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Short-Form Video Journalism and the Changing Dynamics of News Consumption: A Systematic Review of Audience, Algorithmic, and News Production Studies

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Abstract

Short-form video platforms such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts are becoming important spaces for news, especially among younger audiences. This study reviews how short-form video journalism is changing the way people find, watch, understand, and respond to news. A focused systematic literature review was conducted using 20 empirical studies published online or in print between January 2021 and 30 November 2025. The studies were examined through descriptive mapping and thematic synthesis. The review covered audience behaviour, algorithmic news exposure, attention, trust, engagement, storytelling practices, and newsroom adaptation. The findings show that short-form video makes news faster, more visual, and easier to discover. It can reach people who do not regularly visit news websites or watch traditional

news. However, the format may also reduce context, encourage fragmented consumption, and make it harder for some users to move from a brief clip to detailed reporting. Trust remains a concern because professional journalism appears beside entertainment, opinion, influencer content, and unverified information. Journalists are using captions, direct presentation, music, emotion, and platform-specific editing to attract audiences, while still trying to protect accuracy and credibility. TikTok received much more research attention than Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts, showing a clear platform gap. Overall, short-form video offers useful opportunities for journalism, but it should support rather than replace detailed reporting. News organisations need to balance speed, creativity, engagement, accuracy, context, and source transparency.

Keywords: Short-Form Video Journalism, TikTok, Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts, News Consumption

1. Introduction

The way people receive news has changed greatly with the growth of social media. Many users, especially younger people, now meet news while scrolling through platforms that are mainly used for entertainment and social interaction. TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts have made brief vertical videos a common part of everyday media use. In these spaces, news appears beside comedy, lifestyle content, advertisements, and influencer posts. This makes news easier to access, but it also means that journalism must compete for attention in a fast, personalised, and highly visual environment.

Short-form video journalism refers to news and public information presented through brief, mobile-friendly videos. These videos often use captions, graphics, music, quick editing, hashtags, and direct-to-camera explanation. News organisations have learned that content made for these platforms cannot simply copy a television report or a website article. It needs to fit the technical features and audience expectations of each platform. Research shows that news outlets adapt their topic selection, visual style, and level of interaction across Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and other platforms (Hase *et al.*, 2023) [6]. Studies also show that many publishers now create news specifically for Instagram and TikTok rather than using them only to direct users to external websites (Hendrickx & Vázquez-Herrero, 2024; Vázquez-Herrero *et al.*, 2022) [9, 22].

These platforms also change how audiences come across news. Traditional news use is often intentional, such as opening a news website or watching a scheduled bulletin. On Instagram and TikTok, users may see news without actively searching for it. Young adults often value this news because it is quick, visual, and easy to understand. However, their expectations are not

the same on every platform. TikTok news may be seen as more informal, emotional, and entertaining, while Instagram may be viewed as more suitable for explanation and background information (Hendrickx, 2025b) ^[8]. This suggests that platform design and culture influence how users judge news and how much attention they give to it.

Short-form news can help people discover current events, especially those who do not regularly follow traditional media. At the same time, there are concerns about attention and deeper understanding. In an eye-tracking study, participants who browsed TikTok before reading news articles showed lower sustained attention, particularly when they were not frequent news users (Cole *et al.*, 2025) ^[4]. Algorithms also shape news exposure. Although personalised feeds can introduce users to stories by chance, TikTok does not always recommend a large or varied amount of news, even when users show interest in it (Hagar & Diakopoulos, 2025) ^[5]. As a result, the news people see may depend heavily on platform systems that are designed mainly to maintain engagement.

Engagement features also affect the style of short-form news. Likes, comments, shares, and views encourage producers to create content that gains a quick reaction. Cheng and Li (2024) ^[2] found that negative emotion and direct second-person presentation were linked with stronger engagement in TikTok news videos. News organisations also mix information with entertaining elements to make stories suitable for Instagram and TikTok (Wirz & Zai, 2025) ^[23]. This can make news more attractive and easier to follow, but it may also reduce background information, source explanation, and context. Audience research shows that TikTok users still value accuracy, credibility, and useful information, even when they prefer an engaging style (Cheng *et al.*, 2025) ^[3]. Therefore, short-form journalism must balance attention-grabbing presentation with basic journalistic standards.

Research on short-form video journalism has grown quickly, but the evidence remains divided across different subjects. Some studies examine audience behaviour, while others focus on algorithms, engagement, storytelling, or newsroom practices. A review of TikTok information research found clear growth in the field, but also major differences in theories, methods, and topics (O'Brien *et al.*, 2025) ^[14]. TikTok has received much more academic attention than Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts. It is therefore difficult to understand the wider effect of short-form video journalism by looking at one platform or one outcome alone. To address this problem, the present study reviews literature published up to November 2025 on TikTok and Douyin, Instagram and Reels, YouTube Shorts, and relevant cross-platform settings. It brings together three connected areas: audience experiences and news-consumption outcomes, the role of algorithms in exposure and engagement, and the ways journalists and news organisations adapt their content and working practices. The review aims to identify the main findings, areas of agreement and disagreement, and important gaps for future research.

1.1 Objective of the Review

This systematic literature review aims to organise and explain existing research on short-form video journalism and changing patterns of news consumption. It focuses on audience experiences, algorithmic news exposure and engagement, and the adaptation of journalistic work to

short-form video platforms.

