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DOI
10.1080/21670811.2025.2464062

Publication date
2025

Document Version
Final published version

Published in
Digital Journalism

DIGITAL JOURNALISM
2025, VOL. 13, NO. 7, 1249–1270
https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2025.2464062

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

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Infotainment on Social Media: How News Companies Combine Information and Entertainment in News Stories on Instagram and TikTok

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ABSTRACT

News companies increasingly produce genuine content for social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. Unlike content posted on Facebook or X, these news stories are often stand-alone news products adapted to the platforms' logic and aesthetics. Since Instagram and TikTok are primarily known as entertainment platforms, this raises concerns about the informativeness of such news content. With this study, we therefore explore to what extent news stories on Instagram and TikTok provide relevant information about current affairs, and to what extent this information is combined with entertaining elements. To do so, we collected Instagram stories ($N=1946$) and TikTok videos ($N=677$) of the six largest Swiss news outlets for a full week each month during a year (February 2022 to January 2023). We compare the prevalence of hard and soft news topics, the degree of information and entertaining elements, and the co-occurrence of information and entertainment (infotainment) between tabloid and quality news outlets, as well as between the two investigated platforms.

KEYWORDS

Infotainment; social media; news; journalism; content analysis; tabloids

News companies have extended their social media presence to Instagram and TikTok (Reuters 2023). Unlike Facebook and X, these platforms restrict links to third-party websites and previews of online news articles; news companies thus must produce genuine content for these platforms. Scholars have started to investigate the characteristics of journalistic content on Instagram and TikTok (Al-Rawi, Al-Musalli, and Fakida 2021; García-Ortega and García-Avilés 2023; Hase, Boczek, and Scharkow 2023; Hendrickx 2023; Hendrickx and Vázquez-Herrero 2024; Newman 2019, 2022; Peña-Fernández, Larrondo-Ureta, and Moraes-I-Grass 2022; Vázquez-Herrero, Direito-Rebollal, and López-García 2019). While news companies differ in their approaches (Newman 2022); most of them post a mix of informative and entertaining content (Peña-Fernández, Larrondo-Ureta, and Moraes-I-Grass 2022; Vázquez-Herrero, Direito-Rebollal, and López-García 2019, 2022). What has not been studied yet,

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however, is to what extent they combine information with entertaining elements, i.e., to what extent news on Instagram and TikTok can be considered as *infotainment*.

Taking this perspective is important since infotainment can be functional or dysfunctional. Infotainment refers to the inclusion of entertaining elements in news content in terms of topic, format, or style (Brants and Neijens 1998). One major perspective in infotainment research addresses the development of infotainment in traditional news media, i.e., the tabloidization or sensationalization of news (Marinov 2020). For infotainment to be functional, entertaining elements should complement, but not replace information (Bernhard and Scharf 2008). That means, societally relevant hard news topics should not be replaced by less relevant soft news topics, and the information provided about news topics should not be reduced in favor of entertainment elements. Instead, relevant information should be presented in an entertaining way.

Since social media have become the primary gate to news for the majority of people (Reuters 2024), news media need to adapt a social media logic instead of the traditional mass media logic to ensure that their content gains high visibility in algorithmically curated environments (Tsuriel et al. 2021; van Dijck and Poell 2013). Social media editors need to find a balance between creating popularity and engagement on the social media platforms themselves and creating traffic to the news medias' websites to secure revenue. This is especially challenging on Instagram and TikTok, as these platforms restrict links to third-party websites and are primarily entertainment oriented. The production of infotainment content therefore seems to be a logical solution to the conflict of adapting to the platform logic and fulfilling the primary democratic function of journalism, which is providing people with information (Nielsen 2017).

Scholars have extensively debated positive and negative consequences of infotainment on the audience's political knowledge in the early 2000s (Baum 2003; Brants 1998; Grabe et al. 2000, Grabe, Lang, and Zhao 2003; Prior 2003). The more choice media users have, the more they can follow their own preferences; media users who prefer entertainment will thus consume less news (Prior 2005). In this light, infotainment can be seen as a poison or an antidote; providing news users with a more entertaining and accessible form of news may foster their engagement with news topics but can also lure them away from "proper" news. The dilemma of giving users what they want, rather than what they "need" from a normative point of view, is a perennial issue in journalism (e.g., Carlson 2018).

We currently have limited knowledge about the combination of news and entertainment on Instagram and TikTok. While some Instagram stories and TikTok videos by news media companies are created for entertainment only (Peña-Fernández, Larrondo-Ureta, and Moraes-I-Grass 2022; Vázquez-Herrero, Direito-Rebollal, and López-García 2019, 2022), it remains an open question if news topics, and especially hard news topics, are presented in an entertaining way on these platforms. Thus, to what extent to news media replace information with mere entertainment (dysfunctional), and to what extent do they complement information with entertainment (functional)? With this study, we investigate *to what extent news media report on hard vs. soft news topics, how much information they provide on these topics, and to what extent information is combined with entertaining elements in Instagram stories and TikTok*

videos. To do so, we propose a new framework to measure infotainment that does not only consider the presence of entertaining elements in news content, but also how much information is provided on a news topic, and if this topic is politically relevant.

We focus on the case of large Swiss news media outlets and take two comparative perspectives: First, we compare between two media types, tabloid and quality news outlets. We base this categorization on a yearly assessment of media quality performance in Switzerland (fög – Forschungsinstitut Öffentlichkeit und Gesellschaft 2022). Tabloid outlets mostly generate their revenue from advertising and have a down-market orientation, whereas quality outlets generate their revenue from subscriptions and focus towards the up-market, which has traditionally led to differences in topic selection and reporting style (Blassnig and Esser 2022; Magin et al. 2023; Udris et al. 2020). We investigate if these differences prevail on Instagram and TikTok. Second, we compare between Instagram and TikTok and investigate to what extent reporting differs between these platforms. We find that Instagram stories and TikTok videos of quality media contain more information, but also more entertainment; quality media thus demonstrate a better adaption to the platform logic than tabloid media.

This study thus contributes a framework to quantify infotainment in a way that allows to assess whether it is functional (relevant information is presented in an entertaining way) or dysfunctional (entertainment is replacing information). This framework is applicable beyond the context of this study and is useful for all researchers who are interested to study infotainment from a functionalist perspective. Moreover, we apply our framework to investigate what type of news content tabloid and quality news media in Switzerland produce for Instagram and TikTok. Thereby, we not only demonstrate an empirical application of the proposed framework, but also generate insights about functional and dysfunctional uses of entertainment in social media journalism which are of relevance for journalism researchers and journalists alike.

Journalism on Instagram and TikTok

News consumption on Instagram and TikTok is still relatively low; according to the Reuters Digital News Report of 2023, 14% of digital news users use Instagram and 6% use TikTok for news. Nevertheless, these two social networks are the only ones where news consumption has been growing over the last years and they have become highly relevant platforms for news among young audiences (Reuters 2023).

