SMI BAROMETER RESEARCH REPORT

Social Media &
Influencer Barometer

WWW.SMIBAROMETER.BE

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Preface

The Social Media & Influencer Marketing (SMI) Barometer tracks how people in Belgium use social media and how they respond to brand communication across social media platforms, influencers, and podcasts. Published annually by Artevelde University of Applied Sciences in collaboration with Comeos, the Belgian trade federation, the Barometer aims to bridge research and marketing practice.

This edition marks an important new phase for the study. For the first time, **the scope has been expanded from a youth-focused research project to Belgians aged 16 to 70**. This wider lens allows us to better understand how social media usage, preferences, and attitudes towards brand communication through social media and influencers differ across generations. It also reflects the reality that social media is no longer the domain of younger audiences alone, but a central part of everyday life for consumers of all ages.

The report is based on a representative survey among Belgians aged 16 to 70 and offers a comprehensive view of the current social media landscape in Belgium. By combining continuity with adaptation, the SMI Barometer remains a valuable tool for identifying long-term shifts while also capturing new developments as they emerge.

Alongside the recurring Barometer indicators, **this edition includes a dedicated deep dive into TikTok Shop, with a specific focus on adoption intention among Gen Z**. As social commerce continues to gain momentum, this topic offers valuable insight into how younger consumers perceive the integration of entertainment, influence, and purchasing within a single platform environment.

This year also marks the launch of the **Influencer Marketing Benchmark**, a new initiative that complements the SMI Barometer by offering **additional insight into the state of influencer marketing in Belgium**. Readers interested in this topic can find more information at influencermarketingbenchmark.be.

With this new edition, we hope to provide researchers, marketers, retailers, and brands with relevant insights into the changing role of social media in Belgian consumers' lives and the opportunities and challenges this creates for digital communication.

Enjoy the read,

Marijke De Veirman, Laurien Desimpelaere, Eveline Mollaert & Femke Loose

Artevelde University of Applied Sciences

Social Media in Transition: Insights for Belgian Retail

The SMI Barometer has become a trusted reference for anyone seeking to better understand Belgium's social media landscape. In a context where consumer behavior is evolving at great speed, this annual study offers clear insights into how Belgians use social media, which channels are gaining importance, and how brands can respond effectively.

The rise and shifts within social media channels continue at a rapid pace. New players and functionalities are challenging established platforms, while users are becoming increasingly selective and purposeful in the way they manage their online presence. At the same time, we see social platforms evolving ever more explicitly into fully fledged sales channels. The integration of e-commerce, through features such as TikTok Shop, is making inspiration and purchase increasingly part of one seamless experience.

In addition, conversational commerce is gaining ground. Consumers expect direct, personal interaction with brands, and channels such as WhatsApp play a key role in this. This evolution compels companies not only to be present on the right platforms, but also to fundamentally rethink the way they communicate.

With the SMI Barometer, Comeos and Artevelde University of Applied Sciences aim to continue supporting businesses, marketers and policymakers with relevant and up-to-date insights. Only by measuring and understanding continuously can we anticipate change and make sustainable choices in an increasingly complex digital ecosystem.

Kristof Delhez
Senior Manager Innovation & Platforms

Comeos

10 Key Insights

With 73% daily usage, WhatsApp is the most used social media platform in Belgium, ahead of Facebook (65%), Instagram (48%), Messenger (44%) and YouTube (39%). Beyond daily use, WhatsApp reaches 91% of Belgians monthly, underlining its exceptional breadth. YouTube also shows near-universal reach at 86% monthly, although it is used less intensively on a day-to-day basis.

1

Social media use in Belgium is highly age-driven. Younger audiences are strongly concentrated on Instagram, TikTok and Snapchat, while older audiences rely far more heavily on Facebook. Daily use of TikTok and Snapchat is especially pronounced among 16-24-year-olds, with 67% using TikTok daily and 66% using Snapchat daily. Usage remains meaningful among 25-34-year-olds as well, at 31% for TikTok and 24% for Snapchat, but drops sharply in older age groups. Instagram also extends beyond youth segments, but daily use peaks at 86% among 16-24-year-olds and 67% among 25-34-year-olds.

2

Social media plays a stronger role in inspiration than in direct conversion. A majority of respondents (51%) say they mainly use social media to get inspired and then prefer to buy in-store or via a webshop. More direct forms of commercial behavior remain secondary: 27% say they sometimes click on brand ads or sponsored posts, 15% click through via influencer or creator links, and 11% engage with tagged products in influencer posts or stories.

3

62% of Belgians follow brands on social media, mainly on Facebook and Instagram. Brand following rises to 85% among 16-24-year-olds and 77% among 25-34-year-olds. Facebook remains the strongest platform for broad-based brand following, with relatively robust levels across age groups: it is lowest among 16-24-year-olds (26%), rises to around 44-45% among those aged 25–54, and declines only moderately among older audiences. Instagram is much more youth-oriented, with 71% of 16-24-year-olds and 56% of 25-34-year-olds following brands there, after which penetration declines steadily. TikTok is even more concentrated among the youngest audiences, with 51% of 16-24-year-olds following brands on the platform.

4

Instagram and TikTok are particularly effective for brand and product discovery: 56% of weekly Instagram users and 52% of weekly TikTok users say they discovered brands or products there, compared with 47% on Facebook and 39% on Pinterest. Facebook, however, stands out more clearly as a platform that drives action beyond discovery. Among weekly users, 32% click through to a website or webshop, compared with 30% on Instagram and only 18% on TikTok. TikTok matches Instagram as a platform for active information seeking, with 31% of weekly users on both platforms searching for more information about brands or products there.

5

Traditional search engines remain the dominant source of brand and product information, but AI already plays a meaningful role in the search journey. Consumers still rely on traditional search engines, with 85% using platforms such as Google or Bing to look up information about brands, products or services. Even among 16-24-year-olds, 69% still turn to traditional search. At the same time, AI-assisted search is already significant: 29% of Belgians use tools such as ChatGPT, Perplexity or Copilot for this purpose, rising to 46% among 16-24-year-olds. Social media itself also plays a role as a search environment, though a smaller one: 16% overall use platforms such as Facebook, Instagram or TikTok to search for product or brand information, compared with 36% among 16-24-year-olds.

6

55% of Belgian social media users aged 16 to 70 say they follow influencers, content creators and/or famous people on social media. This rises to 82% among 16-24-year-olds. Among this age group, 63% say they have discovered a new brand through influencers, 45% have searched for more information, 34% have started following a brand, and 31% have made a purchase. These shares decline steadily with age, indicating that influencer marketing is a powerful among younger consumers, but far less relevant for older audiences.

7

41% of Belgian social media users say they have consciously encountered influencer content created with the help of AI. Awareness is substantially higher among younger groups: 66% of 16-24-year-olds report having seen such content, compared with around 27% among those aged 55 and older. While younger audiences are more likely to encounter AI-generated influencer content, older audiences place greater importance on transparency about its use.

8

44% of Belgian social media users say they know what virtual influencers are, yet actual engagement remains very limited: only 5% currently follow a virtual influencer, rising to 14% among 16–24-year-olds and 9% among 25–34-year-olds.

9

Nearly half of Belgians aged 16 to 70 (48%) listen to podcasts, including 16% weekly and 14% daily. Usage is strongly age-driven, with 25-34-year-olds (64%) forming the most active audience and listening declining steadily with age. For brands, podcasts offer strong visibility: 68% of listeners say they encounter brands while listening. Their impact is strongest higher up the funnel, particularly in brand discovery (32%) and information search (21%), while their ability to drive purchase (12%) is more limited.

10

Methodology

ONLINE SURVEY

The findings presented in this report are based on an online survey among Belgians aged 16 to 70. The questionnaire was administered via Qualtrics, and respondents were recruited through panel provider BPact. As a different panel provider was used this year, comparisons over time should be interpreted with some caution.

WEIGHTING

To ensure a representative sample of the Belgian population aged 16 to 70, weighting was applied based on census data from Statbel. In line with previous editions, the sample was adjusted to reflect the demographic composition of the population based on age group, gender, and geographical region.

COMPARATIVE AND MULTIPLE RESPONSE ANALYSES

Statistical analyses were carried out using IBM SPSS Statistics. Where meaningful, differences were examined across gender, age groups, and language groups (Dutch- and French-speaking respondents). Reported differences between groups are statistically significant at the .05 level. This analytical approach is consistent with the previous edition.

For questions in which respondents could select more than one answer option, multiple response analyses were used. As a result, percentages may exceed 100%, since participants were able to provide more than one response.

TREND ANALYSIS

The SMI Barometer has gradually expanded in scope over time. The research initiative started with a focus on Flemish youth aged 16 to 24, was later extended to the whole of Belgium, and was subsequently broadened to include respondents aged 16 to 39. In the current edition, the scope has been extended further to include Belgians aged 16 to 70.

Because the target population has changed over time, comparisons across editions should be interpreted with appropriate caution. Where relevant, trend analyses are made based on equivalent segments of the population to ensure comparability over time.

Differences between percentages are expressed in percentage points, referring to the absolute difference between two percentages. For example, an increase from 20% to 30% represents an increase of 10 percentage points.

Sample description

The sample consisted of 4.926 participants. Due to the survey design and routing of certain questions, some results are based on smaller subsamples, as not all respondents were presented with every question.

AGE

The target group of this survey is Belgians between the age of 16 and 70. The mean age of the participants is 41,5 years (SD = 16,4).

16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-70
23%	18%	16%	16%	19%	9%
N = 116	N = 866	N = 767	N = 790	N = 922	N = 465

Table 1: Distribution across age categories (N = 4.926)

GENDER

50% females (N = 2.446) and 50% males (N = 2.437) participated in the online survey. 29 participants indicated to be genderqueer, and 14 participants identified themselves as different or preferred not to share their gender.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

53% of the sample was Dutch-speaking (N = 2.629), and 46% French-speaking (N = 2.297).
Figure 1 shows the distribution of participants across the regions in Belgium.

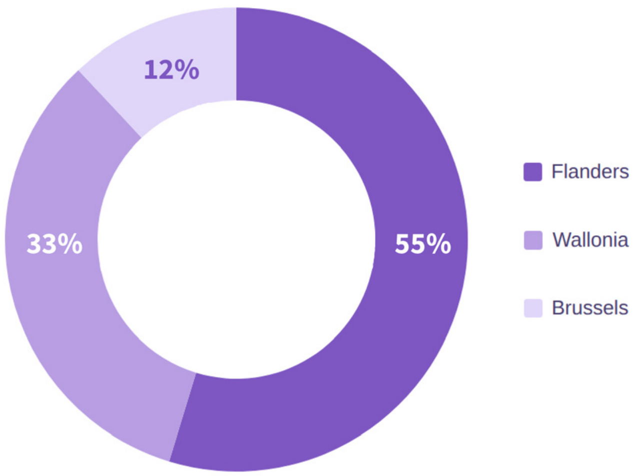


Figure 1: Distribution of participants across region (N = 4.926)

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

At the time of the survey, 52% worked at least part-time (N = 2.570), either in paid employment (47%) or self-employed (5%). 18% (N = 898) of the participants were enrolled at least part-time in a school. Table 2 provides an overview of which studies these participants were enrolled in at the time of survey. Other participants (N = 4.028) were asked to indicate their highest level of education, which is presented in Table 3.

General secondary education	13%
Technical secondary education	9%
Vocational secondary education	7%
Art secondary education	1%
Bachelor's studies or short-cycle tertiary education	49%
Master's studies	18%
Other	4%

Table 2: Overview education of participants enrolled at least parttime at school (N = 898)

Primary education or none	2%
Lower secondary education	10%
Upper secondary education	35%
Bachelor's studies or short-cycle tertiary education	28%
Master's or doctoral studies	25%
Unknown	1%

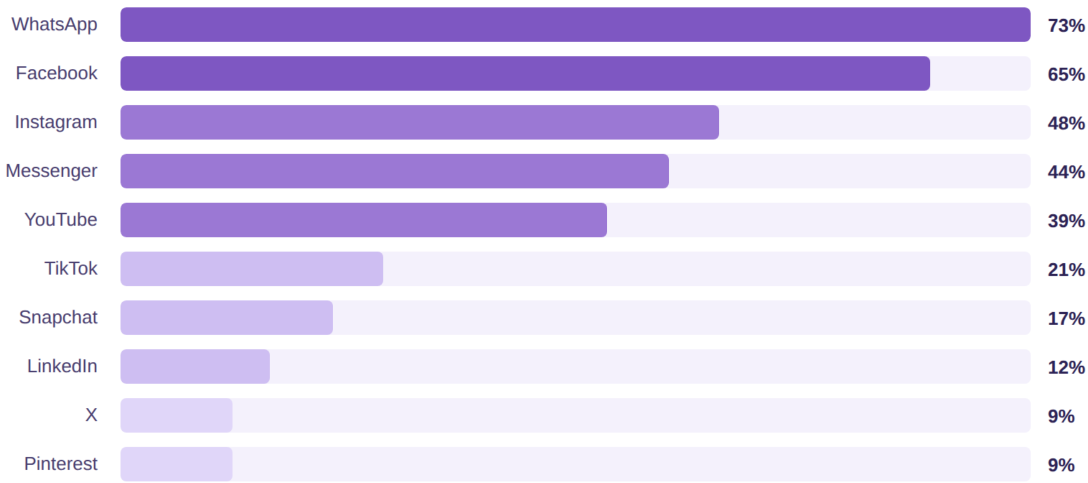
Table 3: Overview of the level of graduated participants' education level (N = 4.028)

Social media use

KEY INSIGHTS

- Daily social media use remains concentrated around a small number of dominant platforms. WhatsApp is the most used platform in Belgium on a daily basis. Facebook and Instagram follow at some distance.
- Social media use in Belgium is strongly shaped by age. Among 16–24-year-olds, Instagram is the most intensively used platform, followed by WhatsApp, TikTok and Snapchat, all of which are deeply embedded in young people's daily routines. In older age groups, Facebook becomes much more prominent, while TikTok and Snapchat fade sharply. WhatsApp stands out as the only platform with consistently high daily use across generations, and YouTube also maintains a broad reach across all age groups.
- Gender differences are clearly visible in platform use. Women are more active on Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and Messenger, while men are more active on YouTube and on several niche platforms.
- Social media use also differs substantially between Dutch- and French-speaking Belgians. French-speaking respondents are generally more active across a broader range of platforms, whereas Dutch-speaking respondents stand out primarily for their stronger use of WhatsApp.

