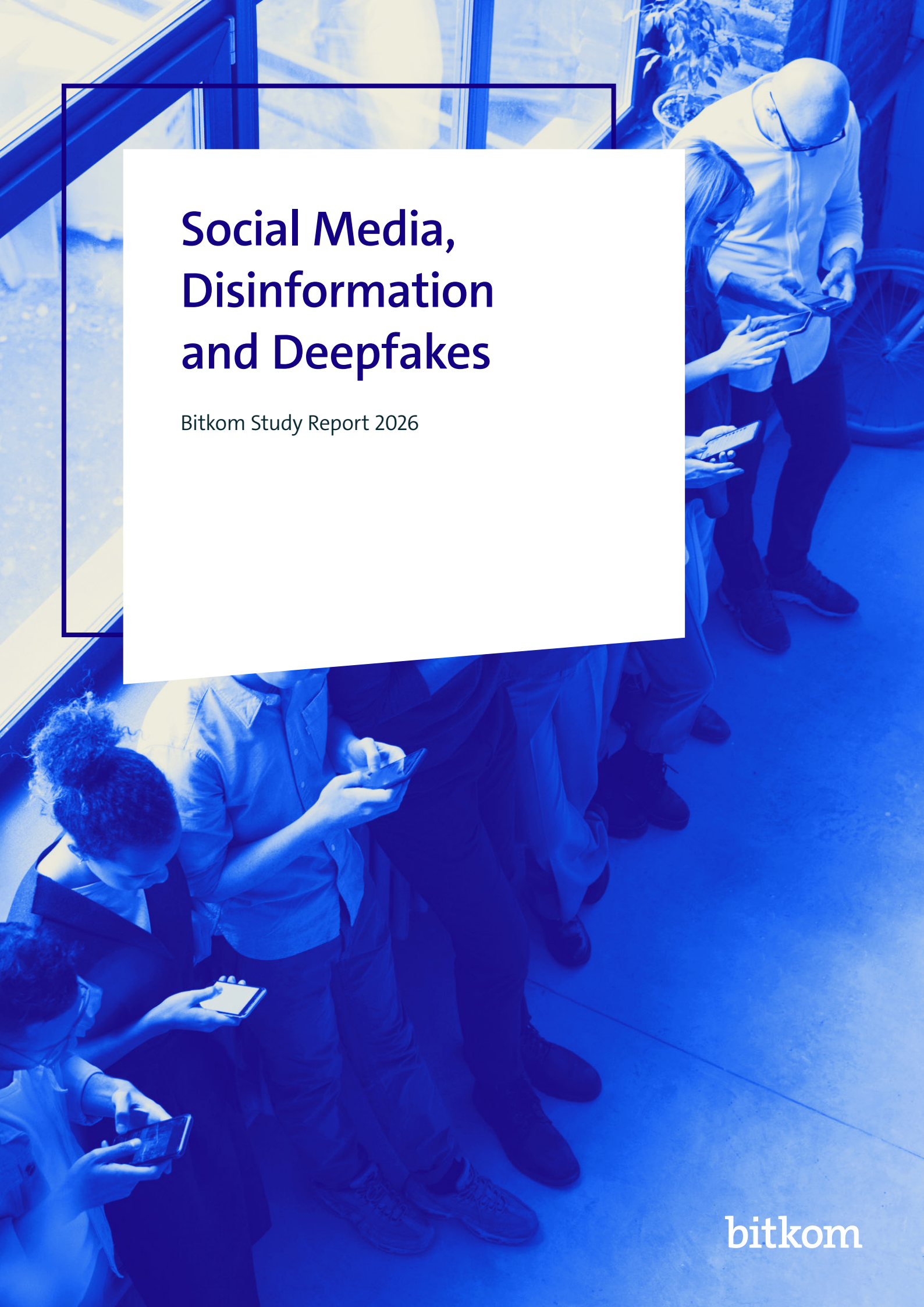




Social Media, Disinformation and Deepfakes

Bitkom Study Report 2026

Social Media, Disinformation and Deepfakes

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Executive Summary

Social media is an integral part of everyday digital life in Germany. It connects people, creates spaces for interaction, entertainment and community, and serves as a key gateway to news and current affairs for many. Platforms, messaging services and video services are increasingly shaping how people communicate, stay informed and participate in public debates. This report illustrates the extent to which social media is now used and the role digital channels play in everyday life and the formation of public opinion. At the same time, it examines how people deal with the abundance of information they encounter on social networks, messaging services and video platforms. It also explores the factors that help people navigate these spaces more effectively: media literacy, transparent labelling and reliable digital communication.

The report is based on a representative survey conducted by Bitkom Research using computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI). A total of 1,006 people aged 16 and over were interviewed in Germany.

