Media Literacy Assessment in the Republic of Moldova

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Media Literacy Assessment in the Republic of Moldova

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List of abbreviations

IDK/IDA – I don't know/I don't answer

N – number of respondents

p.p. – percentage points

AI – Artificial Intelligence

TV – Television

RM – Republic of Moldova

ATU Gagauzia – Administrative Territorial Unit of Gagauzia

M – Male (used in quoting focus group participants)

F – Female (used in quoting focus group participants)

Summary

The scope of the research was to assess citizens' media consumption habits, level of trust in the media and media literacy. To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, a mixed methodology was applied, which included a quantitative survey of a nationally representative sample (1542 respondents) and an additional sample of parents with children aged 7-18 (326 respondents), data being complemented by a qualitative analysis carried out through focus group discussions.

More than half of the general population (56%) consider themselves to be well informed and 65% are interested in the news in the country. The media is perceived as interesting (61%), but not politically independent (61%). The main reason, mentioned in the focus group discussions, is the perception of political and financial control, with media sources seen as "coloured" according to the interests of funders. The most sceptical groups regarding the independence of the media are Russian speakers (only 17% consider it independent), people with very low incomes (25%), employees (32%) and retired people (34%).

The main source of daily information is social media (64%), followed by traditional TV (41%). Parents with children aged 7-18 are even more likely to use social media, with 80% using them daily for information. In terms of trust, traditional TV (28%) is still in first place, closely followed by social media networks (24%). For parents, however, the hierarchy is reversed: social media networks are the main source of trust (33%), ahead of television (21%). A general lack of trust in the media is a major problem, with 55% of respondents saying they do not fully trust any media source, the percentage rising to 63% among parents. Qualitative analysis highlights that the main cause of mistrust is the perception of political and financial control over media outlets, which results in a poor quality, often negative and sensationalist content. However, people choose a media source primarily because it is accessible (42%) and because they are used to it (40%). The majority of the population would like to see more local entertainment content (78%) and support an 80% quota of Romanian-language content on TV (73%).

Nearly all citizens (96%) believe it is important to be able to distinguish disinformation from news. The majority (59%) feel personally able to identify false news, but think it is difficult for the rest of the population (70%). Social media networks are considered the main source of disinformation by 70% of respondents, and 73% state they come across false information at least once a week. Focus group participants explain this phenomenon by the vast volume of information available on these platforms, but also by the high frequency of consumption, which inevitably leads to more false news, but also by the specificity of the content, which can be much more easily edited. However, over a third (36%) take no steps to verify the information. The level of trust in the press is low, with 55% saying they do not fully trust any source. Knowledge of institutions that can intervene is very low, with 44% of people not knowing where they could report false news.

Experience with media literacy training/courses is almost non-existent among the general population, with only 4% stating they have attended or know someone who has attended such courses. Personal interest in taking such training is also low, with 35% interested, while 64% show no interest. In contrast, the idea of introducing an optional media education course in schools is supported by the majority: 72% of respondents. Parents also support the idea, but to a slightly lesser extent (65%), with some expressing concerns in focus groups about overcrowding the school curriculum or a lack of qualified teachers to teach the course.

Introduction

This report has been prepared by Magenta Consulting for the Council of Europe and presents the results of the comprehensive study "Media Literacy Assessment in the Republic of Moldova". The study was conducted in the framework of the project "Advancing Media Freedom in the Republic of Moldova" (2025-2028).

1 Scope of the study

The main scope of the study is to establish a clear baseline for measuring the level of media literacy and public attitudes towards the media. The research analyses how citizens consume, trust and interact with information sources. One of the objectives is to assess media consumption habits among different demographic groups, including parents with school-age children (7-18 years old). The results are intended to support the development of public policies, educational programs and strategic communication efforts.

To achieve this goal, the study covered the following key topics:

- Media consumption habits
- Awareness and perceptions of disinformation
- Digital skills and access to information

2 Applied Methodology

The data presented in this report was collected through a mixed methodology, which combined quantitative (nationwide survey) and qualitative (focus groups) research to ensure a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study. Data collection was conducted from May 23 to June 23, 2025.

