directly. Instead, they encountered news through social media. The interviews suggest that competition for young people’s attention takes place within a much broader media environment, where journalism must compete with entertainment and algorithmically curated content.

“The news just kind of pops up on TikTok. I use bt.dk if nothing else works.”

Me, 17 years old

“I don’t watch the news, but I get some news from TikTok.”

Ol, 17 years old

During the interviews, several questions had to be clarified because the term *media* was, for some students, more closely associated with Twitch, Instagram, or TikTok than with traditional news organizations. This suggests that traditional news media are not necessarily the first point of reference when young people talk about media. For several students, journalism is simply one type of content among many in their daily media consumption.

Several students also mentioned TV MidtVest as a media outlet they found interesting and trustworthy.

“There are some media outlets I trust more than others. For example, I trust TV MidtVest.”

Mi, 16 years old

This is interesting because TV MidtVest does not cover Varde Municipality. Nevertheless, its content has found its way into the students’ feeds and is perceived as both relevant and trustworthy. This suggests that geographical proximity alone does not determine what young people perceive as local or relevant.

The students did not reject local news as irrelevant. On the contrary, several mentioned local news as something that interested them. The problem therefore does not appear to be a lack

of interest in local communities, but rather that local news rarely becomes an active part of their daily media habits. Interest in local affairs exists, but the relationship with the media organizations producing local journalism is weak.

In general, there were no news sites that students consciously avoided, and Danish news media were largely regarded as trustworthy.

“I trust DR and TV 2.”

Va, 17 years old

“I trust DR and TV 2, but I don’t actively seek them out unless there is a topic I’m particularly interested in.”

Ka, 17 years old

There were, however, a few reservations regarding tabloids such as BT and Ekstra Bladet.

“I avoid BT. I’ve been told they exaggerate.”

Am, 16 years old

“I avoid Ekstra Bladet because it’s fake news.”

Ni, 17 years old

Taken together, the interviews paint a picture of young people who fundamentally trust established Danish news media, but who rarely seek them out actively. News is something that comes to them through algorithms, social relationships, or chance encounters in their feeds. At the same time, the interviews show that several students do not immediately associate the concept of *media* with traditional news organizations, but equally with social platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Twitch.

The credibility of different media appears to be based largely on personal impressions and social narratives rather than knowledge of journalistic practices or editorial responsibility. The challenge therefore does not seem to be a lack of trust in journalism, but rather the absence of a direct relationship with journalism and a limited understanding of the role played by editor-led news media.

Young people encounter news, but they rarely seek it out themselves. This is an important finding in relation to the central question of this project: how local journalism can establish a connection with the next generation.

Schools’ concerns

All upper secondary education institutions within JydskeVestkysten’s coverage area were contacted by phone and email, including 10th-grade centres, social and healthcare colleges

(SOSU), and preparatory basic education programmes (FGU). The purpose was to gain a better understanding of the challenges schools face in relation to students' source criticism skills.

The response was clear: yes, there is a challenge, and yes, both school leaders and educational managers would welcome visits from journalists to teach students about journalism and source criticism.

"They have great difficulty assessing whether sources are trustworthy. They think TikTok is a valid source. When they see a post from a news outlet on social media, they do not perceive it as part of a newspaper. Source criticism is almost non-existent."

Educational manager at an upper secondary school.

Or, as one principal at a general upper secondary school (STX) explained during a telephone interview:

"There are certainly some students who can distinguish between what they encounter on social media, but there are also some who simply accept it without question."

Artificial intelligence was also highlighted as an important issue by many of the school leaders. Several viewed AI as closely connected to the broader challenge of source criticism.

"In general, students can struggle to distinguish between fake news and reliable news. They often get their information from TikTok. Likewise, we are now dealing with AI, where one of the challenges is teaching them to use it critically."

Principal at a 10th-grade school.

Another educational leader at an FGU institution recently set a concrete example of the problem:

"Yesterday, for example, I had a student who was supposed to complete an assignment about the seasons and the Earth's rotation around the Sun. The student had asked Google/AI the question in such a way that they ended up receiving information about menopause instead."

It is worth noting that these concerns were expressed across upper secondary schools, 10th-grade centres, SOSU programmes, and FGU institutions alike.