Key findings of the report:

- **Social media is virtually standard in internet use**
89 percent of internet users use social media. Among those under 30, the figure is 98 percent, and even among those aged 65 and over, it's 72 percent.
- **A few platforms shape the digital public sphere**
Facebook (74 percent), Instagram (59 percent), WhatsApp (85 percent) and YouTube (85 percent) dominate usage. TikTok already reaches 30 percent.
- **Social media is both a social space and an information channel**
Social networks are primarily used for connecting with communities and people who share similar interests (75 percent), but also for keeping in touch with friends and family (73 percent), and for entertainment (64 percent). News and current affairs are mentioned by 45 percent.
- **News sources on social media are hard to identify**
50 percent of those who get news via social media say they sometimes find it difficult to identify the source of the content.
- **Fake news is widespread**
95 percent are familiar with the term "fake news", and 91 percent encounter such content at least occasionally. Disinformation about US politics, wars, the economy and celebrities is encountered particularly frequently.
- **Media literacy is seen as a key countermeasure**
85 percent believe that children should learn in school how to recognise disinformation and fake news; 71 percent also see a particular need to improve media literacy among older people.
- **Deepfakes exacerbate the problem**
75 percent are familiar with the term, 61 percent have already encountered deepfakes, but only 34 percent feel confident about recognising them. 89 percent consider deepfakes dangerous.

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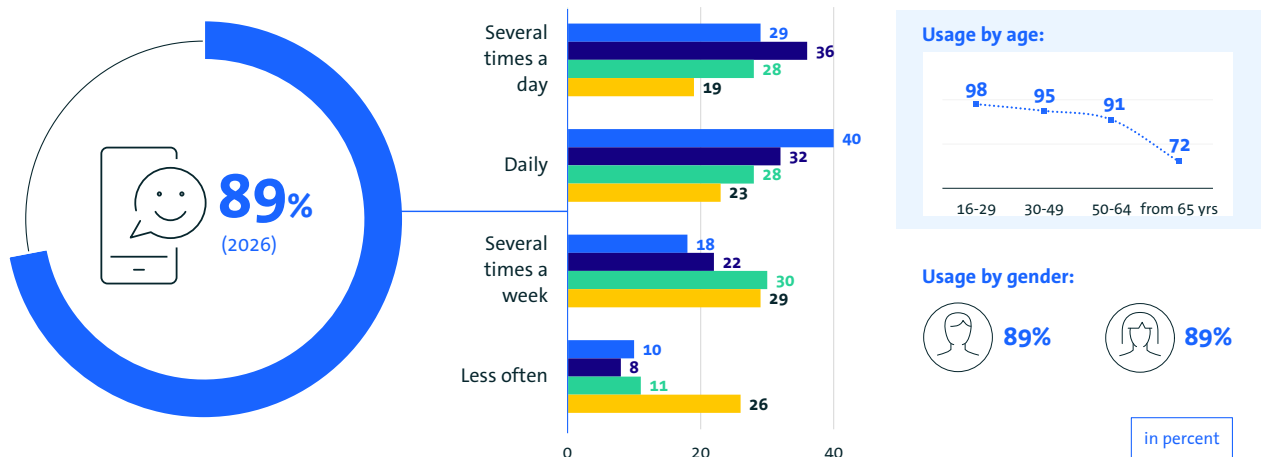
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1 Overview of Social Media Use

1 Overview of Social Media Use

1.1 General Social Media Use

Do you use social media? How frequently do you use social media?



Base: Internet users aged 16 and older (n=939) | Source: Bitkom Research 2026

Figure 1: Social media usage among internet users

Internet use almost always goes hand in hand with social media use

Internet use almost always goes hand in hand with social media use. Among internet users, 89 percent use social media. This proportion is unchanged from 2023 [↗Dataverse](#).

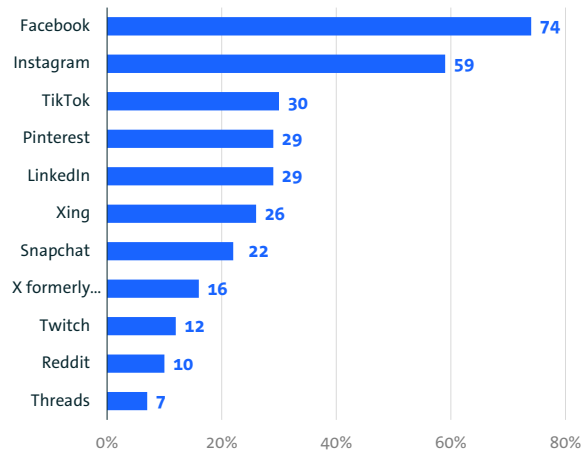
Among social media users, the frequency of use varies significantly by age. Daily use is particularly high among 16- to 29-year-olds: 29 percent use social networks several times a day and 40 percent once a day. Even among 30- to 49-year-olds, social media use is firmly integrated into daily life: 36 percent use social media several times a day and 32 percent once a day.

Among 50- to 64-year-olds, use is more evenly distributed: 28 percent use social networks several times a day, a further 28 percent once a day, and 30 percent several times a week. Among those aged 65 and over, overall use is less frequent. Here, 19 percent are active several times a day and 23 percent once a day, while just over a quarter say they use social networks only occasionally.

However, there are no differences between women and men: 89 percent of both groups use social media. Social media use is therefore not gender-specific but varies primarily by age.

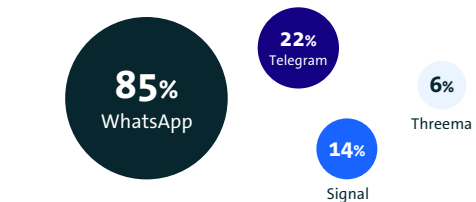
1.2 Social Networks, Messaging Services and Video Platforms Used

Which social networks do you use?