2.1 Survey

- **Method:** face-to-face interview using tablets (TAPI F2F)
- **Total sample:** 1868 respondents, of which:
- **National sample:** 1542 respondents, representative at national level
- **Booster sample:** 326 respondents among parents with children aged 7-18.
- **National sample type:** stratified multistage proportional probabilistic
- **Booster sample type:** stratified multistage probabilistic
- **Geography:** nationally representative
- **Respondents:** 18+, citizens of the Republic of Moldova

Table 1 contains the distribution of the national and booster samples collected, by region, district, and residence.

Table 1. Geographical distribution of national and booster samples

Region	Group	Districts	Area	National sample collected, N	Booster sample collected, N
North	Group 1	Briceni, Edinet, Ocnita, Donduseni	Urban	41	7
			Rural	74	16
	Group 2	Soroca, Drochia, Floresti	Urban	27	6
			Rural	90	19
	Group 3	Mun. Balti	Urban	55	12
			Rural	0	0
	Group 4	Falesti, Glodeni, Riscani, Singerei	Urban	22	4
			Rural	116	27
Centre	Group 5	Orhei, Rezina, Soldanesti, Telenesti	Urban	21	6
			Rural	93	20
Chișinău	Group 6	Mun. Chișinău	Urban	362	75
			Rural	41	8
Centre	Group 7	Anenii Noi, Criuleni, Dubasari rural	Urban	9	2
			Rural	81	19
	Group 8	Ialoveni, Straseni, Hincesti	Urban	21	4
			Rural	102	20
	Group 9	Ungheni, Calarasi, Nisporeni	Urban	27	6
			Rural	73	14
South	Group 10	Basarabeasca, Leova, Cimislia	Urban	14	4
			Rural	34	7
	Group 11	Causeni, Stefan Voda	Urban	15	2
			Rural	60	16
	Group 12	ATU Gagauzia	Urban	28	6
			Rural	45	8
	Group 13	Cahul, Cantemir, Taraclia	Urban	28	6
			Rural	63	12
Total				**1542**	**326**

Development and pre-testing of the questionnaire

The questionnaire, consisting of 43 questions, was developed in close cooperation with the Council of Europe and the Audiovisual Council of the Republic of Moldova. It covered topics such as media consumption habits, trust in media sources, perception of disinformation and media literacy. The instrument was pre-tested on 10 respondents (5 Romanian and 5 Russian speakers) to ensure the clarity and relevance of the questions, and was subsequently adjusted and approved.

Selection and training of interviewers

A team of 47 operators experienced in conducting field surveys was selected and their training was organised. During the training the purpose of the study, the methodology and the application of the questionnaire were explained. Each question in the questionnaire was explained and an interview was simulated so that operators understood how to ask the questions and what answers to expect.

Selection of participants

The selection process was rigorous in order to guarantee the representativeness of the data.

1. **Locality selection:** The territory of the country was divided into 13 geographic groups, further stratified by residence area (urban/rural) and type of locality (cities, large, medium, and small villages). Localities were randomly selected from each stratum.
2. **Household selection:** In urban areas, random selection of streets and starting points was applied, followed by the "+3" selection step rule. Routes for the national and booster sample were planned separately.
3. **Respondent selection:** Within the household, the eligible person who most recently celebrated his or her birthday was selected. If this person was not present for a longer period (e.g. gone abroad), the next eligible person would be selected. Up to three visits were made to contact the respondent, with each attempt documented in the time sheet.

Data collection

The approved questionnaire was programmed and collected on an online platform. All interviews were conducted in Romanian or Russian, depending on the respondent's preference. Responses were entered into the database immediately after completion, simplifying the data management process. This approach minimized the risk of errors, eliminated the need for double data entry and improved the efficiency of data processing.

Quality control

Continuous supervision of the operators was practised, with the appointment of an employee who continuously monitored the data collection process - this employee was familiar with the rules for completing the questionnaire and conducted checks on the collection process and the work of the operators.

Multiple control procedures were implemented:

- **Real-time monitoring:** Verification of operators' GPS location, average interview duration and data consistency, directly from the platform.
- **Callbacks:** All respondents who provided contact data were contacted, with up to 3 attempts per respondent. The callbacks were conducted by an experienced operator, who asked several demographic questions and specific questions from the questionnaire, to verify the accuracy of the data completed.
- **Database analysis:** Daily checks of key variables, demographic distribution, consistency of responses, and productivity per operator.
- **Elimination of non-compliant cases:** Questionnaires with inadequate duration, incomplete (mid-terminates) ones or those with a high number of non-responses were excluded from the final database.

