

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EUROPEAN MEDIA CONSUMER

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Abstract

The profile of the media consumer varies according to age, gender, education level, and geographical location. Younger generations tend to prefer digital platforms and social networks, whereas older generations remain loyal to traditional media. Regional differences between Western and Eastern Europe significantly influence media consumption patterns, with internet access levels and technological infrastructure playing a key role in shaping these behaviors. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the shift toward digital media consumption and increased familiarity with new platforms. The European media consumer is becoming increasingly digitalized, and the media industry must respond by adapting its offerings and maintaining the quality of content.

Keywords: *european media consumer, media consumption profile, digital environment, media industry.*

JEL Classification: *D11, E21, E71, L82.*

Introduction

The European media landscape has undergone profound transformations over the past decade, driven by structural factors such as accelerated digitalization, the rise of over-the-top (OTT) platforms, and the proliferation of social networks. In this context, European media consumers have rapidly adapted to new technological and economic realities. Today, European media

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consumers have unprecedented access to information and entertainment, facilitated by the high penetration rate of the internet. Media consumption is increasingly shifting toward digital platforms, while traditional formats are experiencing significant declines.

The way Europeans consume media influences public opinion, culture, and the media market as a whole. Understanding the characteristics of the European media consumer enables the industry and policymakers to anticipate trends, adjust communication strategies, and promote a sustainable and pluralistic media ecosystem.

1. Profile of the European Media Consumer

The European media consumer represents any individual in Europe who accesses media content—whether through traditional channels (television, radio, printed newspapers) or modern digital channels (news websites, social networks, streaming platforms, podcasts, etc.). The profile of the media consumer is not uniform; it varies significantly depending on demographic segment and local context. Key demographic factors considered in profiling include age, gender, education level, and geographical location.

- **Age** is one of the most important segmentation factors. Younger generations (adolescents and young adults) are “digital natives,” having grown up with the internet and smartphones, which is reflected in their media preferences. Young people (aged 15–24) engage much more intensively with interactive digital media—social networks, online video platforms, and streaming services—compared to older generations. Conversely, middle-aged and senior individuals tend to remain more loyal to traditional media, particularly television. At the European level, television remains the primary source of news for those over 54 years of age, with approximately 85% of this age group prioritizing television for news consumption (European Parliament, 2022).

In contrast, young people aged 15–24 show a significantly higher preference for online platforms, with 46% of this segment using social networks, blogs, or sharing platforms as sources of news, compared to only 15% among



those over 55 years old (European Parliament, 2022). These statistics illustrate a pronounced generational gap in media consumption: younger generations are far more integrated into the digital ecosystem, while older generations remain more reliant on traditional channels (TV, radio, newspapers). However, as time progresses, even older audiences are increasingly adopting digital media. For instance, over 50% of Europeans aged 55–64 used the internet to stream video content in 2022 (Eurostat, 2022), a significant percentage indicating that these age groups are gradually adopting new consumption habits.

- **Gender.** Differences in media consumption between men and women exist but are generally less pronounced than those related to age. Overall, internet access and the use of digital media are relatively similar across genders in Europe. In many countries, the proportion of daily internet users is nearly equal between men and women (Eurostat, 2022). However, nuances appear in **platform and content preferences**. Studies suggest that women tend to use social networks slightly more for information and communication, whereas men, on average, spend more time on video platforms and news sites related to sports or technology (European Parliament, 2022). According to the Media & News Survey 2022, a higher proportion of women reported using social media to send messages to friends and family (53% vs. 44% among men), whereas men accessed news and event-related posts more frequently. These gender differences may stem from both content preferences (e.g., men’s greater interest in video content related to news, gaming, sports, or technology) and social factors (women may place greater value on social networking and communication). Nevertheless, both genders maintain high media consumption rates across both traditional and digital channels.

- **Education and Socio-Economic Status.** Education level influences both access to technology and media preferences. Individuals with higher education levels generally have higher internet usage rates and tend to consume a wider variety of media content, including high-quality press, educational digital platforms, and on-demand services. Online news consumption and subscriptions to digital publications are more prevalent among those with higher education levels, who also possess the necessary digital literacy to navigate the diversity of available sources (Reuters Institute, 2023). Conversely,

individuals with lower education levels or from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to rely on free-to-air television and social networks (accessible via mobile phones) and less on print media or specialized websites. Economic status is closely linked to the ability to own multiple devices (smartphones, laptops, smart TVs) and to afford subscriptions (cable TV, high-speed internet, premium streaming services). As a result, **the digital divide** based on socio-economic criteria has significantly narrowed in Europe (due to declining technology costs and initiatives aimed at increasing access), but it has not disappeared entirely. Households with low incomes still display a preference for free television and radio consumption, while households with medium and high incomes make more extensive use of the internet and advanced digital services.

- **Geographical Location.** There are significant differences among media consumers across various regions of Europe. At a macro level, a distinction can be made between Western and Eastern Europe (BestBroadbandDeals.co.uk, 2023), as well as between urban and rural areas. In cities, broadband infrastructure and 4G/5G coverage are more advanced, facilitating high-intensity digital consumption (HD streaming, multiple connected devices). Urban audiences have access to a more diverse media offering (including cinemas, cultural events, etc.) and a broad range of streaming services and online platforms. In rural areas, although the situation has improved, there are still zones with limited access to high-speed internet. In such cases, traditional television and radio remain essential sources of information and entertainment, alongside mobile internet, which is primarily used for social networking. There are also **distinct regional and national differences**. For example, in Nordic countries, the average consumer is highly digitalized, with record levels of streaming and online news consumption (Eurostat, 2022). In contrast, in some Southeastern European countries, the average consumer spends more time watching television and less time on online news platforms — both due to established consumption habits and lower levels of trust in online sources.

- **Demographic Profile of the European Media Consumer.** The demographic profile of the European media consumer is highly heterogeneous. Young, urban, and educated individuals from Western Europe represent the most digitally oriented segment—they predominantly consume media online,