Compared to Facebook and X, which have been the dominant social networks for news consumption over the past years (Reuters 2023), Instagram and TikTok focus on visuals rather than on text and restrict the use of links. Thus, while Facebook and X were mainly an opportunity for media outlets to disseminate existing news content, Instagram and TikTok require the production of specific content adapted to the platforms' logic and aesthetics. With this, Instagram and TikTok enforce media companies to shift even more from a mass media logic, which aims at creating traffic on the news media's website, to a social media logic, which aims at engagement within the social media platform itself (Tsuriel et al. 2021; van Dijck and Poell 2013).

Initial studies have investigated how the growing relevance of Instagram and TikTok has affected journalistic practices and role performance (Bossio 2023; Hermida and Mellado 2020; Negreira-Rey, Vázquez-Herrero, and López-García 2022; Perreault and Hanusch 2024) and how journalistic content is adapted for these platforms (García-Ortega and García-Avilés 2023; Hase, Boczek, and Scharkow 2023; Hendrickx 2023; Hendrickx and Vázquez-Herrero 2024; Newman 2019, 2022; Peña-Fernández, Larrondo-Ureta, and Moraes-I-Grass 2022; Vázquez-Herrero, Direito-Rebollal, and López-García 2019, 2022). The latter perspective is of particular relevance for this study, but it is difficult to draw general conclusions as the findings are conflicting. Hase, Boczek, and Scharkow (2023) found that news content by German legacy media shows only low levels of adaptation to the affordances of Instagram and TikTok, while Hendrickx and Vázquez-Herrero (2024) found high levels of adaptation for content produced by a diverse sample of news outlets in Belgium, Spain, and the UK.

Similarly, the studies come to different conclusions about the ratio of information and entertainment content. In an early investigation of journalistic content on TikTok, Vázquez-Herrero, Negreira-Rey, and López-García (2022) find that 58.1% of the videos are information, the rest are entertainment or promotion. Peña-Fernández, Larrondo-Ureta, and Moraes-I-Grass (2022) even find that a minority of the TikTok content posted by news media outlets and journalists is about current affairs. However, Hendrickx and Vázquez-Herrero (2024) find that the vast majority of content on Instagram (87.5%) and TikTok (89.7%) is information, while entertainment and promotion play a minor role. These differences may be explained by regional variations or the type of media outlets that were investigated, but more likely by the fact that media companies were still experimenting with the content they published on Instagram and TikTok in the last years, with a recent onset of professionalization or normalization, which has led to an increase in informational content (Hendrickx and Vázquez-Herrero 2024). What has not been investigated so far is how *much* information about current affairs topics is provided in news items on Instagram and TikTok, and to what extent this content is presented in an entertaining way. This research gap is addressed by the study at hand.

Who's Afraid of Infotainment?

There is concern among news media companies that an entertaining presentation on Instagram and especially on TikTok may trivialize serious news (Newman 2022). This refuels a debate that has been led at the turn of the millennium, driven by the emergence of a high-choice media environment. Scholars discussed whether news are too sensationalist and thus lead to news avoidance (Bennett 2003; Zaller 2003). Bennett (2003) argued that the news were a "burglar alarm that just keeps ringing" (131); sensationalization and scandalization would make every minor issue look like an emergency, and the overall negativity would lead media users to avoid news. Ultimately, there seems to be some consensus that infotainment can be functional when substantial information is presented in an entertaining way, but is dysfunctional when the degree of information is reduced in favor of more entertainment (Bernhard and Scharf 2008).

The fear of a "TikTok-ization" (or trivialization) of news is best addressed by in investigating to what extent news on these platforms represent functional

infotainment. While previous research has focused on quantifying how much of the news content on Instagram and TikTok is information/entertainment, we aim to investigate how much information these news items contain, and to what extent information is combined with entertainment. However, researchers have struggled to quantify infotainment; there are no standardized instruments to measure the construct (Boukes 2019; Marinov 2020). In previous research on infotainment in newspapers or TV, this has led to inconclusive results. Reinemann et al. (2012) for example demonstrate that one can conclude that news have become softer over time, or less soft over time, depending how the concept is operationalized. To evaluate the opportunities and challenges that social media news formats pose for an informed public, it is thus necessary to develop a framework to measure infotainment in a way that allows to decide whether it is functional or dysfunctional.

Measuring Infotainment

Infotainment is a multi-facetted construct and there is no consensus on its components. Marinov (2020) describes it as "a set of changes and developments within traditional news media outlets that have rendered the news increasingly soft, sensationalized, personalistic, and entertainment-oriented" (12). When studying infotainment, some scholars have zoomed in on a few specific aspects, e.g., narration and humor (Davis et al. 2020), personalization and privatization (Jebril, Albæk, and de Vreese 2013) or dramatic reporting style (Ryffel and Wirth 2020). Others have proposed comprehensive indices to measure infotainment as a multi-dimensional construct. Brants and Neijens (1998) consider infotainment on the topic level in terms of human interest framing, on the style level in terms of lighthearted, entertaining and empathetic reporting, and on the format level in terms of "amusement qua setting" (153), i.e., music or interaction with the public. Reinemann et al. (2012) refer to "hard vs. soft news" instead of infotainment but propose a similar perspective. Mellado (2015) measures infotainment with a mix of topic- and style-related characteristics of news: personalization, focus on private life, sensationalism, scandal, emotions and morbidity (see also Mellado et al. 2017). Vettehen, Nuijten, and Beentjes (2005) included four dimensions with a total of 15 indicators in their measure of sensationalism; basic needs content, tabloid packaging, concreteness, and proximity.

Graber (1994) follows a different approach; her "infotainment quotient" considers not only the entertaining features, but also the amount of information presented. Based on a typology by Nimmo and Combs (1989), she distinguishes between a factual/feature reporting style focusing on information and a dramatic reporting style. She measures the presence of factual and dramatic elements in each news story. Factual elements were operationalized as the presence of information on *who* were the relevant actors, *what* situations were reported on, *where* and when they happened, and *why* and *how* they happened (Graber 1994, 488). The dramatic elements were operationalized as the portrayal or construction of conflict, human interactions, arousal of empathy and identification, and emotional scenes.

Graber's (1994) approach considers both information and entertainment and therefore reflects a two-dimensional perspective on infotainment, as it has also been proposed by Bernhard and Scharf (2008) in order to evaluate if infotainment is

functional or dysfunctional. We adopt this approach and by a third dimension, the political relevance of the news topic (in line with e.g., Reinemann et al. 2012). Thus, we propose to study infotainment as a combination of what a news item is about (hard vs. soft news topic), how much information is provided about this topic (degree of information) and to what extent this information is presented in an entertaining way (degree of entertainment).

Based on the understanding of infotainment as a three-dimensional construct, the aim of this study is to explore to what extent news stories on Instagram and TikTok provide relevant information about current affairs, and to what extent this information is combined with entertaining elements. We do this along the following research questions:

RQ1: To what extent do tabloid and quality media report on hard and soft news topics on Instagram and TikTok?

RQ2: How much information do news items of tabloid and quality media contain on Instagram and TikTok?

RQ3: How many entertaining features do news items of tabloid and quality media contain on Instagram and TikTok?

RQ4: To what extent do news items of tabloid and quality media combine information and entertainment (= infotainment) on Instagram and TikTok, and does this differ between hard and soft news topics?