1.2 Research Questions

RQ1. How has short-form video journalism been studied across TikTok and Douyin, Instagram and Reels, YouTube Shorts, and related cross-platform environments?

RQ2. How does short-form video journalism influence news exposure, attention, engagement, trust, credibility, and audience consumption practices?

RQ3. How are news organisations and journalists adapting their content, routines, and professional roles to short-form video platforms?

RQ4. What theoretical, methodological, geographical, and platform-specific gaps remain in the existing literature?

2. Review Methodology

2.1 Review Design

This study used a focused systematic literature review to examine how short-form video is changing journalism and news consumption. A systematic review was suitable because the topic has been studied in different ways. Some studies focus on audiences, while others examine algorithms, news content, or newsroom practices. Bringing these studies together makes it easier to see the main findings, areas of agreement, and gaps in the existing research.

The review was guided by the PRISMA 2020 reporting principles, which support clear reporting of the search, screening, and study selection process (Page *et al.*, 2021) ^[15]. The search method was also organised with reference to PRISMA-S, which recommends that authors clearly report the sources, keywords, search dates, and record-management process used in a review (Rethlefsen *et al.*, 2021) ^[16]. The purpose was not to conduct a statistical meta-analysis. The selected studies used different research designs, samples, platforms, and outcome measures, so a descriptive summary and thematic synthesis were more appropriate.

2.2 Search Scope and Information Sources

The review included studies published online or in print from January 2021 to 30 November 2025. This period was selected because TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts became important parts of the social media environment during these years. The review focused on English-language research about short-form video journalism, news use, audience behaviour, algorithmic news exposure, and the adaptation of journalism to short-video platforms.

Relevant studies were identified through Google Scholar, Crossref and DOI searches, and direct searches of major publisher platforms. These included SAGE Journals, Taylor & Francis Online, MDPI, and the ACM Digital Library. Reference lists of closely related studies were also checked. The review applied a publication cutoff of 30 November 2025, and only studies available online or in print by that date were eligible. Publisher pages and DOI records were used to confirm article titles, author names, dates, journals, and publication status.

2.3 Search Terms

The search combined three groups of terms: platform and format terms, journalism and news terms, and audience or production terms. The main search string was adapted

slightly for each search source because the search functions were not identical.

("short-form video" OR "short video" OR "vertical video" OR TikTok OR Douyin OR "Instagram Reels" OR "YouTube Shorts" OR "Facebook Reels") AND (journalism OR news OR "news consumption" OR "digital news") AND (audience OR attention OR trust OR credibility OR engagement OR algorithm* OR newsroom OR journalist*). Separate searches were also carried out using platform-specific combinations, such as "TikTok news consumption," "Instagram Reels journalism," "YouTube Shorts news," "short-form video news attention," and "short-video journalism trust." This helped reduce the risk of missing studies that did not use the exact phrase short-form video in their titles or abstracts.

2.4 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies were selected using clear inclusion and exclusion criteria. The criteria were applied to the title, abstract, and available full text. Table 1 summarises the main rules used in the review.

Table 1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criterion	Included	Excluded
Publication period	Published online or in print from January 2021 to 30 November 2025	Published before 2021 or after 30 November 2025
Language	Written in English	Written in other languages without an English full text
Publication type	Peer-reviewed empirical journal articles; one peer-reviewed ACM conference paper was included because journalism research on YouTube Shorts was limited	News reports, opinion pieces, book reviews, theses, dissertations, non-peer-reviewed essays, or general web articles
Topic	Directly examined journalism, news, news consumption, news audiences, algorithmic news exposure, or news production on short-video platforms	Focused only on marketing, entertainment, health promotion, education, or influencer content without a clear news or journalism link
Platform	TikTok/Douyin, Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts, Facebook Reels, or a relevant cross-platform comparison	General social media studies that did not examine short-form video or did not provide platform-specific findings
Evidence	Reported a clear method, sample or dataset, and findings relevant to the review questions	Did not provide enough methodological or findings information for analysis

2.5 Study Selection Process

The first stage produced a focused working set of 30 potentially relevant papers. Titles and abstracts were checked against the eligibility criteria. Studies that were unrelated to journalism or news were removed. The remaining papers were examined in more detail by checking their objectives, methods, platforms, publication dates, and main findings. Papers that repeated very similar points, fell outside the November 2025 cutoff, or addressed a narrow issue outside the main review questions were not placed in the main synthesis.

After the relevance and date checks, 20 studies were selected for the main review. Ten other candidate papers

were not counted in the main evidence base because they were published after the cutoff, overlapped strongly with included studies, or were less directly connected to the research questions. Some of these papers were used only as background reading. Because the search sources did not provide one complete export file, the study-selection process is reported as a focused, transparent review rather than a claim that every paper in the field was located.

2.6 Data Extraction

A structured Excel sheet was prepared to organise the information taken from each included study. The same fields were used for all papers so that the studies could be compared in a consistent way. The extracted information included the author and year, country or research setting, platform, study objective, research method, sample or dataset, theoretical approach, main findings, limitations, and suggested areas for future research.

The findings were also coded according to the part of news consumption or journalism they addressed. These areas included news exposure, attention, recall, trust, credibility, audience engagement, algorithmic recommendation, infotainment, platform-specific storytelling, newsroom routines, and journalistic authority. When a study covered more than one area, it was coded under more than one category.

