

INTRODUCTION

Today’s college students are growing up in a media environment shaped by smartphones, algorithms, and fast-moving content. Generation Z are turning to platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube for news—but do they trust what they see?



Previous research shows that Gen Z often consumes news incidentally—meaning they come across it while doing other things online (Boczkowski et al., 2017). At the same time, trust in media, especially on social platforms, is low (Kalogeropoulos et al., 2019), and digital literacy skills like source verification are inconsistent (Gün Tosik et al., 2023). This study seeks to understand these trends locally through a student-centered lens.

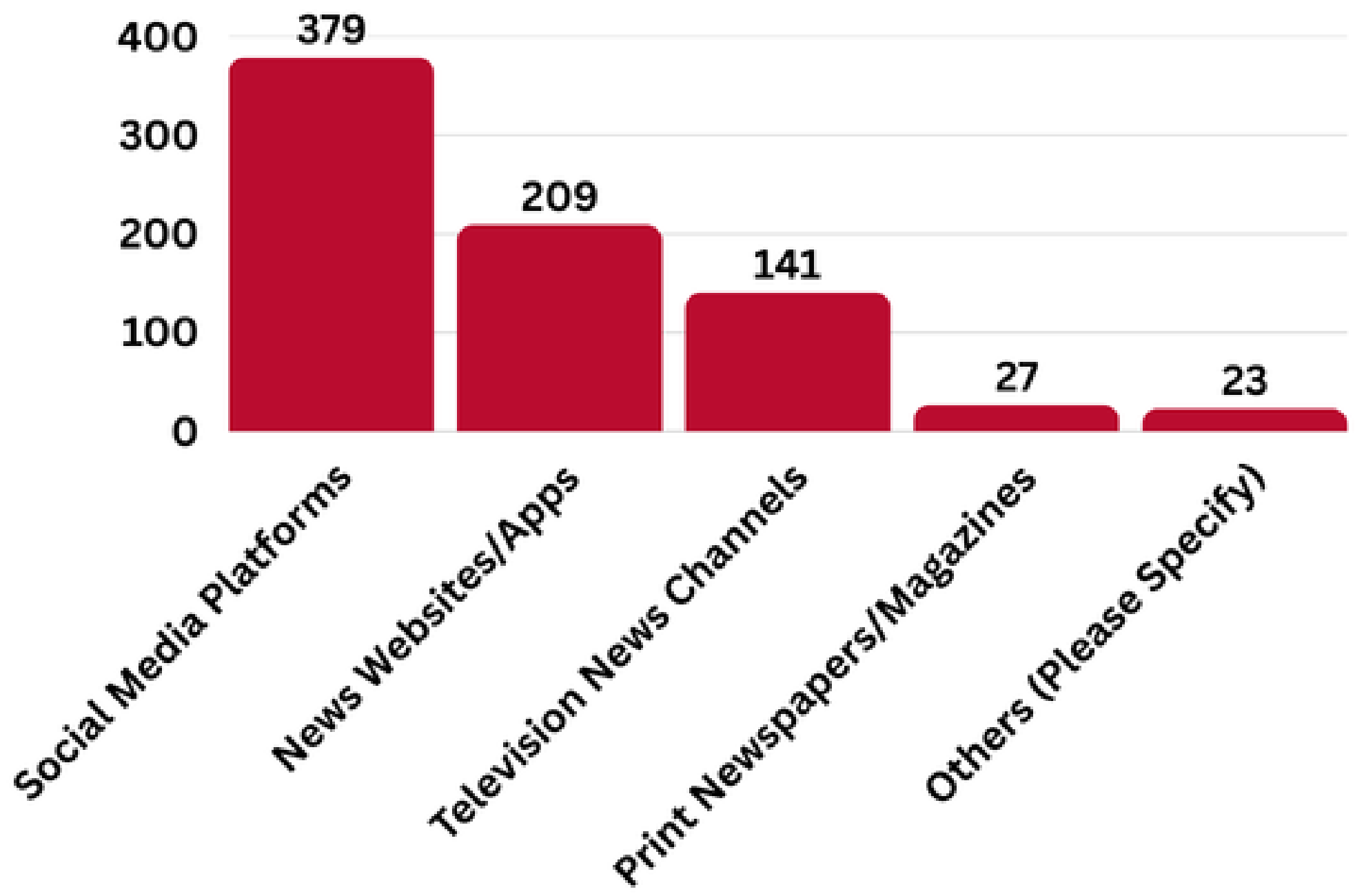
METHODS

- **Research Focus:** Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) explores how students choose media platforms to fulfill needs (e.g., staying informed, social connection, self-expression).
