MEDIA LITERACY OF SERBIA’S CITIZENS

Survey Research Report

Belgrade, 2025

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#ЕУ ЗА ТЕБЕ

Contents

Research on media literacy of the general population in Serbia was carried out within the *Media Literacy Index* project, a requirement set out in the Strategy for the Development of the Public Information System in the Republic of Serbia for the 2020–2025 Period (hereinafter: the Media Strategy). The survey was conducted by telephone between 15 May and 15 June 2025 on a two-stage stratified representative sample of 800 respondents. The findings will be integrated in the formulation of a Media Literacy Index, based on the EAVI model[1] that clusters media literacy into two main dimensions: environmental factors and individual competencies. The research explores personal skills and abilities needed to engage critically and actively with media, such as cognitive skills for understanding and analyzing media content, technical skills to use media tools, and participatory skills to communicate and contribute through media channels.

[1] https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/culture/library/studies/literacy-criteria-report_en.pdf

Research highlights

The research shows that television, messaging app, and music-oriented radio stations continue to dominate the media landscape:

- **96.7%** of respondents watch **television,**
- **81.5%** use **messaging apps** to communicate and exchange messages, and
- **66.3%** listen to the **radio,** mostly to music stations.

The research points to a lower use of social media. While this finding warrants further investigation, one possible explanation is that young people between 15 and 29 years of age – the most frequent users of social media – make up only about 16% of Serbia's population[2].

Social media *are used by* **57.5%** of the respondents.

Research shows that high proportion of people who do not follow the news, either through the press or via online news portals.

Print media are *not read by as many as* **77.4%** of the respondents.

Online news portals *are not followed by* **43.5%** of the respondents.

Between a quarter and a third of the respondents use streaming platforms, for watching films and series (e.g. Netflix, Max) or for listening to audio content - music or podcasts (e.g. Spotify, Deezer).

Music streaming platforms are *used by* **26.7%** of the respondents.

Video streaming platforms *are used by* **35.7%** of the respondents.

Artificial intelligence (AI) platforms (e.g. ChatGPT) are used by a quarter of the respondents.

AI platforms are used by **25.4%** of the respondents.

Among them:

67.8% use AI to check their *own content.*

30% *never check* AI-generated content before sharing it.

30% *never edit or adapt* AI-generated content before sharing it.

A large share of the respondents said they did not recognise harmful content in the media.

27.6% of the respondents *rarely or never* recognise **fake news**.

51.5% of the respondents *rarely or never* recognise **conspiracy theories.**

[2] Population by Age and Sex, 2023, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia. https://data.stat.gov.rs/Home/Result/3104020201?languageCode=en-US

25% of the respondents *rarely or never* recognise **hate speech.**

23.2% of the respondents *rarely or never* recognise **the promotion of someone's personal interests.**

71.9% of the respondents *rarely or never* recognise **AI-generated content.**

Consistent with these findings, the media were observed to exert a strong impact on the respondents. A strong impact is shown on one side as strengthening the views users already have, and on the other, as exerting a strong emotional impact.

59.5% said they *rarely or never* **learned anything new** in the media that **changed their views on a political or social issue**.

68.6% reported feeling **overwhelmed by media information and content** either *frequently or on a daily basis*.

58.3% said they were *frequently or daily* **exposed to media content that provoked strong negative emotions**.

When it comes to **fact-checking**, 38.4% of the respondents said they often, and 33.6% occasionally, believed *information from the media that later turned out to be false,* while almost half (47.9%) *rarely or never verified information across multiple sources*. Similarly, 65.8*% rarely or never read comments below posts* and as many as 90.3% *rarely or never checked information on a fact-checking website*. Respondents most often *verified* the truthfulness of media information *by consulting someone they knew* – a practice reported by as many as 89.7%.

The **most trusted sources of information**, according to 68.5% of respondents, are friends, relatives and colleagues, while far fewer place their trust in the media. Television was rated as a mostly or fully reliable source of information by 36.9% of respondents; it was followed by messaging apps (32.4%), radio (22%), AI (20.5%), social media (17.6%) and online news portals (11.7%). The least trusted medium was the press, viewed as reliable by only 3.7% of respondents.

Among the **digital skills** measured, just over half of respondents reported knowing how to *disable location tracking* (55.7%) or *digital activity tracking* (52.2%), and how to *block or remove someone from their friends list* (54.9%). The least developed skills were those relating to protection from harmful content (lacking in 86.2%), closely followed by the ability to protect against online fraud (86%), to report hate speech (83.9%) and to disable AI memory (82.5%).

The research data show that most of the respondents **use the internet and media passively** – primarily to obtain information on important issues (94.9%) and to connect with others (65.5%). They engage in other activities to a far lesser extent.

About the Research

Research on media literacy of the general population in Serbia was carried out within the *Media Literacy Index* project, a requirement set out in the Strategy for the Development of the Public Information System in the Republic of Serbia for the 2020–2025 Period (hereinafter: the Media Strategy). This project is being carried out in cooperation with and with the support of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, with the aim of implementing the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Media Strategy, which highlights (in Section 5.1) the lack of continuous systemic and systematic measurement of citizens' media literacy, i.e. the cumulative effects of different indicators significant for its development. Since the development of a tool for researching the media literacy of the general population constitutes the first step towards achieving the Media Strategy Action Plan[3], an initial working version of the media literacy index was first prepared in order to identify the most important indicators and the available data relating to them. Where it was impossible to obtain data concerning the key dimensions of media literacy, these were included as a battery of questions in the questionnaire. In accordance with the EAVI model[4], the basic dimensions of media literacy covered by this questionnaire relate to individual competences (access and use, i.e. the critical dimension) and social competences (communication and participation). Emphasis was placed on the critical dimension of media literacy.

Drawing on the EAVI media literacy model and its core user-related dimensions, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ 1. How do Serbia's citizens use (traditional and digital) media and artificial intelligence?
RQ 2. What critical skills do they develop in relation to the media and artificial intelligence?
RQ 3. What forms of communication and participation can we identify in the digital space and which digital skills are the citizens developing?

Sample

The sample for the research on media literacy among the general population of the Republic of Serbia was based on the probability theory. Random selection is a key assumption for producing unbiased estimates of population parameters, as randomly chosen units are expected to reflect the overall characteristics of the population. The sample was defined as a ***two-stage stratified representative sample*** of Serbia's population (since reducing error in estimated parameters is achieved by minimising variability

[3] Activity 5.1.1. of the 2020-2025 Media Strategy provides for the establishment of a media literacy index in the Republic of Serbia in accordance with European methodology. The Media Strategy is available in Serbian at: https://www.media.srbija.gov.rs/medsrp/dokumenti/medijska_strategija210_cyr.pdf.

[4] https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/culture/library/studies/literacy-criteria-report_en.pdf.

between the units studied), comprising 800 respondents. This division process is known as stratification, with the resulting segments referred to as strata. The basic strata were the main territorial units: Belgrade, Vojvodina and Central Serbia. Within each of these, urban and rural substrata were defined, giving a total of six strata. The sample design enables extrapolation to the population as a whole, meaning that the data relate to the population of Serbia (the territory of Kosovo and Metohija was not included in the research), between 18 and 75 years of age. The results can also be disaggregated by sociodemographic characteristics – sex (men and women), age (18–29, 30–44, 45–59 and 60–75), education (incomplete and completed primary education, secondary education, and higher or university education), and region (Belgrade, Vojvodina and Central Serbia). This sample makes it possible to draw conclusions at the national level, with a margin of error of 3.5 percentage points.