Method

To answer the research questions, we conducted a quantitative content analysis of Instagram and TikTok content published by the six Swiss news media with the highest online reach. Three trained coders assessed the presence of information and entertaining elements in Instagram Stories ($N = 1946$) and TikTok videos ($N = 677$) as well as the main topic of the news items. The codebook and the data can be found on OSF[1].

Sample

We collected Instagram Stories and TikTok videos posted by the six Swiss news media with the highest online reach from February 2022 to January 2023.[2] This period was selected because it was 1) a routine period without any elections, 2) we assumed it would generate a sufficiently large sample of TikTok videos to analyze, and 3) because it balances seasonal influences in topic selection. Based on a yearly assessment of media quality performance in Switzerland, we categorized the outlets as tabloid or quality media, whereby the Swiss public broadcaster was counted in the latter category (fög – Forschungsinstitut Öffentlichkeit und Gesellschaft 2022). The sample includes three quality outlets (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung (NZZ), Tages-Anzeiger,* and public broadcaster *SRF News*) and three tabloid outlets (*Blick, 20 Minuten, Watson*). *SRF* is a legacy TV station (public broadcaster), *Watson* a digital born medium, and all others are legacy print media. While all these outlets had an active Instagram account during the whole sampling period, the NZZ only started their TikTok channel in November 2022.

For Instagram, we focused on stories because of their high relevance for journalistic reporting (García-Ortega and García-Avilés 2023; A. Gruber and Radü 2022; Vázquez-Herrero, Direito-Rebollal, and López-García 2019) and because they can include entertaining features such as interactive elements, animated stickers, or music. The sample consisted of one week with consecutive day sampling in each month; stories were collected in the first week of February, second week of March, third week of April, and so forth. Since Instagram Stories are only available for 24 h, they were downloaded daily, always at the same time, with the Chrome browser extension *StoriesHub*.[3] This procedure ensured that we could collect all stories that were posted within the sampling weeks. Overall, 21'381 files were downloaded. During the coding process, three trained coders opened all files and checked whether they were stand-alone stories, or whether they were part of a consecutive story consisting of several slides. Slides were part of a consecutive story when they had the same topic[4] and the same layout or were in some other form connected to each other. The coding unit then was a complete story. See Table 1 for the number of collected stories per media outlet.

For the TikTok videos, we downloaded all videos that had been posted during the same weeks as the collected Instagram data. Since the number of videos was relatively low, especially for SRF News and Tages-Anzeiger, and since NZZ only started their TikTok account towards the end of the data collection period, we additionally downloaded all videos posted in the last three months of the data collection period (November 2022 to January 2023). The videos were downloaded with the R-package *traktok* (J. Gruber 2023) in November 2022 and at the end of the data collection period[5]. Overall, 677 videos were downloaded; the coding unit was the whole video. See Table 1 for the number of videos per media outlet.

Instrument

As far as possible, we used the same coding instructions for Instagram and TikTok. The following descriptions thus apply to both formats, unless specified otherwise.

Topic

The main topic of each news item was coded. The list of topics included politics, economy, science and technology, arts and culture, media, religion, sports, celebrities, accidents, advice (e.g., health), lifestyle, travel and nature, and other. If several topics were combined in a news overview, coders were instructed to code this as "several topics". Following Curran et al. (2009) and Udris et al. (2020), we consider all topics from politics to religion as "hard news" and all topics from sports to travel and nature as "soft news". It is thereby important to note that topics such as health or nature were coded as politics or science when respective aspects were covered (e.g., political

Table 1. Number of downloaded news content per media outlet.

	NZZ	Tages-Anzeiger	SRF News	Blick	20 Minuten	Watson	
	Quality Media			Tabloid Media			Total
Instagram	369	74	156	294	661	392	1946
TikTok	36	55	62	143	250	131	677

debates about climate change or health care), and only fell in the soft news category when this was not the case (e.g., advice to stay healthy during flu season or suggestions for hikes; see codebook for details).

Information

Following Graber (1994), we measured the amount of information provided by each news item. The coders assessed whether the item provided answers to the following questions: who, what, where, when, why und how? Each of these dimensions of information was coded as absent (0) or present (1). According to Graber (1994) who, what, where, when represent *basic information*, while why and how represent *context information*. We created summative indices for both constructs, as well as a combined index *information* which ranges from 0 (no questions answered) to 6 (all questions answered). For news overviews, which contain several news issues in one story or video, coders were instructed to measure the amount of information for on the first issue.

Entertainment

We measured the presence of six types of potentially entertaining features based on previous infotainment measures. *Emotionalization* was coded for text and visuals separately (see Graber 1994), but then combined to one dichotomous measure (emotionalization present/absent). *Personalization* was coded when the main actor is a specific person instead of a group or abstract entity. *Dynamic presentation* was coded when Instagram stories included videos, sound, or animated stickers/gifs, and when TikTok videos included music or animations. Narration was operationalized with two constructs; *narrative techniques* were coded when the news story had a protagonist, was presented in chronological order, created expectations that were later resolved (e.g., started with a question), or included irrelevant illustrative attributes (see e.g., Früh and Frey 2014). *Narrative presentation* was coded when an Instagram story consisted of several slides, and when a TikTok video had a presenter (news anchor). In addition to these constructs that have been typically used to measure infotainment in print media or TV, we also measured interactivity as a potentially entertaining feature that is unique to digital media. *Interactivity* was coded when Instagram stories contained interactive elements such as quizzes, polls, or emoji sliders, and when TikTok videos explicitly encouraged viewers to comment, like or share the video. To create an *entertainment* index similar to the information index, we summed up all of these dichotomous variables. This index ranges from 0 (no entertaining features) to 6 (all dimensions present).

Infotainment

We have defined infotainment as the co-presence of information and entertaining elements in a news item. To quantify the extent to which information and entertainment co-occur, we have multiplied the information and entertainment indices, creating a score ranging from 0 to 36. The value 0 indicates that at least one of the two dimensions, information or entertainment, was absent. A value of 36 would mean that all aspects of information and entertainment were present.

Procedure

Three coders were trained to conduct the content analysis. As part of the coder training, an inter-coder reliability test was conducted with material from a day within the data collection period that was not included in the sampling weeks (138 Instagram story slides and 12 TikTok videos). All coders agreed on the number of coherent stories for Instagram, thus the number of coded stories for the reliability test was $N=98$. Reliability values were calculated using *Nogrod* (Wettstein, M., 2019). Across all variables, we achieved a satisfactory agreement between the coders (rH = 84.90%, Brennan & Prediger's $\kappa=0.76$). The lowest score was obtained for emotional visuals (rH = 61.40%, Brennan & Prediger's $\kappa=0.42$), the highest for dynamic presentation video (only coded for Instagram) (rH = 100%, Brennan & Prediger's $\kappa=1$). Emotional visuals were the only category for which we could not achieve satisfactory reliability according to the chance-corrected Brennan & Prediger's κ coefficient, even when reduced to a dichotomous variable. We still report the prevalence of emotional visuals and compare it across outlets and platforms, but this should be interpreted with caution. To calculate the entertainment and infotainment score, we used the dichotomized version of the variable, which has a slightly higher but still not fully sufficient reliability (rH = 73.6%, Brennan & Prediger's $\kappa=0.47$). To mitigate the influence of subjectivity in the coding, coding material was distributed in a way that all coders had an equal share of material from all media outlets and all platforms.