- **Key Concept:** UGT suggests that media users make intentional platform choices based on desired outcomes
- **Survey Overview:**
 - Launched Fall 2024-May 2025, IRB-approved, targeting UNM undergraduates
 - Distributed via emails, student groups, and social media
 - 27-question survey (multiple choice, scaled, and short-answer)
 - Collects both quantitative and qualitative data
- **Participants:** Over 400 students, mostly aged 18-25, from diverse majors and backgrounds
- **Survey Topics:** Media habits, platform preferences, and trust in news sources
- **Research Goals:**
 - Investigate intersections of age, ethnicity, major, year in school, and media habits.
 - Understand how students assess media credibility in a digital-first news environment.

RESULTS

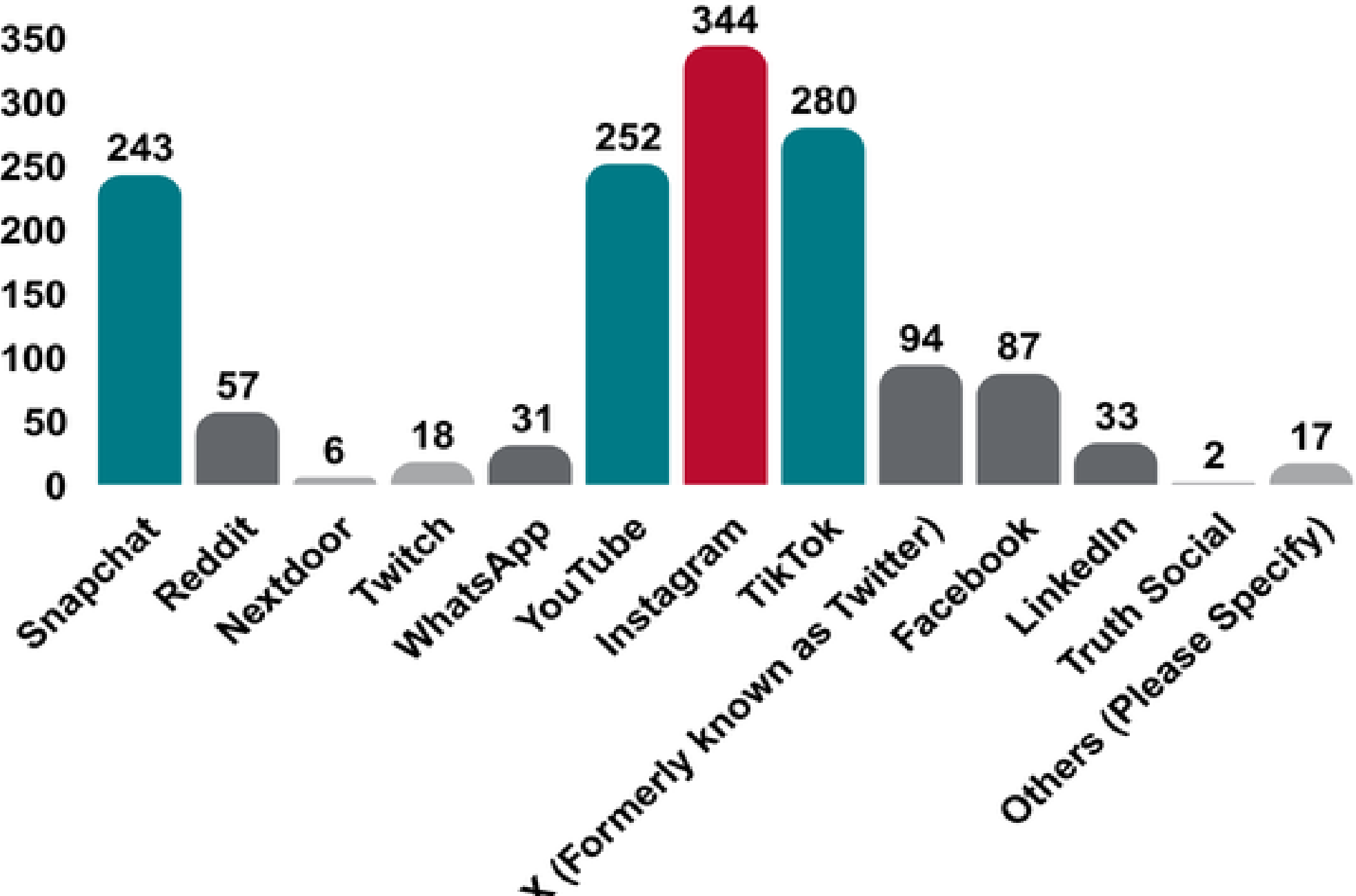
Where do students get their news?