Questionnaire

The semi-standardised questionnaire on the media literacy of the general population contains closed questions, with the exception of one open question and identification characteristics of the respondents (sex, age and educational attainment). The only open question was the one asking the respondents to specify their year of birth. Closed questions contained pre-formulated response options.

When it designed the questionnaire, and to ensure comparability, the research team drew on media literacy studies of the general population in European countries (Ofcom, 2024; Oxford, 2019) and in neighbouring countries (Paško, 2023; Raičević & Vranjanac, 2023), as well as on data from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS), which had included a number of media literacy questions in its annual surveys on ICT use until 2024. In addition to e-skills, these included four questions concerning the respondents' experience with disinformation – whether they had encountered it, whether they had checked it, how they had checked it and, if not, why not – as well as a set of questions on privacy (Kovačević et al., 2023). In 2024, SORS replaced groups of questions relating to digital skills and privacy protection by sets of questions relating to the industry – use of smart devices and green ICT (Josipović et al., 2024). This means that there is no longer any institution in Serbia that measures even the minimum of these important competences among citizens on a representative sample and on an annual basis.

Most media literacy research studies begin with a set of questions on ***access to and use of different media***. These questions relate to the frequency and dynamics of media, device and internet use, as well as the types of media and media content, whilst focusing on news media and social media. The second element of media literacy repeatedly examined in various studies concerns ***critical thinking***. This mainly consists of a battery of questions on trust in the media, often focusing on the area of information and disinformation. ***Participation*** is the third element of media literacy in the analysed studies, which

encompasses communication and creation, as well as civic engagement. The Oxford Internet Institute questionnaire (OXI, 2019) includes detailed batteries of questions on content production and a wide range of other online activities. SORS has placed emphasis on the economic aspect, i.e. on skills related to safe online shopping and communication with the public administration. Croatian research also emphasised content production skills (Paško, 2023), while the Montenegrin study linked this part to its key research topic - disinformation (Raičević & Vranjanac, 2023).

The questionnaire developed within this research places emphasis on the dimensions of media literacy relating to critical thinking and media and content evaluation, wherefore all other questions (on e.g. media use) were adapted accordingly. The researchers examined ways of use of various media, both traditional and digital, including artificial intelligence, which is becoming increasingly important in generating, creating and editing content, as well as in fact-checking. Activities covering digital skills, content creation, verification and dissemination, as well as the role of artificial intelligence, were also in focus. Although media literacy includes popular formats, they were covered to a lesser extent due to the constraints of space and the efficiency required by the CATI method. The questionnaire primarily examined news media, artificial intelligence, and the challenges they pose to the development of media literacy.

The research was conducted between 15 May and 15 June 2025 across Serbia. The telephone survey technique was used, with the assistance of the Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) platform, which provides direct computer support to different phases of the research through specialised software. The SPSS statistical analysis programme was used to process the data collected through the questionnaire.

The data obtained through the research reflect the respondents' subjective views and opinions. With regard to critical thinking, this type of analysis needs to be complemented by qualitative methods. Coverage of all the important elements and questions by a single questionnaire is definitely not only a complex task requiring considerable resources but may also not always be feasible. Researchers involved in the evaluation of the European model for analysing media literacy indicators (EC, 2011) do not recommend this. "Given the breadth of contexts and behaviours associated with media literacy, a simple 20-minute survey, no matter how well-designed, cannot provide the comprehensive measures necessary to inform policy […] Attempting a comprehensive measure within a single survey is neither feasible, nor recommended." (Bulger, 2012, p. 95). They propose a so-called modular approach, consisting of two parts. One study would focus on the basic issues of media literacy, which are quantified regularly, while

the other would be concerned with developing a rotating segment of the research, focusing "on specific components of media literacy and could be flexible to adapt to new findings or priorities." (*ibid*.).

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SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESPONDENTS

Slightly more than half of the respondents were women, reflecting the gender structure of the population of the Republic of Serbia. The sample comprised 409 women (51.1%) and 391 men (48.9%). As per the age breakdown of the respondents, 31.9% were aged 60 and over, almost a quarter (24.3%) were between 45 and 59 years of age, while 27.6% were between 30 and 44 years of age. Those aged 18–29 accounted for the smallest number of respondents - 16.2%.

Table 1: Respondents by Sex (n and %):

Sex	*n*	*%*
Men	391	48.9
Women	409	51.1
Total:	800	100

Table 2: Respondents by Age (n and %):

Age Group	*n*	*%*
18 - 29	130	16.2
30 - 44	221	27.6
45 - 59	194	24.3
60 - 75	255	31.9
Total:	800	100

In terms of educational attainment, more than half (55.9%) of the respondents had completed secondary education, a fifth (20.5%) had a tertiary qualification, 6.5% had some higher education but had not earned a degree, while 17.1% had only incomplete or complete primary education (Table 3).

Table 3: Respondents by Education Level (n and %)

Highest Educational Attainment	*n*	*%*
Incomplete and Complete Primary Education	137	17.1
Secondary Education	448	55.9
Incomplete Tertiary Education	52	6.5
Tertiary Education	163	20.5
Total:	800	100

Most of the respondents were employed or retired (50.9% and 17.9% respectively). The unemployed accounted for 5.9% and college students for 6.3% of the respondents. Nine percent of the respondents were homemakers, while 10% were engaged in agriculture (Table 4).

Table 4: Respondents by Employment Status (n and %)

Employment Status	*n*	*%*
Employed	408	50.9
Unemployed	47	5.9
Retired	143	17.9
Student	50	6.3
Agricultural worker	80	10
Homemaker	72	9
Total:	800	100

Most of the respondents – nearly a half of them (48.3%) – were living in Central Serbia, while 26.3% lived in Vojvodina and 25.4% lived in Belgrade. More than half of the respondents (58.9%) lived in urban settlements, while 41.1% lived in rural areas.

Table 5: Respondents by Region (n and %)

Region	*n*	*%*
Central Serbia	386	48.3
Belgrade	204	25.4
Vojvodina	210	26.3
Total:	800	100

Table 6: Respondents by Settlement Type (n and %):

Settlement Type	*n*	*%*
Urban	471	58.9
Rural	329	41.1
Total:	800	100

Most respondents (39.8%) lived in households with a monthly income ranging from 60,000 RSD to 150,000 RSD[5]. A substantial share – more than a fifth, specifically 22.4% – lived in households with a monthly income not exceeding 60,000 RSD. Monthly household income of between 150,000 RSD and 200,000 RSD was reported by 18.3% of respondents, while only 8% stated that their household income exceeded 200,000 RSD. Slightly over a tenth (11.5%) of the respondents did not wish to disclose their household's monthly income.