Data weighting

In order to ensure that the results are representative at national level, the data collected in the national sample were weighted by region, residence area (urban/rural) and gender.

2.2 Focus Group Discussions

In order to deepen the data obtained from the survey, a qualitative research was conducted using the focus group method. This allowed the perceptions, attitudes and experiences of the participants to the study to be explored in detail.

- **Number of focus groups:** 5 online sessions
- **Total number of participants:** 48 people, aged 18 and over
- **Group composition:** 3 focus groups brought together participants from different regions of the Republic of Moldova, and 2 focus groups were dedicated to the Russian-speaking population of the ATU Gagauzia.
- **Collection period:** June 16 - June 23, 2025.

The distribution of focus groups can be visualized in the table below.

Table 2. Distribution of focus groups

Region	Language	Number of FGs
North	Romanian	1
Centre (incl. Chișinău)	Romanian	1
South (excl. ATU Gagauzia	Romanian	1
ATU Gagauzia	Russian	2

Moderation guide

A structured moderation guide was developed based on the results of the quantitative survey to explore themes such as media consumption, trust in media sources, exposure to disinformation and attitudes towards media literacy.

Selection of participants

Participants were recruited on the basis of a screener questionnaire to ensure diversity of profiles according to socio-demographic criteria, media consumption behaviour and level of digital literacy.

Data collection

The discussions, lasting approximately 90 minutes each, were moderated by an experienced facilitator and were conducted online on the Google Meet platform. The sessions were audio recorded and transcribed in full.

2.3 Data analysis

Survey data analysis was conducted using the SPSS statistical software program. The results are presented visually in graphs, accompanied by analytical comments highlighting the main findings and trends. The percentages presented in the report are rounded, so the sum of rounded values may vary by ±1 percentage point.

Qualitative data analysis was conducted using the thematic and narrative analysis method, and direct quotes from participants have been integrated into the report to illustrate the findings. The data collected through the focus groups are presented in this report in grey shading.

CHAPTER I:

Demographic profile of participants

This chapter presents the socio-demographic profile of the participants to the research. The characteristics of the respondents in the opinion survey are described in turn - the national sample and the sample of parents, as well as the profile of the focus group participants.

1.1 Demographic profile of survey participants

Within the sample representative of the general population, 1542 people participated, 25% are aged 18-35 years old, 34% fall into the 36-55 age bracket and 40% are over 55. More than a third of respondents (36%) live in a household with at least one child aged between 7-18 years old. Regarding employment status, 38% are employed, 31% are retired, and 17% are unemployed or not currently working. In terms of level of education, one in four respondents has higher education (24%) and 26% have specialized or vocational secondary education. The economic situation of households is perceived as difficult by the majority of respondents: 56% say they are "having a pretty hard time" or "very hard time" on their current income. Respondents were asked to indicate the ethnic group or groups with which they identify. According to the collected data, 83% of participants identify as Moldovan ethnicity, 10% as Romanian ethnicity, 9% as Russian ethnicity, 4% as Ukrainian, and 4% as Gagauz (multiple answers were possible). Regarding the language spoken, respondents indicated, without receiving predefined answer options, the language they speak most frequently in their daily life. Nearly half state that they speak Romanian (46%), 35% declare that they speak "Moldovan," and 16% speak Russian. Because the perceptions and behaviours expressed by those who mentioned speaking Romanian differ significantly from those of respondents who declared speaking "Moldovan," these two groups have been analysed separately throughout the report.

In the booster sample of parents with children aged between 7 to 18 years old, 326 people participated, 67% of them women and 33% men. 29% of the respondents are aged 18-35 years old , 61% fall into the 36-55 age bracket, and 10% are over 55. Household composition predominantly consists of larger families: 35% of respondents live in households with four members and 36% in households with five or more members. All participants have at least one child aged between 7 and 18 years old. in the household: 41% have one child, 39% have two children, and 19% have three or more children. Just over half of the respondents are employed (53%), while 24% are unemployed or not currently working, and 9% are on parental leave. Regarding the level of education completed, 30% of the respondents have higher education.