Analyses

To compare quality and tabloid media, t-tests were conducted. For the comparison of hard and soft news topics across different media types, one-way ANOVAs were used. If the criterion of equal variances in the compared groups was not met, Welch's tests were applied. The application of Welch's tests offers more control of Type 1 error rates in cases where the assumption of equal variances is violated (Delacre et al. 2017, 2019). To test for differences in frequencies, chi-square-tests were conducted. Yates continuity correction was applied to the test if any expected cell count was lower than 5. As mentioned before, the TikTok sample consists of content from sampling weeks parallel to the Instagram sample and a top-up sample with all content posted during the last three months of the sampling period. Since the results do not differ between the initial and the top-up sample, the data were pooled for all analyses.

Results

The first research question aims at the share of hard and soft news topics in quality and tabloid media on Instagram and TikTok. On Instagram, quality media have a hard news share of 57.43% and a soft news share of 24.21%, whereas tabloid media provide 41.05% hard news and 38.90% soft news. Thus, quality media overall have a higher share of hard news on Instagram than tabloid media. A chi-square test shows a significant relation between media type and news style, X^2 (3, $N=1946$) = 109.5, $p < .001$. The remaining content either covers several news topics or is non-news (e.g., entertainment or advertising). Figure 1 provides an overview of shares in both media types.

Looking at the different news topics on Instagram alone (i.e., excluding non-news), we see that for hard news topics, quality media report more on politics (27.37%),

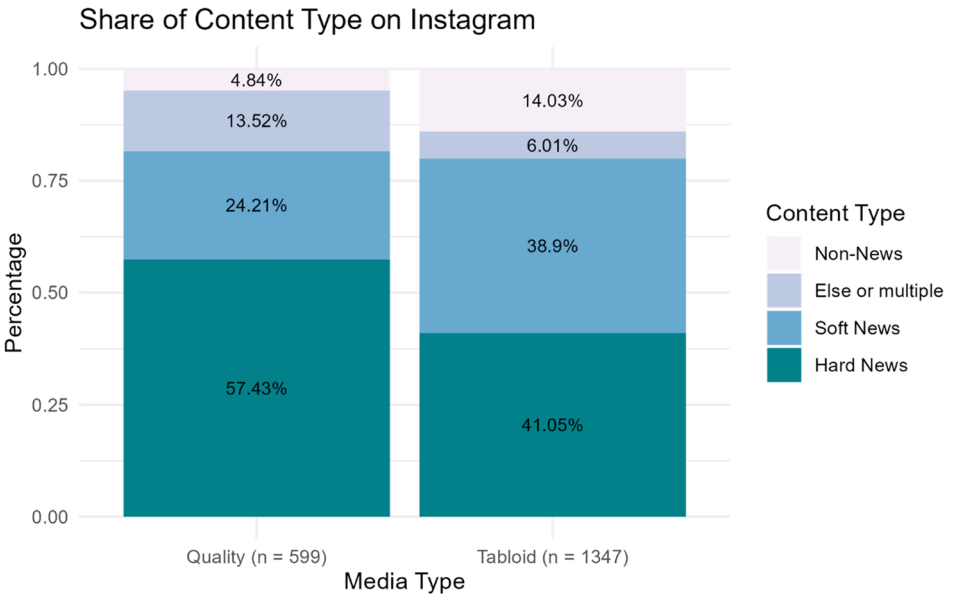

Figure 1. Share of content type on Instagram.

and science (11.93%) in their Instagram stories than tabloids (16.32%; 6.91%). Tabloids, on the other hand, provide more sports reporting (6.48%) than quality media (3.86%). Regarding soft news topics, it is evident that tabloid media report more on accidents (22.63%), and on celebrities (9.50%) than quality media (11.75%; 4.74%). Reporting on economy, culture, media, religion, advice, lifestyle, travel, and nature are approximately at the same level (see Figure 2 for a full overview). The high number of multiple topics in the quality media sample is due to public broadcaster *SRF News*, which often covers several topics in one story.

On TikTok, quality media provide 52.29% hard news and 20.92% soft news, while tabloids provide 27.67% hard news and 33.21% soft news. Therefore, quality media have a higher share of hard news topics on TikTok than tabloid media. A chi-square test shows a significant relation between media type and news style X^2 (3, N=677) = 33.27, $p < .001$. On TikTok, the share of non-news is generally higher than on Instagram (see Figure 3).

For the different hard news topics, we see that quality media report more on politics (30.22%), science (14.39%), and sports (4.32%) than tabloids (12.86%; 6.80%; 3.88%; 1.70%). However, tabloid media report more on economy (6.07%), and media (3.64%) than quality media (3.60%; 2.16%). Within the soft news topics, quality media report more on lifestyle (3.60%) than tabloid media (1.70%). Tabloids, on the other hand, report more on celebrities (5.34%), accidents (22.09%), traveling (3.64%), and nature (7.04%) than quality media (2.88%; 9.35%; 1.44%; 2.88%). Reporting on arts and culture, religion, and advice are at similar levels (see Figure 4 for a full overview). On TikTok, the high number of multiple topics in tabloids are caused by *Blick* and *20 Minuten*. Both produce short video news broadcasts providing a selection of daily news updates (e.g., top five news of the day).

A comparison of both platforms shows significant differences regarding the share of content type, X^2 (3, N=2623) = 83.355, $p < .001$. The share of non-news content (e.g., mere entertainment) is higher on TikTok than in Instagram stories (20.27% vs.

