

Transformations in the Audiovisual Consumption of Young Argentinians (2013-2023)

Transformaciones en los consumos audiovisuales de la juventud argentina (2013-2023)

Transformações no consumo audiovisual dos jovens argentinos (2013-2023)

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This paper examines the transformations in the audiovisual consumption practices of Argentinian youth, based on data from the National System of Cultural Consumption (2013-2023) and own qualitative research. The study identifies changes in the consumption of television, radio, and digital platforms, highlighting the persistence of traditional media and their capacity to adapt to new dynamics. Finally, it proposes discussions aimed at overcoming technological determinism and age essentialism by rethinking the causes behind these changes in youth media consumption in Argentina.

KEYWORDS: audiences, young people, cultural consumption, audiovisual, Argentina.

El artículo analiza las transformaciones en las prácticas de consumo audiovisual de la juventud argentina, con base en los datos provistos por el Sistema Nacional de Consumos Culturales (2013-2023) y datos cualitativos propios. Se identifican los cambios en el consumo de televisión, radio y plataformas digitales, y destacan la persistencia de medios tradicionales y su capacidad de adaptarse a nuevas dinámicas. Finalmente, se proponen discusiones que buscan superar el determinismo tecnológico y el esencialismo etario al repensar las causas de estos cambios en el consumo mediático juvenil en Argentina.

PALABRAS CLAVE: audiencias, jóvenes, consumos culturales, audiovisual, Argentina.

O artigo analisa as transformações nas práticas de consumo audiovisual dos jovens argentinos, com base em dados fornecidos pelo Sistema Nacional de Consumo Cultural (2013-2023) e em dados qualitativos próprios. Identificam-se alterações no consumo de televisão, rádio e plataformas digitais, evidenciando a persistência dos meios de comunicação tradicionais e a sua capacidade de adaptação às novas dinâmicas. Por fim, são propostas discussões que buscam superar o determinismo tecnológico e o essencialismo etário, repensando as causas dessas mudanças no consumo de mídia juvenil na Argentina.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: públicos, jovens, consumo cultural, audiovisual, Argentina.

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INTRODUCTION

The perspective on disruption and future trends is a plot in which the novelty is an update of variations and combinations of the traditional with new technologies. In this context, we aim to discuss the transformations in youth cultural consumption from a perspective that acknowledges both traditional and innovative practices. Our goal is to identify a differentiated cultural experience linked to a key life stage without assuming future trends. We seek to propose some guiding frameworks into how the new and the old are articulated, as well as the related transformations. The questions we pose are: What are the current characteristics of audiovisual consumption among young Argentinians? What transformations have occurred? And what are the reasons behind these changes?

The study of youth cultural consumption is an active and rapidly developing field in Latin America, grounded in the recognition that youth cultures represent a distinct cultural dynamic. This differentiation emerges both through certain disruption with adult culture and the search for identity resources tied to consumption and cultural practices.

Approaching youth as a distinct cultural experience and a specific sensitivity in the ways they perceive the world, within a context of deepening mediatization trends associated with the digitization of social life, allows us not only to describe the practices carried out by this group, but also to recognize specific links between age and socioeconomic dimensions.

Focusing on the transformations of the processes that shape young audiovisual audiences allows us to recognize the social work developed to design a social classification and a system of interpellations carried out by the infocommunication market, in which institutional actors are also involved. The association between youth and future can operate in different ways. On one side, as a result of a mercantile construction that links an abstract representation of youth with certain knowledge and practices that would be operating through the substitution of technologies. But also, in line with Martín-Barbero's (2002) proposal, we can recognize that this cultural experience is not tied to any kind of linearity: hence, rather than building a future that can

be envisaged in these practices, we can observe certain conditions in which the particular sensibility linked to this cultural experience can be expressed, in which technological and institutional transformations and the logics of cultural production and circulation are articulated.

In this framework, we will review the transformations in audiovisual consumption practices of Argentinian youth based on the historical series of cultural consumption surveys conducted by the Cultural Information System of Argentina (SINCA) belonging to the Ministry of Culture of the Nation. We will identify the transformations and persistence of these practices, considering the particularities linked to this age group. Complementary, we will present qualitative data that contribute to understanding the meaning of these practices, produced in other research developed within the framework of the Communication and Citizenship Studies Program.