Table 6: Respondents by Average Household Income (n and %)

Average Monthly Household Income	*n*	*%*
Under 60,000 RSD	179	22.4
Between 60,000 and 150,000 RSD	319	39.8
Between 150,000 and 200,000 RSD	146	18.3
Over 200,000 RSD	64	8
Prefer not to answer	92	11.5
Total:	800	100

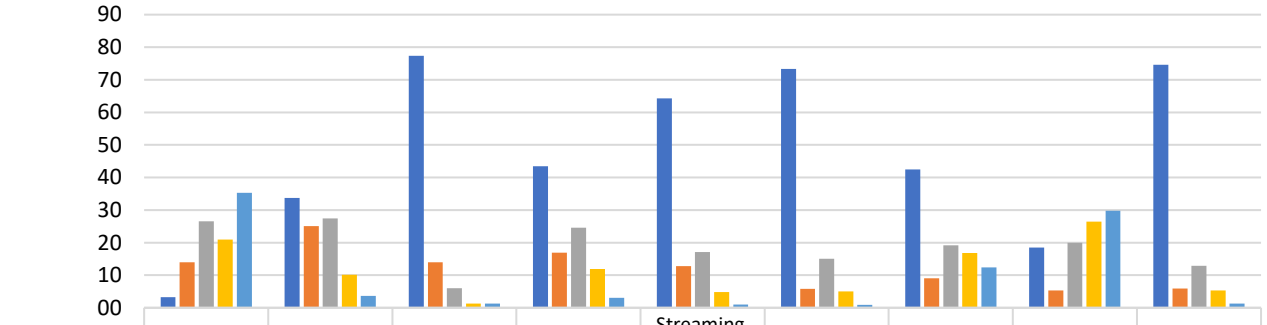
[5] The average net salary in Serbia in May 2025 was 107,705 RSD, while median net income was 84,408 RSD: https://stat.gov.rs/en-us/vesti/statisticalrelease/?p=17056

Research Results

I ACCESS TO AND USE OF MEDIA AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

This section of the research measured the frequency with which specific media and artificial intelligence platforms were used. The first set of questions in the questionnaire asked respondents to assess how often they used particular media. Respondents answered by selecting one of five options on a five-point scale: 1 – Never, 2 – Rarely, 3 – Occasionally, 4 – Often, and 5 – Daily (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Frequency of (Traditional and Digital) Media and Artificial Intelligence Platform Use (%)



	TV	Radio	Press	Online news portals	Streaming platforms (films and series)	Music streaming platforms	Social media	Messaging Apps	AI Platforms (e.g. ChatGPT)
Never	03	34	77	44	64	73	43	19	75
Rarely	14	25	14	17	13	06	09	05	06
Occasionally	27	27	06	25	17	15	19	20	13
Often	21	10	01	12	05	05	17	26	05
Daily	35	04	01	03	01	01	12	30	01

According to the data obtained in this research, **television** is the dominant media outlet in terms of frequency of use – more than half of the respondents watch it either often (20.9%) or every day (35.3%). Only 3.3% of the respondents said they never watched television. **Communication and messaging applications** (such as Viber, WhatsApp, etc.) are used almost as much – 29.8% of respondents use them daily, 26.4% often, around a quarter use them rarely or occasionally (5.3% and 20% respectively), while about a fifth (18.5%) never use these applications.

It is also clear that traditional media, such as the **press and radio,** have lost substantial ground to television. A third of the respondents (33.7%) said they never listened to the radio, a quarter (25.1%) reported listening to it only rarely, while only 3.6% said they listened to it every day. The fewest respondents read the **press**: 77.4% of the respondents reported never reading it, while a further 14% said they read it only rarely. This leaves slightly over 2.5% who read newspapers often or every day.

Over half of the respondents keep informed through **online news portals**, while 43.5% never use them. Sixteen percent read them rarely and a quarter (24.6%) occasionally. A further 11.9% use portals often and 3.1% every day - figures almost identical to those of the most regular radio listeners.

Streaming platforms are not widely used – 73.3% of the respondents do not use music streaming services (e.g. Spotify, Deezer), while 64.3% do not use such services for watching films and series (e.g. Netflix, Max, Amazon Prime, Disney+). Only 1% use them every day, around 5% use them often, while most of those who engage with such content do so occasionally – 17.1% of respondents watch and 15% listen to content via dedicated streaming services.

Social media are used daily by 12.4% and often by 16.8% of the respondents. One in five (19.2%) use them occasionally, 9.1% rarely, while 42.5% do not use them at all. It is important to note that these figures refer solely to the frequency of use over the past month, not to the number of respondents with social media accounts.

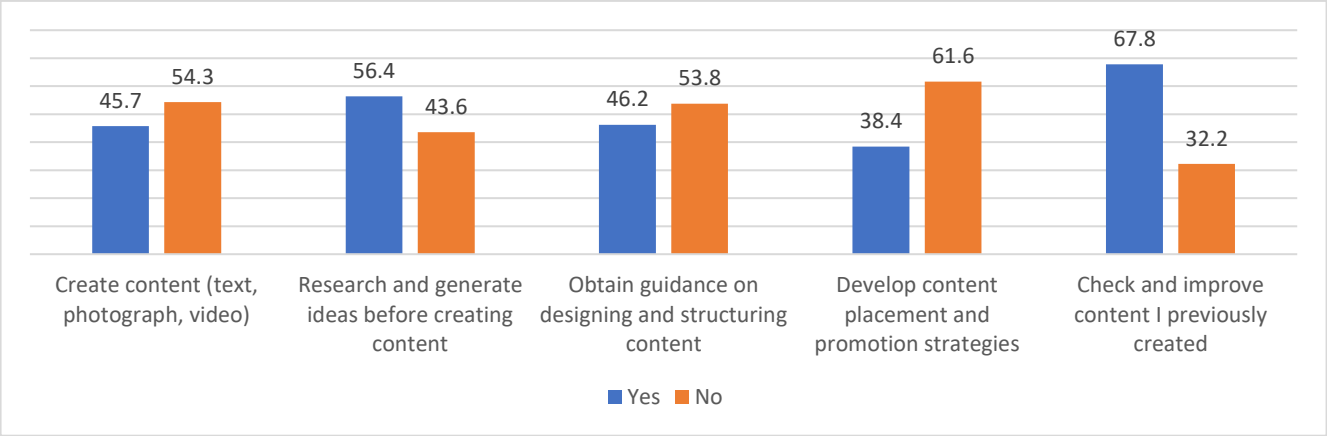
Interestingly, similar shares of respondents use **artificial intelligence** (AI) and streaming platforms. Most respondents have never used AI (74.6%), 5.9% use it rarely, 12.9% occasionally and only 5.3% and 1.3% use it often or daily, respectively. Given that both streaming services and AI tools have only recently become available, it will be interesting to see how quickly their use becomes widespread.

USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Respondents were also asked a specific set of questions (Figure 2) aimed at measuring diversity of AI use. Three-quarters of them (around 75%) reported that they did not use AI, while 25.4% stated that they did.

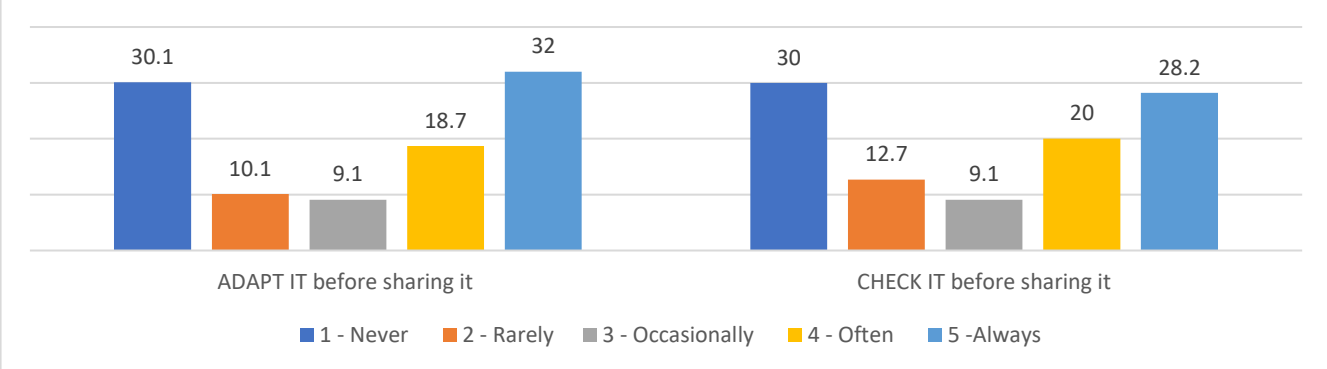
Respondents who used AI mainly did so to check and refine content they had already created (67.8%) and for researching and generating ideas before creating content (56.4%). Fewer than half reported using AI to obtain guidance on designing and structuring content (46.2%) or for content creation itself (45.7%), while the smallest proportion used it to develop content placement and promotion strategies.