SOCIAL MEDIA USE IN BELGIUM



| **Figure 2**: Top 10 social media platforms in Belgium (expressed in % of daily users; N = 4.926).

Social media use in Belgium remains strongly concentrated around a limited number of dominant platforms. **WhatsApp is by far the most widely used platform**, with nearly three in four respondents using it daily (73%) and more than nine in ten using it overall (91%). Usage levels are high across all age groups, with no remarkable differences, indicating that WhatsApp has a broadly universal reach. On a daily basis, women appear to be even more frequent users than men, with 76% reporting daily use compared with 71% of men. **Facebook also retains a remarkably strong position**, with 83% overall use and 65% daily use, suggesting that it continues to play an important role despite the growing diversification of the social media landscape. However, a comparison across age groups (see next sections) shows that this strong overall position is driven primarily by **high levels of daily use among older age groups**. Among Gen Z (16-24), by contrast, daily Facebook use reaches only 48%. For Facebook, too, women report higher levels of use than men, (71% vs. 59% daily). In addition, Facebook remains more strongly embedded among French-speaking respondents, with daily usage (70%) clearly exceeding that of Dutch-speaking respondents (61%).

Instagram and YouTube occupy a similarly central position, although in different ways. Instagram combines broad appeal with relatively strong habitual use, with 48% of respondents using the platform daily. Women are more strongly represented on Instagram than men, with 53% reporting daily use compared with 44% of men. **YouTube**, by contrast, **reaches one of the largest audiences in Belgium after WhatsApp**, with 86% using it at least monthly, but is somewhat less embedded in everyday routines, as daily use stands at 39%. This suggests that YouTube remains a near-universal platform, however men (49% daily; 90% monthly use) are more strongly represented on this video-based platform compared to women (29% daily; 82% monthly use , while French-speaking respondents also report higher YouTube use (46% daily; 90% monthly) than Dutch-speaking respondents (34% daily; 83% monthly).

TikTok and Snapchat also maintain a meaningful presence, although their **popularity is concentrated primarily among younger age groups**. In Belgium, 30% use TikTok at least monthly, including 21% who use it daily, while Snapchat reaches 26% of Belgians monthly, with 17% using it daily. Both TikTok and Snapchat are also more widely used among French-speaking respondents than among Dutch-speaking ones, as reflected in daily usage levels of 27% versus 16% for TikTok and 22% versus 13% for Snapchat, respectively.

Several platforms display a clear gap between overall and daily use, pointing to more functional or occasional usage patterns. This is particularly the case for LinkedIn, X, Pinterest, Discord, Reddit, and Strava. Finally, a long tail of smaller or emerging platforms records comparatively low levels of overall use. Threads, BeReal, Telegram, Signal, Clubhouse, Triller, Bluesky, and Mastodon all remain below 15%.

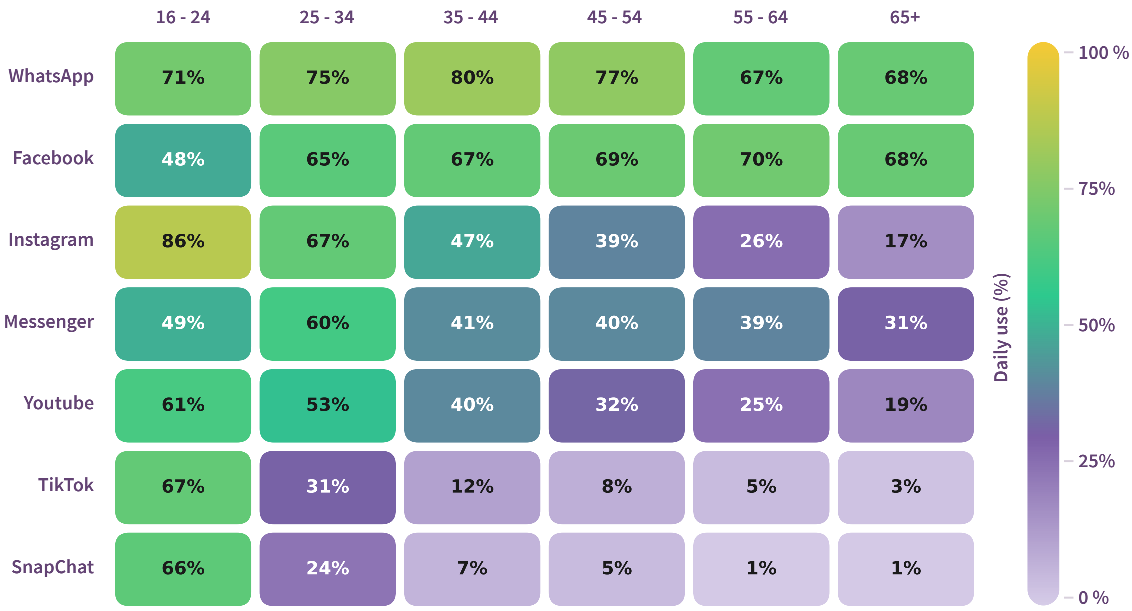
	Monthly	Weekly	Daily
WhatsApp	91%	86%	73%
Facebook	83%	76%	65%
Instagram	65%	58%	48%
Messenger	75%	61%	44%
YouTube	86%	64%	39%
TikTok	30%	26%	21%
Snapchat	26%	21%	17%
LinkedIn	38%	23%	12%
X	20%	14%	9%
Pinterest	37%	19%	9%
Discord	18%	12%	8%
Reddit	18%	12%	7%
Strava	20%	13%	6%
Signal	13%	9%	6%
Telegram	14%	10%	5%
Twitch	12%	8%	5%
BeReal	9%	7%	5%
Threads	12%	8%	4%
Tinder / Grindr	9%	7%	4%
Bluesky	7%	5%	3%
Mastodon	5%	3%	2%
Triller	5%	4%	2%
Clubhouse	4%	3%	2%
OnlyFans	4%	3%	2%

Table 4: Social media use in Belgium (N = 4.926)

SOCIAL MEDIA USE ACROSS AGE GROUPS

Daily platform use varies strongly by age. Instagram, TikTok and Snapchat are most clearly associated with younger users, with usage dropping sharply in older age groups. Facebook shows the opposite pattern and remains especially strong among older respondents. WhatsApp is the only platform with consistently high daily use across all generations, while YouTube also reaches all age groups but is more strongly embedded among younger users, as shown in the following heatmap:

Daily social media use by age group (%)



Ages 16–24

Among 16–24-year-olds, social media use is both very high and broadly distributed across platforms. Instagram has the widest reach in this group (95%), followed closely by YouTube (94%) and WhatsApp (93%). Snapchat (79%) and TikTok (77%) also hold exceptionally strong positions, far more so than in older age groups. In terms of daily use, Instagram (86%), WhatsApp (71%), TikTok (67%), and Snapchat (66%) stand out, indicating that these platforms are deeply embedded in young people's everyday routines. Discord (47% monthly; 23% daily) and Twitch (33% monthly; 14% daily) also show a distinctly youth-oriented profile. Facebook remains widely used (81%), but it is less central to daily use (48%) than Instagram, TikTok, or Snapchat.

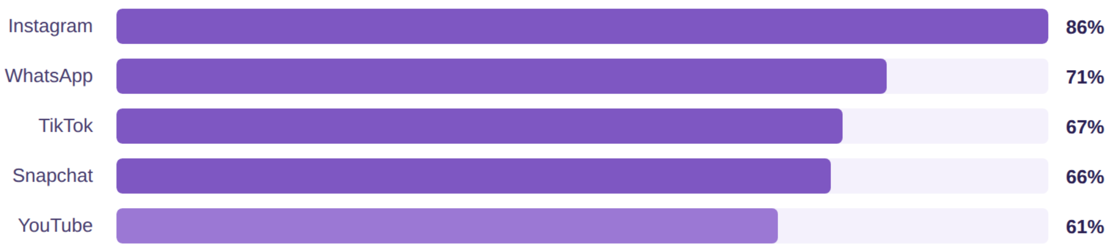


Figure 3: Top 5 daily social media among 16-24 year-olds (N = 759)

Evolution of social media use among 16–24-year-olds (2021–2026)

Between 2021 and 2026, social media use among 16–24-year-olds shows both continuity and change. Instagram remains the most widely used platform throughout the period, maintaining consistently high levels of use and reaching 86% in 2026. At the same time, TikTok and WhatsApp record the strongest growth, with TikTok rising sharply from 47% in 2021 to 67% in 2026 and WhatsApp increasing steadily from 53% in 2022 to 71% in 2026. Snapchat also remains highly relevant among younger users, with a peak in 2023. By contrast, Facebook shows a marked decline, falling from 71% in 2021 to 48% in 2026, while YouTube decreases more gradually from 72% to 61%. X remains comparatively limited and loses ground over time. Overall, Instagram remains the leading platform among 16–24-year-olds, followed by WhatsApp, which has continued to grow. TikTok, Snapchat, and YouTube also remain highly used, while platforms such as Facebook and X have become less prominent.

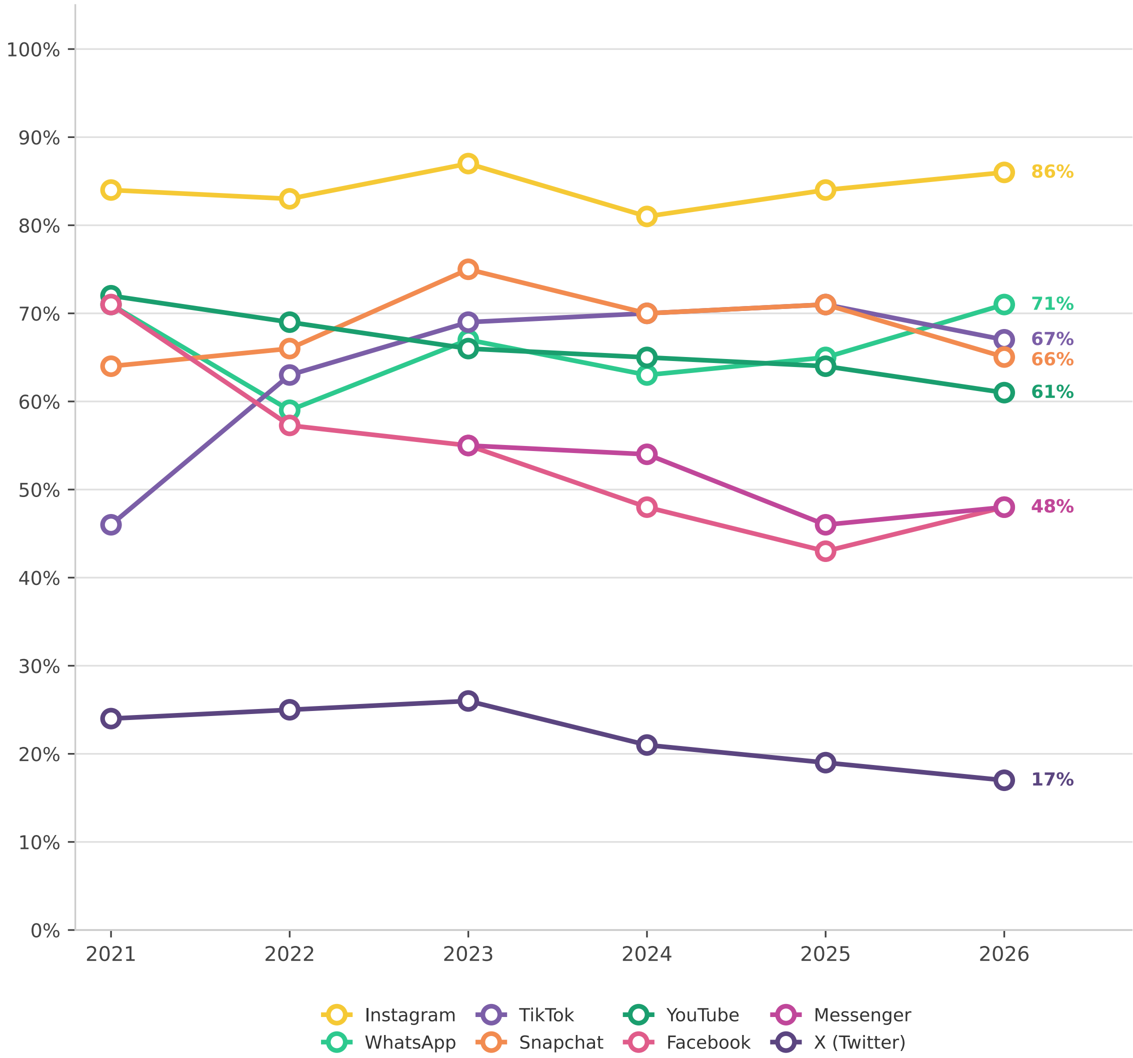


Figure 4: Evolution of daily social media use among Belgian young people (16-24)

Ages 25–34

Among 25–34-year-olds, overall use remains very high, although the platform mix becomes somewhat more diverse. WhatsApp (94%), YouTube (91%), Facebook (86%), and Messenger (86%) form the core of social media use (based on monthly use). Instagram still maintains strong reach (81%), while TikTok remains relevant (43%), though clearly less dominant than among the youngest users. This age group also records relatively strong usage levels across a wider range of platforms, including LinkedIn (55%), Pinterest (44%), Reddit (37%), and Snapchat (37%). Daily use is led by WhatsApp (75%), Instagram (67%), Facebook (65%), and Messenger (60%), while TikTok (31%) and Snapchat (24%) continue to play a meaningful role.