BACKGROUND AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Approaches to youth and cultural consumption have a long tradition in Latin American communication studies. Alongside peer groups and the creation of a distinct style, these consumption practices play a central role in the construction of identity (Reguillo, 2012). The ways of “being young” are shaped through relationships with symbolic goods and specific cultural products, which also define different modes of public visibility. In this context, the different modes of recognition, sociality, and significance around youth lives are built in connection with communication and information technologies (Reguillo, 2000).

In the 1980s, the emergence of studies about youth coincided with the development and consolidation of cultural consumption studies. In Argentina, the latter emerged after the democratic transition to guide the development of cultural policies (Grillo et al., 2016). At the same time, research on youth advanced within the framework of accelerated transformations and the proliferation of information and communication technologies. In this context, examining the centrality of cultural consumption in youth identity construction, within a scenario marked by the intensification of mediatization processes (Silverstone, 2004), requires acknowledging how cultural production is

structured through a highly concentrated technical framework in terms of ownership and content creation.

In social science debates on the category of youth, heterogeneity, complexity, and multiplicity in the ways of being young become central to its definition once the linear association with the sole variable of age is set aside. Additionally, the conflicts and ambiguities in the relationship with traditional institutions intersect with class, socioeconomic, gender, ethnic, and territorial factors (Feixa, 1998). Specifically, belonging within a given generation provides insight into a social and cultural condition organized around age. This generational dimension enables the exploration of this differentiated experience around a shared memory, where social, ethical, political, expressive, and aesthetic dimensions are intertwined (Reguillo, 2012), along with group affiliations and the creation of a distinct style (Feixa, 1998).

We define cultural consumption as the set of social practices through which meanings are constructed around life by using and appropriating symbolic goods (García Canclini, 1999; Mata, 2001). These practices, in turn, establish a system of relationships with other cultural practices, forming logics of social and symbolic differentiation in the process of appropriation (Mata, 2001).

These consumption practices, which link media contexts with local, national, and international symbolic propositions, shape the construction of audiences in relation to specific histories and traditions. Contemporary cultural production logics present certain characteristics that intensify mediatization trends, as described by Hepp (2022) in the concept of “deep mediatization”. The dimensions referenced by this concept, related to the reorganization of experience and mediated interaction modalities, the relationship with time and space, the ontological status of reality (Sodré, 1998), forms of sociality and community, and hegemonic forms of public visibility (Córdoba, 2015), are all disrupted by the processes of digitization and convergence. The datafication of daily life deepens its performative capacity consumption practices, through the massive extraction of data linked to the everyday fabric, which is carried out via digital devices (Morales, 2020).

Communication and information technologies, as articulators of the processes of signification, accompany the late-modern tendencies towards fragmentation, privatization of life and the tendency towards the dissolution of traditional social anchors, strengthening individuation processes. This complicates the possibilities of common representation, while also redefining the architecture of the public space. The different dynamics of audience segmentation promoted by the market also produce forms of consumption and interaction concentrated within these segmentations and tensions between the shared spaces of representation and public debate.

There is a wide predominance of research on cultural consumption of young people related to the transformations produced by the processes of digitization of culture: the texts produced by Balardini (2002) and Morduchowicz (2008), among others, address the centrality of digitization processes in the consumption and production of youth sociality. The vast literature on the relationship between young people and audiences tends to focus on the way in which digitization processes are linked to youth practices (Car & Ader, 2021; Morduchowicz, 2022), with emphasis on informative practices (Albarello et al., 2016; Hidalgo Toledo & Ramírez Alvarado, 2021). In this line, Mitchelstein and Boczkowski (2018) recognize in the youth population of high socioeconomic sectors the greater preponderance of incidental news consumption, explained by the access to connectivity and devices that allow ubiquitous consumption, as well as by informative practices focused on personal ties and interaction in networks. They also analyze this relationship in specific groups and communities such as groups of indigenous youth or university students (Chaparro-Hurtado & Guzmán-Ariza, 2017; Villamil Guzmán & Hurtado Torres, 2019). Finally, some address this relationship in times of crisis, such as the Covid-19 pandemic (Heram & Dagatti, 2022).