Figure 2: Reasons for Using Artificial Intelligence among Respondents Who Reported Using It (%)



Respondents were also asked how often they adapted and checked AI-generated content before sharing it (Figure 3). About one-third (32%) reported that they always *adapted* such content (32%) and almost as many (30.1%) that they never did so before sharing it; 28.2% said they always *checked* the content and 30% reported that they never did so before sharing it. Roughly one in five respondents reported carrying out both activities often, while around one in ten did so rarely.

Figure 3: ***Frequency of Checking or Adapting AI-Generated Content (%)***
When you use AI, how often do you:



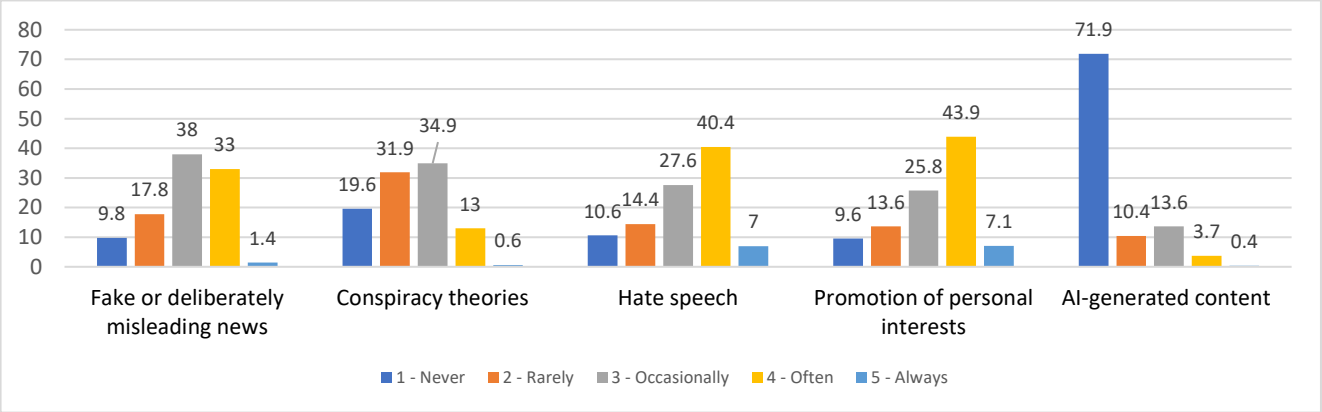
II CRITICAL READING

This part of the questionnaire focused on assessing the respondents' self-perceived ability to recognise various types of media content, whether or not it involved some form of AI-generated disinformation or manipulation. The respondents were given the option of answering on a five-point scale: 1 – Never, 2 – Rarely, 3 – Occasionally, 4 – Often and 5 – Always (Figure 4).

The respondents expressed the greatest confidence in their ability to identify hate speech and promotion of personal interests in the media: 7% of them stated that they could always recognise such content with certainty, while more than 40% reported that this was often the case – slightly more so in relation to the

promotion of personal interests (43.9%) than *hate speech* (40.4%). They were less confident about their ability to recognise *fake news* and *conspiracy theories* – only a very small share could confirm with certainty that they were always able to identify such content (1.4% for fake news and 0.6% for conspiracy theories). However, more than a third of the respondents reported that they recognised fake news with certainty often (33%) or occasionally (38%). By contrast, far fewer felt confident about recognising conspiracy theories in the media – 13% said they were often certain they could identify them, while 34.9% said they occasionally did so with certainty. The respondents were the least confident in their ability to identify AI-generated content – as many as 71.9% stated that they were never sure they recognised it.

Figure 4: Content Recognition (%)- How often are you sure you recognised the following in the media?



MEDIA IMPACT ON RESPONDENTS

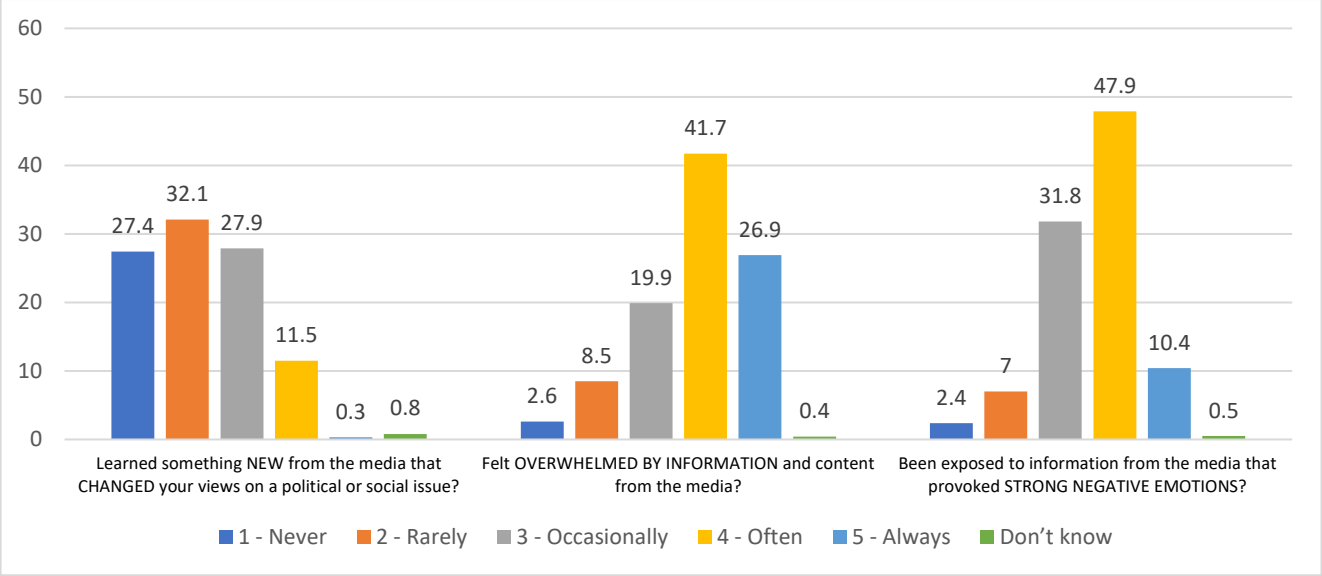
The questionnaire also addressed the media's impact on the users' views and feelings (Figure 5). When asked how often they had learned something in the media *that changed their views on a political or social issue*, more than half of respondents answered that this happened rarely (32.1%) or never (27.4%). A further 27.9% said their opinions were swayed occasionally, while 11.5% reported that the media often had such an impact on them.

The media have a strong impact on the respondents' emotional responses. Most reported feeling *overwhelmed by emotions and media content* either often (41.7%) or every day (26.9%). Only 2.6% said they had never experienced this, while 8.5% reported it happening rarely. A fifth of the respondents (19.9%) said they occasionally felt overwhelmed by emotions triggered by media content.

More than half of the respondents also said that media content often (47.9%) or daily (10.4%) triggered *strong negative emotions such as sadness, anger, shame, disgust, fear, etc*. A substantial share (31.8%)

reported feeling this way occasionally, while only 2.4% said they had never experienced such feelings because of something they had seen or heard in the media.