Base: Internet users aged 16 and older (n=939) | Source: Bitkom Research 2026

Which messaging services do you use?



Which video platforms do you use?

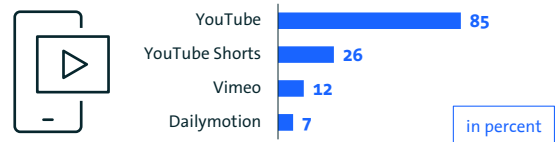


Figure 2: Social networks, messaging services, and video platforms used

Which platforms dominate?

Among the social networks, Facebook leads with 74 percent, followed by Instagram with 59 percent. TikTok ranks next at 30 percent, followed by Pinterest and LinkedIn, both at 29 percent, and Xing at 26 percent. Snapchat reaches 22 percent, X (formerly Twitter) 16 percent, Twitch 12 percent, Reddit 10 percent and Threads 7 percent.

Compared to 2023, there are few significant shifts. At that time, Pinterest ranked third with 38 percent, ahead of TikTok; by 2026, its share had fallen to 29 percent. The most significant decline was recorded by X (formerly Twitter): its share fell from 27 percent in 2023 to 16 percent in 2026 [↗Dataverse](#).

Among messaging services, WhatsApp clearly dominates with 85 percent, ahead of Telegram with 22 percent, Signal with 14 percent and Threema with 6 percent.

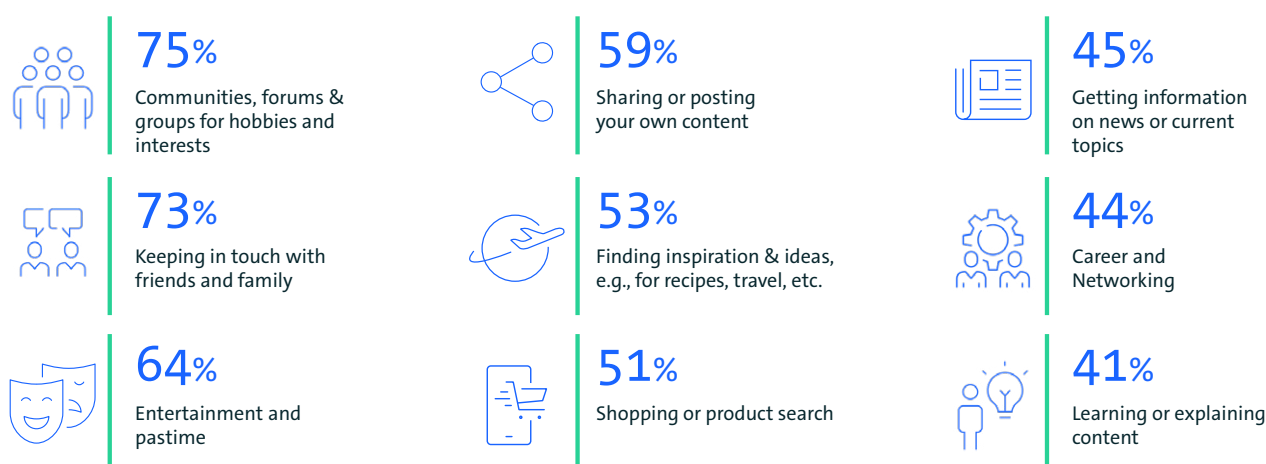
Among video platforms, YouTube is clearly the market leader, with 85 percent. YouTube Shorts is used by 26 percent, Vimeo by 12 percent and Dailymotion by 7 percent.

2 Reasons for Using Social Media and Social Media Settings

2 Reasons for Using Social Media and Social Media Settings

2.1 Main Reasons for Using Social Media

What are your main reasons for using social networks?



Base: Respondents using social media (n=835) | Source: Bitkom Research 2026

Figure 3: Primary Uses of Social Networks

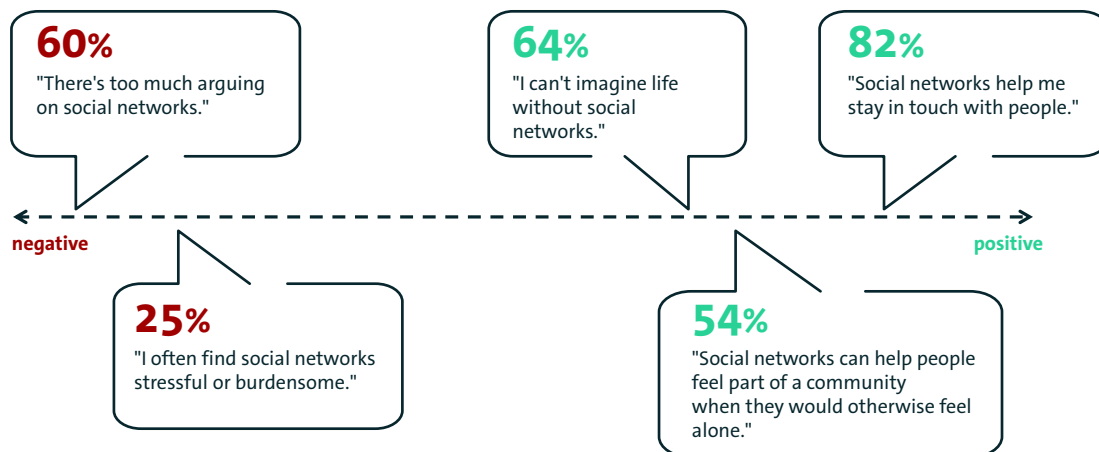
What do people look for on social networks?