2.7 Quality Assessment

The selected studies used qualitative, quantitative, experimental, computational, and mixed-method designs. For this reason, quality was checked using simple criteria adapted from the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool. The MMAT is designed to assess different types of empirical research without forcing all studies into the same methodological standard (Hong *et al.*, 2018) ^[10].

Each paper was checked for five basic points: whether the research aim was clear, whether the chosen method matched the aim, whether the sample or dataset was explained, whether the analysis was suitable, and whether the conclusions were supported by the reported findings. The purpose of this step was not to produce a single quality score. Instead, it helped identify studies that needed more careful interpretation. A paper was not excluded only because it had a limitation, as long as the method and evidence were clear enough to answer one of the review questions.

2.8 Data Analysis and Thematic Synthesis

The analysis had two parts. First, descriptive information was summarised to show how the field has developed. This included the year of publication, platforms studied, geographical focus, research methods, sample types, and main areas of interest. This descriptive mapping was used to identify patterns, such as the strong concentration of research on TikTok and the smaller number of studies on Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts.

Second, the main findings of the papers were brought together through thematic synthesis. This method allows findings from different studies to be compared and grouped while keeping a clear link with the original evidence (Thomas & Harden, 2008) ^[19]. The process involved reading the findings of each paper, assigning short codes to important ideas, comparing similar codes, and grouping them into broader themes. Differences and conflicting

findings were also recorded instead of being removed. Six broad themes were developed from the final study set: (1) incidental and algorithmic news exposure; (2) attention, recall, and fragmented news consumption; (3) trust, credibility, and perceived news quality; (4) audience engagement and participation; (5) infotainment and platform-native storytelling; and (6) newsroom adaptation and journalistic authority. The themes were checked against the full-text findings, and overlapping ideas were combined where necessary.

2.9 Ethical Considerations

This review used information from published studies and did not collect personal data from human participants. Therefore, formal ethical approval was not required. However, care was taken to report the original studies accurately, cite all sources, and avoid presenting an author's conclusion without considering the method and context of the study.

3. Results

This section presents the main findings from the 20 studies included in the review. The results are organised in two stages. First, the section describes publication years, platform coverage, research focus, and study designs. Second, it brings together the findings under six themes that directly answer the research questions. The aim is not to describe each paper separately, but to show common patterns, differences, and gaps across the studies.

3.1 Study Selection

The final review included 20 empirical studies that were published online or in print between 2021 and 30 November 2025. Each study directly examined short-form video in relation to journalism, news consumption, audience behaviour, algorithmic exposure, news presentation, or newsroom practice. Ten other candidate papers were excluded from the main synthesis because they fell outside the date cutoff, repeated similar evidence, or were less directly relevant.

The selected studies covered different forms of evidence. Some examined audiences through interviews, surveys, experiments, diaries, or eye-tracking. Others analysed large collections of videos and posts, compared news formats across platforms, audited recommendation systems, or studied the work of journalists and social media editors inside newsrooms. This range of methods allowed the review to consider both the audience side and the production side of short-form video journalism.

3.2 Publication Trends

The publication pattern shows that research on short-form video journalism is very recent. One included study was published in 2021, two in 2022, one in 2023, and three in 2024. The number increased sharply in 2025, when 13 of the 20 studies were published by the end of November. This means that 65% of the included evidence appeared in 2025 alone. The rapid increase shows that short-form video journalism has moved from a small emerging topic to an active area of journalism research.

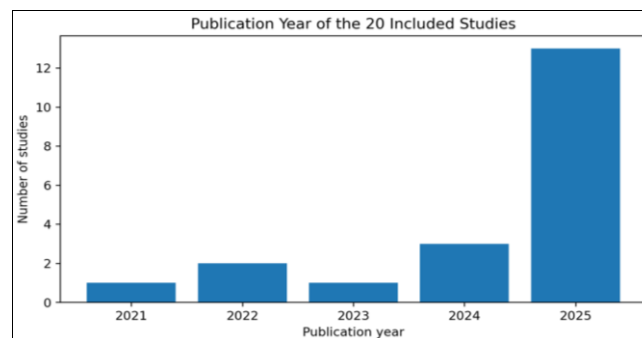


Fig 1: Publication Year of the 20 Included Studies

3.3 Platform Coverage

TikTok and its Chinese version, Douyin, dominated the literature. Twelve studies focused only on TikTok or Douyin. Three studies compared Instagram and TikTok, while two focused mainly on Instagram or Instagram Reels. One study examined YouTube Shorts, one discussed short-form video platforms more generally, and one compared Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter. Therefore, most of the evidence came from TikTok- or Douyin-only research.

This imbalance is important. The findings give a strong picture of TikTok journalism, but they cannot always be applied directly to Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts, or Facebook Reels. Each platform has a different recommendation system, interface, audience culture, and style of interaction. The small number of studies on Reels and Shorts is therefore a clear gap in the current literature.