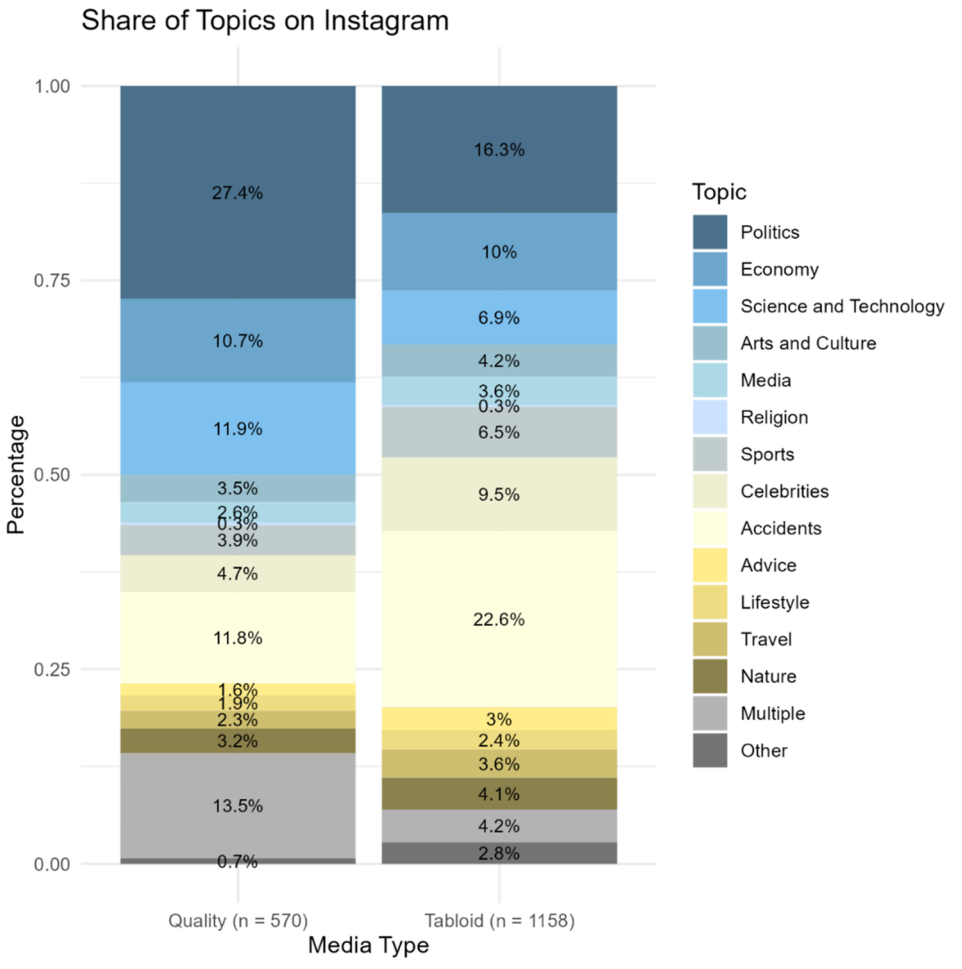

Figure 2. Share of topics on Instagram.

11.20%). Also, the share of hard news is lower on TikTok than in Instagram stories (33.28% vs. 46.09%). With 34.38% (Instagram) and 30.47% (TikTok) the share of soft news is at a similar level.

The second research question investigates how much information news items of tabloid and quality media provide on Instagram and TikTok. We look at basic and context information, as well as a combined information score in the news content. On Instagram, both quality ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 0.64$) and tabloid media ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 0.73$) provide a fair amount of basic information. Nevertheless, the score is higher for quality media; a Welch two-sample t-test shows that the difference is significant, $t(1726) = 7.49$, $p < .001$. The effect size is small ($d = 0.38$). Regarding context information, quality media ($M = 0.44$, $SD = 0.68$) also provide significantly more information on Instagram than tabloid media ($M = 0.13$, $SD = 0.37$), $t(740.42) = 10.25$, $p < .001$. The effect size is medium ($d = 0.63$). Consequently, for the combination of basic and context information on Instagram, an overall significantly higher level of information becomes evident for quality media ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 1.02$) compared to tabloid media ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 0.68$), $t(967.09) = 11.77$, $p < .001$; the effect size is medium ($d = 0.64$).

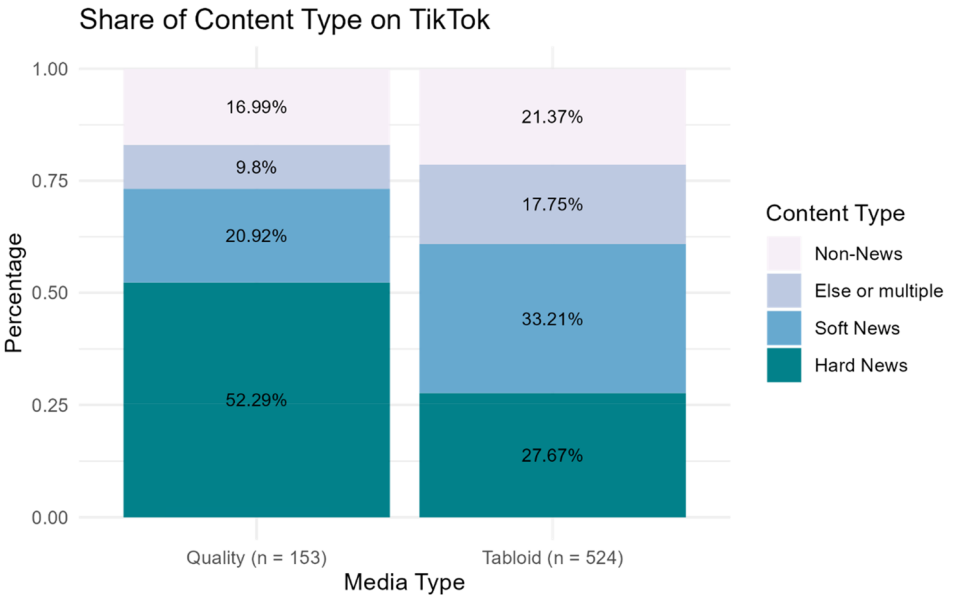

Figure 3. Share of content type on TikTok.

On TikTok, the level of basic information is also high for both quality ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 0.56$), and tabloid media ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 0.61$) but higher for quality media. A Welch two-sample t-test shows that the difference is significant, $t(244.96) = 2.47$, $p = .014$; the effect size is small ($d = 0.24$). For context information, quality media ($M = 1.33$, $SD = 0.98$) also provide significantly more information than tabloid media ($M = 0.98$, $SD = 0.82$), $t(243.98) = 4.78$, $p < .001$. The effect size is small ($d = 0.44$). As a result, the combination of basic and context information is also higher for quality media ($M = 5.47$, SD = 0.91) than for tabloid media ($M = 4.55$, $SD = 1.04$). A Welch two-sample t-test shows that the difference is significant, $t(237.16) = 5.1728$, $p < .001$; the effect size is small ($d = 0.49$). Overall, quality media provide more information in their Instagram and TikTok news content than tabloid media.

A comparison of the two platforms shows that news media provide more basic information on TikTok ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 0.60$) than on Instagram ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 0.71$). A Welch two-sample t-test indicates a significant difference, $t(1050.2) = -9.9154$, $p < .001$; the effect size is small ($d = 0.45$). A bigger difference becomes evident regarding context information. Here, news media on TikTok provide more information ($M = 1.06$, $SD = 0.80$) than on Instagram ($M = 0.23$, $SD = 0.52$). A Welch two-sample t-test shows that the difference is significant, $t(683.25) = -22.685$, $p < .001$; the effect size is large ($d = 1.39$). Therefore, in the combined information score, we also see that news media provide more information on TikTok ($M = 4.67$, $SD = 1.03$) than on Instagram ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 0.95$). A Welch two-sample t-test indicates a significant difference, $t(840.73) = -22.827$, $p < .001$; the effect size is large ($d = 1.18$). Overall, we see that the news videos on TikTok provide more information, especially context information, than the news media's Instagram stories.