Social networks are most commonly used to exchange ideas in communities, forums and groups centred on hobbies and interests. This is mentioned by 75 percent of social media users. Almost as many use them to keep in touch with friends and family (73 percent). 64 percent use social networks for entertainment and leisure. Creating and sharing content also plays an important role: 59 percent post or share their own content.

Just over half use social networks to find inspiration and ideas (53 percent) or to shop and search for products (51 percent). 45 percent use social networks for news and current affairs. Similar proportions cite career development and professional networking (44 percent), as well as learning or accessing explanatory content (41 percent).

2.2 Perception of Social Media

Which of the following statements about social networks apply to you?



Base: Respondents who use social media (n=835) | Source: Bitkom Research 2026

Figure 4: Settings and assessments of social networks

Social media offers many benefits, but it can also be stressful

Social networks are predominantly seen as helpful for staying in touch with others: 82 percent of social media users agree that social networks help them stay connected with people. In addition, 54 percent see them as a way to find a sense of community when they might otherwise feel alone. At the same time, social networks are deeply embedded in everyday life for many: 64 percent can no longer imagine life without them. This is particularly noticeable among older users: 60 percent of social media users aged 65 and over agree with this statement [Dataverse](#).

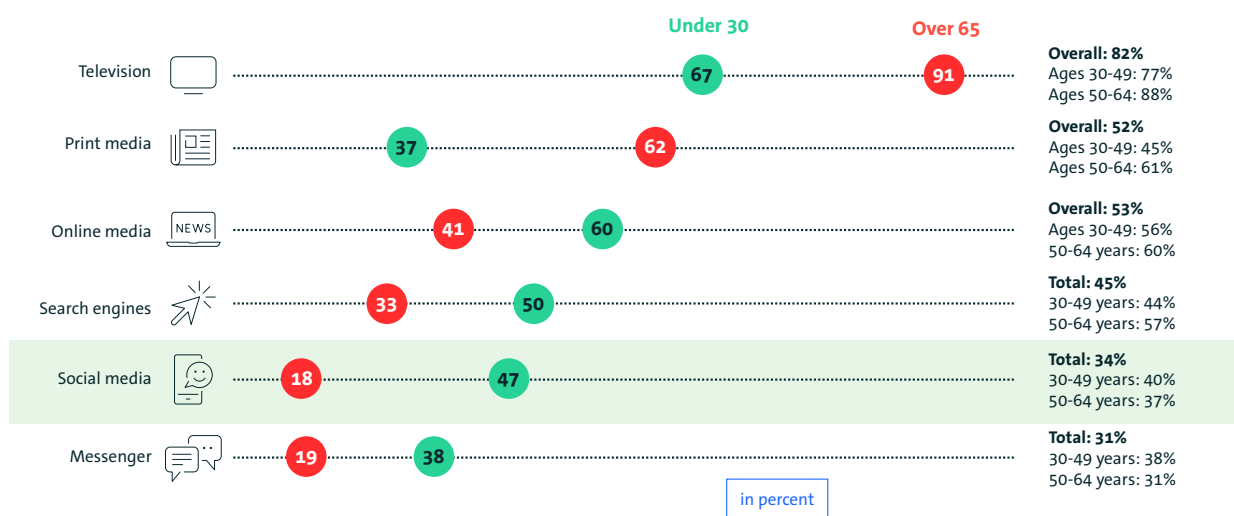
However, alongside these positive assessments, there are also critical views: 60 percent believe that there is too much arguing on social networks. 25 percent often find using them stressful or burdensome.

3 Exposure to News on Social Media

3 Exposure to News on Social Media

3.1 Initial Sources of News

Where do you usually first come across news and current information?



Base: All respondents (n=1,006) | Multiple answers possible | Source: Bitkom Research 2026

Figure 5: Initial contact points with news and current information

News consumption: people under 30 are significantly more likely to use social media

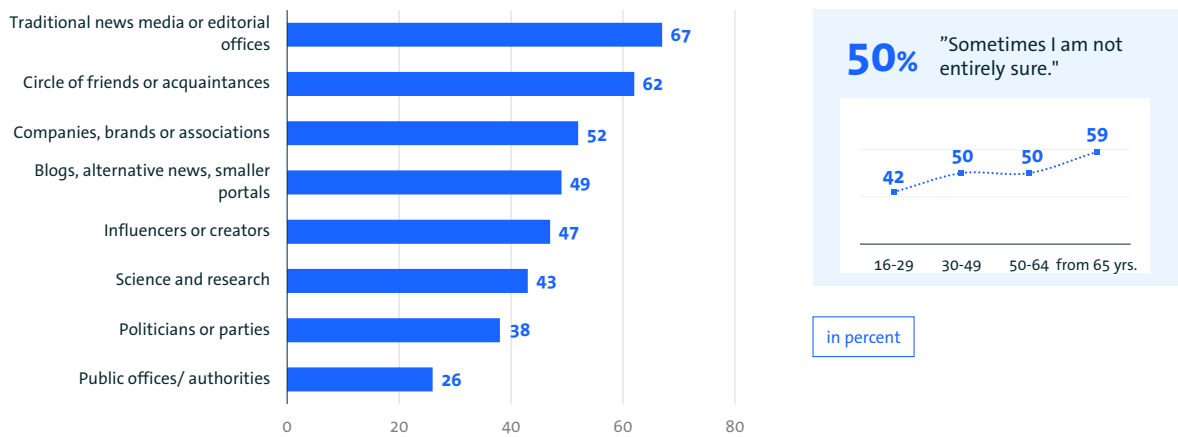
Television remains the most common first source of news and current information. Overall, 82 percent cite television. Among those under 30, the figure is still high at 67 percent, while among those aged 65 and over, it rises to 91 percent.