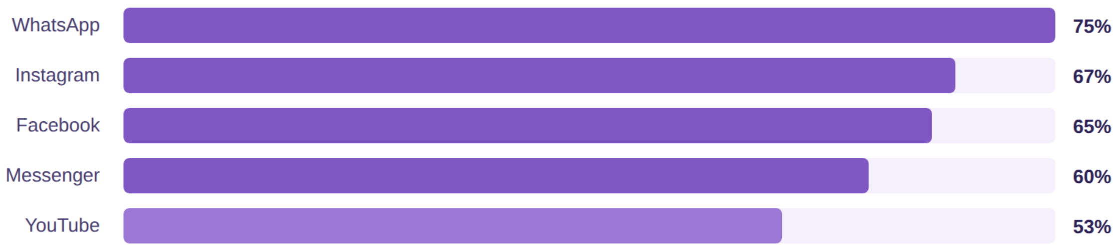


Figure 5: Top 5 daily social media among 25-34 year-olds (N = 909)

Ages 35-44

Among 35–44-year-olds, social media use shifts more clearly toward established platforms, with the same three leading platforms that also dominate older age groups already firmly in place. WhatsApp (94%), YouTube (90%), and Facebook (85%) dominate in monthly reach, while Messenger (74%) and Instagram (64%) also remain widely used. Compared with younger age groups, the reach of TikTok (21%), Snapchat (17%), Discord (15%), and Twitch (8%) declines sharply. LinkedIn is notable in this group as a more functional platform, reaching 47% monthly. Daily use is concentrated mainly around WhatsApp (80%), Facebook (67%), and Instagram (47%), while YouTube combines very broad reach with lower daily intensity (40%).

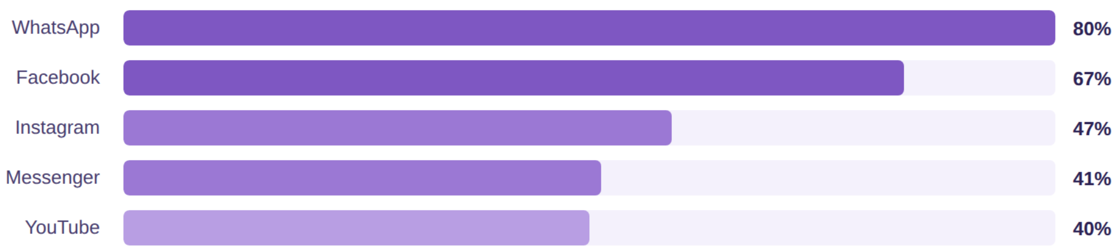


Figure 6: Top 5 daily social media among 35-44 year-olds (N = 931)

Ages 45–54

Among 45–54-year-olds, the same three core platforms continue to dominate monthly reach, with WhatsApp (92%), Facebook (84%), and YouTube (84%) clearly occupying the central position. Messenger (73%) and Instagram (61%) remain relevant, but younger-oriented platforms such as TikTok (18%) and Snapchat (12%) have limited monthly reach. LinkedIn also retains a relatively solid position in this age group (40%). Daily use is strongly concentrated on WhatsApp (77%) and Facebook (69%), while Instagram (39%) and YouTube (32%) remain important but are less central to everyday routines.

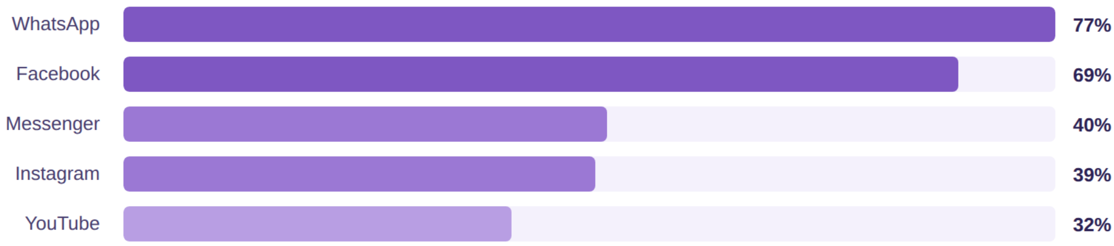


Figure 7: Top 5 daily social media among 45-54 year-olds (N = 909)

Ages 55–64

Among 55–64-year-olds, social media use remains concentrated above all around the same three leading platforms: WhatsApp (86%), Facebook (81%), and YouTube (81%). Messenger (71%) follows at some distance, while Instagram drops to 48% monthly reach. Platforms such as TikTok (12%) and Snapchat (5%) have only a limited presence in this age group. Other platforms are used more occasionally or functionally, such as LinkedIn (25%) and Pinterest (30%). Facebook records the highest daily use in this group (70%), slightly above WhatsApp (67%).

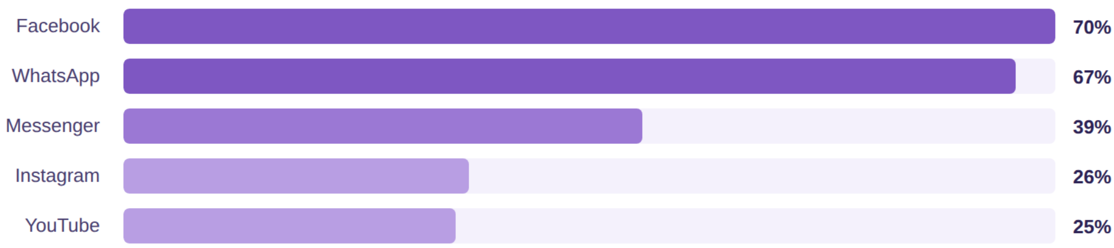


Figure 8: Top 5 daily social media among 55-64 year-olds (N = 933)

Ages 65+

Among respondents aged 65 and over, the same three dominant platforms continue to structure social media use, with WhatsApp (89%), Facebook (80%), and YouTube (72%) clearly occupying the top positions. Messenger (63%) still plays a secondary but relevant role. Instagram still reaches 36% of this group, although daily use is limited to 17%. Platforms such as TikTok (8%) and Snapchat (5%) remain limited in this age group. Facebook (68%) and WhatsApp (68%) are the two most important platforms in terms of daily use.have only a limited presence in this age group. Other platforms are used more occasionally or functionally, such as LinkedIn (25%) and Pinterest (30%). Facebook records the highest daily use in this group (70%), slightly above WhatsApp (67%).

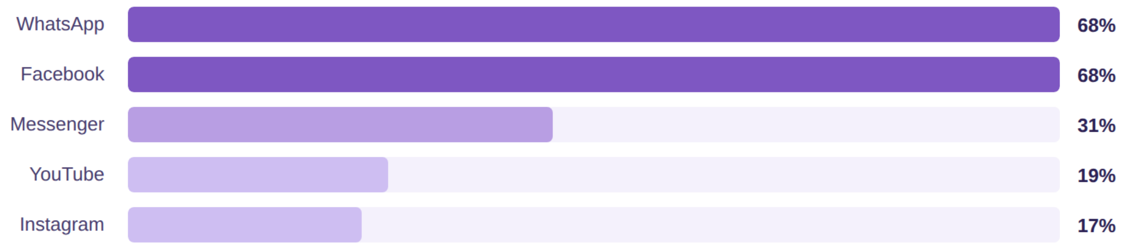


Figure 9: Top 5 daily social media among 65+ year-olds (N = 484)

DIFFERENCES IN SOCIAL MEDIA USE BETWEEN DUTCH- AND FRENCH-SPEAKING BELGIANS

A comparison between Dutch-speaking and French-speaking respondents reveals some substantial differences in platform use. Overall, **French speakers appear to be more active across a broader range of social media platforms, including Facebook, Messenger, TikTok, Snapchat, and YouTube**. The contrast is particularly strong for Facebook and Messenger. For Facebook, daily use reaches 70% among French-speaking respondents, compared with 61% among Dutch-speaking respondents, while monthly use stands at 87% versus 80%. An even larger gap appears for Messenger, with 56% of French speakers using it daily, compared with 35% among Dutch speakers. Similar differences can be observed for TikTok and Snapchat: daily TikTok use reaches 27% among French speakers, compared with 16% among Dutch speakers, while for Snapchat the corresponding figures are 22% and 13%. YouTube also shows a clear linguistic divide, with 46% of French-speaking respondents using it daily and 90% monthly, compared with 34% daily and 83% monthly among Dutch-speaking respondents. By contrast, **Dutch speakers stand out primarily for their much stronger use of WhatsApp**, with 81% using it daily compared with 63% of French speakers. Instagram, however, does not show similarly pronounced differences between the two language communities. More generally, French-speaking respondents also appear to be more active across a range of smaller or more niche platforms, including X, Twitch, Discord, Telegram, Threads, and BeReal, all of which show consistently higher daily and monthly use among French speakers than among Dutch speakers.

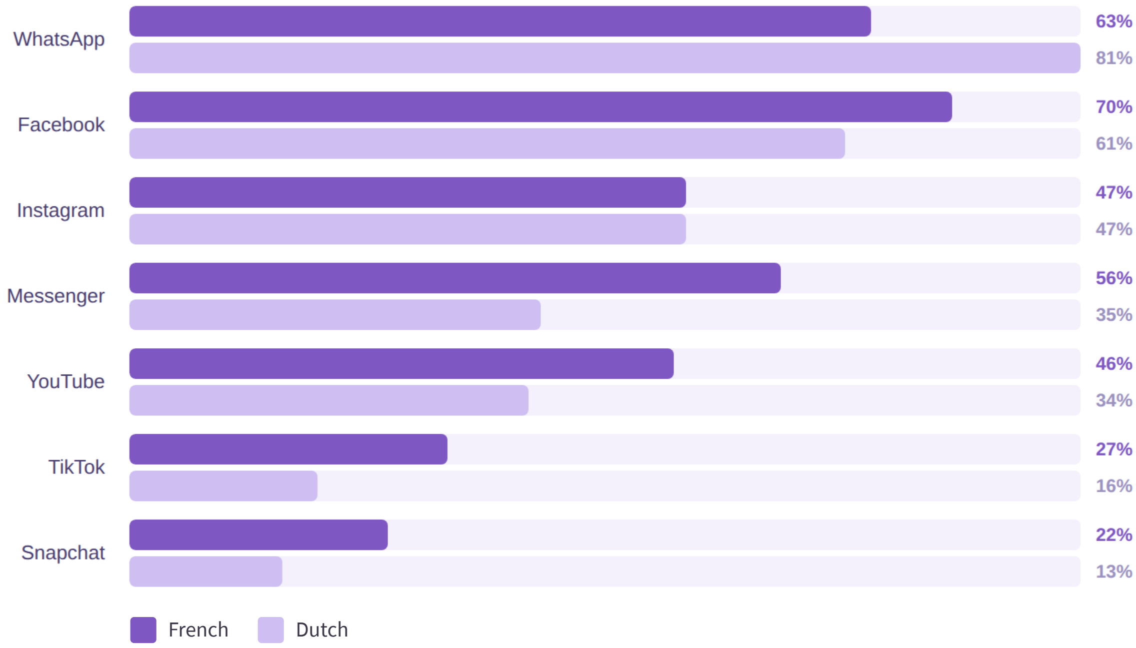


Figure 10: Daily social media use by language group (N = 4.926)

Among **16-24-year-olds**, the contrast between Dutch-speaking and French-speaking respondents is even more pronounced across several platforms. **French-speaking young people are clearly more active on visual and entertainment-driven platforms such as TikTok, Snapchat, and YouTube**. The gap is especially large for TikTok, where daily use reaches 79% among French-speaking respondents aged 16-24, compared with 58% among their Dutch-speaking peers. A similar pattern can be observed for Snapchat (76% versus 57%) and YouTube (65% versus 56%). Instagram is used very intensively in both groups, with no substantial difference between them. Differences for Facebook and Messenger are smaller, although French-speaking respondents still report slightly higher levels of use, with 51% versus 46% for Facebook and 50% versus 47% for Messenger. **WhatsApp is the main exception: Dutch-speaking young people stand out clearly here**, with 82% using the platform daily, compared with 57% of French-speaking youth.