For the third research question we looked at the degree of entertaining features of quality and tabloid media's news content on Instagram and TikTok. On Instagram, quality media include more entertaining features in their stories ($M = 2.66$, $SD = 1.45$)

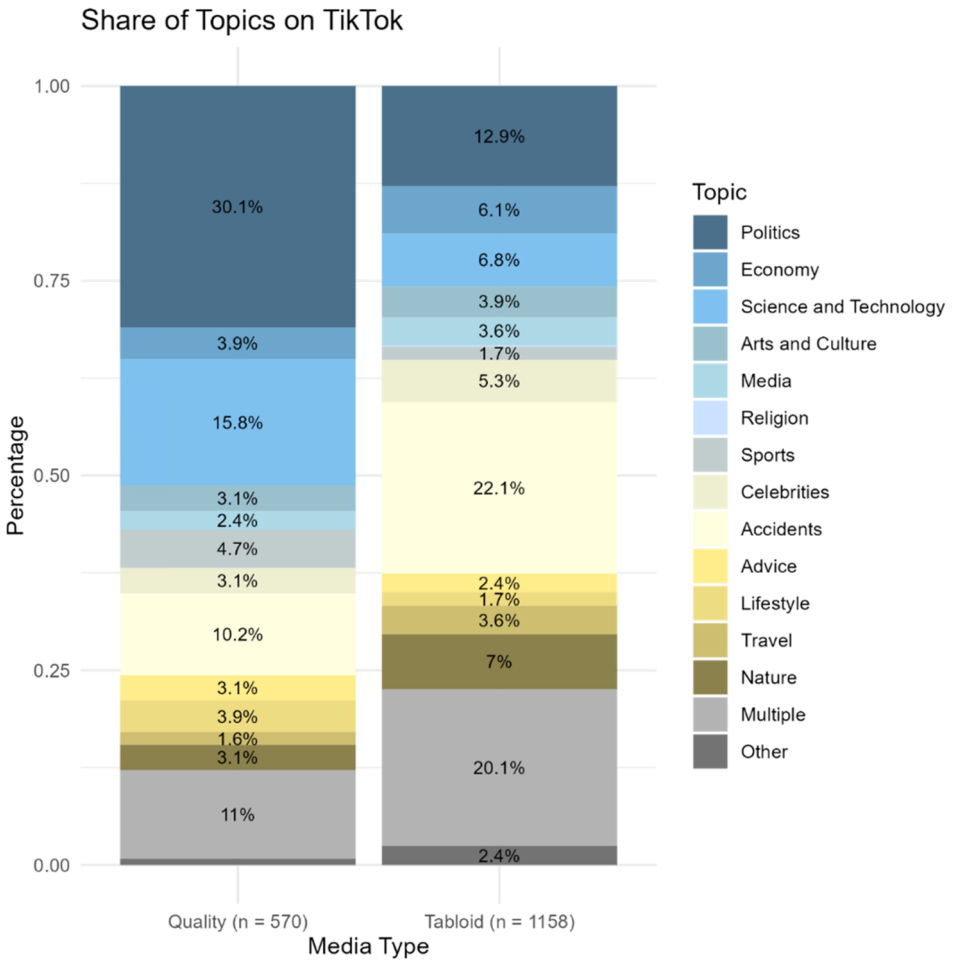

Figure 4. Share of topics on TikTok.

than tabloid media ($M = 2.35$, $SD = 1.19$). A Welch two-sample t-test shows that the difference is significant, $t(954.51) = 4.40$, $p < .001$. The effect size is small ($d = 0.24$).

On TikTok, quality media also provide significantly more entertaining features ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 1.23$) than tabloid media ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 1.37$), $t(230.7) = 3.6215$, $p < .001$. The effect size is small ($d = 0.35$).

Comparing the two platforms, we see that news videos on TikTok contain more entertainment ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 1.28$) than the Instagram stories ($M = 2.45$, $SD = 1.29$), $t\ (2265) = -18.791$, $p < .001$. The effect size is large ($d = 0.93$).

A detailed analysis of the frequencies of each element gives further insights of how quality and tabloid media exactly differ.

Emotionalization

Quality media more frequently employ emotional text on Instagram than tabloid media (25.96% vs. 20.90%), X^2 (2, $N = 1728$) = 6.81, $p < .05$. The visualization of

emotions is approximately at the same level for quality (55.09%) and tabloid media (58.29%). However, there are still some significant differences, X^2 (3, $N = 1728$) = 38.928, $p < .001$. Tabloid media include more emotional pictures (47.84% vs. 36.84%), and quality media more symbolic pictures (18.25% vs. 10.45%).

On TikTok, quality media also provide slightly more emotional text (32.28% vs. 30.10%) but the frequencies do not differ significantly. Compared to Instagram, visualized emotions are used more by both quality (92.13%) and tabloid media (82.28) on TikTok. Again, there are significant differences between media types, X^2 (2, $N = 539$) = 7.681, $p = .02$. The use of symbols is at a similar level but slightly higher for tabloids (8.01% vs. 7.09%). However, the use of emotional pictures is higher for quality media (85.04% vs. 74.27%).

Personalization

Tabloid and quality media differ significantly regarding personalization both on Instagram, X^2 (4, $N = 1728$) = 131.43, $p < .001$, and on TikTok, X^2 (4, $N = 539$) = 30.265, $p < .001$. Tabloid media feature actors in 86.96% of their Instagram stories, of which 39.72% are individuals. 30.88% of quality media's Instagram stories do not include any actors, and if they do, they are rather groups or abstract entities (18.95%). On TikTok, tabloid media also feature more individual actors (44.66%) in their videos than quality media (33.07%). On the other hand, quality media's TikTok videos again contain more groups or abstract entities (59.84% vs. 41.02%).

Dynamic Presentation

Tabloids present their news content more dynamically on Instagram, whereas quality media make more use of dynamic elements on TikTok. News media of both types do not use sound in their Instagram Stories very frequently. Still, tabloid media use more sound elements (13.56%) than quality media (7.02%), X^2 (3, $N = 1728$) = 17.37, $p < .001$. There are no significant differences for media type and animations nor the use of videos in Instagram stories. Animations are used frequently by both quality (69.65%) and tabloid media (72.45%), while videos are generally used less frequently (Quality: 11.58%; Tabloid: 13.64%).

On TikTok, with news content being presented in video format, almost all posts use sound (Quality: 100%; Tabloid: 99.76%). Yet there are differences in how quality and tabloid media use sound, X^2 (3, $N = 539$) = 10.185, $p = .02$. Quality media use more natural sound (40.16%) than tabloids (27.18%), and tabloids use more music (63.35%) than quality media (48.03%). While the general use of animations is also high on TikTok, quality media use more animations in their videos (85.83%) than tabloids (75.49%), X^2 (1, $N = 539$) = 5.4484, $p = .02$.

Narrative Techniques

Quality media use more narrative techniques both on Instagram and TikTok. On Instagram, quality media more often create a story arch by generating expectations (e.g., by asking a question in the beginning) and resolving them (15.79%) than tabloid

media (0.74%), X^2 (1, $N = 1728$) = 153.36, $p < .001$. Even though news stories generally do not frequently follow a chronology, quality media more often tell a story according to its natural chronology (5.44% vs. 0.35%), X^2 (1, $N = 1728$) = 44.518, $p < .001$. Tabloid media, on the other hand, use more protagonists in their Instagram Stories (32.47%) than quality media (23.68%), X^2 (1, $N = 1728$) = 13.738, $p < .001$. Irrelevant attributes are not used very often by quality (7.37%) and tabloid media (9.76%) and there are no significant differences.