Alongside television, other channels also play an important role. 53 percent mention online media, 52 percent print media and 45 percent search engines. Social media are cited by 34 percent and messaging services by 31 percent.

Digital channels are significantly more important among younger people than among older age groups. Among those under 30, 60 percent mention online media, 50 percent search engines, 47 percent social media and 38 percent messaging services. Among those aged 65 and over, television and print media are clearly more prominent.

3.2 Sources of News Content on Social Media

Which sources do the news items you encounter on social media most often come from, in your view?



Base: Respondents who obtain news and information from social media (n=344) | Source: Bitkom Research 2026

Figure 6: Perceived sources of news on Social Media

News on social media comes from a wide range of sources

News content on social media is most frequently attributed to traditional news organisations or editorial teams. 67 percent of those who get their news and information from social media encounter content from these sources. This is followed by content from friends or acquaintances at 62 percent, and from companies, brands or associations at 52 percent. Other sources also play an important role: 49 percent cite blogs, alternative news outlets or smaller platforms, while 47 percent cite influencers or content creators. Content from science and research is identified by 43 percent, and content from politicians or political parties by 38 percent.

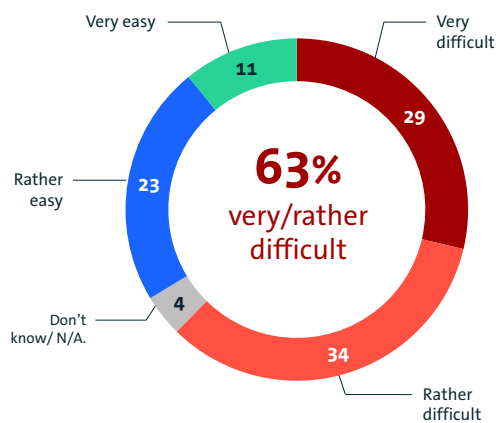
Public authorities or government agencies are mentioned least often (26 percent). It is also notable that 50 percent say they are sometimes unsure where news content on social media comes from. This uncertainty increases with age: among 16- to 29-year-olds, the figure is 42 percent, rising to 59 percent among those aged 65 and over.

4 Perceived Reliability of News

4 Perceived Reliability of News

4.1 Ability to Assess the Reliability of News

How easy or difficult do you find it to assess whether the news you come across is reliable?



Base: All respondents (n=1,006) | Deviations from 100% due to rounding | Source: Bitkom Research 2026

How often do you encounter content whose accuracy you are unsure about?

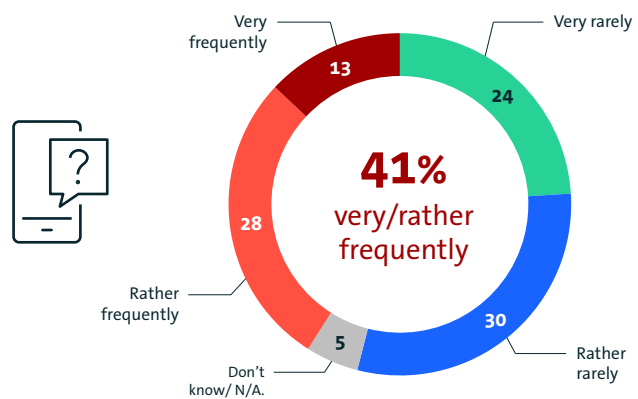


Figure 7: Assessment of the reliability of news and uncertainty about questionable content

Uncertainty about content is widespread

Many people find it difficult to assess the reliability of news. Overall, 63 percent say they find it very or somewhat difficult, while only 34 percent find it very or somewhat easy. This shows that assessing the reliability of news is a challenge for a large proportion of the population. Similarly, many people regularly encounter content whose accuracy they are unsure about. 41 percent report encountering such content very or somewhat often, while 54 percent do so rather seldom or very seldom.