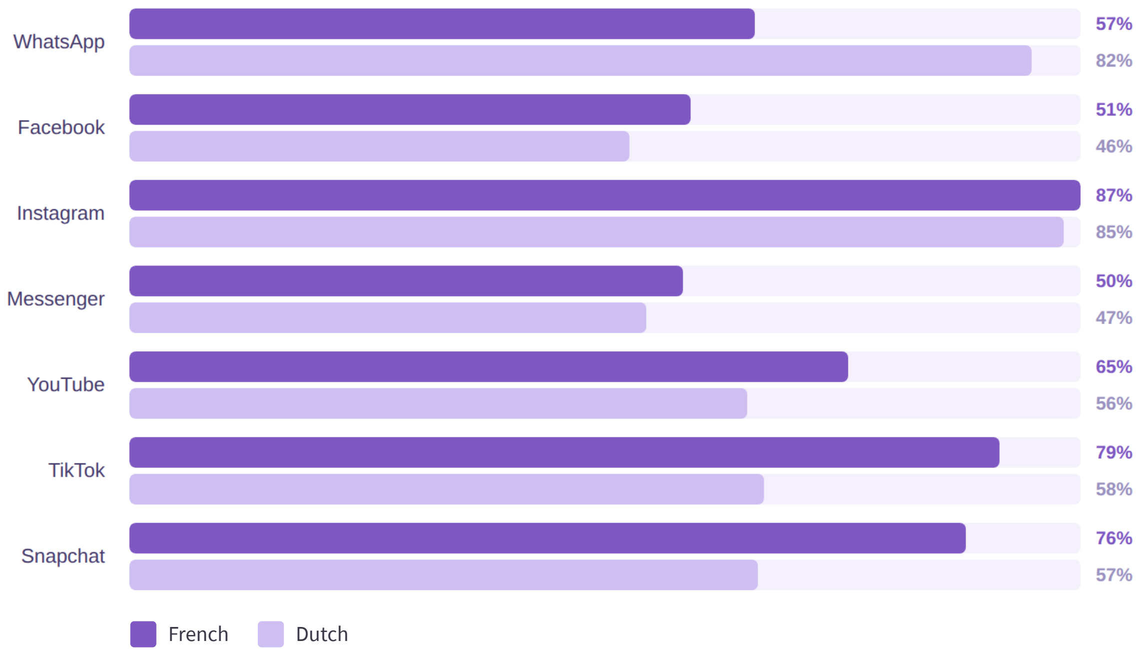


Figure 11: Daily social media use by language group (16-24 y.o.; N = 1.116)

French-speaking respondents are generally also more active across a range of smaller or **more niche social media platforms**. This pattern can be observed across most age groups, but it is especially pronounced among younger respondents, particularly those aged 16-24 and 25-34. The clearest differences appear for platforms such as Twitch, X, Telegram, Discord and Threads. For Twitch, daily use is much higher among French-speaking respondents aged 16-24 (23% versus 6%) and 25-34 (20% versus 3%). A similar pattern can be seen for X, where the gap is especially marked among 25-34-year-olds (24% versus 6%) and also visible among 16-24-year-olds (23% versus 13%). Telegram likewise shows consistently higher daily use among French speakers, especially in the 25-34 group (18% versus 4%). Other niche platforms follow the same general trend, with the largest differences again concentrated among younger adults. In older age groups, these differences become smaller and often largely disappear.

DIFFERENCES IN SOCIAL MEDIA USE BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

A comparison between men and women reveals clear differences in platform use. **Overall, women appear to be more active on several major mainstream social and messaging platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Messenger**. The contrast is particularly pronounced for Facebook and Messenger. For Facebook, daily use reaches 71% among women, compared with 59% among men. A similar gap can be observed for Messenger, with 47% of women using it daily, compared with 41% of men. Instagram also shows a clear female skew, with 53% of women using it daily, versus 44% of men. WhatsApp remains highly used by both groups, although women report slightly higher levels of daily and monthly use than men. **Men, by contrast, are much more likely than women to use YouTube**, both daily (49% vs. 29%) and monthly (90% vs. 82%), while no significant gender differences are observed for TikTok and Snapchat.

Men are also more strongly represented across a range of niche platforms. Monthly use of X reaches 27% among men, compared with 12% among women, and a similar pattern is visible for Reddit, Discord, Twitch, and Telegram, all of which show consistently higher daily and monthly use among men. Pinterest is the clearest exception, with substantially higher use among women: 50% use it at least monthly, compared with 25% of men. BeReal and LinkedIn, by contrast, display more balanced usage patterns, with gender differences that are far less pronounced.

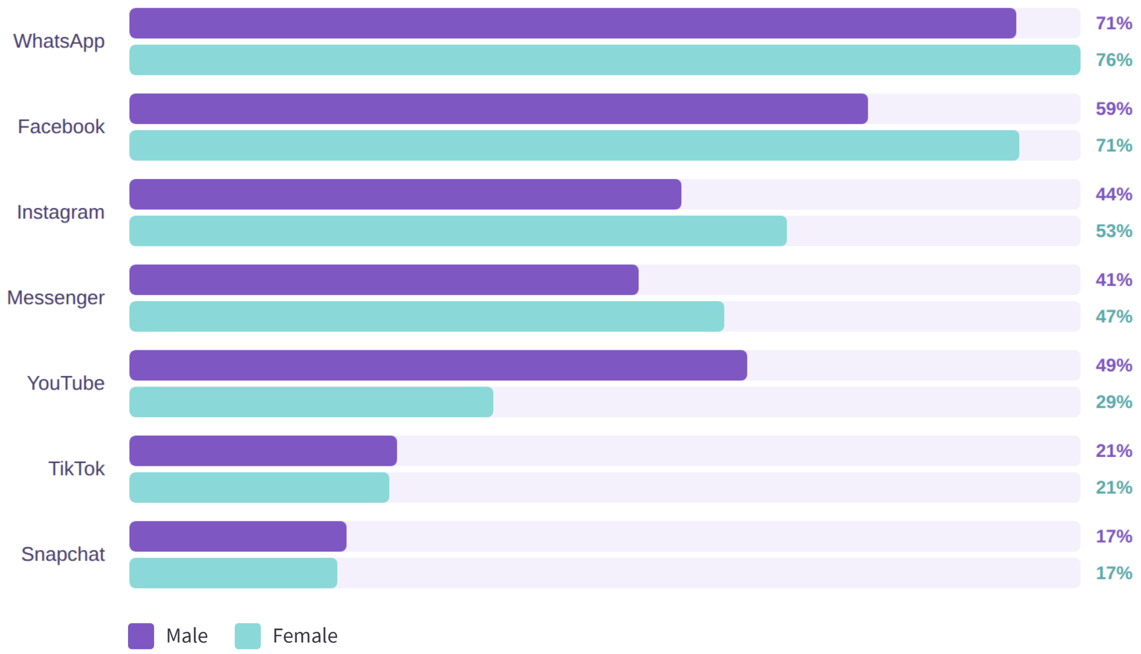


Figure 12: Daily social media use by gender (N = 4.926)

Among **16-24-year-olds**, significant gender differences in use are found for several major mainstream platforms. **Women report more frequent use of Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, while men report substantially more frequent use of YouTube**. Daily Facebook use reaches 54% among young women, compared with 43% among young men. For Instagram, daily use amounts to 90% among women and 83% among men, while for WhatsApp the figures are 75% and 68%, respectively. By contrast, YouTube is much more strongly associated with young men: 72% of men aged 16–24 use it daily, compared with 48% of women. Messenger also shows a small but significant female skew, with 50% of young women using it daily compared with 47% of young men. No significant gender differences are observed for TikTok or Snapchat.

On niche platforms, the pattern is largely reversed. **Men report significantly more frequent use of Discord, Reddit, Twitch, Telegram and X**. Among 16-24-year-olds, daily use of Discord reaches 33% among men compared with 12% among women, while for Reddit the figures are 17% versus 5%, for Twitch 20% versus 8%, for Telegram 15% versus 5%, and for X 23% versus 11%. **Pinterest forms the clearest exception, as women use it significantly more frequently than men**: among 16–24-year-olds, 24% of women report daily use, compared with 12% of men. Similar platform-specific gender patterns are also visible in other age groups, although their strength varies by age.

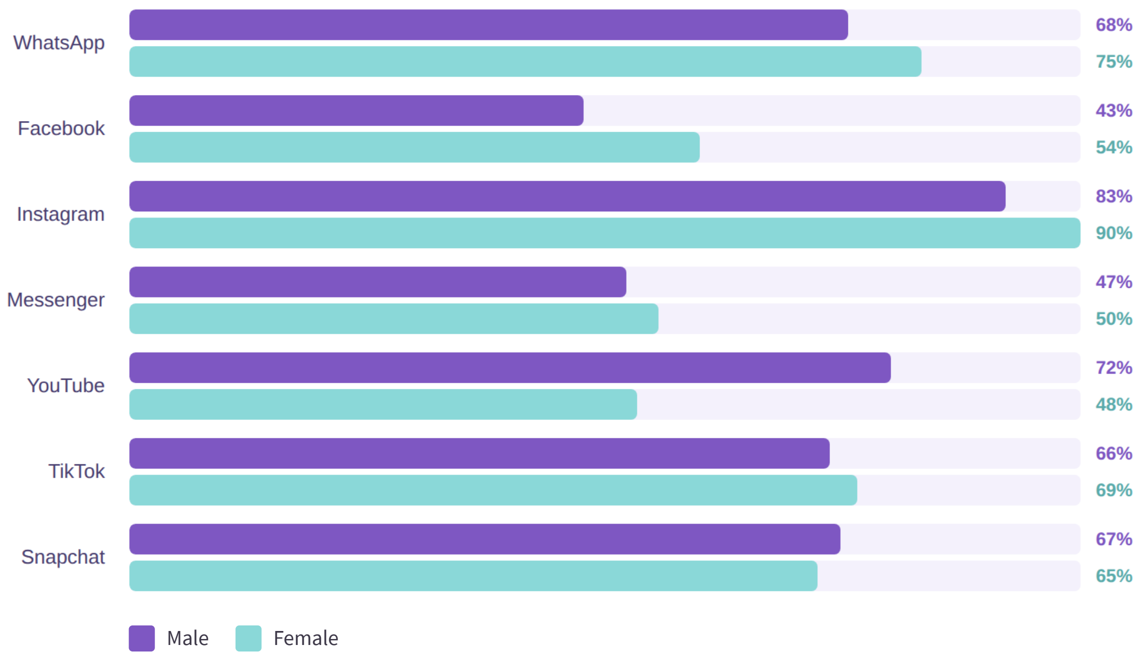


Figure 13: Daily social media use by gender (16-24 y.o.; N = 1.116)

Social media & brands

KEY INSIGHTS

- 62% of Belgians follow brands on social media, primarily on Facebook and Instagram. Brand following is especially widespread among younger audiences, with 85% of 16–24-year-olds and 77% of 25-34-year-olds following brands, while non-following becomes much more common among older age groups.
- In terms of brand following, Facebook has the broadest cross-generational reach, while Instagram and TikTok are far more youth-driven.
- Fashion and culture & events are the most followed brand categories on social media, followed by media, food, drinks & hospitality, and travel.
- Social media serves primarily as a source of inspiration rather than as a direct shopping channel.
- Facebook, Instagram and TikTok are the strongest platforms for brand-related activity overall. Among weekly users, these platforms stand out clearly for combining brand discovery, information seeking and click-through behavior.
- Instagram and TikTok stand out particularly for brand discovery, while Facebook is more strongly linked to action-oriented behavior, especially clicking through to a website or webshop.
- Traditional search engines remain the dominant source of brand and product information, but AI tools are already playing a meaningful complementary role, especially among younger audiences.

FOLLOWING BRANDS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

62% of Belgians follow brands on social media, primarily on Facebook and Instagram, at 40% and 39% respectively. Brand following is especially widespread among younger audiences: **85% of 16-24 year-olds and 77% of 25-34 year-olds** follow brands on social media. By contrast, the share of people following brands on social media decreases sharply with age, 59% among 65-70 year-olds does not follow brands on social media.

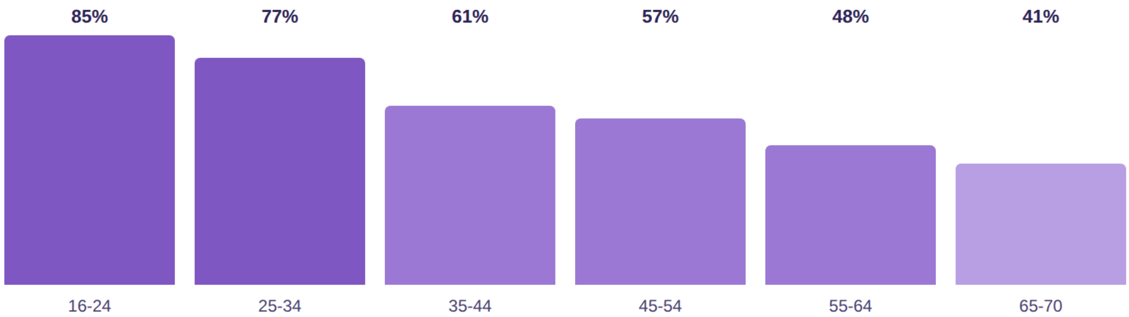


Figure 14: Following brands on social media by age group (% of total respondents within each age group)

Facebook has the broadest cross-generational appeal, with brand following remaining relatively strong across all age groups. Levels are lowest among 16–24-year-olds (26%) but rise to around 44–45% among those aged 25–54, before declining only moderately among older respondents (40% among 55–64-year-olds and 36% among 65–70-year-olds). **Instagram**, by contrast, **is much more youth-oriented: 71% of 16–24-year-olds follow brands on the platform**, compared with 56% of 25–34-year-olds, after which this figure declines steadily to just 8% among 65–70-year-olds. **TikTok shows the strongest concentration among the youngest group, with 51% of 16–24-year-olds following brands there**, compared with 22% of 25–34-year-olds and no more than 8% in the older age groups. YouTube occupies a more modest and fairly even position across age groups, although it still performs best among younger respondents, declining from 27% among 16–24-year-olds to 10% among those aged 65–70. 23% of 16-24 year-olds follow brands on Snapchat, compared with negligible shares among older groups.