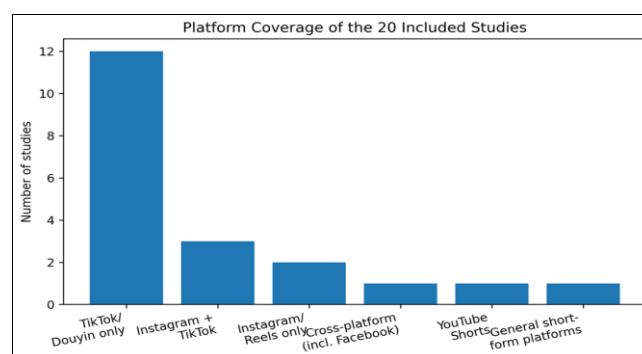


Fig 2: Platform Coverage of the 20 Included Studies

3.4 Research Focus and Study Designs

The 20 studies were grouped into three broad evidence areas. Six studies mainly focused on audiences and news consumption. These papers examined issues such as news encounters, attention, trust, credibility, and political engagement. Ten studies focused on news content, journalistic formats, and newsroom production. The remaining four studied algorithms, platform recommendations, news diversity, or broader engagement patterns.

The methodological pattern was diverse. Qualitative studies used interviews, walkthroughs, newsroom observation, and multimodal analysis. Quantitative studies used surveys, online experiments, eye-tracking, content analysis, computational methods, and algorithm audits. Several

studies worked with very large datasets. For example, Cheng and Li (2024) ^[2] analysed 101,292 TikTok news videos, Li and Shi (2025) ^[11] studied 92,895 Douyin videos, and Violot *et al.* (2024) ^[21] compared 9.9 million YouTube

Shorts with 6.9 million regular videos. Interview-based studies also provided detailed explanations of how young people judge and experience news on these platforms (Cheng *et al.*, 2025; Hendrickx, 2025b) ^[3, 8].

Table 2: Main Evidence Areas in the Included Studies

Evidence area	Number of studies	Main issues examined
Audience and news consumption	6	News encounters, attention, recall, trust, credibility, and political engagement
Content and news production	10	News values, infotainment, formats, platform adaptation, sourcing, and newsroom routines
Algorithms and platform dynamics	4	Recommendation systems, news exposure, diversity, engagement, and short-versus-long video differences

Table 3: Summary of the 20 Included Studies

	Platform(s)	Design or data	Main focus
Al-Rawi <i>et al.</i> (2021) ^[1]	Instagram	Content analysis and topic modelling; 123,683 items	International news values and audience preferences
Vázquez-Herrero <i>et al.</i> (2022) ^[22]	TikTok	Content analysis of 19 verified news profiles	How news media adapt to TikTok logic
Negreira-Rey <i>et al.</i> (2022) ^[13]	TikTok	Database, survey, and content analysis	Journalistic roles and TikToker-style practices
Hase <i>et al.</i> (2023) ^[6]	Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter	Multimodal analysis; 4,412 posts and 6,850 visuals	Cross-platform adaptation of news
Cheng & Li (2024) ^[2]	TikTok	Computational analysis; 101,292 videos	Sentiment, visual style, and engagement
Hendrickx & Vázquez-Herrero (2024) ^[9]	Instagram and TikTok	Content analysis; 458 posts in three countries	Platform-specific social media journalism
Violot <i>et al.</i> (2024) ^[21]	YouTube Shorts	Metadata analysis; 9.9M Shorts and 6.9M regular videos	Engagement and production differences
Cole <i>et al.</i> (2025) ^[4]	TikTok	Lab study and eye-tracking; N = 242	Attention to longer news reading
Cheng <i>et al.</i> (2025) ^[3]	TikTok	In-depth interviews; N = 23	Perceived quality, credibility, and engagement
Hagar & Diakopoulos (2025) ^[5]	TikTok	Algorithm audit with controlled accounts	Algorithmic recommendation of credible news
Hendrickx (2025b) ^[8]	Instagram and TikTok	Interviews and walkthroughs; N = 25	Young adults' news encounters and experiences
Hendrickx (2025a) ^[7]	TikTok	Digital methods; 26,473 videos from 91 outlets	Use of visual, hashtag, and audio affordances
Li & Shi (2025) ^[11]	Douyin	Computational analysis; 92,895 videos	News values and algorithmic engagement
Luginbühl (2025) ^[12]	Instagram and Reels	Multimodal genre analysis; 600 posts/reels	News genres and visual design
Shi & Li (2025) ^[17]	Douyin	Agent-based testing experiments	Personalisation and news diversity
Sparks & Hutchens (2025) ^[18]	TikTok	Online experiment; N = 325	Political news expectations and credibility
Verstappen & Opgenhaffen (2025) ^[20]	TikTok	Newsroom observation and interviews	Editorial decision-making and organisational pressure
Wirz & Zai (2025) ^[23]	Instagram and TikTok	Content analysis; 1,946 stories and 677 videos	Information, entertainment, and infotainment
Wu (2025) ^[24]	TikTok	Content analysis; 200 videos from 10 organisations	Traditional news norms and platform adaptation
Zhao <i>et al.</i> (2025) ^[25]	Short-form video platforms	Survey of U.S. voters; N = 781	Incidental political news and engagement

3.5 Overview of the Included Studies

Table 3 gives a short overview of the final evidence base. The table shows the platform, design or dataset, and the main issue examined in each study. This overview also shows why the review used thematic synthesis: the studies were different in method and scale, but many of them addressed related questions about exposure, attention, trust, engagement, and journalistic adaptation.