However, the focus on the transformations linked to the digital somehow prevents the recognition of the ways in which traditional consumption structures and organizes modern practices (Morales & Iglesias, 2024). In opposition to this, Martín-Barbero's (2017) proposal, which postulates that youth consumption is articulated between palimpsest and hypertext, emphasizes the different ways in which

consumption traditions are updated in the context of the exponential multiplication of the discursive production of society, as a framework for new cultural practices. This perspective allows us to investigate the diverse articulations between analog and digital consumption without assuming that is simply due to the shift between technologies.

There are different public measurements of cultural consumption with information on this age group in different countries. In Argentina, cultural consumption surveys of the National System of Cultural Consumption were conducted between 2005 and 2008. Since 2013, three national surveys, every five years, have been conducted by the Cultural Information System of Argentina. These surveys provide structural data on media consumption, among other consumptions, at national level and disaggregated by regions that allow reading some general trends (Grillo et al., 2016). In terms of public policies oriented to the audiovisual, the experience of the “Technological Audiovisual Hub” program developed research on consumption and audiences in different cities around the country (Córdoba & Morales, 2021). More recently, these studies have been developed in some universities at Buenos Aires suburbs and some have been conducted in partnership with public (Monje & Mercadal, 2018) and community media (Kejval & Ávila Huidobro, 2017; Morales & Iglesias, 2024; Segura et al., 2018).

METHODOLOGY

A multiple strategy was developed to analyze youth cultural consumption. Secondary data provided by Argentina’s National System of Cultural Consumption was used, including a historical series that standardizes the databases from the surveys conducted in 2013, 2017, and 2022. Additionally, data from the 2017 and 2022 editions was used to identify information that cannot be tracked in the historical series but is considered relevant for this discussion. While we affirm that the concepts surrounding youth exceed the age marker used for statistical purposes, we focus on the groups aged 13 to 17 and those aged 18 to 29 to identify two distinct life stages. The first is still associated with compulsory education, while the second is associated with a much more diverse experience, evidencing the various modalities in which this life

phase is expressed. Although we acknowledge that this single variable does not encompass the multiplicity of ways of being young, we believe it provides valuable insight into the generational significance of this category.

Subsequently, we revisited a series of studies on audiovisual consumption and audiences that focused on youth. Each study considered dimensions such as audiovisual consumption practices, evaluations, and expectations related to these practices. The data was collected from six focus groups composed of young individuals aged 18 to 24 from various Argentinian cities as part of different projects (two in Quilmes, Buenos Aires province; two in Córdoba; one in Cosquín, and one in Unquillo, both in Córdoba province). This qualitative data served as the basis to understand the quantitative data cited in other publications. While it is not possible to consider that this data has national coverage, its diversity enables us to identify certain regularities that enhance our understanding of the quantitative findings.

Transformations in youth consumption

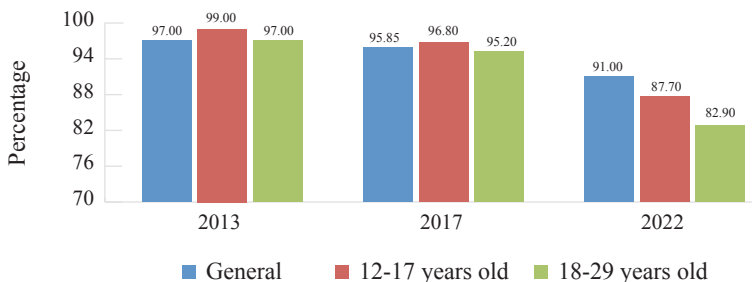
In this section, we will present data that illustrate the transformations in youth cultural consumption, consistently comparing them with the general transformations of these practices to identify their particularities where they exist.

In relation to television, we note that there has been a decrease of 6% among those who consume it in the last ten years. However, if we analyze the group between 13 and 17 years of age, the decrease is 11.1%; and in the group between 18 and 29 years of age it is even greater, 14.1%.

In Figure 2, we observe which genres are consumed on television. First, we can recognize that the predominant use of television is informative, a genre consumed by 70% of the population. However, in the group between 13 and 17 years of age this use decreases to 46.1% and in the group between 18 and 29 years of age it decreases to 62.9%.