At the same time, the responses indicate that schools are already working actively with source criticism and digital literacy. The challenge therefore does not appear to be a lack of awareness, but rather that the task has become increasingly complex as social media and artificial intelligence have grown in importance.

Several school and educational leaders therefore expressed a desire for external input, including journalists, who can contribute practical experience and knowledge about how journalism is produced and how the credibility of information can be assessed.

Meeting with foundations

JydskeVestkysten cannot finance a project on its own that both provides free access to journalism and prioritizes sending journalists out to upper secondary schools across the newspaper's entire coverage area.

External funding is therefore necessary if a project involving journalists teaching students is to have a realistic chance of success. Inspired by Fædrelandsvennen, several foundations were contacted as part of this project.

Both large national foundations and smaller local foundations were approached, and it was possible to arrange a meeting with one major Danish foundation.

One clear lesson from these discussions was that foundations are, in principle, willing to support projects that create value and contribute to society. This does not mean that any funding was promised, but rather that foundations are prepared to engage seriously with relevant project ideas.

Another important lesson was the need for complete transparency regarding the media organization's own financial contribution. It must be clear which elements of the project the media outlet finances itself. Any foundation support must not be perceived as indirect media subsidies, as this could be viewed as distorting competition.

Contacting foundations is a time-consuming process. Some foundations took between two and four weeks to respond to a single inquiry, while others did not respond at all. The contact established as part of this project should be understood as preliminary dialogue intended to assess whether the project would even be considered by a given foundation.

Several foundations are, however, extremely busy, and it is not uncommon to receive a response such as:

“Unfortunately, we do not have the opportunity to advise on project ideas. However, you are very welcome to apply to the foundation.”

This illustrates that applying for foundation funding is both a strategic gamble and an analytical exercise. Significant work must be carried out in advance to determine which foundations are relevant to the project and where it is worth investing time and resources in an application.

Several foundations require up to six months to review and process an application.

Technical considerations

If a specific group is to receive free access to jv.dk, a digital strategy is required not only for how young people gain access, but also for how they eventually leave the program.

After discussions with internal employees at JFM, it quickly became clear that the necessary digital solutions are technically possible. However, they are not something that can be implemented overnight.

In addition to creating a simple and free way for students to access the platform, a strategy must also be developed for how students are removed from the program once they are no longer enrolled at the relevant educational institution. At the same time, mechanisms must be built in to prevent students from simply sharing their subscriptions with family members. Otherwise, there is a risk that parents, for example, could cancel their own subscriptions and instead rely on their son's or daughter's free access.

Amedia addressed this challenge by using what can best be described as a Norwegian equivalent of MitID, which young people must use to verify their age.

At Fædrelandsvennen, access is managed through partnerships with individual schools, where students are registered via their school email accounts. In Denmark, many educational institutions use Uni-Login, a digital identity system for students, parents, and staff. Uni-Login is used across primary schools, upper secondary schools, and vocational education programs throughout the country.

JFM is currently undergoing a major IT restructuring as part of the integration and cooperation with Amedia. Whether this process will make it possible to adopt digital solutions directly from the Norwegian media group remains to be seen.

Discussion

The literature, the student interviews, and the feedback from educational institutions all suggest that young people do not lack information. On the contrary, they are constantly exposed to information through social media, friends, family, influencers, and artificial intelligence.

The challenge therefore does not appear to be access to information, but rather the ability to assess the credibility of information and understand who is behind it. Several of the educational leaders described situations in which students struggled to distinguish between journalism, social media content, influencers, and AI-generated information. This suggests that the issue is not simply one of news consumption, but of media literacy more broadly.

In this context, understanding journalism becomes important. If young people are unable to distinguish between different forms of information, it becomes difficult to understand why some sources may be more trustworthy than others. The challenge is therefore not only to strengthen young people's relationship with journalism, but also to strengthen their understanding of how information is produced, verified, and distributed in a digital environment.

Viewed from this perspective, relationship-building emerges as a central concept. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that relationships are unlikely to be the only factor shaping young people's engagement with journalism. Content relevance, life stage, social background, and broader media habits may also play an important role.