Figure 5: Media Impact on Users (%) – How often have you:



CONTENT VERIFICATION

Questions relating to the practice of verifying information, i.e. media content, were also scaled from 1 to 5 (1 – Never, 2 – Rarely, 3 – Occasionally, 4 – Often, 5 – Always). The respondents answered questions about ways of checking suspicious information they encountered in the media – from cross-checking across different media sources, reading comments and consulting people they know, to using fact-checking resources or artificial intelligence (Figure 6).

Respondents were least likely to verify information through *fact-checking websites or applications*: 84% said they never did so, 6.3% rarely, 5.8% occasionally, while only 3.1% reported doing so often and just 0.8% daily. Likewise, only a small proportion used *artificial intelligence* for this purpose. Just 0.3% said they used it daily, 6.1% often, 11% occasionally, 6.8% rarely, while 75.5% reported never having used AI to verify suspicious information in the media.

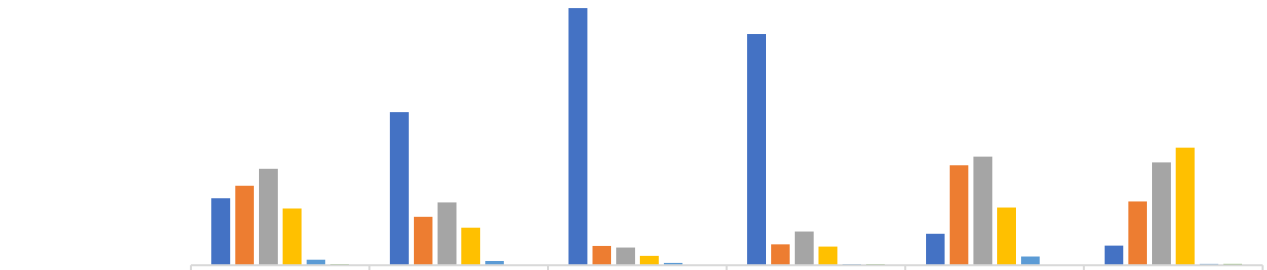
When respondents found a piece of information from the media suspicious, they most often verified it by consulting people they knew or by checking other media sources, with acquaintances and close contacts having a slight edge over the media. Only 10.3% said they had never *sought verification from people they knew*, while 32.6% said they did so rarely. Some 35.5% of the respondents reported verifying information in this way occasionally, 18.8% often and 2.8% daily. By comparison, one in five respondents turned to *other media sources*, often (18.5%) or daily (1.8%). A further 31.5% did so

occasionally and 26% rarely. Over a fifth (21.9%) never checked suspicious information against multiple sources.

Half of the respondents reported never reading *comments on suspicious content or information*, while only 1.4% said they did so daily. Among those who read comments, a fifth (20.5%) did so occasionally, 15.8% rarely and 12.3% reported doing so often.

An additional question - on personal experience with fake or misleading news - was added to questions about verifying suspicious content and information published by the media. Asked *how often they had believed information from the media which later turned out to be false*, 38.4% of respondents said this often happened to them and 33.6% that it happened occasionally. A fifth of the respondents (20.8%) reported it had happened rarely, while 6.4% claimed it had never happened to them.

Figure 6: Respondents' Personal Experience with Fake or Misleading News (%) – As regards suspicious content or information in the media, how often have you:



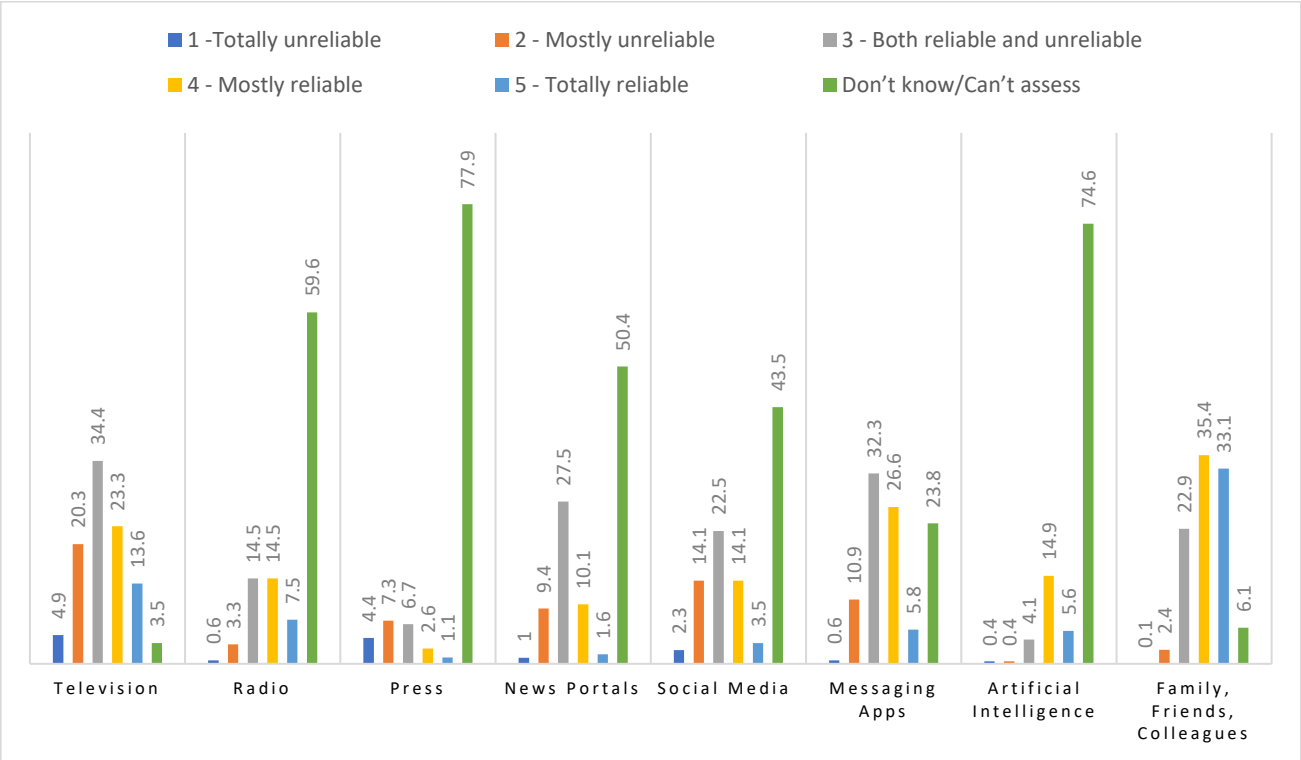
	Checked it across multiple sources?	Read the comments?	Checked it on a fact-checking website or application?	Checked it by using AI?	Checked it with someone you know?	Believed information in the media that later turned out to be untrue?
1 - Never	21.9	50	84	75.5	10.3	6.4
2 - Rarely	26	15.8	6.3	6.8	32.6	20.8
3 - Occasionally	31.5	20.5	5.8	11	35.5	33.6
4 - Often	18.5	12.3	3.1	6.1	18.8	38.4
5 - Daily	1.8	1.4	0.8	0.3	2.8	0.4
Don't know	0.3	0	0	0.3	0	0.4

SOURCE CREDIBILITY

Questions concerning the reliability of sources of information aimed to measure whom the respondents trust the most – the media, artificial intelligence, or family, friends and colleagues. The respondents selected answers on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicated a source that was not reliable at all and 5 a source that was totally reliable. They were also given the option of stating that they were unable to assess

the reliability of a source. (Figure 7). The respondents place the greatest trust in people they know - friends, colleagues and family. More than 68% consider them either fully (33.1%) or mostly reliable (35.4%) sources of information, while 22.9% consider them both reliable and unreliable.