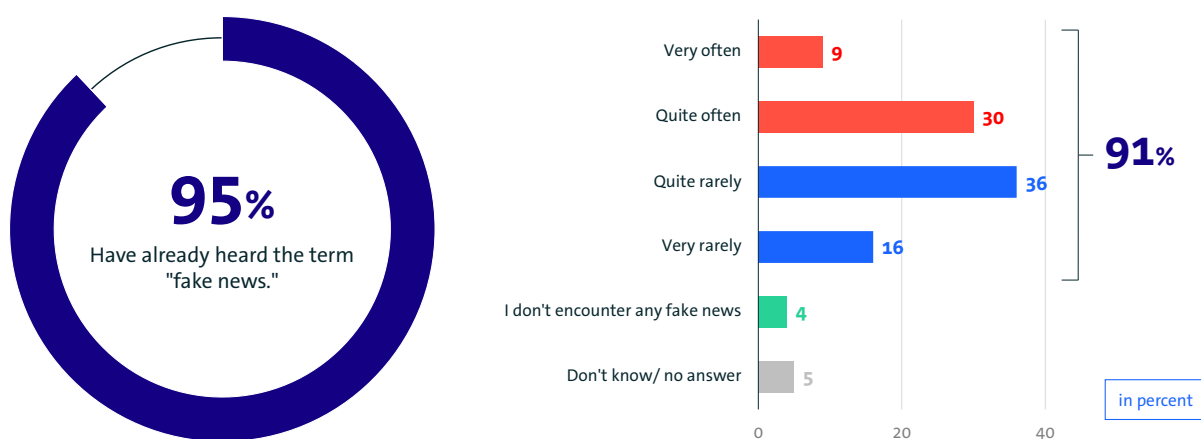
Uncertainty about news content is therefore not a marginal phenomenon, although it does not affect all respondents equally often.

5 Perceptions of Disinformation and Fake News

5 Perceptions of Disinformation and Fake News

5.1 False or Misleading Information

How often do you encounter false or misleading information that has been deliberately spread?



Base: All respondents (n=1,006) | Source: Bitkom Research 2026

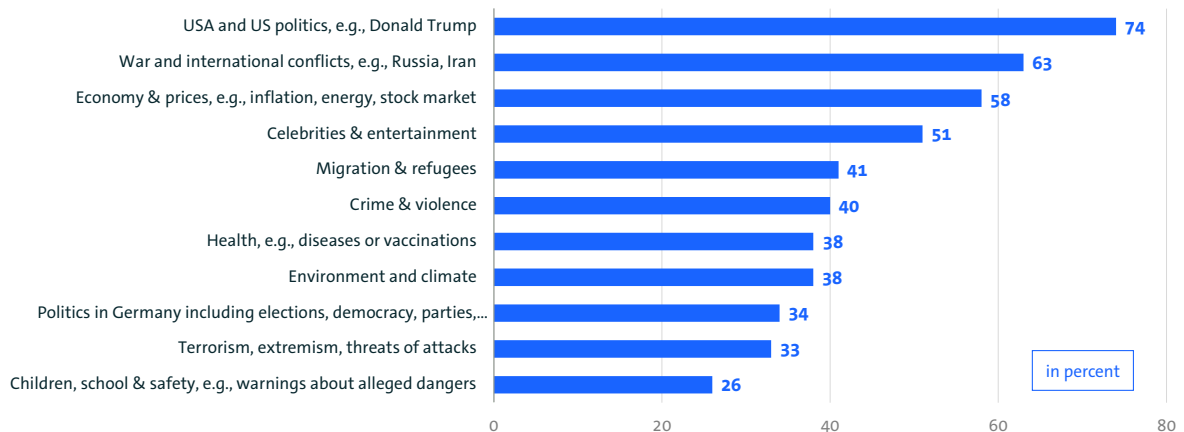
Figure 8: Awareness of the term "Fake News" and perceived frequency of false or misleading information

9 in 10 people encounter fake news

The term 'fake news' is now familiar to almost all respondents: 95 percent have heard of it. Exposure to such content is also widespread. Overall, 91 percent say they have encountered deliberately disseminated false or misleading information. Of these, 9 percent encounter such content very frequently and 30 percent somewhat frequently. A further 36 percent encounter it somewhat rarely and 16 percent very rarely. Only 4 percent say they never encounter fake news.

5.2 Areas in Which Misinformation Is Perceived

On which of the following topics have you noticed disinformation or so-called fake news in the past 12 months?



Base: Respondents who have encountered fake news (n=916) | Multiple responses possible | Source: Bitkom Research 2026

Figure 9: Areas of Perceived Disinformation and Fake News

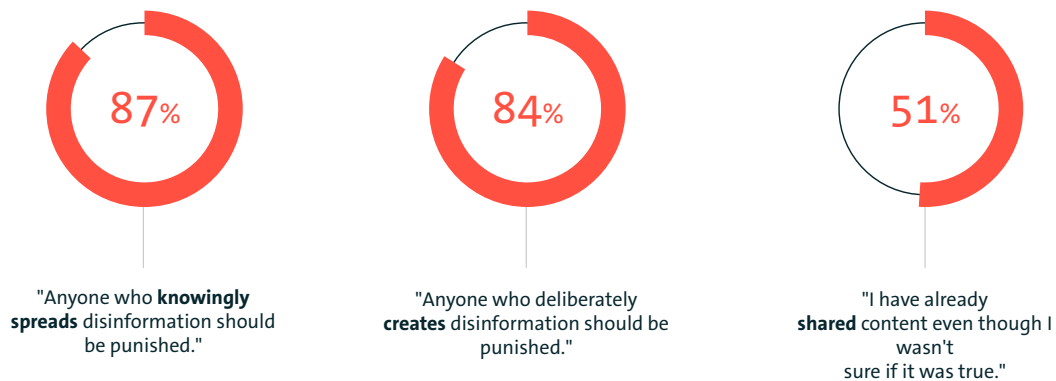
The US, war, the economy and celebrities

Disinformation and fake news are most frequently perceived in relation to the US and US politics, such as Donald Trump (74 percent). This is followed by wars and international conflicts at 63 percent, and the economy and prices at 58 percent. Many respondents also perceive fake news in relation to celebrities and entertainment (51 percent). Other frequently mentioned topics include migration and refugees (41 percent), crime and violence (40 percent), as well as health and the environment and climate, each at 38 percent.