Most students are already familiar with JydskeVestkysten as a media outlet, yet very few have an active relationship with it. The newspaper exists in their awareness without playing a natural role in their daily search for information. The experiences from FVN Ung suggest that relationships with journalism can be strengthened through education, dialogue, and physical presence. Journalism becomes concrete, human, and understandable. This is supported by research showing that young people increasingly orient themselves through relationships and communities. If journalism is to play a larger role in young people's lives, it may therefore be necessary for them to meet the journalists behind journalism.

However, it remains difficult to determine whether relationship-building itself is the decisive mechanism or whether the effect is primarily driven by increased relevance, visibility, and exposure to journalism.

At the same time, a central paradox emerges. If relationships are the decisive factor, this is also where the project faces its greatest uncertainty. Relationships do not arise automatically through access and cannot simply be distributed through subscriptions. They require time, presence, and repeated interaction. It is therefore relevant to ask whether a single annual school visit is sufficient to create the kind of relationship with which the project is built. The findings suggest that the success of such an initiative may depend less on access to journalism itself and more on the quality and continuity of the encounters between young people and journalists.

This issue becomes particularly evident in relation to free access. Amedia demonstrates that free access can persuade large numbers of young people to register. However, the analysis provides only limited evidence that cost is the primary barrier in a Danish local media context. Only a few students mentioned paywalls as a problem. Far more described how they rarely seek out journalism actively. The risk, therefore, is that free access addresses a problem that only a small number of young people perceive as their main challenge. Access may remove an economic barrier, but it does not necessarily create relevance, interest, or relationships.

This does not mean that free access lacks value. On the contrary, it may function as an important precondition for transforming relationships into actual use of journalism. It is possible that access plays a larger role than suggested by the interviews, as financial barriers may influence behavior in ways that young people do not necessarily articulate themselves.

But if journalism continues to appear alongside entertainment, influencers, and algorithmically curated content, it must actively demonstrate its relevance. This place demands communication, platforms, and editorial priorities. Local journalism cannot be expected to be chosen automatically.

At the same time, the analysis indicates that the project addresses a need that extends far beyond local journalism itself. The feedback from schools' points consistently to challenges related to source criticism, evaluating information, and the use of artificial intelligence. Several educational leaders specifically requested the kind of insight that journalists can provide. In this sense, the project is not only about creating future readers, but also about strengthening young people's ability to navigate a complex information environment. The benefits may therefore lie somewhere other than increased traffic or higher subscription numbers. If young people develop a greater understanding of journalism, source criticism, and credibility, the project may have democratic value even if its impact on news consumption proves limited.

There are, however, significant arguments against the project. Visiting approximately 60 educational institutions requires considerable resources, external funding, and organizational commitment. At the same time, not all schools perceive the need for such initiatives or have room for them in their schedules. Journalists are not teachers, and it is legitimate to question whether journalists should take on responsibilities that traditionally belong to educational institutions. Furthermore, students in upper secondary schools, vocational programs, social and healthcare education, and FGU programs do not necessarily encounter journalism in the same way or learn in the same way. If relationship-building is to succeed, it will likely require different strategies for different target groups.

Taken together, the analysis suggests that the project's greatest strength is not necessarily free access to journalism, but rather the attempt to create a relationship between young people and journalism. Such a relationship may help young people understand how journalism is produced, how editorial media operates, and why journalism differs from social media content, influencers, and AI-generated information.

If relationships are the mechanism through which young people develop a better understanding of journalism and information, they require more than access and isolated encounters. The analysis suggests that the success of the project may depend less on how many young people gain access to jv.dk and more on whether JydskeVestkysten can become a meaningful part of young people's information environment.

Conclusion

This report has examined whether a combination of education, relationship-building, and free access to local journalism can strengthen young people's relationship with trustworthy news, and whether a model inspired by the Norwegian initiatives Amedia and FVN Ung is realistic within a Danish local media context.

The report's most important finding is that the challenge does not primarily appear to be young people's trust in journalism, but rather their relationship with journalism. Without such a relationship, it becomes more difficult for young people to understand how journalism differs from other forms of information in an increasingly complex information environment.

The literature shows that young people continue to value credible information and consider it important to stay informed about society. The interviews conducted with students at Varde Gymnasium support this picture. Most students expressed trust in established news organizations such as DR and TV 2, and several showed an interest in local issues. At the same time, they rarely seek out journalism actively. News is largely something that reaches them through social media, family, friends, and other relationships.