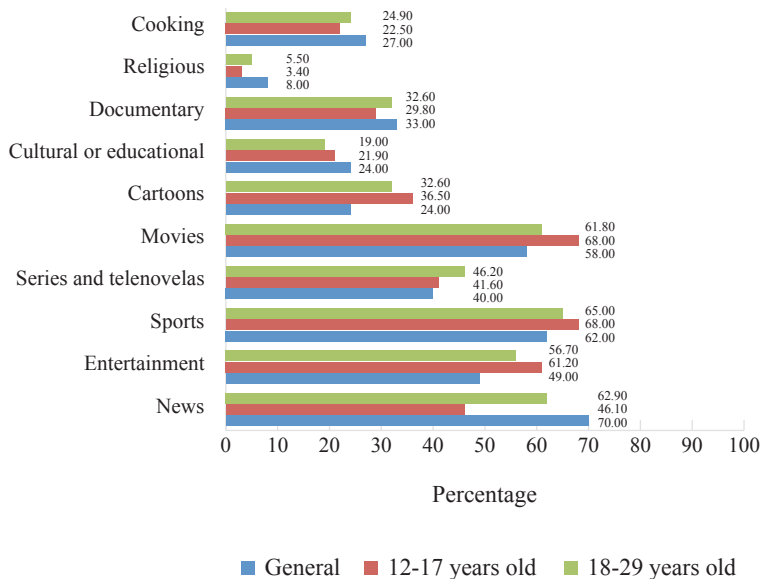
Various qualitative studies demonstrate how television news programs serve as mechanisms for the hierarchization and legitimization of information amidst the vast volume of available content (Calzado et al., 2021; Romero, 2020). Additionally, there is a widespread

FIGURE 1
TV CONSUMPTION



Source: The author based on SINCA (2023).

FIGURE 2
GENRES CONSUMED ON TV



Source: The author based on SINCA (2022).

perception of a repetitive news agenda focused on a limited number of topics (Doyle et al., 2021). The ubiquity of the same information across various media, often beyond the desire to consume it, creates a sense of overwhelm. Specifically, for young audiences, the television news environment is experienced as repetitive and often violent due to the topics covered, the representations employed, and the dynamics of exchanges, debates, and conversations among those who produce television. This informational landscape, which is not only deeply politically polarized, but is also perceived as constructed in hostile terms (Doyle et al., 2021; Focás, 2021; Morales & Iglesias, 2024). From this, different informative practices result from these facts among young people: those who reject television information due to the grammar already mentioned, and make of this rejection a criterion of generational distinction; while for others, television information has a hierarchical and ordering function, similar to what happens with other age groups (Doyle et al., 2021).

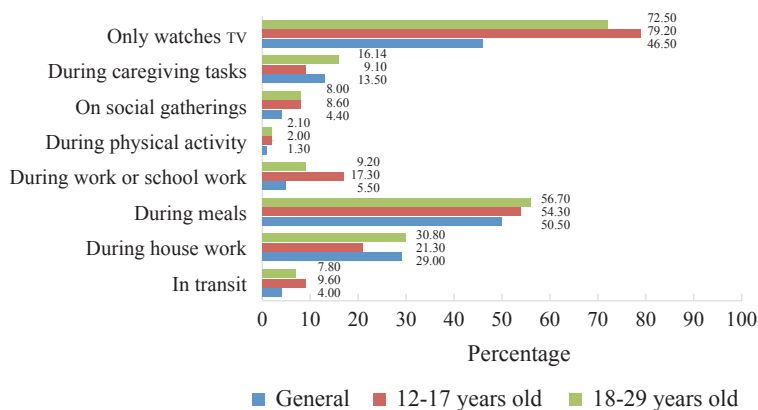
Furthermore, we note that the consumption of fiction on television maintains significant audience levels. In this context, we can affirm that television continues to serve as a key organizer of non-informative consumption, even among younger viewers: movie consumption reaches 58% of respondents, rising to 68% among those aged 13 to 17, and to 61.3% among those aged 18 to 29. Meanwhile, the consumption of series and telenovelas on television accounts for 40% of total respondents, reaching 41.4% and 46% in our target groups. Notably, in contrast to linear narratives suggesting a shift towards digital platform-centric fiction consumption, television continues to be a central medium for accessing fiction genres.