Figure 7: Reliability of Sources of Information (in %)



Given that many respondents said they were unable to assess the reliability of some types of media, their responses may be linked to how frequently they use them: respondents tend to feel more confident judging the reliability of media they use often and understand well, and vice versa. For example, 74.6% of the respondents could not assess how reliable artificial intelligence is. Interestingly, a similar pattern emerged with the press, where 77.6% were unable to judge its credibility as a source of information. Likewise, when asked about radio, 59.6% reported being unable to assess its reliability. By contrast, only 3.5% of respondents could not judge the reliability of television. Among those who did evaluate media credibility, most were ambivalent, viewing them as both reliable and unreliable — a finding likely related also to the general nature of the question and the diversity of outlets within each category.

Of the 96.5% of the respondents who expressed an opinion on the *reliability of television*, 36.9% considered it a fully or mostly reliable, compared with 25.2% who qualified it as an unreliable or mostly unreliable source of information, while 34.4% regarded it as both reliable and unreliable. Around 40% of the respondents expressed an opinion about *radio*, with 14.5% considering it both reliable and

unreliable. A much greater share of respondents, however, regarded it as reliable (22% in total) compared with those who considered it unreliable (3.9%).

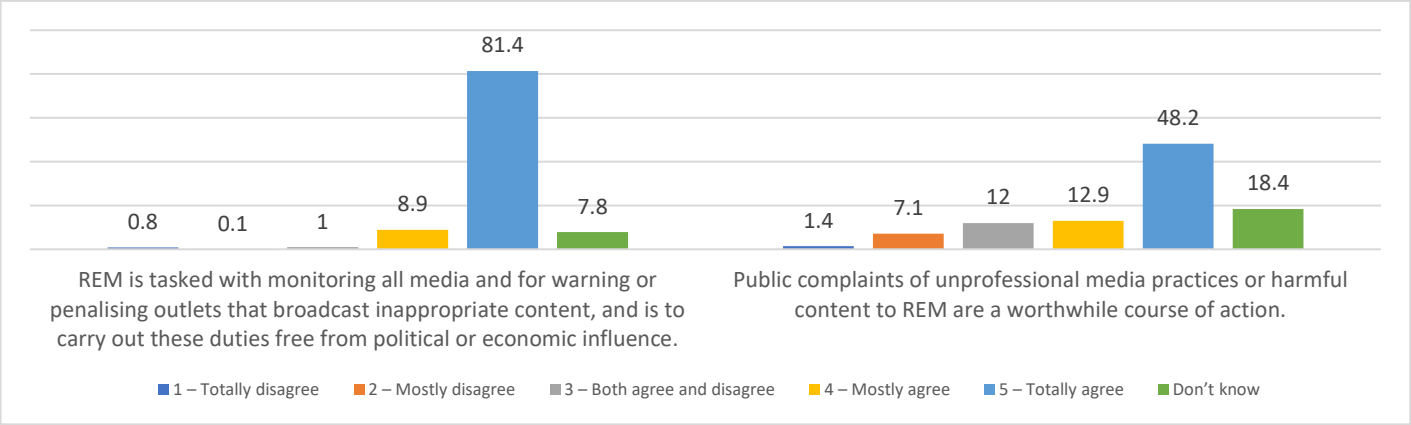
Most respondents who evaluated *news portals* were ambivalent (27.5%). Some 11.7% considered them reliable sources, compared with 10.4% who distrusted them, while more than half were unable to assess their credibility as sources of information. The fewest respondents expressed an opinion about the *reliability of the press* — only 22.1%. However, the answers of just these respondents show that the press is rated as the least credible source: 11.7% qualified it as unreliable or mostly unreliable, compared with just 3.7% who consider it a credible source.

The figures are almost evenly divided between those who trust (17.6%) and those who distrust (16.4%) *social media* as sources of information. However, more respondents considered them both reliable and unreliable (22.5%) or were unable to assess their credibility (43.5%). *Messaging applications* and *artificial intelligence* were rated as more credible than social media. However, a much larger share of respondents expressed an opinion about the reliability of messaging apps – more than three-quarters (76.2%), which corresponds to the proportion of respondents who reported using them every day, often, or at least occasionally. Of them, 32.3% considered messaging apps both reliable and unreliable, 11.5% unreliable and 32.4% reliable or mostly reliable sources of information. Although fewer respondents evaluated artificial intelligence (though more than the press!), the smallest proportion were ambivalent (4.1%) about the credibility of this source and only 0.8% regarded it as unreliable. A fifth (20.5%) of the respondents assessed artificial intelligence as a credible source of information.

THE ROLE OF INSTITUTIONS

An important aspect of media and information literacy concerns attitudes towards the role of the electronic media regulatory authority (REM), as well as understanding the difference between public service broadcasters and commercial media. Respondents were asked to express their (dis)agreement with the four statements they were given on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 indicated complete disagreement and 5 complete agreement. The first two statements regarded REM and its remit and whether public complaints to REM about unprofessional media conduct were a worthwhile course of action (Figure 8).

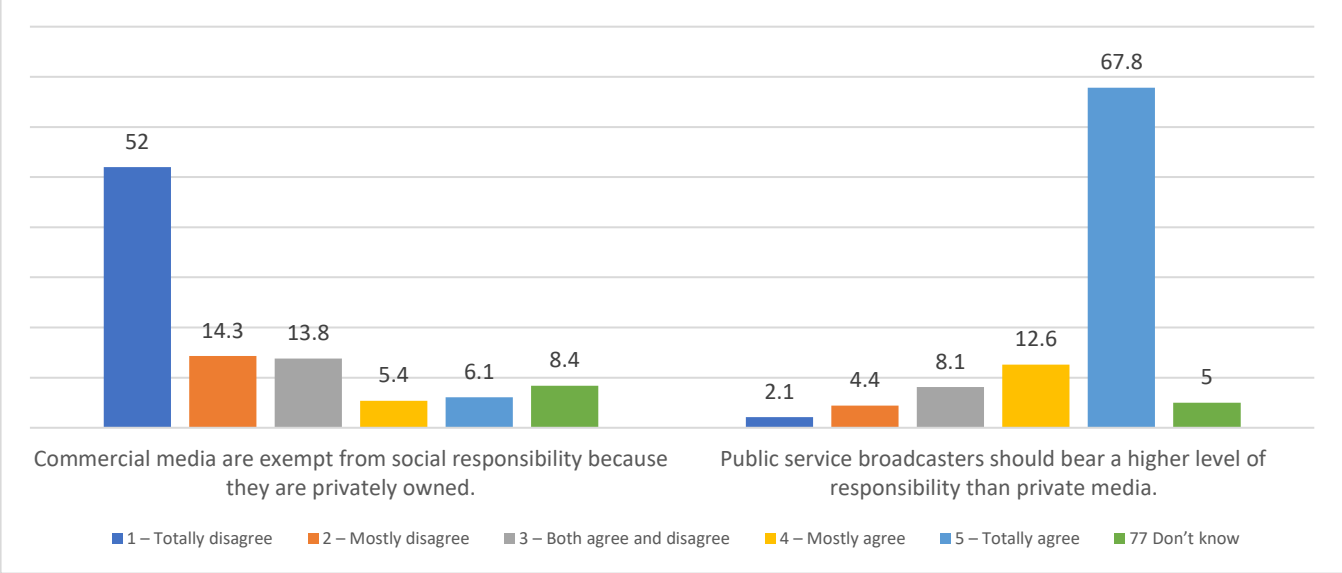
Figure 8: REM's Role (%)



Almost all respondents agreed (8.9% mostly and 81.4% completely) with the statement that REM was charged with monitoring the work of all media, issuing warnings and imposing sanctions against outlets broadcasting inappropriate content, and that it was to carry out these duties free from political or economic influence. Only 1% of the respondents disagreed with this statement or were ambivalent. However, the answers were somewhat different when it came to public complaints about the outlets' unprofessional conduct. Around 60% agreed (12.9% mostly and 48.2% completely), while 12% were undecided about whether public complaints to REM about unprofessional media conduct or harmful content were a worthwhile course of action. Only 8.5% mostly or completely disagreed with this statement.