3.6 Thematic Findings

Six themes were identified across the studies. The themes are closely connected. For example, algorithmic exposure affects what audiences see, while platform design also influences attention, trust, engagement, and the way journalists prepare news. The themes are presented

separately to make the findings easier to understand.

3.6.1 Incidental and Algorithmic News Exposure

The first theme concerns how people come across news. Short-form platforms often place news inside an entertainment feed, so users may see it without actively searching for it. Hendrickx (2025b) ^[8] found that young adults commonly encountered news while scrolling through Instagram and TikTok. This made news easy to access, but the experience was usually brief and mixed with many other types of content. Zhao *et al.* (2025) ^[25] also showed that accidental political news encounters can lead to more active engagement when users feel a need or responsibility to remain informed.

However, incidental exposure is not guaranteed. Hagar and Diakopoulos (2025) ^[5] found that TikTok's recommendation

system offered very little credible news to controlled accounts, even after the accounts showed interest in news. Research on Douyin presents a more complex picture. Shi and Li (2025) ^[17] found that algorithmic recommendations could increase topic diversity in some situations, although strong user preferences could reduce the range of content shown. These findings show that short-form news exposure depends heavily on platform design, user signals, and choices made by recommendation systems. Direct evidence about news recommendation on Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts remained very limited within the cutoff period.

3.6.2 Attention, Recall, and Fragmented News Consumption

The second theme relates to attention and the depth of news use. Short videos are designed for quick viewing and continuous scrolling. This can make news easier to notice, but it may also encourage fragmented consumption. In an eye-tracking study, Cole *et al.* (2025) ^[4] found that participants who browsed TikTok before reading news articles were less likely to maintain attention on the articles. The effect was stronger among people who did not consume news frequently.

The evidence should still be interpreted carefully. One eye-tracking study cannot show that short-form video always damages attention. Qualitative research instead suggests that users expect information to be brief, clear, and connected to their interests. Hendrickx (2025b) ^[8] found that participants viewed TikTok as fast and playful, while Instagram was often considered more suitable for slower or more explanatory news. Cheng *et al.* (2025) ^[3] also found that users often treated TikTok as a starting point and searched elsewhere when they wanted more detail. The overall finding is therefore that short-form video changes the conditions under which attention is given and can make sustained news use more difficult in an endless feed.

3.6.3 Trust, Credibility, and Perceived News Quality

Trust remained important to audiences, even when news was presented in a casual and entertaining style. Cheng *et al.* (2025) ^[3] found that TikTok users valued accuracy, useful information, and credible sources. Many participants treated TikTok as a starting point and then looked for more information elsewhere. This suggests that short-form videos can introduce a topic, but users may not see them as complete sources of news.

Credibility was also linked to users' intentions. Sparks and Hutchens (2025) ^[18] found that people who intentionally looked for political news on TikTok showed stronger engagement and credibility judgements than users who used the platform more generally. At the content level, Wu (2025) ^[24] found that news organisations continued to use several traditional journalistic norms on TikTok, including objectivity and source transparency. However, many videos relied on one-sided presentation or a narrow range of official sources. These findings suggest that a platform-friendly style does not automatically remove journalistic standards, but it can reduce context and the range of voices presented.

3.6.4 Audience Engagement and Participation

The fourth theme shows that engagement on short-form platforms is strongly connected to emotion, style, and platform features. Cheng and Li (2024) ^[2] found that TikTok news videos with negative sentiment and a stronger second-person visual style received more likes, comments, and shares. Li and Shi (2025) ^[11] also found that news values

such as prominence, uniqueness, sentiment, and government agenda were related to engagement on Douyin. These results suggest that engagement is not based only on the importance of the event. It is also influenced by how the story is framed and presented.

Audience preferences differed from the priorities of news organisations. Al-Rawi *et al.* (2021) ^[1] found that Instagram audiences often preferred positive, general, and human-interest stories, while news outlets posted more political and negative content. On YouTube, Violot *et al.* (2024) ^[21] found that Shorts received more views and likes per view than regular videos, but fewer comments per view. This indicates that short videos can produce fast and visible reactions without always creating deeper discussion. Zhao *et al.* (2025) ^[25] nevertheless found that incidental political news can support information seeking and political engagement. Overall, short-form video appears effective in attracting quick participation, but likes, views, comments, and meaningful civic engagement should not be treated as the same outcome.

3.6.5 Infotainment and Platform-Native Storytelling

The fifth theme concerns the way news is reshaped for short-form platforms. News organisations use captions, music, direct speech, vertical video, informal presenters, humour, visual effects, and strong opening lines to hold attention. Vázquez-Herrero *et al.* (2022) ^[22] found that news outlets were adapting their work to TikTok's platform logic, especially to reach younger users and build their brands. Hendrickx and Vázquez-Herrero (2024) ^[9] also found clear use of platform-specific features across Instagram and TikTok, although news organisations still kept many familiar journalistic practices.

Infotainment was one of the most visible patterns. Wirz and Zai (2025) ^[23] found that news companies combined information and entertainment in different ways on Instagram and TikTok. Importantly, entertainment did not always replace information; some quality news outlets provided both. Luginbühl (2025) ^[12] identified several Instagram news genres, including headlines, news briefs, reports, and Reels, each with a different multimodal design. Hendrickx (2025a) ^[7] found that European news outlets made strong use of TikTok's visual and hashtag features but used audio features less consistently. Wu (2025) ^[24] also showed that TikTok news often kept traditional news topics while adding human-interest and shareable elements. These findings suggest that platform-native storytelling can make news more accessible, but very short and highly edited formats may reduce context or simplify complex issues.