Movies (68%) and sports (68%) are the most consumed genres on television by the group aged 13 to 17. Meanwhile, news (62.9%) and movies (61.8%) are the most consumed genres among those aged 18 to 29.

Digitization processes have made possible specific transformations in the locations, timing, and rituals of usage that are expressed differently in television consumption modalities, related to both daily routines and opportunities enabled by new communication and information technologies. In this context, the 2022 survey indicates that

those who watch television without multitasking are primarily from the youngest age group. Moreover, family traditions linked to consumption during lunch or dinner –often moments of gathering– exhibit similar percentages across all age groups.

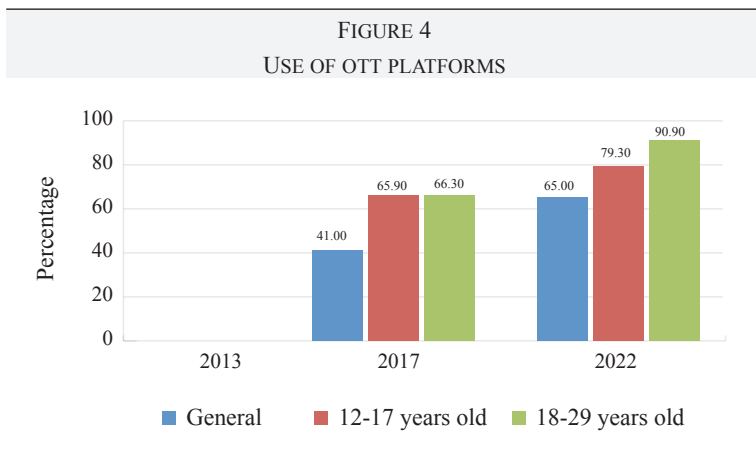
FIGURE 3
SIMULTANEOUS TV CONSUMPTION



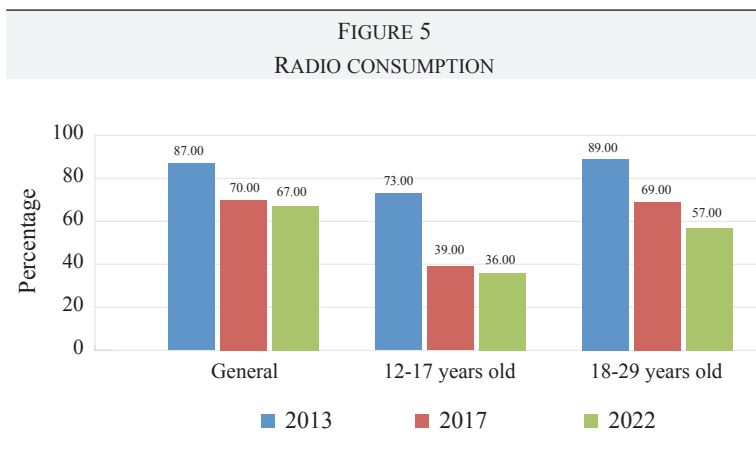
Source: The author based on SINCA (2022).

Audiovisual consumption via on-demand platforms accounts for 65% of the population and has experienced a growth of 24% over the past five years. Notably, the highest growth (24.6%) is among those aged 18 to 29.

Radio remains as the other analog audiovisual medium deeply rooted in our communities. As illustrated in Figure 5, radio listening has declined by 20% over the past decade, in particular between 2013 and 2017, a period marked by significant growth in Internet connectivity via mobile phones. The largest decline is observed in the 13 to 17 age group, with a drop of 39%, of which 34% occurred during the aforementioned period. In the 18-29 age group, the drop is 29% over the last 10 years, 10% less than the youngest group. However, the trend follows the same structure as the overall drop.



Source: The author based on SINCA (2017, 2022).



Source: The author based on SINCA (2023).

Various qualitative studies reveal different types of listening and relationships with the radio. One type is associated with family consumption at home or in the car, where the stations tuned in are typically those chosen by adults. In this context, listeners recognize that radio facilitates family conversations and shared rituals. Even if young

people do not select the station themselves, they identify as listeners and have distinct preferences for music and information formats. Moreover, they acknowledge that the practice of listening to the radio helps organize family relationships and routines, establishing a certain temporality in daily life through its programming.