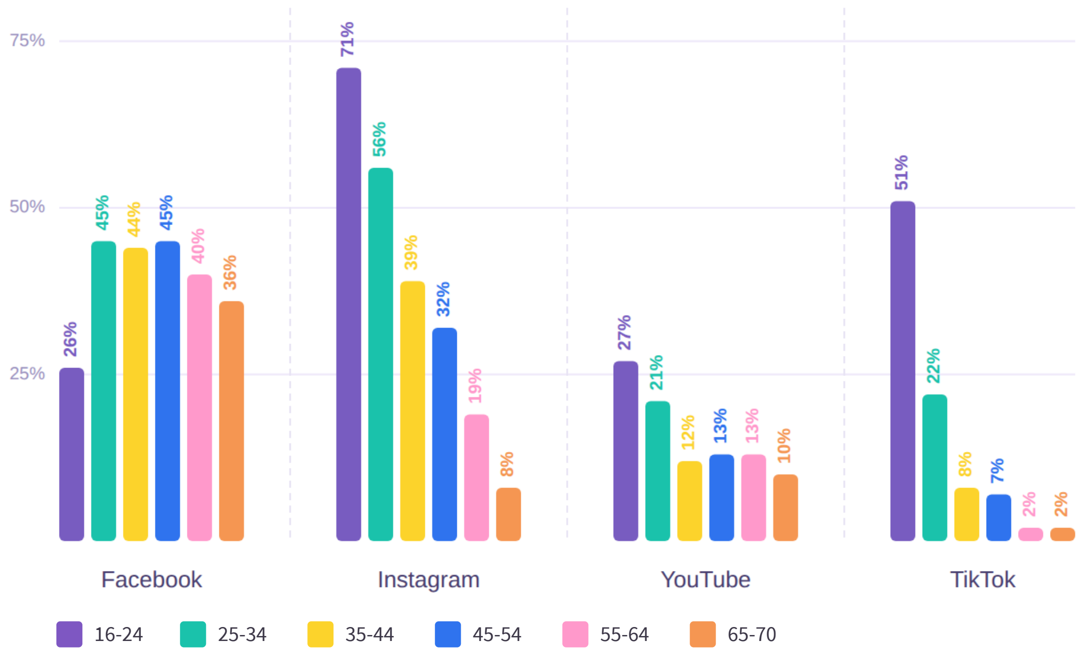


Figure 15: Brand following on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and TikTok by age group (% of total respondents within each age group)

Women are more likely to follow brands on Facebook (42% vs. 38% for men), **Instagram** (43% vs. 35%) **and Pinterest** (8% vs. 4%). Men show a stronger preference for platforms such as YouTube (21% vs. 11%), X (7% vs. 2%), LinkedIn (8% vs. 5%), Twitch (3% vs. 1%), Discord (3% vs. 1%) and Reddit (3% vs. 1%). TikTok, by contrast, is used almost equally for brand following by both genders, at around 15% to 16%.

Looking across age groups, the strongest and most consistent gender differences appear on YouTube and X, where men are systematically more likely than women to follow brands. On YouTube, this gap is particularly pronounced among younger and middle-aged respondents, reaching 36% versus 17% among 16–24-year-olds and 29% versus 14% among those aged 25–34, while remaining visible in older groups as well. X shows an even more male-skewed pattern, although the overall shares involved are smaller. Instagram displays almost the reverse pattern, especially from age 25 onwards: among 25–34-year-olds, 65% of women follow brands on Instagram, compared with 48% of men, a pattern that continues into the older age groups. Only among the youngest age group are gender differences on Instagram minimal. Pinterest is the clearest female exception, with women in every age group substantially more likely than men to follow brands there. Facebook, by contrast, is relatively balanced by gender across the age spectrum, making it the most clearly cross-gender and cross-generational platform for brand following. TikTok appears fairly gender-neutral among younger respondents but becomes slightly more female-skewed in older age groups, although absolute levels are then already low. Snapchat, finally, is above all a youth platform for brand following: usage remains meaningful only among the youngest group, where men (28%) still outscore women (19%), but it drops to negligible levels from age 35 onwards.

Most-followed brand categories on social media

Fashion and culture & events are the most followed brand categories on social media, each reaching 27% of Belgians. Media follows closely at 25%, while food, drinks & hospitality and travel both account for 22%. Sports (19%) and health & pharmacy (18%) also have a substantial reach, followed by several more niche categories with a smaller but still distinct audience.

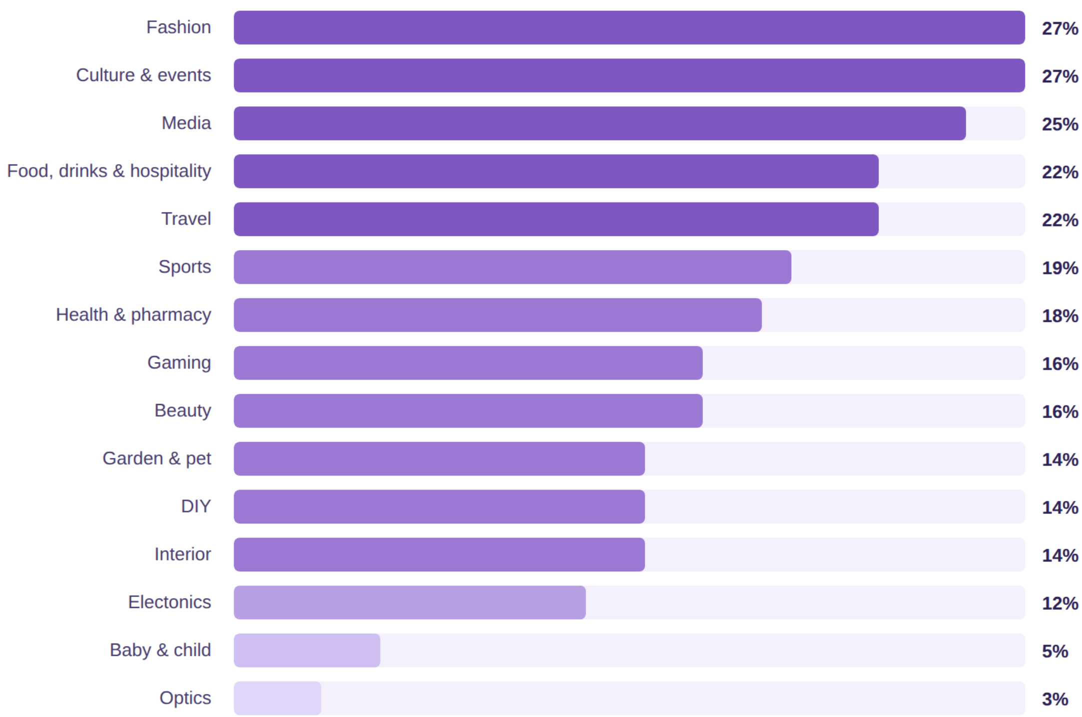


Figure 16: Brand categories followed on social media in Belgium (% of total respondents N = 4.926)

Clear gender differences emerge across categories. Women are much more likely to follow brands related to fashion, beauty, health, interior, food & hospitality, culture, and baby & kids. Men, on the other hand, are particularly likely to follow brands in electronics, gaming, sports and DIY. Media, travel and optics show the most balanced appeal between men and women.

Age patterns add a further layer of differentiation. Fashion, beauty, sports and gaming perform best among younger age groups. Culture & events, media, and food & hospitality show broad appeal across audiences, with a particular strength among middle-aged consumers. By contrast, health & pharmacy, gardening & pets, and DIY become more prominent with age.

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE CUSTOMER JOURNEY

Social media is used primarily as **a source of inspiration** rather than as a direct shopping channel. Most respondents (51%) say they mainly use social media to get inspired, while preferring to purchase in-store or via a webshop. More direct commercial actions are less widespread, although 27% do sometimes **click on brand ads or sponsored posts**, 15% sometimes click through via influencer or creator links, and 11% sometimes engage with tagged products in influencer posts or stories. While 16–24-year-olds are more likely to use social media primarily for inspiration (60%), they are also more inclined to act on influencer- or creator-driven shopping cues, for example by clicking through via shared links or tagged products in posts and stories as shown in the following graph. Livestream shopping (4%) remains rather niche.

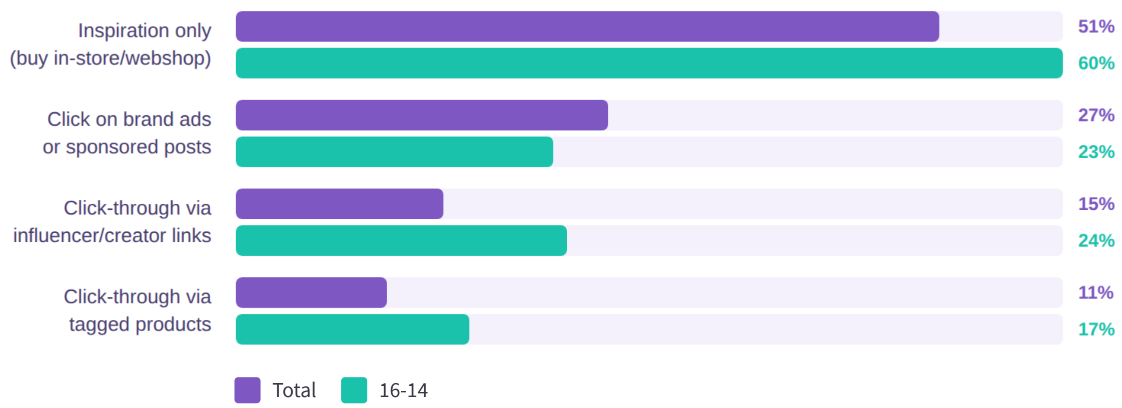


Figure 17: The role of social media in the shopping journey: overall vs. ages 16-24

When **looking up information about a brand, product or service**, consumers still rely overwhelmingly on **traditional search engines**. 85% of respondents say they use a search engine such as Google or Bing, making this by far the dominant route for information seeking. This also holds true among younger consumers aged 16–24, although to a lesser extent: 69% of this group use traditional search engines. When consumers move from social media to a more traditional search environment to look up a product, some also use visual search tools, with 11% saying they sometimes take screenshots and rely on image scanners such as Google Lens to identify products. Using a SKU or article number shared by a brand or influencer remains very niche, at just 2%.

At the same time, **AI tools** are already playing a meaningful role in the search journey. Almost three in ten respondents (29%) say they use tools such as ChatGPT, Perplexity or Copilot to look up information about brands, products or services. Among 16–24-year-olds, this rises to 46%, showing that younger consumers are considerably more likely to turn to AI-assisted search than the population overall. **Social media** itself plays a more limited, but still relevant, role as a search channel: 16% of respondents say they use platforms such as Facebook, Instagram or TikTok to search for brand or product information. Here too, younger audiences stand out: 36% of 16–24-year-olds use social media as a search channel.

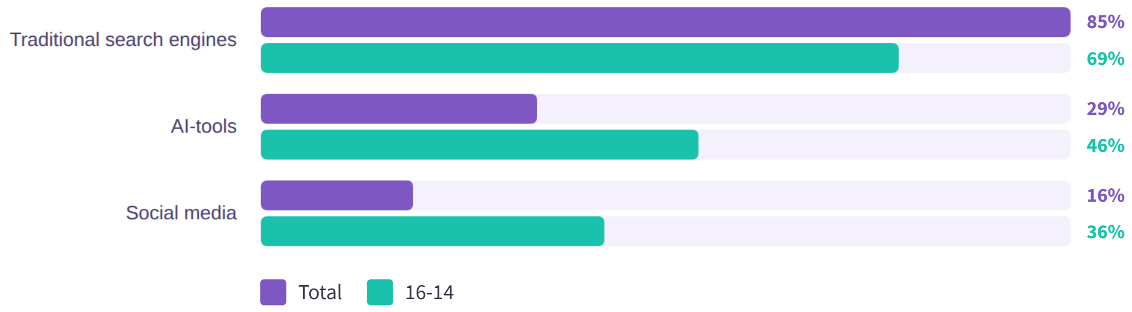


Figure 18: Use of search engines, AI tools, and social media for brand-related information: overall vs. ages 16-24

BRAND-RELATED ACTIVITIES ACROSS SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

To better understand the commercial potential of social media platforms, we asked active social media users to indicate which brand-related activities they had engaged in on each platform, allowing respondents to select more than one activity per platform. Only frequent users, defined as those who use the platform at least weekly, were included in the analyses below.

Some platforms appear to be far more conducive to brand-related use than others. **Looking at the share of weekly users who engaged in at least one brand-related activity, Facebook (73%), Instagram (72%), and TikTok (72%) clearly stand out**. Pinterest (58%) and Twitch (57%) also show a relatively strong commercial dimension, while YouTube occupies more of a middle position at 49%. By contrast, platforms such as X (44%), Snapchat (40%), Discord (39%), LinkedIn (36%), Messenger (27%), and WhatsApp (24%) appear to play a less prominent role in this respect.

The type of brand-related activities performed also differs by platform. **Instagram** and **TikTok** are especially strong for **brand and product discovery**, with 56% and 52% of weekly users respectively saying they had learned about brands or products there, compared with 47% on Facebook and 39% on Pinterest. **Facebook**, however, stands out more clearly as a platform that also drives traffic and further consideration, with 32% **clicking through** to a website or webshop, slightly ahead of **Instagram** (30%) and well above TikTok (18%). **TikTok** matches **Instagram** as a platform for active **information seeking**, with 31% of weekly users searching for information about brands or products on both platforms. The following table summarizes the prevalence of different brand-related activities across platforms among weekly users.