3.6.6 Newsroom Adaptation and Journalistic Authority

The final theme focuses on the work of journalists and news organisations. Producing short-form news is not simply a matter of cutting a television report into a shorter clip. It requires new decisions about topic choice, presenter style, length, tone, sources, editing, and audience interaction. Verstappen and Opgenhaffen (2025) ^[20] found that TikTok editors had some editorial freedom, but their decisions were also shaped by newsroom expectations and the pressure to fit the platform. Negreira-Rey *et al.* (2022) ^[13] showed that journalists on TikTok combined traditional roles, such as informing the public, with entertainment and self-presentation.

The studies did not fully agree on how deeply journalism has changed. Hase *et al.* (2023) ^[6] found more evidence of technical adaptation than major changes in news content

across platforms. In contrast, Hendrickx and Vázquez-Herrero (2024) ^[9] identified clearer adaptation to platform features and audience expectations. Wu (2025) ^[24] found that traditional values such as objectivity and source transparency remained visible, but many TikTok stories used one-sided presentation and a narrow range of official sources. These findings show that short-form journalism creates a difficult balance: journalists need to appear personal, quick, and platform-friendly while also protecting accuracy, context, independence, and clear sourcing.

3.7 Summary of the Results

The results show that short-form video journalism is changing news consumption in several connected ways. It increases the chance that people, especially younger users, will meet news during everyday social media use. At the same time, exposure is strongly shaped by recommendation systems and can remain limited when platforms favour entertainment. Brief and continuous viewing may make the move to longer news more difficult for some users, while emotional presentation and direct address can increase visible engagement.

Audiences still value accuracy, credibility, and useful information, although they often use TikTok, Reels, or Shorts as an introduction to a story rather than a complete news source. News organisations are responding with platform-native storytelling, infotainment, informal presenters, and visually attractive formats. These approaches can make news more accessible, but they may also reduce context. The strong focus on TikTok shows that the field still lacks enough evidence about Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts, Facebook Reels, and the long-term effects of short-form news consumption.

4. Discussion

4.1 Overall Interpretation of the Findings

The findings show that short-form video is not simply another channel for distributing news. It is changing how news is found, presented, judged, and discussed. On platforms such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts, people usually meet news inside a mixed feed that also contains entertainment, personal stories, advertising, and humour. As a result, news often reaches users when they are not actively looking for it. This makes short-form video useful for reaching younger and less regular news users, but it also makes news consumption more dependent on platform design and recommendation systems (Hagar & Diakopoulos, 2025; Hendrickx, 2025b; Zhao *et al.*, 2025) ^[5, 8, 25].

A central point from the review is that short-form news works best as a quick entry point rather than a complete replacement for longer journalism. Users may learn the basic facts of an event from a short video and then search for more details elsewhere. This pattern is visible in audience studies where users valued speed, visual presentation, and simple explanations, but still expected accuracy and credibility. Therefore, the main change is not that audiences have stopped caring about journalistic quality. Instead, they now expect quality information to be delivered in a faster and more engaging form (Cheng *et al.*, 2025; Hendrickx, 2025b) ^[3, 8].

4.2 News Exposure, Attention, and Fragmented Consumption

Short-form platforms can widen news exposure because users may come across current affairs while scrolling for other reasons. This type of incidental exposure can encourage later information seeking and political engagement, especially among people who feel a need to stay informed. However, the effect is not automatic. Users differ in their interest, motivation, and willingness to continue beyond the first short video. A brief encounter may create awareness, but awareness does not always lead to deeper understanding (Zhao *et al.*, 2025) ^[25].

The role of algorithms makes this process more complicated. TikTok is often described as a platform where the recommendation system can introduce users to unexpected information. Yet an audit by Hagar and Diakopoulos found very little proactive distribution of credible news to new users, even when simulated users showed interest in news. This means that short-form platforms may create opportunities for incidental news exposure, but the platform may still give priority to content that is more entertaining or more likely to keep users scrolling (Hagar & Diakopoulos, 2025) ^[5].

The review also points to a possible tension between quick news awareness and sustained attention. Cole *et al.* found that participants who browsed TikTok before reading news articles were less likely to maintain attention during longer reading, particularly when they were not regular news consumers. This result should not be used to claim that every short video damages attention. Still, it suggests that rapid switching between brief clips may make a later move to detailed reading more difficult for some users. News organisations therefore need to create clear links between short videos and fuller reporting instead of treating a short clip as the complete story (Cole *et al.*, 2025) ^[4].

4.3 Trust, Credibility, and Perceived News Quality

Trust remains important even in an entertainment-based environment. TikTok news users may enjoy informal presentation, creator-style delivery, and visually attractive editing, but they still look for basic signs of quality. These signs include accuracy, useful information, clear sourcing, and a believable presenter or organisation. Users also judge quality differently depending on the topic. A light and personal style may work for lifestyle or cultural news, while political, public-health, or crisis reporting may require a more careful tone and stronger evidence (Cheng *et al.*, 2025) ^[3].