The listening experience characterized by a personal connection to the radio represents a form of individual consumption that encompasses two nonexclusive modalities. On the one hand, it accompanies daily routines and organization through programming, defining rhythms and moods while also establishing a current affairs agenda that organizes external activities. On the other hand, radio contributes to the construction of a distinct temporal space within daily life –whether at home, in institutional settings, or while traveling– a time and space perceived as welcoming amidst hostility. This personal time and space, shaped by radio listening, integrates live broadcasts with podcast-style content: “The individualization of listening disrupts time and space: radio presents an opportunity to create a new ‘space’ beyond the environments where these young people find themselves” (Morales & Iglesias, 2024, p. 17).

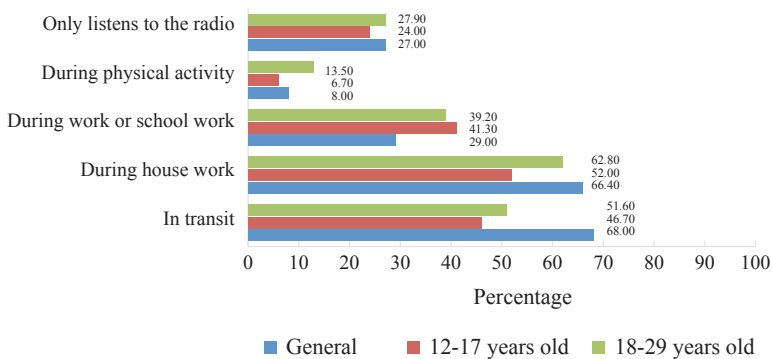
Overall, radio is perceived as an adult medium. The practice of listening is viewed as an adult activity, and those who produce radio content, particularly for younger audiences, do not offer anything that interests them. The informational modalities, the interactions, and the voices, all of them suggest to youth that radio is primarily a medium for adults (Morales & Iglesias, 2024).

For these young individuals, if radio functions as part of the adult world, they may be attracted to proposals that differ in both sound and adult-centric perspectives. Conversely, considering our earlier characterization of the informational landscape, young people perceive that radio offers a less strident logic and a more approachable informational dynamic that enables them to connect with current media affairs (Morales & Iglesias, 2024).

Radio, as companionship, is often listened to while performing other tasks, a fact that can be linked to the particularities of the different stages of life. In the 2022 survey, we can observe certain similarities between general listening and the group between 18 and 29 years of

age, since listening while traveling or while performing household activities reach similar percentages. While listening during work or study concentrates higher percentages in the younger group, it is the age group with the lowest levels of exclusive listening of radio.

FIGURE 6
SIMULTANEOUS RADIO LISTENING



Source: The author based on SINCA (2022).

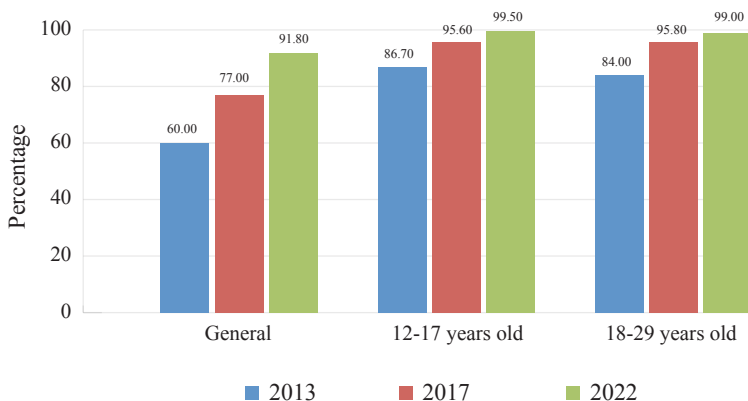
Consumption of radio via the Internet has experienced a steady growth over the past decade: among those aged 13 to 17, it increased from 58% to 77%, while it rose from 52% to 81% in those aged 18 to 29. The 2022 survey provides a data point beyond the historical series: podcast consumption (on-demand audio content available digitally) now accounts for 13% of the population. The age group with the highest consumption of this type of content is that aged 18 to 29, with 23% engaging with it. Within the youngest group, 16% listen to podcasts.