	Facebook (N = 4.089)	**Instagram** (N = 3.221)	**TikTok** (N = 1.481)	**Pinterest** (N = 1.840)	**Twitch** (N = 599)	**YouTube** (N = 4.245)	**X** (N = 970)	**Snapchat** (N = 1.274)	**Discord** (N = 866)	**LinkedIn** (N = 1.880)	**Messenger** (N = 3.691)	**WhatsApp** (N = 4505)
Get to know brands / products	47%	56%	52%	39%	30%	33%	22%	21%	13%	15%	7%	6%
Searching for brand / product information	27%	31%	31%	24%	20%	24%	19%	14%	14%	14%	6%	5%
Contacting brands / companies	14%	13%	10%	6%	14%	4%	12%	12%	10%	13%	11%	8%
Giving reviews	13%	8%	11%	6%	14%	5%	11%	8%	10%	6%	4%	3%
Clicking through to a website / webshop	32%	30%	18%	14%	11%	10%	10%	8%	7%	9%	3%	4%
Recommending products / services	10%	12%	11%	6%	9%	5%	6%	6%	10%	4%	9%	9%
None of these	27%	28%	28%	42%	43%	51%	56%	60%	61%	64%	73%	76%

Table 5: Share of weekly users engaging in brand-related activities, by platform (% of respondents within each platform)

THE ROLE OF AI IN ONLINE SHOPPING

The use of AI tools such as ChatGPT, Perplexity or Copilot is widespread but strongly varies by age. Overall, **27% of Belgians use AI tools daily**, with an additional **24% using them weekly**, meaning that **more than half of the population engages with AI on at least a weekly basis**.

A clear age effect emerges, with usage highest among younger audiences. Among **16-24-year-olds, 51% use AI tools daily**, compared to 35% among 25-34-year-olds and 28% among 35-44-year-olds. Daily usage then declines steadily with age, reaching just 8% among those aged 65-70. At the same time, occasional use (weekly or monthly) remains relatively stable across younger and middle age groups, while the share of those **who seldom or never use AI increases sharply with age** (up to 66% among 65+ olds).

Differences by language are limited. French-speaking respondents show slightly higher daily usage in some age groups (e.g. 39% vs. 32% among 25–34-year-olds), but these gaps remain small and inconsistent across frequencies.

Differences by gender are more pronounced. Men consistently report higher daily usage than women (31% vs. 23% overall), particularly among younger age groups (e.g. 57% vs. 46% among 16-24-year-olds). Women, in turn, are more likely to report lower or occasional usage, as reflected in slightly higher shares in the monthly and seldom/never categories.

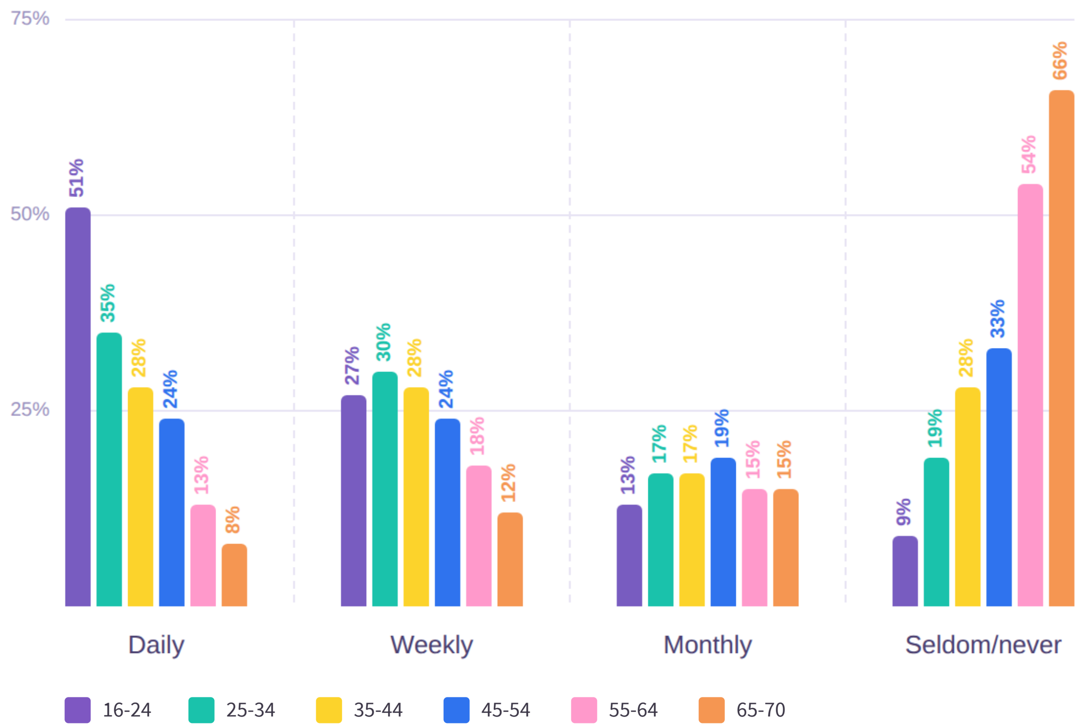


Figure 19: The use of AI-tools in Belgium (in %, N = 4.926)

To better understand the commercial potential of AI tools, respondents were asked to indicate which brand- and product-related activities they had engaged in using platforms such as ChatGPT, Perplexity or Copilot. The following analyses focus on **regular users**, defined as those who use these tools at least monthly (i.e., 67%).

As noted earlier, AI tools are increasingly used as a source of information for brands and products, although traditional search methods still dominate. When looking up information, **85% of respondents rely on search engines**, while **29% already use AI tools**, indicating that AI is emerging as a complementary search channel.

Among regular users, AI is primarily used as **an information and evaluation tool** rather than a direct conversion driver. The most common activity is **searching for information about brands or products (37%)**, followed by **asking for personal advice (26%)**, **comparing brands/products (25%)**, and **looking up instructions or help (25%)**. This highlights AI's strong role in the early and mid-stages of the customer journey, supporting users in exploration and decision-making.

In contrast, more action-oriented behaviors remain less frequent. Only **17% compare prices**, while **13% search for reviews** and **12% look for promotions or click through to a webshop**. Just **9% search for contact information**, confirming that AI is still less embedded in the final stages of the journey. Additionally, **34% do not use AI for any of these activities**, indicating that commercial use of AI is still developing.

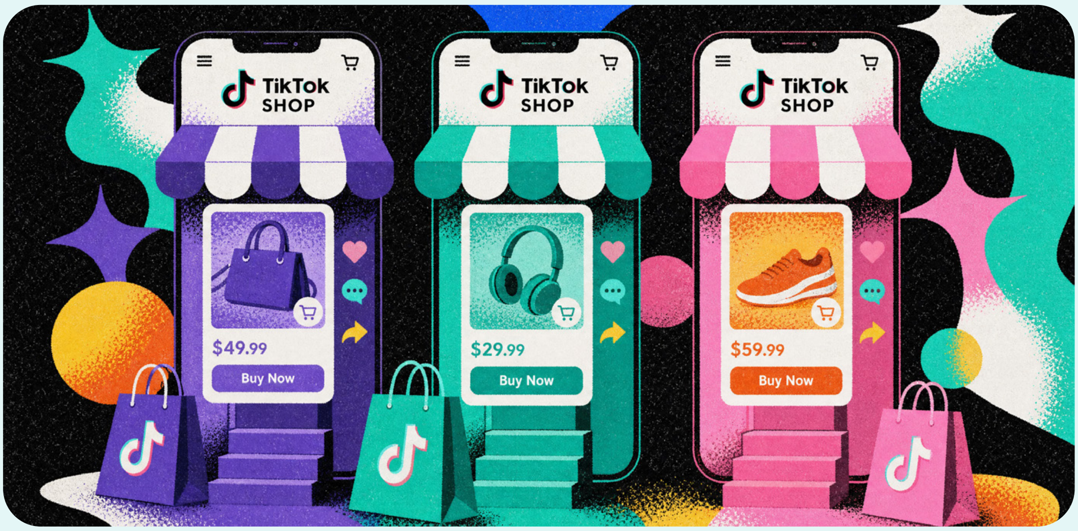
A strong **age effect** emerges across all use cases. Younger audiences are significantly more active, particularly for exploratory and commercial behaviors. For example, **searching for information reaches 47% among 16–24-year-olds**, compared to **26% among those aged 65+**. Similarly, **comparing products (28% vs. 10%)**, **searching for promotions (19% vs. 4%)**, and **discovering brands (20% vs. 6%)** decline sharply with age.

In contrast, more **functional uses** such as **looking up instructions or help** increase with age, peaking among older groups (34% among 55–64 and 33% among 65+), suggesting that older users rely on AI more for practical support than for exploration. The share of respondents who do not use AI for any of these purposes also rises steadily with age, from 23% among 16–24-year-olds to 47% among 65+, highlighting a clear generational divide in adoption.

	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	Total
Searching general information	47%	41%	37%	31%	30%	26%	37%
Asking for personal advice	30%	30%	26%	23%	19%	14%	26%
Comparing brands / products	28%	32%	27%	21%	17%	10%	25%
Looking up instructions or help	19%	22%	25%	26%	34%	33%	25%
Comparing prices	23%	17%	16%	14%	13%	11%	17%
Discovering brands / products	20%	20%	11%	10%	7%	6%	14%
Searching reviews	17%	15%	13%	11%	9%	6%	13%
Clicking through to a webshop	12%	13%	13%	12%	12%	11%	12%
Searching promotions / discount codes	19%	15%	11%	10%	6%	4%	12%
Searching contact information	10%	9%	8%	9%	11%	12%	9%
None of these	23%	27%	38%	41%	40%	47%	34%

Table 6: Brand-related activities using AI among regular users, split by age (in %, N = 3.298)

TikTok Shop and Gen Z adoption intent



With launches in several European countries like France and Germany, TikTok is increasingly expanding into e-commerce through TikTok Shop, a feature that allows products to be promoted, discovered, and purchased directly within the app. By integrating shopping into the content experience, the platform enables users to move seamlessly from content consumption to purchase.

This raises an important question: to what extent are Belgian users willing to adopt this new form of in-app shopping? This question is particularly relevant for younger audiences. As discussed earlier in this report, TikTok is deeply embedded in the daily routines of young people in Belgium: among Gen Z (16-29 year olds), 64% use TikTok on a weekly basis, making it one of the most intensively used platforms within this age group. We therefore asked them about their attitudes towards and intentions to adopt TikTok Shop once it would become available in Belgium. Respondents evaluated the feature based on its described functionality and their prior experience with TikTok, allowing us to capture early perceptions and behavioral intentions before actual usage.

This analysis therefore focuses on **Gen Z users** (aged 16-29) **who use TikTok at least weekly**. All questions were measured using statements, with respondents indicating the extent to which they agreed with items related to attitude, adoption intention, perceived usefulness, ease of use, and privacy concerns. Answer possibilities ranged from 1 = totally not agree to 5 = totally agree.

Gen Z users are hesitant to use TikTok Shop, yet, expect a frictionless experience

Overall, there is **limited enthusiasm for TikTok Shop among Belgian Gen Z users**. When asked whether they intend to use the feature once it becomes available, only 16% express the intention to use TikTok Shop once it becomes available in Belgium. This hesitation may be linked to how useful the feature is perceived to be. Only 28% of the Gen Z users **consider TikTok Shop to be useful**. Similarly, only 18% believe that the feature would improve their shopping experience.

Furthermore, across multiple dimensions, **a majority of Gen Z users express skepticism towards TikTok Shop**. Trust issues and concerns about privacy are acknowledged. That is, only 1 out of 4 Gen Z users trust that TikTok Shop will be safe (26%), and trust TikTok to adequately protect their privacy(25%).

Concerns also extend to consumer protection and product quality, where only 3 out of 10 expect products to be safe (34%) and trust that products will comply with European standards (30%). Moreover, 43% do not expect TikTok Shop to treat users fairly and responsibly and 46% do not expect the platform to assist them if something goes wrong.

In contrast, **perceptions of usability are considerably more positive**. More than half of Gen Z users (57%) expect TikTok Shop to be easy to use and 59% believe it will be easy to find products on the platform. In addition, 52% think that making a purchase via TikTok Shop would require little effort.

Taken together, while willingness to adopt TikTok Shop is currently low, perceived usefulness is limited and concerns exist regarding consumer protection, product quality and seller trust, a substantial share of Gen Z users do expect the feature to be easy and frictionless to use.

Others are more vulnerable: perception bias in impulsive buying

Additionally, we examined expectations regarding impulsive buying behavior. Here, a clear perception bias emerges. **A majority of Gen Z users (57%) believe that TikTok Shop would *not* lead them to make more impulse purchases**. At the same time, they expect others to be very susceptible: **8 out of 10 think that *other users* will buy more impulsively** through TikTok Shop.

This pattern reflects a well-known tendency in consumer research, where individuals perceive themselves as less vulnerable to persuasive or impulsive influences than others. In the context of TikTok Shop, this suggests that while users recognize the platform's potential to stimulate impulse buying, they may underestimate its impact on their own behavior.