Short-form journalism therefore faces a balance problem. If a video follows traditional news style too closely, it may feel slow or out of place in the feed. If it copies influencer content too strongly, it may lose professional authority. The strongest approach appears to be a mixed style: direct language, visible human presentation, and simple visual storytelling, combined with clear facts, source information, and links to fuller coverage. This allows the content to feel natural on the platform without hiding its journalistic identity (Cheng *et al.*, 2025; Vázquez-Herrero *et al.*, 2022) ^[3, 22].

Source selection also affects credibility. Wu (2025) ^[24] found that many organisational TikTok accounts remained

transparent about sources and journalistic processes, but stories often presented a single side and relied heavily on government voices. This creates a professional challenge. Short-form news must be simple enough for a brief video, but it should not remove necessary viewpoints or make authority depend only on a confident presenter. Clear attribution, links to supporting material, and careful source balance can help maintain trust.

4.4 Engagement, Emotion, and Infotainment

Engagement is one of the main reasons news organisations use short-form video. Likes, comments, shares, watch time, and follower growth give newsrooms immediate signals about audience response. Large-scale research on TikTok news videos shows that emotional tone and camera perspective can influence engagement. Negative sentiment and direct visual address may attract attention, although their effects are not the same for professional news publishers and other creators. This suggests that platform techniques cannot simply be copied without considering the reputation and role of the news source (Cheng & Li, 2024) ^[2].

The combination of information and entertainment is not always harmful. Entertainment elements can make difficult topics easier to approach, especially for audiences who would not open a traditional news article. Music, humour, fast editing, subtitles, and a personal presenter can help a video compete inside a busy feed. The problem begins when entertaining presentation replaces important explanation. Research on Instagram and TikTok shows that infotainment should be understood as a combination of topic, amount of information, and style of presentation. A video can be engaging and still provide meaningful information, but this requires deliberate editorial choices (Wirz & Zai, 2025) ^[23]. This balance is especially important because short-form platforms reward immediate reactions. News producers may feel pressure to start with the most dramatic detail, use emotional headlines, or simplify a complex issue into a clear conflict. These choices may increase visibility, but they may also remove uncertainty, background, and different viewpoints. A successful short-form news strategy should therefore measure more than views. It should also consider whether users understand the story, recognise the source, and move to more complete reporting when needed (Cheng & Li, 2024; Luginbühl, 2025) ^[2, 12].

4.5 Platform-Native Storytelling and Newsroom Adaptation

News organisations are clearly changing their production routines for short-form platforms. Research shows that they use vertical video, subtitles, close camera framing, short sentences, presenters speaking directly to viewers, trending sounds, and platform-specific visual effects. These features help news fit the normal style of TikTok and Instagram. At the same time, organisations continue to use logos, brand colours, factual headlines, and familiar presenters to maintain recognition and trust (Hendrickx, 2025a; Luginbühl, 2025; Vázquez-Herrero *et al.*, 2022) ^[7, 12, 22]. However, adaptation is uneven. Cross-platform studies show that news outlets do not always redesign a story deeply for each platform. Sometimes the same story is reposted with

only small changes. This may save time, but it can limit audience response because Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and other platforms have different technical features and audience expectations. Effective platform adaptation requires more than changing the video size. It involves reconsidering the opening, pace, visual structure, language, source use, and the action expected from the viewer (Hase *et al.*, 2023; Hendrickx & Vázquez-Herrero, 2024) ^[6, 9].

The production of short-form news also creates new pressures inside newsrooms. TikTok editors may have room to experiment, but they must work between platform trends, organisational rules, journalistic standards, and limited time. Ethnographic research in a Belgian newsroom shows that editors had considerable autonomy while still facing institutional expectations and the demands of the platform. This creates a continuing tension between innovation and professional responsibility (Verstappen & Opgenhaffen, 2025) ^[20].

4.6 Differences between TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts

The review found a clear research imbalance. TikTok has received much more attention than Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts. This is understandable because TikTok helped establish the current short-form video style, but the three platforms should not be treated as identical. TikTok is strongly organised around personalised discovery, Instagram combines short video with an existing follower network and visual branding culture, and YouTube places Shorts beside a large system of long-form video. These differences can affect how users find news, how long they stay with it, and whether they move from a short item to a detailed report (Luginbühl, 2025; Violot *et al.*, 2024) ^[12, 21].

Research on YouTube shows that Shorts generally receive more views and likes per view than regular videos, but fewer comments per view. The advantage is also smaller for political and educational content than for entertainment categories. This finding is important for journalism because high reach does not necessarily mean deep discussion or learning. A newsroom may gain visibility through Shorts while still needing long-form video for context, explanation, and sustained public discussion (Violot *et al.*, 2024) ^[21].

4.7 Practical Implications for Journalism

For journalists and news organisations, the findings suggest that short-form video should be used as one part of a wider news system. A short clip can introduce a topic, explain one key point, answer a common question, or guide viewers to a longer article or video. It is less suitable for presenting every detail of a complicated story. Newsrooms should therefore plan a clear connection between short and long formats, rather than producing each platform item separately without a follow-up path (Cheng *et al.*, 2025; Cole *et al.*, 2025) ^[3, 4]. Several practical principles follow from the review. The source of the information should be visible. Important facts should not be hidden only in captions. Subtitles should be used because many users watch without sound. The opening should attract attention without making a misleading promise. Complex issues should be divided into a short series when one video is not enough. Finally, success should be judged through a combination of reach, completion rate,

meaningful comments, source recognition, and movement toward fuller reporting (Luginbühl, 2025; Vázquez-Herrero *et al.*, 2022) ^[12, 22].