The relationship with radio is primarily defined by the musical offerings (SINCA, 2013, 2017). These contents have shaped audience segmentation processes for FM stations, which, in the context of digitalization, seem to expand into a myriad of musical platforms. Notably, for young audiences, this does not present a strict dichotomy, as there is a clear differentiation in expectations regarding the

possibilities each technology provides: radio can serve as a space for connection, fostering recognition and community, while also introducing musical novelties that exist outside the algorithmic logic often dictated by repetition. Additionally, traditional radio and programming have the potential to surprise and create experiences that go beyond specific work or travel contexts (Morales & Iglesias, 2024).

Understanding the dynamics of media consumption associated with scenarios characterized by convergence processes –that is, the transformations in consumption practices related to digitalization, which allow audiovisual communication services traditionally offered on analog platforms to be accessed via digital platforms– introduces new complexities for empirical examination. This transformation in consumption practices is primarily influenced by Internet usage. As illustrated in Figure 7, there has been a sustained increase, reaching 91.8% of the population in 2022. Over the past decade, Internet usage has risen by 30%. Notably, access to the Internet is higher and nearly universal among younger age groups.

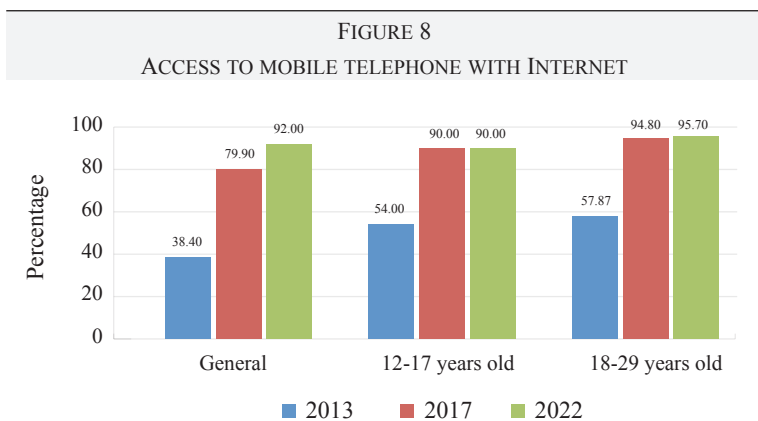
FIGURE 7
INTERNET USE



Source: The author based on SINCA (2023).

Quality is an indicator of Internet access, defined as a continuously available high-capacity connection (capable of transmitting voice, data, images, and videos). This type of connection is accessed via broadband or satellite: from 2013 to 2022, such connections grew from 65 % to 75 % in the households of respondents within the relevant age groups.

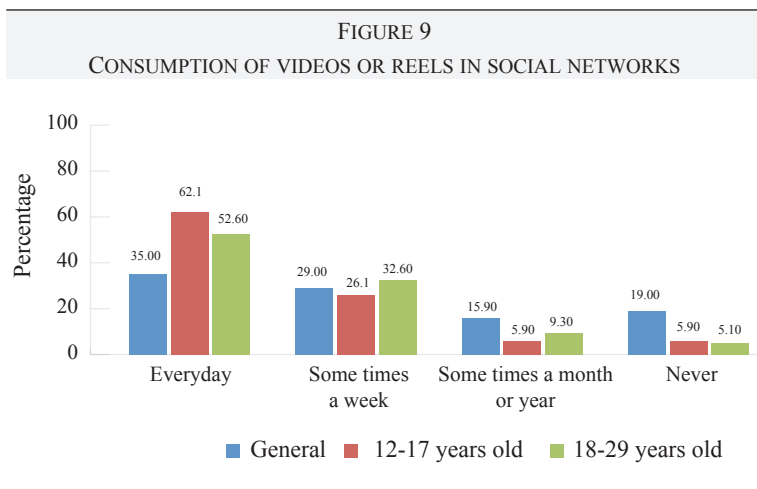
However, the intensification of individualization in audiovisual consumption is largely driven by access to mobile phones with Internet connectivity. In this context, we note that there has been substantial growth in access to these devices overall; however, within the age groups we focus on, this increase predominantly took place during the 2013-2017 period, with no significant changes observed in the past five years. This also suggests that substantial transformations in access to connected phones have occurred among other age groups.