The other two statements regarded the responsibility and obligations of the media, both commercial and public service broadcasters (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Responsibility of Commercial Media and Public Service Broadcasters (%)



More than 80% of the respondents opined that public service broadcasters should bear a higher level of responsibility than private outlets (12.6% mostly agreed and 67.8% completely agreed with the statement). Only 6.5% disagreed, while 8.1% were ambivalent. Most respondents expressed complete (52%) or partial disagreement (14.3%), while 13.8% were ambivalent about whether commercial media were exempt from social responsibility because they were privately owned. Slightly over a tenth of the respondents (11.5%) agreed (mostly or completely) with the statement that commercial media need not be socially responsible because they were privately owned.

III PARTICIPATION

This part of the research focused on the respondents' self-assessment of their digital skills, as well as on their use of media for various activities, such as connecting with other users sharing their interests and participation in social life.

DIGITAL SKILLS

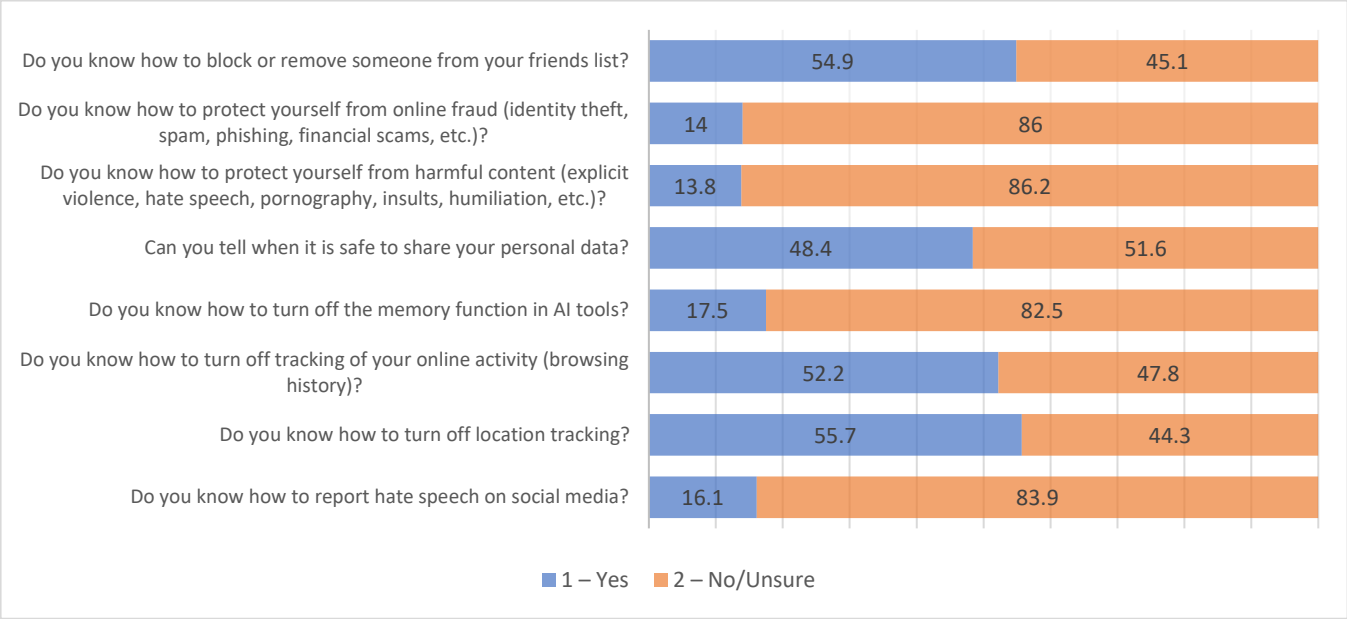
The part of the research dedicated to digital skills provides particular insight into the development of various types of knowledge and experience in using digital information and communication technologies, such as the internet, mobile phones, computers and various software applications designed for communication and messaging, social media, etc., with focus on communication, participation, content creation and protection against harmful content and interactions. The respondents were asked a series of yes/no questions concerning practices related to privacy protection and safeguarding against harmful content (Figure 10).

According to the data obtained, more than half of the respondents know how to turn off location tracking (55.7% answered "yes" to this question, compared with 44.3% who said 'no'), or how to block or remove someone from their friends list (54.9% knew how, while 45.1% did not). Similarly, just over half of respondents (52.2%) know how to disable tracking of their digital activity, such as their browsing history.

The lack of skills is more evident in certain other practices relating personal data protection and protection against harmful content. For example, 48.4% of internet users said they could tell when they could share their personal data, while more than half (51.6%) said they could not. A much smaller share – only 14% – claimed they knew how to protect themselves against online fraud (identity theft, spam, phishing, financial scams, etc.). Only 17.5% of the respondents knew how to disable AI memory. With regard to protection from harmful content, only 13.8% of the respondents said they knew how to protect themselves from material such as explicit violence, hate speech, pornography, insults, humiliation and

the like. Respondents gave similar answers in response to the question whether they knew how to report hate speech on social media – 16.1% answered in the affirmative.

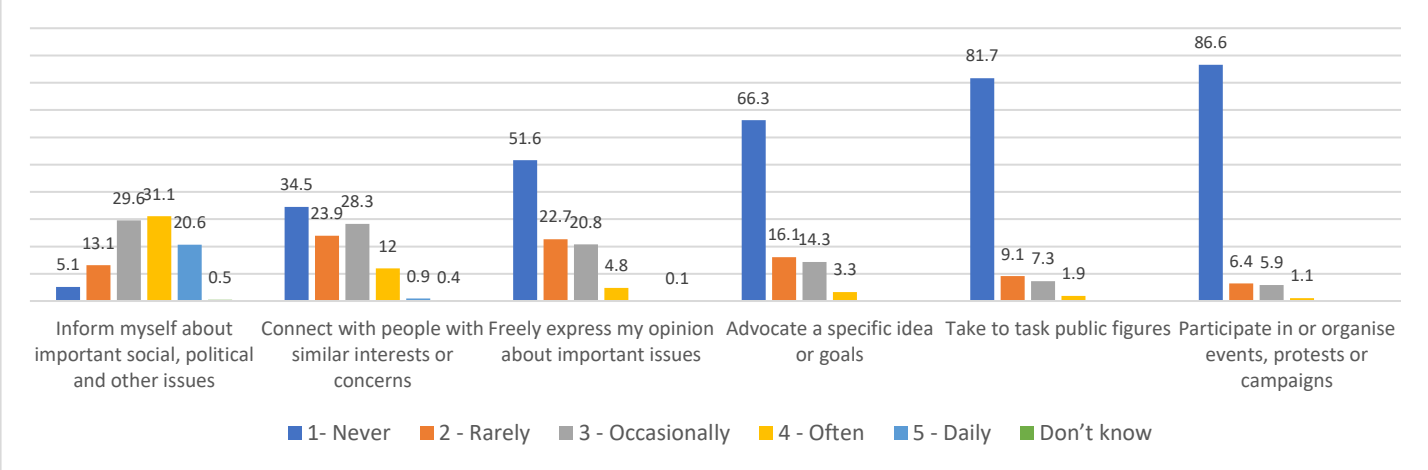
Figure 10: Digital Skills (%)