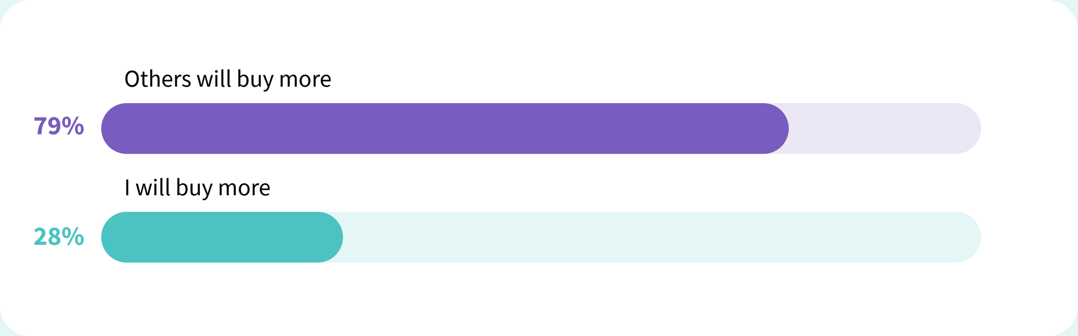
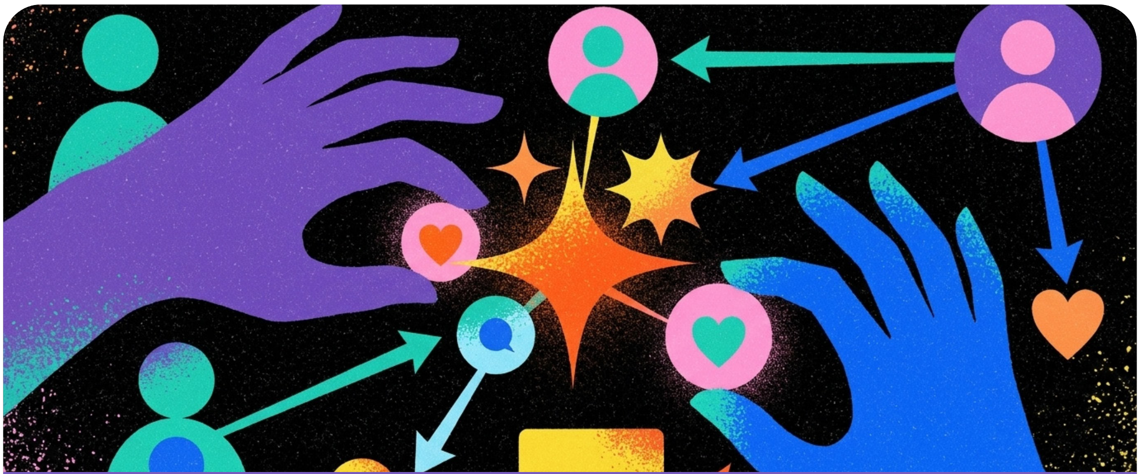


Figure 20: The extent to which Gen Z users think that they themselves and others will make more impulse purchases (N = 692)

Influencer marketing



KEY INSIGHTS [1]

- 55% of Belgian social media users aged 16-70 follow influencers, content creators or famous people on social media. Even among the oldest group, almost one in four (23%) follows social media personalities.
- Acceptance of influencer marketing declines sharply with age, from 66% among 16-24-year-old social media users to only 8% among those aged 65-70, indicating that influencer marketing has limited relevance for influencing brand-related behavior among older audiences.
- Platform preferences vary strongly by age: Instagram, TikTok and YouTube dominate among younger audiences, while Facebook becomes the main platform for following social media personalities from the age of 35 onwards.
- Influencer marketing can effectively trigger brand-related actions (brand discovery, information search, brand following and purchase), particularly among younger social media users.
- 41% of Belgian social media users say they have consciously encountered influencer content created with the help of AI, including around one in four people aged 55 and older.
- While younger social media users report more frequent exposure to AI-generated influencer content, older audiences place greater importance on transparency about its use.
- 44% of Belgian social media users say they know what virtual influencers are, with awareness relatively stable across age groups. Actual engagement with virtual influencers remains limited: only 5% of Belgian social media users follow one, rising to 14% among 16-24-year-olds and 9% among 25-34-year-olds, but remaining nonexistent among older audiences.

[1] Note: Questions about influencers were only asked to respondents who use at least one social media platform at least weekly. Results therefore refer to Belgian social media users only (N = 4.898).

INFLUENCER FOLLOWING

55% of Belgian social media users (i.e. respondents who use at least one social media platform on a weekly basis) aged 16 to 70 say they follow influencers, content creators and/or famous people on social media. As expected, this is far more common among younger people: 82% of those aged 16-24 indicate that they do so.

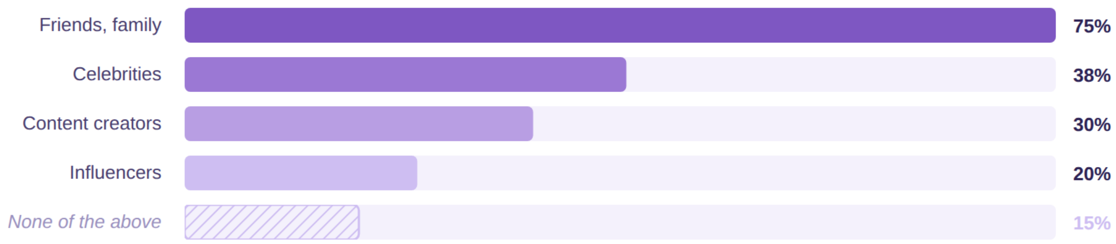


Figure 21: Following of social media personalities. When the categories 'celebrities, content creators and influencers' are combined, they account for a total share of 55% (N= 4.898)

What stands out in the age pattern, however, are **two clear breakpoints** where the share drops by roughly 20 percentage points compared to the previous age group. The first occurs in the 35-44 age group, where the proportion falls from 75% among 25-34-year-olds to 57%. A second notable drop appears from the age of 55 onwards. While about half of those aged 45-54 follow social media personalities (51%), this decreases to just 30% among 55-64-year-olds, and to 23% among those aged 65-70.

At the same time, it is notable that almost **one quarter of the oldest age group still follows social media personalities**. The fact that 23% of those aged 65-70 report doing so illustrates that influencer-driven content has clearly moved beyond the traditionally assumed youth segment.

In addition to age, **differences also appear by gender and language**. Overall, women are slightly more likely than men to follow social media personalities (57% versus 52%). This gender gap becomes particularly visible from the age of 55 onwards, where 35% of women follow them compared to 25% of men. Language differences are also present: French-speaking respondents consistently report higher levels of following than Dutch-speaking respondents (58% versus 52% overall), a pattern that can be observed across most age groups.

16-24		25-34		35-44		45-54		55-64		65-70		Total	
82%		75%		57%		51%		30%		23%		**55%**	
NL	**FR**	**NL**	**FR**	**NL**	**FR**	**NL**	**FR**	**NL**	**FR**	**NL**	**FR**	**NL**	**FR**
79%	86%	73%	77%	56%	58%	48%	55%	27%	34%	21%	26%	52%	58%
♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂
82%	82%	78%	72%	60%	54%	52%	50%	35%	25%	26%	19%	57%	52%

Table 8: Following of social media personalities across age categories (influencers, content creators, and/or famous people; N = 4.898).

Among those following social media personalities, Instagram is the most popular platform to do so (70%), followed by Facebook (41%) and YouTube (39%).

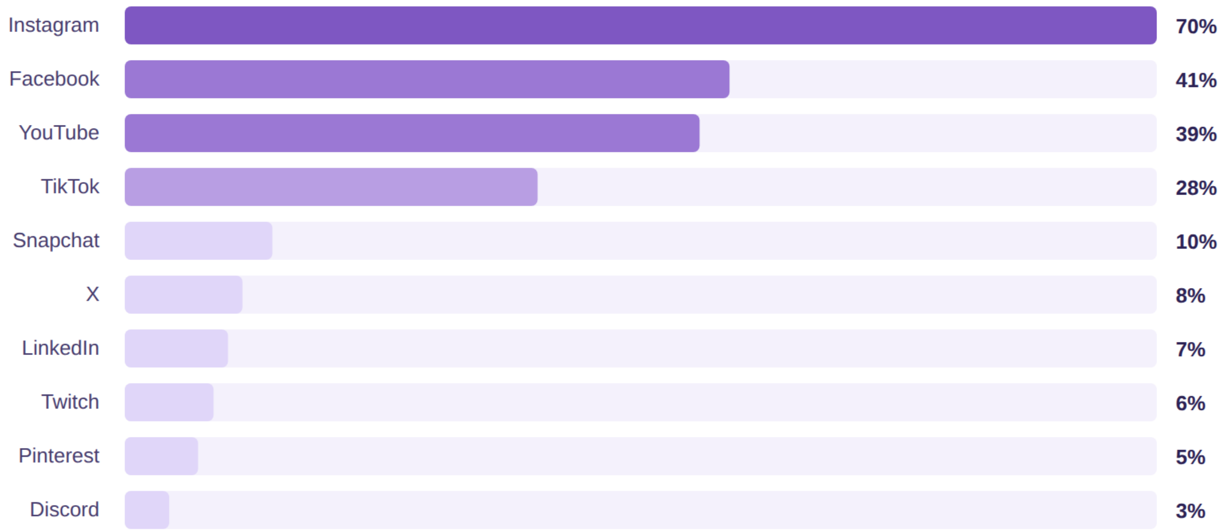


Figure 22: Social media platforms on which social media personalities are being followed (N = 2.696). This was a multiple-response question. Only those who initially stated that they follow influencers, content creators, and/or celebrities were able to answer this question.

Platform preferences for following social media personalities, however, vary strongly by age. Among the youngest age group (16-24), Instagram, TikTok and YouTube are the dominant platforms: eight in ten (83%) follow social media personalities on Instagram and almost 6 in ten on TikTok (59%), while about half do so on YouTube (51%).

From the age of 35 onwards, Facebook gradually becomes the primary platform for following social media personalities. YouTube occupies a more intermediate position. While it is particularly popular among younger audiences, it remains relatively stable across most adult age groups, with around one third of respondents aged 35-64 following social media personalities on the platform.

	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-70	Total
Instagram	83%	73%	71%	65%	50%	35%	**70%**
Facebook	16%	34%	47%	56%	67%	72%	**41%**
YouTube	51%	43%	34%	30%	33%	24%	**39%**
TikTok	59%	28%	18%	13%	8%	5%	**28%**
Snapchat	24%	11%	4%	3%	2%	0%	**10%**
X	10%	9%	9%	7%	6%	4%	**8%**
LinkedIn	4%	8%	7%	11%	9%	5%	**7%**
Twitch	11%	10%	3%	2%	0%	0%	**6%**
Pinterest	4%	5%	3%	4%	8%	6%	**5%**

Table 9: Social media platforms on which social media personalities are being followed across age categories (N = 2.696)

A similar pattern emerges when looking at the acceptance of influencer marketing. As with the following of social media personalities, **younger social media users are considerably more receptive to the use of influencers in advertising on social media**. Acceptance decreases sharply with age. While two thirds of those aged 16-24 (66%) indicate that they accept influencer marketing, this share steadily declines across older age groups, reaching only 8% among those aged 65-70. This illustrates a clear generational divide in attitudes towards the commercial use of social media personalities.

Language differences are also apparent. French-speaking Belgians are consistently more positive towards influencer marketing than Dutch-speaking respondents (39% versus 28% overall), a pattern that can be observed across all age groups.

With respect to gender, the picture is somewhat more nuanced. Overall, women show slightly higher acceptance than men (34% versus 32%). However, this pattern is reversed among the youngest age group. Among 16-24-year-olds, men report higher acceptance of influencer marketing than women (71% versus 62%). This is noteworthy given that young men and women follow social media personalities at similar rates (see previous section), suggesting that **while engagement with influencers is comparable, attitudes towards their commercial use differ within this age group**.

16-24		25-34		35-44		45-54		55-64		65-70		Total	
66%		50%		28%		24%		16%		8%		**33%**	
NL	**FR**	**NL**	**FR**	**NL**	**FR**	**NL**	**FR**	**NL**	**FR**	**NL**	**FR**	**NL**	**FR**
59%	75%	43%	58%	23%	33%	20%	29%	12%	21%	7%	11%	28%	39%
♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂
62%	71%	49%	50%	29%	27%	27%	21%	20%	12%	11%	7%	34%	32%

Table 10: Attitude toward influencer marketing (% of those (totally) agree with the idea that brands use influencers; N = 4.898)

INFLUENCER MARKETING CONVERSION

How effective is influencer marketing in triggering concrete brand interactions? To assess this, Belgian social media users (i.e. respondents who use at least one social media platform on a weekly basis) were asked whether they had engaged in any of the following activities after seeing influencer recommendations for a brand in the past three months: discovering a brand, searching for brand information, following the brand, or purchasing from it.

Overall, **influencer marketing appears to be an effective trigger for brand-related actions, although its impact varies strongly by age** (for an overview, look at Table 9). Across all four activities, the same pattern emerges: the younger the audience, the higher the likelihood that influencer recommendations lead to brand interactions. For instance, 63% of those aged 16-24 report discovering a new brand through influencers, while 45% searched for more information, 34% started following a brand, and 31% made a purchase. These shares decline steadily with age, reaching only single-digit levels among the oldest age groups, indicating that, today, influencer marketing has very limited relevance for influencing brand behavior among older audiences.

Language differences are also evident. French-speaking Belgians consistently report higher engagement after influencer recommendations than Dutch-speaking respondents. This gap is particularly pronounced for stronger forms of engagement such as brand following and purchase. For example, among 16-24-year-olds, 47% of French-speaking respondents indicate that they started following a brand after an influencer recommendation, compared to 'only' 23% of Dutch-speaking respondents. A similarly large difference appears for purchases in this age group (46% versus 19%).

Gender differences are present as well, although they are generally smaller and less consistent than the language effects. Overall, women report slightly higher levels of brand discovery and information search following influencer recommendations, while differences for brand following and purchasing are relatively limited.

		16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-70	Total
Brand discovery		63%	49%	32%	23%	12%	6%	**32%**
	NL	59%	46%	32%	20%	10%	6%	29%
	FR	68%	53%	33%	26%	16%	6%	35%
	♀	64%	54%	36%	25%	14%	4%	34%
	♂	61%	44%	28%	20%	11%	7%	29%
Info search		45%	39%	20%	13%	6%	5%	**22%**
	NL	41%	33%	18%	12%	7%	3%	19%
	FR	50%	46%	21%	15%	6%	8%	25%
	♀	45%	42%	25%	14%	8%	6%	24%
	♂	45%	35%	14%	12%	5%	4%	20%
Brand following		34%	25%	12%	8%	3%	1%	**14%**
	NL	23%	15%	8%	6%	3%	1%	9%
	FR	47%	38%	16%	11%	2%	2%	20%
	♀	31%	24%	14%	9%	4%	1%	14%
	♂	37%	26%	10%	7%	2%	2%	14%
Purchase		31%	24%	11%	7%	3%	1%	**13%**
	NL	19%	14%	8%	5%	2%	1%	8%
	FR	46%	37%	15%	10%	5%	1%	20%
	♀	28%	25%	13%	8%	5%	1%	14%
	♂	35%	23%	9%	7%	2%	1%	13%

Table 11: Conversion in response to brand content posted by influencers (N = 4.898)

AI-GENERATED CONTENT

The use of AI in social media content can no longer be overlooked. But to what extent have Belgian social media users actually encountered influencer content created with the help of AI, and how what importance do they attach to transparency about this practice?