In their TikTok videos, quality media also more often create a narrative arc by following the natural chronology of the events (15.75%) than tabloids (8.50%), X^2 (1, $N = 539$) = 4.8097, $p = .03$, and by more often generating and resolving expectations (38.58%) than tabloid media (15.53%), X^2 (1, $N = 539$) = 29.748, $p < .001$. Again, tabloid media use protagonists slightly more frequently on TikTok (26.46% vs. 23.62%) but there is no significant relation between media type and using a protagonist here. Irrelevant attributes are used more frequently than on Instagram and slightly more often by quality media but there are no significant differences between quality (27.56%) and tabloid media (19.17%).

Narrative Presentation

Generally, quality media rather present their news content in a narrative way. On Instagram, quality media more often present their news content in at least two consecutive slides (36.49%) while tabloid media rather have one static slide per news story (95.42%), X^2 (2, $N = 1728$) = 378.57, $p < .001$. On TikTok, quality media more often use a presenter (70.08%) in their videos than tabloid media (51.46%) X^2 (1, $N = 539$) = 12.908, $p < .001$.

Interactivity

Quality media use significantly more interactive elements (e.g., quizzes or sliders) in their Instagram Stories, X^2 (1, $N = 1728$) = 231.42, $p < .001$. While 25.26% of quality media's stories contain interactive elements, the share of such elements is marginal for tabloid media (2.07%). On TikTok, calls for interaction (e.g., encouraging comments or likes) are used at the same level by quality (39.37%) and tabloid media (39.32%) with no significant differences.

The fourth research question finally looks at the combination of information and entertainment. In line with the previous findings on information and entertainment, it becomes evident that quality media provide more infotainment in their Instagram stories ($M = 10.92$, $SD = 7.54$) than tabloid media ($M = 8.03$, $SD = 4.83$), $t(805.59) = 8.35$, $p < .001$. A Welch two-sample t-test was performed, the effect size is small ($d = 0.49$). The last research question further aims at comparing the infotainment score for hard and soft news topics and media types. For the comparison, we created groups based on the media type (quality vs. tabloid) and the news topics (hard vs. soft news). A one-way ANOVA demonstrates that there are significant differences, $F(5,1722) = 30.63$, $p < .001$ and the effect size is medium ($\eta^2 = 0.08$). Comparisons from the post-hoc test (Tukey HSD) show infotainment is higher for both soft and hard news topics in quality media's Instagram stories than in those of tabloid media (Figure 5). Of note,

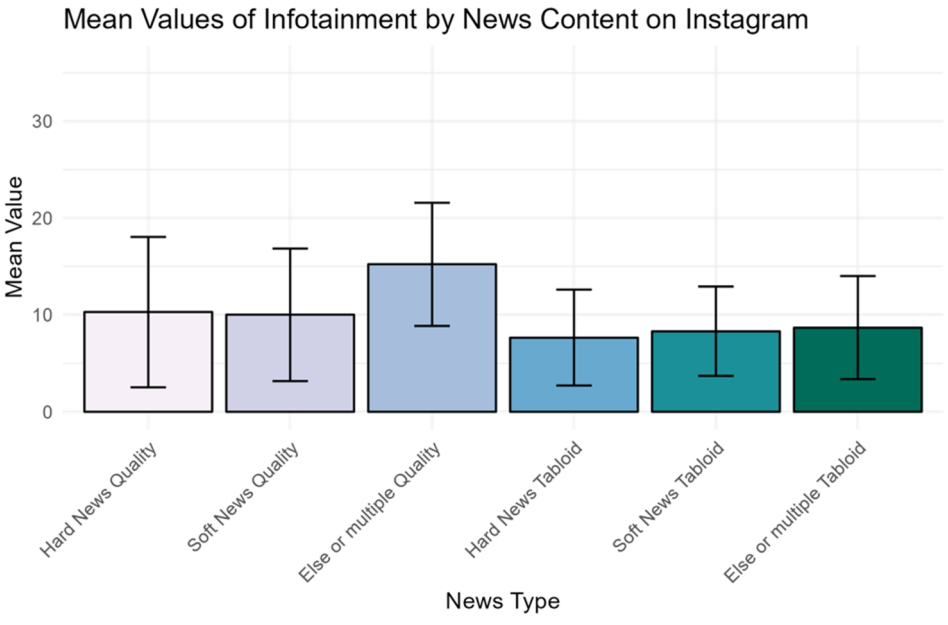

Figure 5. Mean Values of infotainment by news content on Instagram.
Note: Error bars represent standard deviation

stories combining multiple topics provide the most infotainment both in quality media ($M = 15.22$, $SD = 6.35$) and tabloid media ($M = 8.69$, $SD = 5.31$). For quality media, this is higher than all other news types. Further, infotainment in tabloid media's Instagram stories covering multiple topics does not differ significantly from hard and soft news stories in quality media.

On TikTok, the level of infotainment is also higher for quality media ($M = 20.39$, $SD = 7.46$) than for tabloid media ($M = 16.37$, $SD = 7.49$), $t(210.26) = 5.2968$, $p < .001$. A Welch two-sample t-test was performed, the effect size is medium ($d = 0.54$). Infotainment was again compared for hard and soft news topics and media type. A one-way ANOVA shows that there are significant differences, $F(5,533) = 7.728$, $p < .001$with a medium effect size ($\eta^2 = 0.07$). The post-hoc test (Tukey HSD) shows that infotainment is higher both for hard and soft news of quality media ($M = 20.15$, SD = 7.09; $M = 20.97$, $SD = 8.74$) than for soft news of tabloid media ($M = 15.89$, $SD = 7.60$; Figure 6 provides a full overview).

Finally, a Welch two-sample t-test shows that news videos on TikTok provide more infotainment ($M = 17.32$, $SD = 7.66$) than news media's Instagram stories ($M = 8.78$, $SD = 6.01$), $t(755.82) = -23.138$, $p < .001$. The effect size is large ($d = 1.29$).

Discussion

As news companies increasingly produce content for Instagram and TikTok, concerns regarding the informativeness of such news have emerged. This study demonstrates that quality and tabloid media differ in their reporting on these platforms. Quality media covered more hard news (RQ1) and their news items contained slightly more information, especially background information (RQ2). This is in line with studies

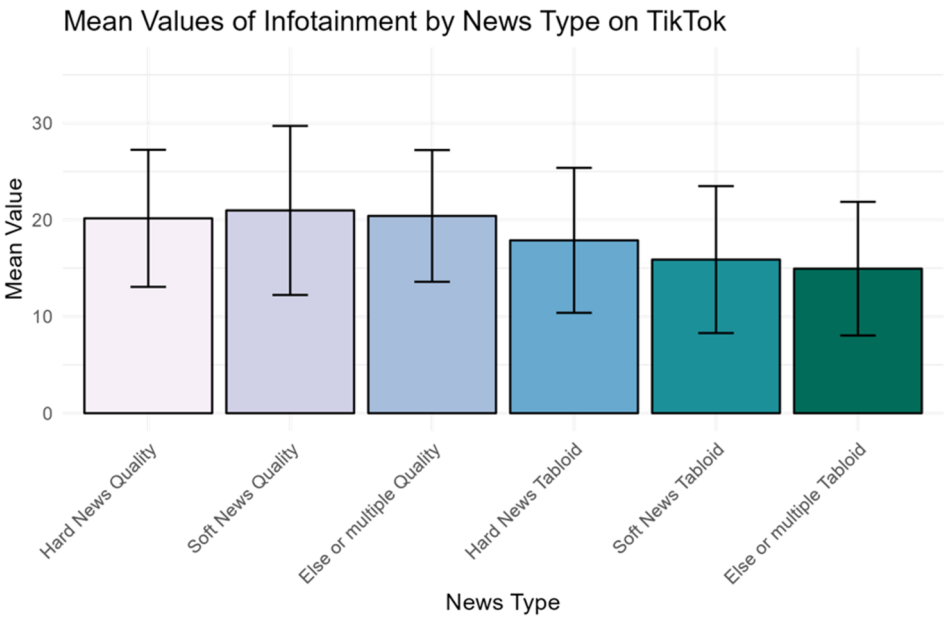

Figure 6. Mean Values of infotainment by news type on TikTok.
Note: Error bars represent standard deviation