Table 4: Practical Guidance for Short-Form Video Journalism

Area	Recommended practice	Main risk to avoid
Opening	State the main point quickly and accurately.	Sensational or misleading hooks.
Evidence	Name the source and show where more detail is available.	Claims without context or attribution.
Presentation	Use subtitles, simple language, and clear visuals.	Over-editing that distracts from the facts.
Depth	Link the short video to a longer report or follow-up.	Treating a complex issue as fully explained in seconds.
Evaluation	Track understanding and follow-up, not only views.	Using popularity as the only measure of quality.

4.8 Research Gaps and Future Directions

The existing evidence is useful, but the field is still developing. First, more direct comparison is needed across TikTok, Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts, and Facebook Reels. At present, platform differences are often discussed using separate studies, which makes strong comparison difficult. Second, more research is needed outside Europe, North America, and China. News use in South Asia, Africa, Latin America, and other regions may be shaped by different languages, media systems, internet costs, and levels of trust in journalism (Hendrickx & Vázquez-Herrero, 2024) ^[9]. Future studies should also examine what audiences remember after watching short news videos, whether they understand causes and consequences, and whether they later check other sources. Longitudinal and experimental studies would be especially valuable because many current studies analyse content or measure behaviour at one point in time. Research should also separate simple visibility from meaningful news engagement. A view, like, or share does not necessarily show that the user understood or trusted the news (Cole *et al.*, 2025; Violot *et al.*, 2024) ^[4, 21].

Finally, more attention should be given to ethical and professional issues. These include algorithmic transparency, the use of creators as news sources, sponsored content, misinformation, limited source diversity, and the pressure to follow trends. Short-form journalism will continue to change as platforms update their algorithms and video formats. For that reason, research methods and newsroom policies will need regular review rather than one fixed model (Hagar & Diakopoulos, 2025; Verstappen & Opgenhaffen, 2025; Wu, 2025) ^[5, 20, 24].

4.9 Discussion Summary

Overall, short-form video journalism offers a real opportunity to reach audiences who may not regularly visit news websites or watch traditional news. It can make news easier to discover, faster to understand, and more open to participation. At the same time, its speed, algorithmic structure, and entertainment culture can reduce context and encourage fragmented consumption. The most suitable response is not to reject short-form video or to copy entertainment creators without limits. News organisations need a balanced model that uses the strengths of the format while protecting accuracy, context, source transparency, and journalistic responsibility.

5. Limitations

This review has several limitations. First, it included English-language studies published online or in print between January 2021 and 30 November 2025. Relevant research in other languages and studies published after the cutoff were therefore not included. The search relied on Google Scholar, Crossref and DOI searches, publisher platforms, and reference checking rather than complete exports from subscription databases such as Scopus and Web of Science. The review should therefore be understood as a focused and transparent synthesis, not a claim that every study on the topic was located. Second, the evidence base was uneven across platforms. Most of the included studies examined TikTok or Douyin, while Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts, and Facebook Reels received much less direct attention. This imbalance limits strong comparison between platforms. The one YouTube Shorts study was a peer-reviewed conference paper and examined platform-level engagement rather than journalism alone, which shows how limited the evidence remained within the cutoff period. Third, the included studies used very different methods, samples, countries, and outcome measures. This diversity was useful for understanding the field, but it did not support statistical meta-analysis. The thematic synthesis identifies common patterns, yet some findings remain context-specific. Finally, short-form platforms, interfaces, and recommendation systems change quickly. As a result, findings about platform practices and algorithms may require regular updating.

6. Conclusion

This systematic review examined how short-form video journalism is changing the way people find, watch, and respond to news. The reviewed studies show that TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts have become important news spaces, especially for younger audiences. These platforms make news quick, visual, and easy to access. They also allow users to discover news while scrolling for entertainment, even when they are not actively looking for information. Short-form video can increase the visibility of news and encourage audience engagement. Captions, music, direct presentation, emotional language, and visual storytelling can make news more attractive and easier to follow. However, the short format may reduce detail and context. Fast scrolling may also make it harder for some users to stay focused on longer or more complex news reports. Therefore, short-form news is useful for attracting attention, but it should not always replace full news coverage.

Trust and credibility remain important concerns. Professional news appears beside entertainment, influencer content, opinion, and unverified information on the same feed. This can make it difficult for users to identify reliable journalism. News organisations need to follow the style of short-form platforms without weakening accuracy, balance, source transparency, and public responsibility. Algorithms also shape what users see. They can help people discover relevant stories, but they may limit the variety of news available to them.

Overall, short-form video journalism is not simply a shorter version of traditional news. It is a growing form of journalism with its own storytelling style, audience behaviour, and professional challenges. It gives news

organisations a useful way to reach people who may not regularly use newspapers, television news, or news websites. Its future value will depend on finding a careful balance between speed and depth, creativity and accuracy, and popularity and public interest. More research is still needed on Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts, different countries, and the long-term effects of short-form news on understanding, memory, trust, and civic participation.

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