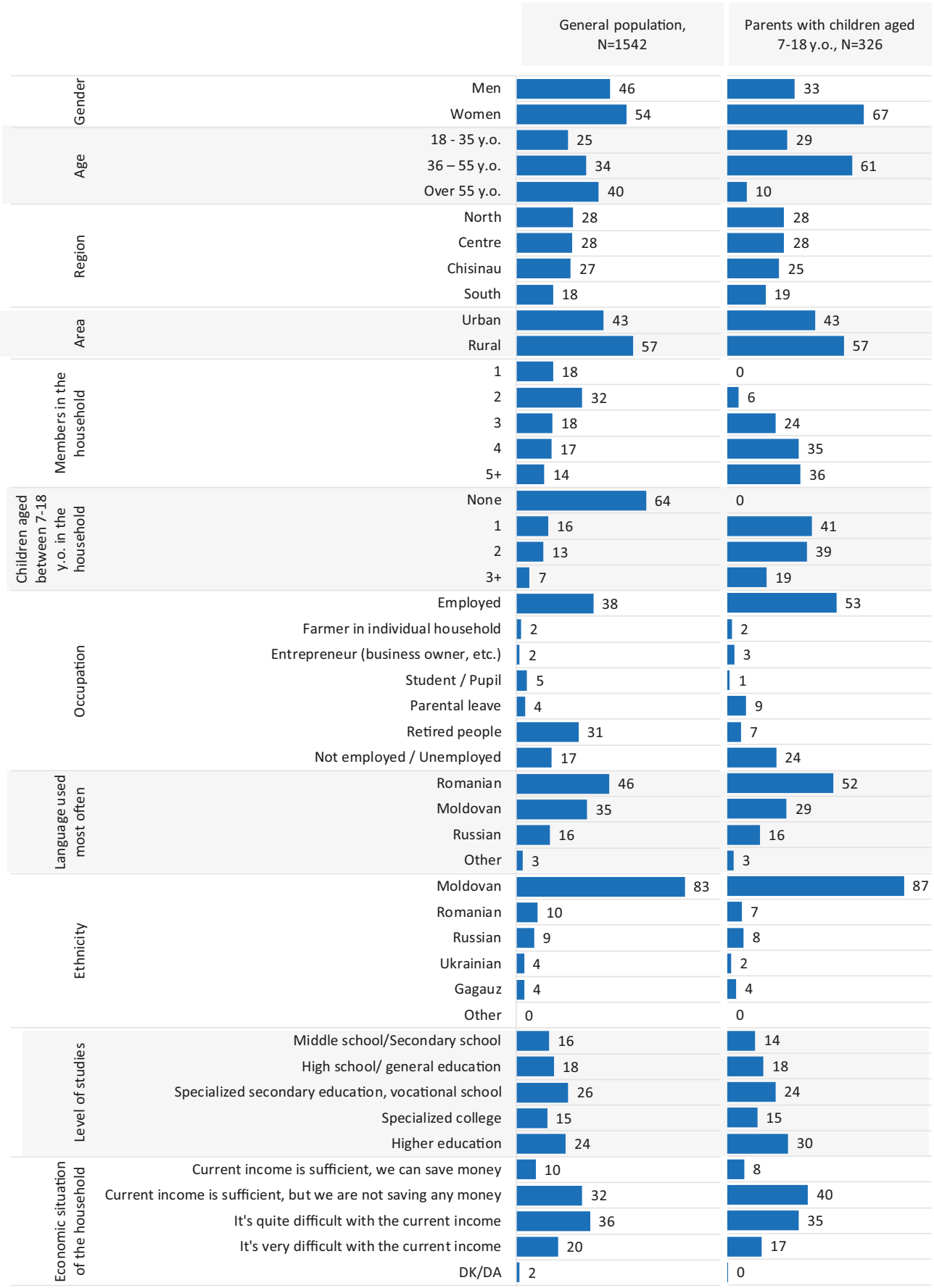

Figure 1.1.1: *Demographic profile of survey participants, %*

1.2 Demographic profile of Focus Group participants

Forty-eight people participated in the focus group discussions, with an equal distribution of women and men from urban and rural areas. Half of the participants were aged between 18 and 35 years old, 17 were between 36 and 55 years old. and 7 participants were over 56 years old.

Table 3. Demographic profile of Focus Group participants

Characteristics		N
Gender	Women	24
	Men	24
Age	18-35 y.o.	24
	36-55 y.o.	17
	56+ y.o.	7
Region	North	9
	Centre	10
	South	8
	ATU Gagauzia	21
Area	Urban	24
	Rural	24
Total		**48**

Chapter II:

Media consumption patterns

This chapter describes the media consumption habits of the population of the Republic of Moldova. It analyses the level of interest in news, perceptions of media quality, the sources of information used (TV, radio, online), as well as the frequency and reasons behind these choices. The chapter details the channels, stations, websites and media platforms preferred by citizens, the degree of trust placed in them, and content and language preferences.