Overall, **four out of ten Belgian social media users (41%) say they have already encountered (consciously) influencer content that was created with the help of AI**. Awareness is clearly higher among younger audiences: two thirds of those aged 16–24 (66%) report having seen such content, compared to around a quarter of those aged 55 and older (27%). This may suggest that AI-assisted influencer content is currently more visible or more often noticed within younger social media environments. This, in turn, may be related both to youngsters' higher levels of social media use, which increase the chances of exposure, and to a greater ability to identify such content as AI-generated or AI-assisted. Yet, it is still remarkable that 1 in 4 of those aged 55 and older report having noticed such content. Further research is needed to better understand whether these age differences are driven by differences in actual exposure to AI-assisted influencer content, by differences in the ability to recognize such content, or by a combination of both.

Language and gender differences are also apparent. French-speaking respondents report higher levels of exposure than Dutch-speaking respondents (45% versus 37% overall). Similarly, men are more likely than women to say they have encountered influencer posts created with AI (45% versus 36%).

	16-24		25-34		35-44		45-54		55-64		65-70		Total	
	66%		50%		38%		34%		27%		27%		**41%**	
	NL	FR	NL	FR	NL	FR	NL	FR	NL	FR	NL	FR	NL	FR
	64%	69%	45%	56%	34%	43%	32%	36%	22%	33%	22%	32%	37%	45%
	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂
	62%	69%	41%	59%	34%	42%	27%	40%	25%	28%	26%	27%	36%	45%

Table 12: Exposure to AI-generated influencer content (N = 4.898)

While exposure to AI-generated influencer content is already relatively widespread, expectations regarding transparency are even stronger. Nearly eight in ten Belgian social media users (79%) say it is (very) important that influencers, content creators and celebrities clearly disclose when their posts are generated with the help of AI.

The perceived importance of disclosure of AI content is lowest among the youngest respondents (70% of those aged 16-24), after which it increases steadily and peaks among those aged 45-54 (86%). Among the oldest age groups the share decreases slightly again, but remains high, with 78% of those aged 65–70 still considering such transparency important. In other words, **while younger social media users report higher levels of exposure to AI-generated influencer content, older audiences tend to attach greater importance to transparency about its use**.

Language differences are visible here as well. Dutch-speaking respondents generally attach greater importance to disclosure than French-speaking respondents (83% versus 75% overall). Gender differences follow a similar pattern: women tend to place slightly more importance on transparency than men (82% versus 76%).

16-24		25-34		35-44		45-54		55-64		65-70		Total	
70%		77%		82%		86%		81%		78%		**79%**	
NL	**FR**	**NL**	**FR**	**NL**	**FR**	**NL**	**FR**	**NL**	**FR**	**NL**	**FR**	**NL**	**FR**
81%	56%	87%	63%	88%	75%	85%	85%	78%	86%	72%	86%	83%	75%
♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂
75%	63%	82%	71%	83%	81%	87%	84%	83%	80%	79%	76%	82%	76%

Table 13: Attached importance to transparency about AI use in influencer posts (N = 4.898)

VIRTUAL INFLUENCERS

More than four in ten Belgian social media users (44%) say they know what virtual influencers are. It is important to note that this is a self-reported measure: respondents were not asked to define the concept themselves. As a result, it is unclear to what extent this figure reflects actual knowledge, rather than a perceived familiarity with the term.

Interestingly, awareness of virtual influencers does not differ dramatically across age groups. Half of the youngest respondents (50% of those aged 16-24) say they know what virtual influencers are, but the share remains does not dramatically drop among older audiences, with around **four in ten respondents aged 55 and older also reporting familiarity with the concept**. This suggests that the notion of virtual influencers has already reached audiences beyond the youngest social media users.

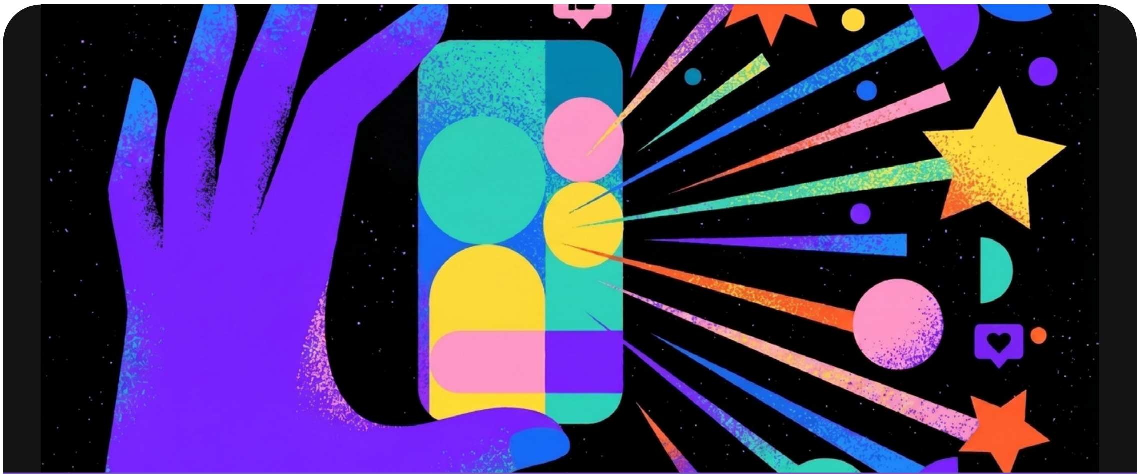
Gender differences are more pronounced. Across most age groups, men are more likely than women to report that they know what virtual influencers are (48% versus 41% overall). Language differences are more limited, although French-speaking respondents report slightly higher levels of awareness than Dutch-speaking respondents in some of the younger age groups.

16-24		25-34		35-44		45-54		55-64		65-70		Total	
50%		49%		44%		38%		43%		40%		**44%**	
NL	**FR**	**NL**	**FR**	**NL**	**FR**	**NL**	**FR**	**NL**	**FR**	**NL**	**FR**	**NL**	**FR**
46%	55%	45%	54%	43%	45%	43%	35%	48%	37%	48%	30%	45%	43%
♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂
44%	56%	46%	52%	39%	49%	36%	43%	41%	45%	39%	42%	41%	48%

Table 14: Understanding of the concept 'virtual influencer' (N = 4.898)

Despite this relatively widespread awareness, **the actual following of virtual influencers remains very limited**. Only 5% of Belgian social media users say they currently follow a virtual influencer. This share is somewhat higher among younger audiences, reaching 14% among 16-24-year-olds and 9% among those aged 25-34, but remains marginal to non-existent in older age groups.

Podcasts



KEY INSIGHTS

- Nearly half (48%) of Belgians aged 16 to 70 listen to podcasts, including 16% weekly and 14% daily.
- Podcast listening is strongly age-driven, with 25–34-year-olds (64%) as the most active group and usage declining steadily with age.
- Male listeners remain slightly more engaged than female listeners, particularly at higher listening frequencies.
- Podcast advertising offers strong brand visibility, with 68% of listeners encountering brands while listening.
- Podcasts mainly drive brand discovery (32%) and information search (21%), while direct purchase remains more limited (12%).

PODCAST LISTENING BEHAVIOR

48% of Belgians aged 16-70 listen to podcasts, including 14% daily and 16% weekly. Podcast consumption is clearly age-dependent, with stronger engagement among younger audiences. Among 16–24-year-olds, 53% listen to podcasts, rising to 64% among 25–34-year-olds, who form the most active group. Usage then gradually declines with age: 53% among 35–44-year-olds, 44% among 45–54-year-olds, 33% among 55–64-year-olds, and 28% among those aged 65+.

Frequency follows a similar pattern. **Daily listening peaks among 25–34-year-olds (22%)**, compared to 17% for 16–24 and 16% for 35–44, before dropping sharply to 4% among 65+. Weekly listening is also highest among 25–34 (21%) and 35–44 (19%), while monthly listening shows less variation across age groups.

Differences in podcast consumption by language and gender are **present but limited**. French-speaking respondents tend to listen slightly more frequently than Dutch-speaking respondents, particularly at higher frequencies (16% vs. 13% daily; 17% vs. 14% weekly), although gaps remain small and not always consistent across age groups. Gender differences are somewhat more pronounced, **with men generally listening more often than women**, especially on a daily basis (15% vs. 12%), while women are slightly more represented among non-listeners (55% vs. 51%). Overall, these differences remain modest. In the following table, more details about the Belgian podcast listeners are presented:

		16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-70	Total
Daily		17%	22%	16%	14%	7%	4%	**14%**
	NL	13%	20%	16%	13%	6%	3%	13%
	FR	21%	24%	15%	15%	8%	5%	16%
	♀	13%	20%	14%	13%	8%	3%	12%
	♂	20%	24%	17%	14%	6%	5%	15%
Weekly		17%	21%	19%	14%	11%	7%	**16%**
	NL	17%	22%	17%	12%	9%	6%	14%
	FR	18%	21%	21%	15%	13%	9%	17%
	♀	16%	20%	17%	12%	12%	7%	15%
	♂	19%	22%	21%	15%	10%	7%	16%
Monthly		19%	21%	19%	17%	16%	18%	**18%**
	NL	23%	21%	20%	17%	15%	16%	19%
	FR	14%	22%	16%	16%	17%	19%	17%
	♀	20%	22%	20%	16%	15%	19%	19%
	♂	18%	20%	18%	17%	17%	17%	18%

Table 15: Podcast listeners in Belgium (N = 4.926)

The most popular platforms used by regular podcast listeners (those listening at least monthly) **are Spotify and YouTube**. Among younger audiences, Spotify clearly dominates as the main platform for podcasts. However, among **older generations** (55+), podcasts are more often accessed through **streaming platforms such as VRT, Play and Streamz**. The table below shows the percentage of cases in which regular listeners reported using each platform.

	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-70	Total
Spotify	78%	66%	59%	47%	31%	26%	**56%**
YouTube	47%	43%	39%	36%	36%	35%	**40%**
Streamingplatform	12%	16%	29%	41%	50%	63%	**30%**
Other	3 %	7%	13%	15%	13%	8%	**10%**
Apple podcasts	7%	11%	9%	12%	8%	7%	**9%**
Google	4%	4%	4%	5%	12%	19%	**6%**
Podimo	3%	4%	1%	1%	0%	1%	**2%**

Table 16: Preferred platforms among regular podcast listeners (N = 2.332)

ADVERTISING EFFECTIVENESS IN PODCASTS

Podcasts offer brands a strong opportunity to reach highly engaged audiences. Among Belgian podcast listeners aged 16-65+ who listen at least monthly, **68% report encountering brands at least occasionally, with 37% stating they encounter them often or every time they listen**.

Beyond simple exposure, podcasts also generate measurable forms of engagement. Over the past three months, 32% of listeners discovered a new product, service or brand through podcasts. In addition, **21% looked up more information**, and **12% reported making a purchase** as a result. These results confirm that podcasts primarily contribute to **awareness and consideration**, while their direct impact on conversion remains more limited.

Although these effects are moderate overall, they are clearly more pronounced among younger audiences. For instance, **43% of 16–24-year-olds** report discovering brands via podcasts, compared to just **17% among those aged 55+**. Similar age-related declines are observed for both information search and purchase, indicating that younger listeners are not only more exposed, but also more likely to take action.

Differences by **language and gender** are present, but less decisive. French-speaking respondents tend to show higher engagement levels, particularly for more action-driven behaviors (e.g. 19% vs. 6% purchase). Gender differences follow a similar pattern, with men more likely than women to take action, especially when it comes to purchasing (15% vs. 8%), while gaps for awareness-related outcomes remain smaller.

Overall, podcast advertising proves most effective among **younger audiences**, with stronger effects among **French speakers and men**. It mainly helps brands build awareness and stimulate interest rather than directly driving sales.

	16-24		25-34		35-44		45-54		55-64		65-70		Total	
Get to know a product, service or brand	43%		42%		32%		23%		17%		17%		**32%**	
	NL	FR	NL	FR	NL	FR	NL	FR	NL	FR	NL	FR	NL	FR
	37%	51%	37%	46%	30%	33%	25%	16%	37%	51%	37%	46%	30%	33%
	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂
	37%	47%	35%	48%	30%	32%	29%	13%	37%	47%	35%	48%	30%	32%
Look up more information about a brand	32%		28%		19%		14%		12%		11%		**21%**	
	NL	FR	NL	FR	NL	FR	NL	FR	NL	FR	NL	FR	NL	FR
	22%	44%	16%	41%	16%	23%	13%	9%	22%	44%	16%	41%	16%	23%
	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂
	23%	40%	21%	35%	19%	18%	16%	7%	23%	40%	21%	35%	19%	18%
Buy a product or service	23%		17%		9%		6%		4%		4%		**12%**	
	NL	FR	NL	FR	NL	FR	NL	FR	NL	FR	NL	FR	NL	FR
	12%	37%	7%	28%	4%	16%	3%	22%	12%	37%	7%	28%	4%	16%
	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂
	13%	32%	11%	22%	8%	10%	5%	19%	13%	32%	11%	22%	8%	10%

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