Source: The author based on SINCA (2023).

The increase in social media penetration across all age groups is a significant factor in the transformations of cultural consumption. In previous articles, we have highlighted the challenges of capturing which audiovisual content is consumed on social media (Morales, 2020). In this context, the 2022 survey examines the consumption of other types of audiovisual content available exclusively on platforms and social media.

In relation to videos or *reels* (short videos produced exclusively for social media), we find that this is a widely adopted practice: 80% of the population watches them. The youngest age group watches those most frequently. The difference with the 18 to 29 age group pertains to frequency, as daily engagement with this practice declines among this demographic.

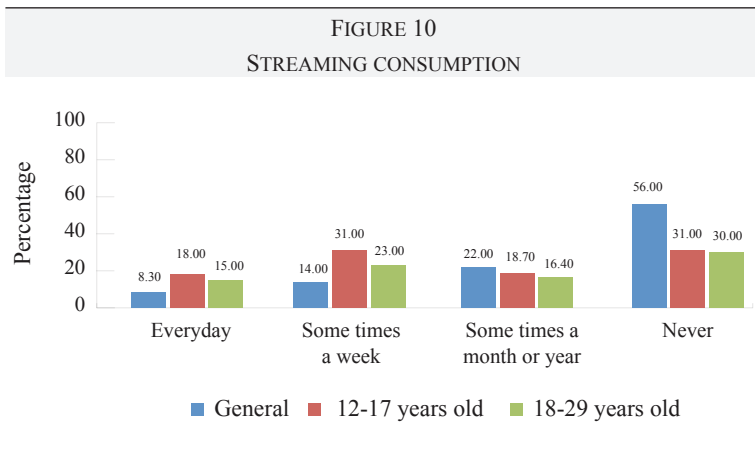


Source: The author based on SINCA (2022).

Streaming is a type and format of audiovisual content that is consumed by 44% of the population. Among the age groups we are interested in, this practice reaches 70% without significant differences in consumption frequency.

A CLOSING THAT OPENS UP NEW QUESTIONS

At the outset of this paper, we intended to highlight the tension between youth and novelty, as well as the anticipation of future trends in the distinct features of youth audiovisual consumption. We emphasized the need of recognizing a differentiated cultural experience that cannot be understood solely through the lens of the relationship with digital technologies. We understand that consumption traditions and



Source: The author based on SINCA (2022).

the performative aspects of the meaning of being young, influenced by the infocommunication market, enrich the analysis of the specific configurations of youth audiences. Thus, the metaphor of tension between palimpsest and hypertext becomes our guiding framework for exploring these transformations.

The analysis of transformations in youth consumption practices enables us to emphasize the resilience and structuring role of traditional media over alternative forms of consumption. Qualitative research indicates that the shift between analog and digital media, particularly social networks, better represents a displacement of technologies and devices rather than of enunciators. The same key actors of the infocommunication market expand their hegemony to social networks (Martínez Luque & Morales, 2020; Romero, 2020). In this context, the algorithmic performativity of digital devices, and its logic of segmentation, serves as a new layer through which the infocommunication market organizes consumption practices, simultaneously expanding the aspects of daily life that become subjects of merchandising. In any case, we can identify diverse modes of articulation between analog and digital media concerning the different expectations and valuations regarding the opportunities each provides.

Moreover, the decline in traditional media consumption among young people is driven by the availability of technologies that facilitate greater individualization and a spatial-temporal disconnection from programming. It is also essential to recognize that traditional media do not appear to offer content relevant for young audiences, both in terms of the topics covered and the interpretive frameworks surrounding them, along with the absence of young voices and perspectives on these platforms. This lack of engagement has led to the emergence of new dynamics in the construction of digital audiences. Consuming products associated with traditional audiovisual media no longer serves as an identity resource for these young individuals, who see a generational distinction in their connection to these media.

There is a pressing need for deeper analyses focused on understanding other variables on the relationship with audiovisual cultural products, such as gender and socioeconomic factors, as potential research lines using the available data. However, in light of the dominance of analyses focused on specific youth communities, examining the generational divide offers valuable insights into the commonalities of this shared experience.

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