focusing on traditional journalistic outlets (Magin et al. 2023; Reinemann, Stanyer, and Scherr 2016; Udris et al. 2020) and thus indicates that the profile of news media organizations extends from their traditional outlets to Instagram and TikTok. Maybe more surprisingly, quality media also employed more entertaining elements (RQ3). Entertaining elements are used with hard and soft news topics (RQ4), which demonstrates that news media companies, especially quality media, try to adapt their news products to the platform logic of Instagram and TikTok. This can be considered as an indicator for an increasing tabloidization or softening of news (Otto, Glogger, and Boukes 2017), driven by a social media logic, more specifically the orientation towards user metrics as indicators for popularity (Tsuriel et al. 2021; van Dijck and Poell 2013). However, an adaptation to the platform logic can also be considered as a factor for news media quality in the digital space (Sehl, Eder, and Kretzschmar 2022) or be an indicator for an increasing professionalization of journalists using these platforms (Hendrickx and Vázquez-Herrero 2024).

We find that entertainment elements are more prevalent on TikTok than on Instagram, which is in line with findings by Hendrickx and Vázquez-Herrero (2024) that show a higher level of adaption to technological platform affordances for TikTok compared to Instagram. In addition, we also find that such elements are used more often by news media generally known for high quality reporting, which in our view supports the perspective that an entertaining presentation of news can be an indicator for quality in social media journalism. Also in line with Hendrickx and Vázquez-Herrero (2024) and contradicting earlier work (e.g., Peña-Fernández, Larrondo-Ureta, and Moraes-I-Grass 2022; Vázquez-Herrero, Negreira-Rey, and López-García 2022) we found that the majority of content news media companies publish on Instagram and TikTok are news. Further, the amount of information

provided in news items is sufficient in terms of basic information, and quality outlets also manage to provide some context information – especially on TikTok.

Overall, our findings thus suggest news content on Instagram and TikTok can be considered as functional infotainment. That is, users of such news find at least basic information about societally relevant topics, and not just entertainment. Nevertheless, it would be important to compare the amount and type of information to other, supposedly more information dense news formats such as TV news and newspaper articles to have a relative measure of how informative news are on different platforms. This could create a benchmark which can be used by journalism researchers, but also social media journalists, to monitor and potentially improve the quality of news reporting on social media. Adopting a functionalist perspective to infotainment is useful to evaluate and optimize specific news items, but also to compare news reporting across outlets, regions, or time.

Further, future research should investigate how the infotainment content on Instagram and TikTok resonates with the audience. It might encourage users who are less interested in hard news topics to engage with incidentally encountered news items, or might foster engagement in situations when users are looking for entertainment rather than for information (Matthes et al. 2020). More research is thus needed to investigate how media users evaluate news content on Instagram and TikTok, and how the use of entertaining features is related to engagement and learning. While our study demonstrates that the fear the fear that Instagram and TikTok are trivializing the news may not be warranted, we are still lacking knowledge about the effects of different journalistic approaches to these news formats.

Finally, this study also contributes to infotainment research by suggesting an operationalization that not only considers the entertainment features, but also the amount of information provided by a news item and contextualizes this with the informational value of the topic. This approach, based on Graber (1994), provides a more nuanced picture of infotainment content that allows to differentiate between functional and dysfunctional infotainment (Bernhard and Scharf 2008). Given the high basic information score across news items, we can conclude that media companies are not replacing information with entertainment, but rather they add entertainment on top of information, thus creating a functional form of infotainment. We further see that TikTok videos generally provide more infotainment than Instagram stories. This result must be interpreted in the context that these are different formats. Information can be presented more densely in short videos, which can be demonstrated by the fact that we found them to offer significantly more contextual information in our study. In addition, more entertaining elements can be incorporated into short videos than on individual story slides. Accordingly, the effects may not only be platform-specific, but also format-specific, and probably also apply to other short video formats (e.g., Instagram Reels). More comparative research is needed to see how the amount of information and entertainment relates to other media formats, outlets, and platforms.

The study has some additional limitations. The findings are limited to the Swiss context; cross-national research is needed to investigate if these trends can be found in other contexts, especially other media or political systems. Further, the study also has some methodological limitations. First, we focused on Instagram stories and neglected other content types on the platform, which provide different technological

affordances and might thus be used differently. Second, we focused on content by established news media companies. Especially on TikTok, news content is often distributed though influencers, and future research should investigate to what extent their content is similar to or different from journalistic reporting on TikTok. Moreover, while most of the categories we developed in the codebook were measured with high reliability, there is some room to improve the instrument. We distributed the material in a way that biases of individual coders are counter balanced, but still the results reported for emotional visuals should be interpreted cautiously.

Nevertheless, this study provides important insights into practices of news reporting on Instagram and TikTok. We can conclude that news media in Switzerland differ in their approach to news on Instagram and TikTok. We find significant differences between quality and tabloid media when it comes to the share of hard news posted on their accounts, the amount of information that is present in a news item, and the amount of entertaining elements that news items contain. Overall, quality media offer more informative content, while also using more entertaining packaging. This seems to be a promising approach to reach young and entertainment-oriented media users, but it may also re-fuel the scholarly debate about opportunities and dangers of infotainment.

Notes

1. https://osf.io/gw6ah/?view_only=fa54691bcfa7489aa3c48fb705ca779d.
2. Since especially the TikTok channels of these news media outlets were very new at the time of study, we opted to select the media based on the reach of their website instead as their follower count.
3. StoriesHub is a third-party browser extension that allows to download Instagram Stories. Since the download is executed manually for each account of interest, this approach is only feasible for small-scale data collection.
4. Some of the news outlets posted news overviews, e.g. "the highlights of today". These were also considered as coherent stories, although they included different topics, as they were clearly connected through the layout. This is similar to news overviews on TikTok, in which one video summarizes the most important news of a day.
5. This package accesses TikTok via API and allows to download videos as well as meta-data (such as comments, shares, views).

Acknowledgment

We thank the research assistants Natalija Bozic, Tim Rihner and Jessica Woodtli, who were employed as coders for this project, for their contribution.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This study has been funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation [SNSF Ambizione PZ00P1_201725, PI Dominique S. Wirz]. This work was funded by the Schweizerischer Nationalfonds zur Förderung der Wissenschaftlichen Forschung.

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