This shows that social media is the most common source of news, followed by news apps and TV.



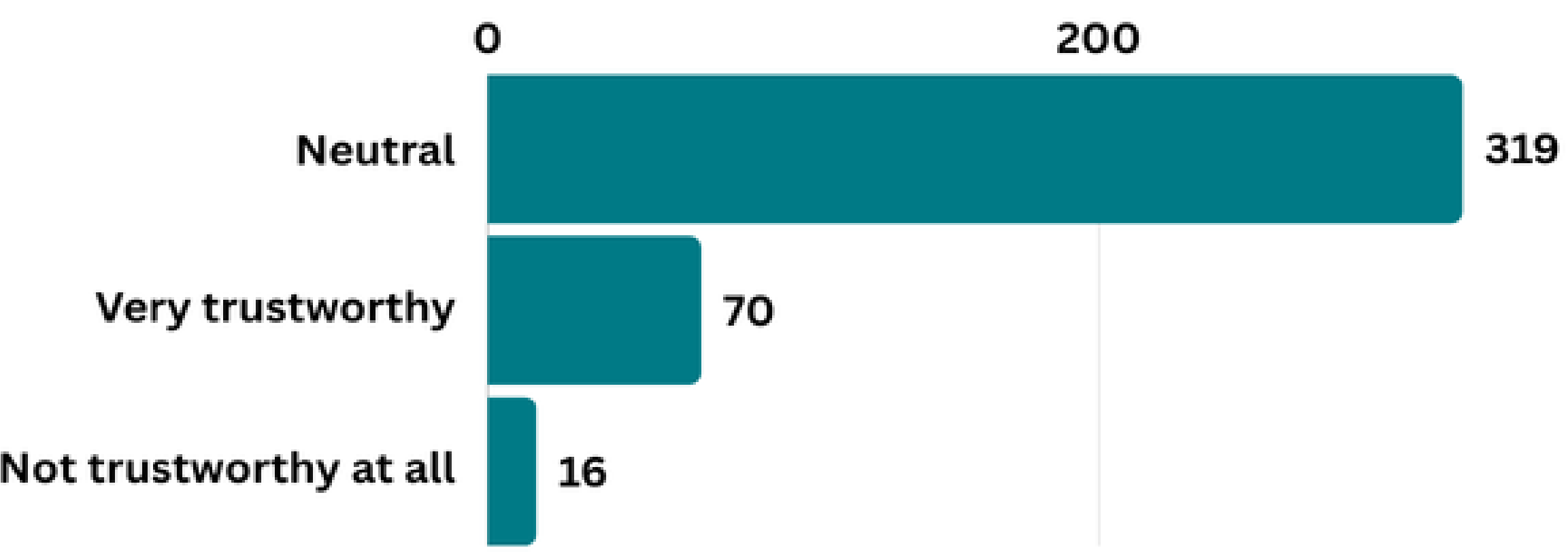
What social media platforms do they use?

This reveals that platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok are the most frequently used.