The analysis therefore suggests that the problem is not necessarily resistance to journalism, but rather that journalism has become less integrated into young people's everyday lives than it was for previous generations. Young people are familiar with JydskeVestkysten as a media outlet, but only to a limited extent have an active relationship with it. The challenge therefore appears to be one of visibility, relevance, and relationship rather than trust.

Against this background, the report suggests that relationship-building may be a more important factor than free access alone. The experiences from Amedia show that free access can encourage large numbers of young people to register. However, they provide less evidence as to whether access alone creates lasting news habits or a stronger relationship with journalism. Fædrelandsvennen's FVN Ung model points in a different direction. Here, access to journalism is combined with education, dialogue, and direct encounters between young people and journalists. This relational dimension aligns closely with both existing research and the empirical findings of this report.

At the same time, the analysis demonstrates that there is a concrete need within upper secondary education. Schools and educational institutions consistently describe challenges related to source criticism, evaluating information, and the growing use of artificial intelligence. Several educational leaders report that students struggle to distinguish between trustworthy and untrustworthy sources and often encounter journalism, influencers, social media content, and AI-generated information within the same information flow.

The findings therefore suggest that the challenge is not only one of critical thinking, but also of understanding how journalism differs from other forms of information. Several schools specifically requested greater insight into journalistic methods, editorial processes, and the principles that distinguish professional journalism from other content. The report therefore finds support for the assumption that journalists can contribute knowledge and perspectives that educational institutions are actively seeking.

The report does not, however, find sufficient evidence to conclude that free access alone will increase young people's use of local journalism. Only a small number of the students interviewed identified paywalls as the primary barrier. Free access therefore appears to be a potential precondition for the project, but not its central mechanism.

Overall, the report finds both theoretical and empirical support for the assumption that a model combining education, relationship-building, and free access can strengthen young people's understanding of journalism and their relationship with trustworthy news. However, it is particularly the educational and relational elements that emerge as the model's key components.

The model is also assessed as realistic for JydskeVestkysten, if it receives external funding and is prioritized organizationally. It should, however, be understood as a long-term democratic project rather than a short-term commercial initiative. The report does not provide grounds for expecting a significant increase in subscribers in the short term. Instead, the analysis suggests that the project may contribute to strengthening young people's understanding of journalism, their ability to navigate information critically, and their capacity to participate in society on an informed basis.

Implications for other local news media

Although this report is based on JydskeVestkysten, the findings point to several lessons that may be relevant for other local and regional news organizations seeking to strengthen their relationship with younger audiences.

1. Relationships may be a path to understanding

The central finding of this report is that young people do not necessarily lack trust in journalism. Rather, they lack a relationship with journalism. Many young people are already familiar with established news organizations and associate them with credibility, but they rarely seek them out actively. If local news media are to play a larger role in young people's information lives, the relationship between the audience and the news organization may be just as important as the content itself.

2. Free access is not a solution in itself

Free access can remove an economic barrier and make journalism more accessible. However, this study does not suggest that cost is the primary reason why young people do not engage with local journalism. Free access may therefore support an initiative, but it cannot by itself create relevance, trust, or lasting news habits.

3. Relevance is about life, not age

Young people do not necessarily demand more journalism about young people. They seek journalism that feels relevant to their own lives. Local journalism has a particular strength in this regard because it can connect broader societal developments to specific people, places, and institutions that young people already know and have a relationship with.

4. Journalism can contribute to more than news consumption

Several educational institutions point to challenges related to source criticism, information evaluation, and artificial intelligence. Projects that combine journalism and education may therefore create value that extends beyond news consumption itself. Their impact may lie in fostering a greater understanding of journalism, stronger critical evaluation skills, and a better ability to navigate complex information environments.

5. Young people must be reached where they already seek information

For many young people, social media platforms are a primary gateway to information about society. Local journalism therefore cannot rely solely on the expectation that young audiences will find their way to media organizations' own platforms. Journalism must be visible within the information environments where young people already spend their time. The task is not to imitate influencers, but to make journalism relevant, recognizable, and accessible without compromising journalistic principles.

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