Fake news about German politics (34 percent), terrorism and extremism (33 percent), and children, schools and security (26 percent) is mentioned somewhat less frequently.

5.3 Disinformation: Perceptions and Impact

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about disinformation and fake news?



Base: Respondents who encounter fake news (n=916) | Percentage for "Applies" | Source: Bitkom Research 2026

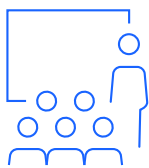
Figure 10: Agreement with Statements on Disinformation and Fake News

Many want consequences but may also contribute to its spread

Many respondents want clear consequences for disinformation. 87 percent believe that those who knowingly spread disinformation should be punished. 84 percent support penalties for deliberately creating disinformation.

Many therefore see disinformation as a problem to whose spread they may themselves contribute unintentionally.

To what extent do the following statements about disinformation and fake news apply to you?



85%

"**Children** should be taught at school how to recognise disinformation and fake news."



71%

"**Older people** who did not grow up with the internet should be better informed about disinformation and fake news."

Base: Respondents who encounter fake news (n=916) | Percentage values for "Applies" | Source: Bitkom Research 2026

Figure 11: Support for educational and informational measures against misinformation and fake news

Focusing on Children and Older People

Many respondents see education and awareness-raising as crucial ways of tackling disinformation: 85 percent believe that children should learn at school how to identify disinformation and fake news.

Older people are also seen as an important target group: 71 percent agree that people who did not grow up with the internet should receive specific information and guidance on disinformation and fake news.

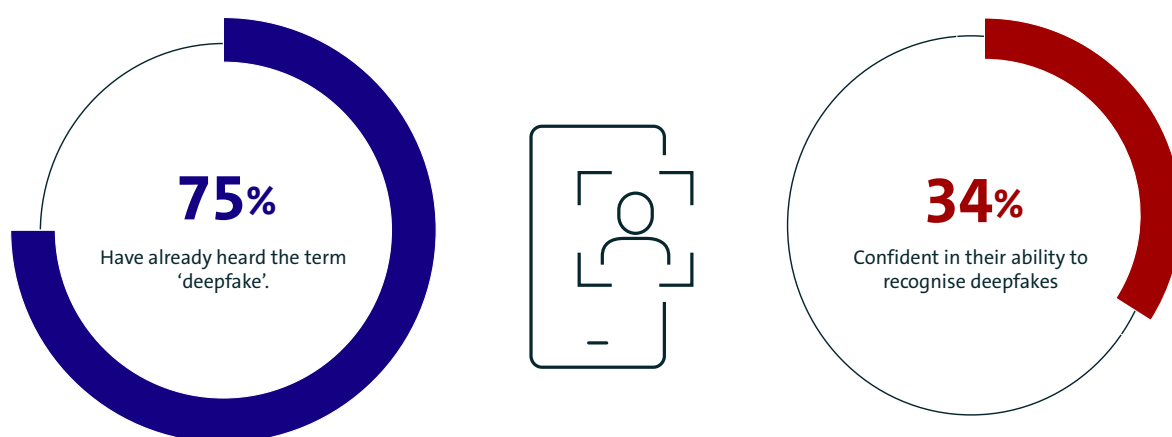
The desire for greater media literacy therefore extends to both younger and older age groups.

6 Awareness and Perceptions of Deepfakes

6 Awareness and Perceptions of Deepfakes

6.1 Familiarity with the Term 'Deepfake'

Have you ever heard the term «deepfake»?



Base: All respondents (n=1,006) | Multiple responses possible | Source: Bitkom Research 2026

Figure 12: Awareness of the term "Deepfake" and self-assessment of the ability to recognise Deepfakes

The term 'deepfake' is familiar to 3 in 4 people

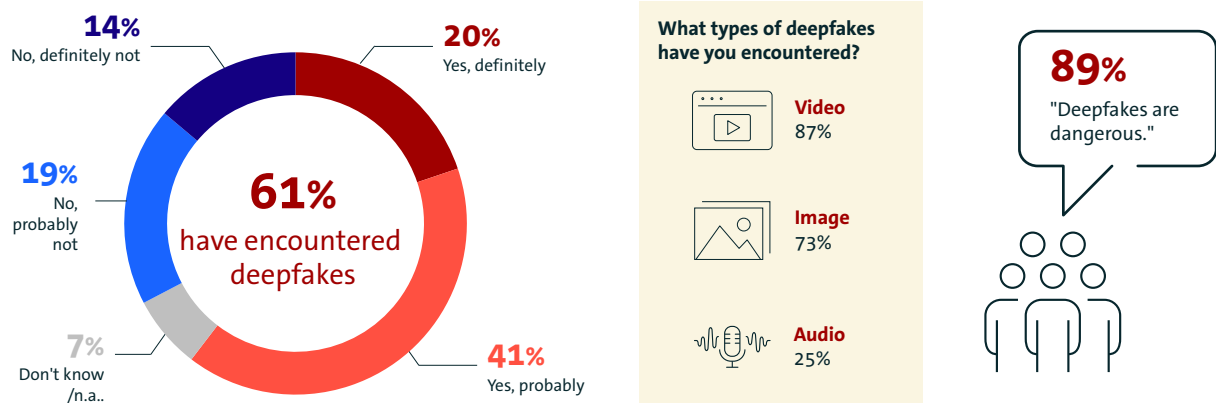
The term 'deepfake' is familiar to many respondents: 75 percent have heard of it. There are significant differences by age. Among those aged 16 to 29, awareness stands at 85 percent, while it is 80 percent among both 30- to 49-year-olds and 50- to 64-year-olds. Among those aged 65 and over, the figure is lower at 61 percent ↗Dataverse.