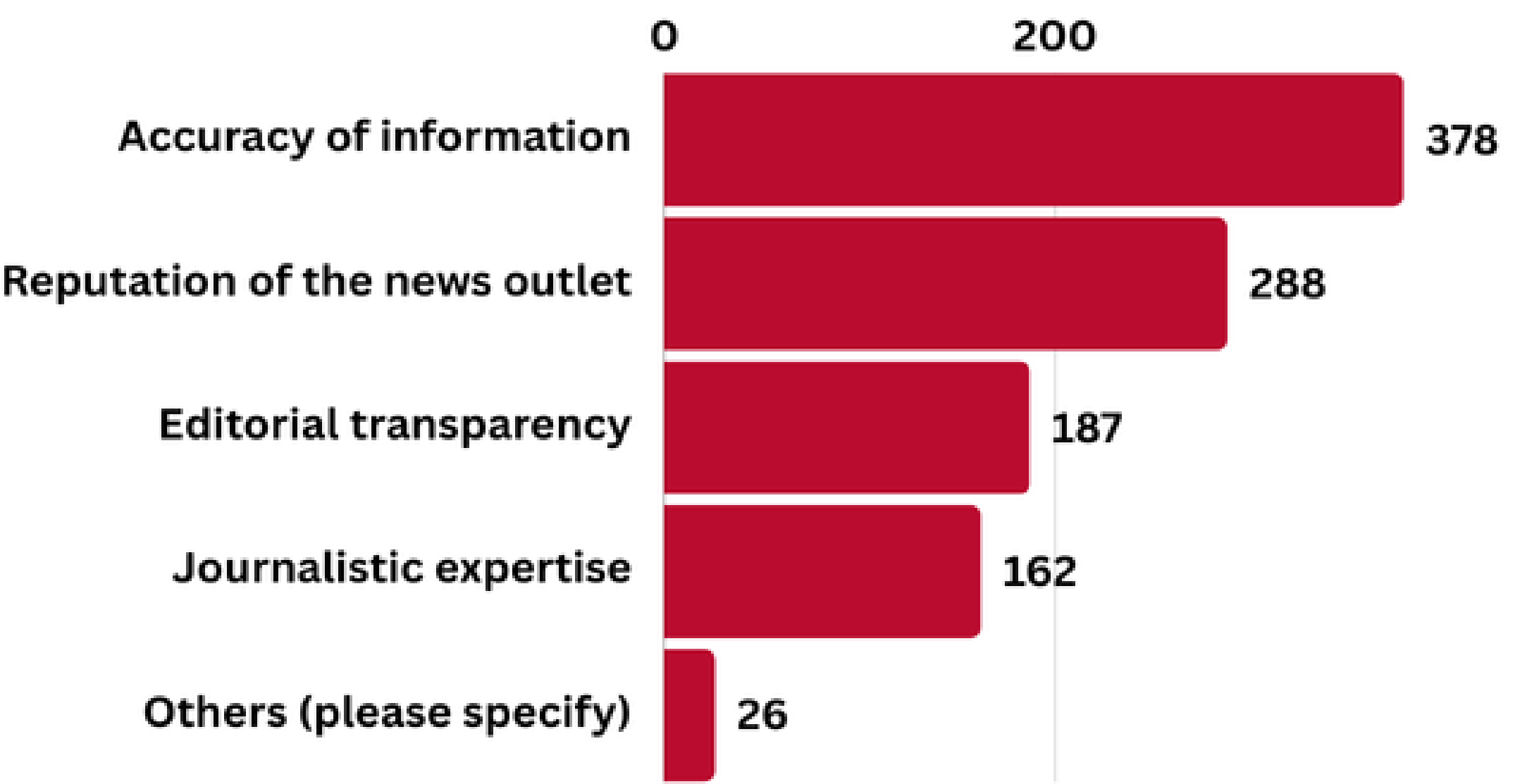
How trustworthy do they find their news sources?

This illustrates that most students feel **neutral** about the trustworthiness of their news sources, with only a small percentage reporting high or low trust.



What factors influence their trust in news?

This identifies the top factors influencing trust: **accuracy of information and outlet reputation**.



FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This project opens the door for deeper research into how undergraduates engage with and trust news. As more responses come in, we will analyze how demographics like age, major, and ethnicity relate to media use and trust. We’ll also explore how other survey questions correlate—for example, how platform usage, frequency of news exposure, and time spent on articles influence trust levels.

In the next phase, I’ll look more closely at factors like platform design, bias perception, and peer influence to understand what shapes trust in news sources for this generation. These insights can help inform media literacy efforts and guide further research on digital news engagement among college students.

REFERENCES

1. Boczkowski, P. et al. (2017). Incidental News: How Young People Consume News on Social Media. *Hawai’i International Conference on System Sciences*
2. Kalogeropoulos, A. et al. (2019). *International Journal of Communication*. 13, 3672-3693.
3. Gün Tosik, E. et al. (2023). *Journal of Learning and Teaching in a Digital Age*. 8(2) 169-175.

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