ACTIVITIES

The research data indicate that the internet is used primarily for obtaining information and only sporadically for exchanging opinions and connecting with other people who share the same interests or concerns (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Most important online activities (%)



More than half of the respondents use the internet to *inform themselves* about important social, political and other issues (31.1% often and 20.6% daily, around 30% occasionally), while only 5% use it regularly

to *express their own views or opinions*. Some 28.3% of respondents occasionally *connect with others*, while more than half do so rarely or never (altogether 58.4%). Almost three-quarters of the respondents are not in the habit of expressing their opinions freely in the online world, with more than half (51.6%) stating that they never do so.

A negligible number of respondents see the internet as a platform for advocating ideas and goals or for organising broader social activities, protests or campaigns. Only 14.3% engage occasionally in advocacy (3.3% do so often), while 16.1% do so rarely. Some 66.3% said they had never used the media or internet for such purposes. As per participation in or organisation of events, as many as 86.6% of the respondents said they had never used the internet or media for that purpose, 6.4% said they did so rarely, 5.9% occasionally and only 1.1% often. The internet is also not used for holding public figures to account – 9.1% of the respondents said they rarely did so, while as many as 81.7% never did. Only 7.3% said they occasionally did so and just 1.9% reported that they did so often.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The research data clearly show that Serbia's citizens predominantly watch television and, to a lesser extent, follow online news portals, whilst disregarding other traditional media – the radio and the press. Particularly noteworthy is the low level of trust the respondents expressed in print media and online portals. Approximately one quarter of all respondents use AI (around 25%), and they mostly use it to check their created content or research before content creation.

Research shows that two-thirds of respondents place their trust in their colleagues, friends, peers, and family and have less trust in media. A very small number of respondents use fact-checking resources and rely predominately on the people they know when verifying the truthfulness of media information. While they feel sure they can recognize content such as hate speech or personal promotion, they are not as certain when it comes to fake news and conspiracy theories—only a very small share could confirm with certainty that they were always able to identify such content (1.4% for fake news and 0.6% for conspiracy theories). This shows a lack of developed critical media reading skills, although most of them feel overwhelmed by media content. The biggest issue still is with AI, where the respondents are the least confident—71.9% stated that they were never sure if they could recognize AI-generated content.

The respondents use the internet passively, mostly for obtaining information and to connect with others via messaging and social networks. Only 5% of respondents use the internet regularly to express their

own views or opinions, over 60% of them have never used it as a platform for advocacy, and over 86% have never used it to participate in or organize an event.

The lack of skills is evident in practices relating to personal data protection and protection against harmful content. Just over half of respondents know how to *disable location tracking* (55.7%) or *digital activity tracking* (52.2%) and how to *block or remove someone from their friends list* (54.9%). The least developed skills were those relating to protection from harmful content (lacking in 86.2%), closely followed by the ability to protect against online fraud (86%), to report hate speech (83.9%), and to disable AI memory (82.5%).

Following these results, several recommendations can therefore be drawn:

1. **Maintaining media pluralism** is definitely a major challenge for media policy in Serbia today, not only in terms of media content, but also in terms of the platforms via which such content can be made available to the public.
2. The low level of trust in news media, particularly the press and online editions, points to the need for promoting **high-quality investigative journalism** and media that uphold journalistic professionalism, provide reliable information and create fertile ground for the development of critical awareness and critical thinking in the public sphere – preceded by ensuring the protection of media freedoms and freedom of expression. This is also linked to the need to **establish effective systemic support for vulnerable and smaller media, especially local outlets**, as opposed to the existing practice of co-financing media content through competitive calls. Several studies (see Ranković, 2021[6]; Matović & Purić, 2018[7]; Nikoletić, 2020[8]; Savić & Milošević, 2021[9]) have highlighted problems in the allocation of funds under these schemes, pointing to bias in the selection of media, vague criteria and non-transparency of the competition process.
3. The respondents recognise the important role of the **media regulator** and the need for it to monitor and supervise, and, where necessary, penalise outlets that broadcast inappropriate content

[6] Ranković, Larisa. 2021. MEDIJSKI KONKURSI MINISTARSTVA KULTURE I JAVNOG INFORMISANJA U 2020. I MEDIJSKI PLURALIZAM. BIRN & OSF. Available in Serbian at: https://nuns.rs/media/2021/11/Medijski-konkursi-Ministarstva-kulture-i-javnog-informisanja.pdf.

[7] Matović, Dragana and Purić, Biljana. 2018. *Analiza obrazloženja komisija za dodelu sredstava na konkursima za sufinansiranje medijskih sadržaja: nejasno i netransparentno*. BIRN. Available in Serbian at: https://safejournalists.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Analiza-obrazlo%C5%BEenja-komisija-za-dodelu-sredstava.pdf.

[8] Nikoletić, I. Danas, 28 May 2020. Za vlast istraživanje korupcije nije u interesu javnosti. Available in Serbian at: https://www.cenzolovka.rs/drzava-i-mediji/za-vlast-istrazivanje-korupcije-nije-u-interesu-javnosti/.

[9] Vlajović Savić, Bojana and Milošević, Marija. 2021. PRATIMO MEDIJSKI KONKURS Analiza prvog konkursa za sufinansiranje medijskih sadržaja od javnog interesa u Kragujevcu. Res Publika. Available in Serbian at: https://www.gradjanske.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Analiza-konkursa-2021-KG-bros%CC%8Cura.pdf.

or breach the law and ethical codes. In addition to the clear need for a regulator with the mechanisms, legitimacy and authority to carry out oversight and regulation responsibly and without bias, the findings also suggest that citizens themselves can be an important resource in safeguarding REM's independence and accountable work. Empowering them to use various courses of action and to cooperate with the regulator would also encourage greater engagement in the media and digital spheres.

4. Given that a large share of respondents uses media and digital technologies passively and within private spheres, emphasis should be placed on programmes **combining the strengthening of critical thinking with the development of digital skills**. Such initiatives would enable citizens to engage with the media more actively and confidently - whether for protection or for civic engagement and participation in public life. These programmes should be designed and delivered to ensure accessibility and to meet the needs of various groups, including specific segments of the population - particularly those considered "vulnerable" and those who use certain types of media most intensively. Coordination among a range of stakeholders in the field of media and information literacy (the media and academic communities, civic, professional and expert associations, and governmental and non-governmental sectors) remains essential in this respect to facilitate the integration of diverse initiatives into a concerted effort to strengthen citizens' capacities, especially in the area of critical media and information literacy.
5. **Artificial intelligence** presents new challenges for all respondents, as it calls for the application of the full range of media literacy competences - access, analysis and evaluation, as well as communication, creation and participation - and for the acquisition of new digital skills in line with the scope of emerging technologies. Monitoring trends and fostering cooperation across sectors (IT, education, media and government) are essential both for adapting legislation and regulatory frameworks and for providing training programmes that familiarise citizens with the new developments. Media literacy initiatives involving AI should be planned and designed to ensure they are accessible to various segments of the population**.**