Confidence in people's ability to identify deepfakes is significantly lower. Only 34 percent feel confident that they can recognise deepfakes. Younger people fare slightly better: 41 percent of those under 30 and 36 percent of those aged 30 to 49 feel confident in doing so. In both older age groups, the figure is 30 percent ↗Dataverse.

Although the term 'deepfake' is familiar to many, correctly identifying such content remains challenging for a large proportion of the population.

6.2 Exposure to Deepfakes

Have you ever come across deepfakes?



Base left and right: All respondents (n=1,006) | Deviations from 100% are due to rounding | Middle: Multiple answers possible | Source: Bitkom Research 2026

Figure 13: Exposure to Deepfakes, perceived formats, and risk assessment

A new form of deception – primarily through videos and images

61 percent of respondents say they have encountered deepfakes before: 20 percent are certain they have, while 41 percent suspect they have. A third say they have not: 14 percent are certain they have never encountered deepfakes, while a further 19 percent believe they probably have not. Deepfakes are most frequently encountered in the form of videos (87 percent), followed by images (73 percent) and audio content (25 percent). At the same time, deepfakes are clearly perceived as a risk: 89 percent consider them dangerous.

Deepfakes are therefore not only familiar to many people but are also regarded as problematic by the majority.

7

Conclusion & Recommendations

The study report shows that social media has long been part of Germany's everyday infrastructure. It connects people, creates communities, enables exchange and, for many, serves as an important source of news and current information. Younger people in particular frequently use social media and messaging services as an entry point into the world of news. Digital platforms therefore shape not only private communication but also how information is perceived, shared and discussed.

At the same time, it is clear that disinformation has also become part of everyday life for many people: fake news is encountered by the vast majority of the population, and many have already shared content despite being unsure of its accuracy. Misinformation is particularly prevalent in relation to topics that dominate the news agenda and everyday life: the US and US politics, wars and international conflicts, the economy and prices, as well as celebrities, migration, crime, health, the environment and climate. Disinformation therefore affects not only political debates but also people's personal lives and private communication spaces. Deepfakes present a further challenge: although many people are now familiar with them and encounter them mainly in the form of videos and images, only a minority feel confident that they can identify them reliably.

The results indicate that the benefits of digital communication must be preserved, while deception and misinformation must be contained. From Bitkom's perspective, this requires a joint approach by government, the digital economy and civil society: clear and practical rules, better labelling and source verification, rapid reporting channels, effective enforcement against illegal content and strong civil society structures. It is crucial to design digital communication in a way that enables exchange, participation and open debate, while also providing people with better protection against disinformation and deepfakes.



Effectively Tackling Misinformation

What Policymakers, Business and Civil Society Can Do

Politics

- **Implement media literacy on a broad scale:** establish permanently funded programmes in schools, vocational training and continuing education.
- **Create legal certainty:** establish clear, practical rules for platforms and providers.
- **Expand the network of trusted flaggers:** recognise more organisations as trusted flaggers and ensure faster processing of illegal content.

Digital Economy

- **Expand technical safeguards:** strengthen detection and **labelling**, establish provenance mechanisms such as **Content Credentials** (for example, C2PA) to verify authentic content, and introduce additional checks before content is shared.
- **Strengthen moderation and enforcement:** respond quickly to illegal and harmful content and provide clear reporting channels.

Civil Society

- **Provide education and guidance:** offer clear, accessible resources to help people identify fake news and deepfakes.
- **Strengthen fact-checking and monitoring:** identify emerging trends early and make corrective information visible quickly.
- **Support those affected:** provide accessible reporting services and assistance for people affected by digital violence or manipulation.

Figure 13: Recommendations for Policymakers, Business, and Civil Society

8 Methodology

Client	Bitkom
Methodology	Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI), dual-frame approach
Target population	People aged 16 and over in Germany
Sample size	n=1,006
Survey period	Weeks 12-17, 2026
Weighting	Representative weighting of the dataset based on the latest micro-census of the Federal Statistical Office
Statistical margin of error	+/- 3 percentage points for the total sample

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Social media are an integral part of everyday life for many people, serving as a space for communication, entertainment, information and guidance. This study report examines how social networks, messaging services and video platforms are used in Germany and what role they play in accessing news and current information. A particular focus is placed on how people deal with disinformation and fake news. The results show that many people encounter false or misleading information, while at the same time a large proportion find it difficult to assess the reliability of news. Deepfakes are also becoming more prominent in public awareness. Although many people are familiar with the term, only some respondents feel confident that they can identify such content reliably.

DOI (German version)

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