2.1 Level of awareness and interest in media

The majority of the general population consider themselves well informed regarding events in the Republic of Moldova - 56% say they are very or to a large extent informed, while 44% declare that they are poorly informed. Men consider themselves slightly more informed than women (60% vs. 53%), and older people tend to rate themselves as more informed - 59% of those over 55 years old declare they are informed, compared to 52% of young people aged 18-35. The perceived level of information increases with the level of education (from 33% among those with secondary education to 77% among those with higher education) and with the economic situation of the household (69% in households that manage to save, compared to 44% in those that have a very hard time surviving on their income). There are also differences according to the language spoken - 68% of Romanian speakers consider themselves well informed, compared to 39% of those who declare they speak "Moldovan," while 59% of Russian speakers consider themselves informed.

Among parents with children aged 7-18 years old, 52% state they are well informed, while 48% rate themselves as poorly informed.

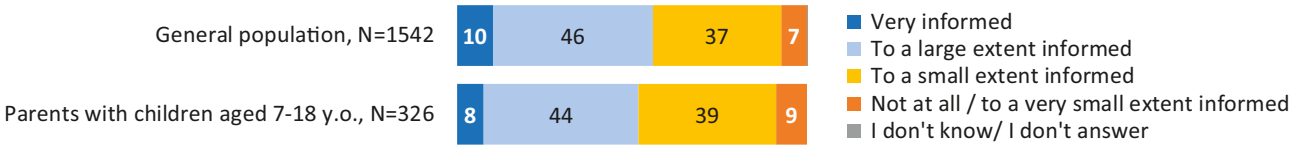

Figure 2.1.1: *"Q7. Overall, how informed do you consider yourself about what is happening in the Republic of Moldova? (one possible answer)", %*

Interest in the latest news and events in the country is high for 65% of respondents from the general population. 29% are moderately or slightly interested in news and events in the country. Women and men show a similar level of interest (65% each). Larger differences appear by language spoken and ethnicity: Romanian speakers (75%) and people of Romanian (84%) or Gagauz (71%) ethnicity declare that they are the most interested in news, while "Moldovan" speakers (54%) and people of Ukrainian and Russian ethnicity (56% each) are less interested. At the same time, people with higher education (78%) or college (73%) are more interested than those with secondary education (48%). Interest in the news is higher in urban areas (68%) than in rural areas (62%) and especially in Chișinău and the North region (66-67%). From an economic perspective, interest is significantly higher among those with a high income (those who can save money) - 78% - and lower in households that declare having great difficulty financially (62% and 52% respectively). The least interested in the latest news (scores of 3-6) are found especially among people with secondary education (42%), those from the South region (32%), those who declare they speak "Moldovan" (36%) and the unemployed (36%).

Parents with children aged 7-18 years old have a similar profile: 62% are interested in news and events in the country, while 32% declare that they have little interest.

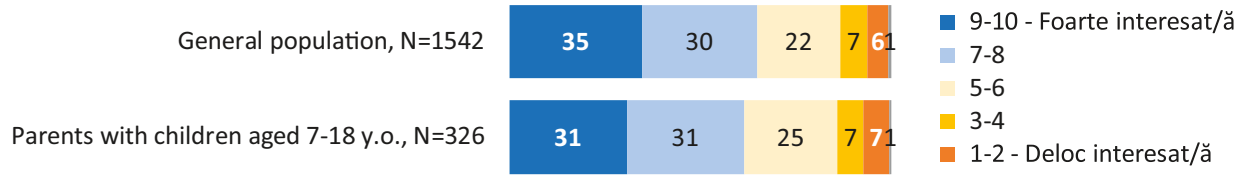

Figure 2.1.2: *"Q10. In general, how interested are you in the latest news and events in the country? Please answer on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 - not interested at all and 10 - very interested in the latest news. If you do not watch or listen to the news at all, please tell me. (one answer)", %*

At least half of the general population considers that the media in the Republic of Moldova produces interesting (61%) and high-quality (57%) content, while half state that the media have sufficient funding (51%). 48% of respondents appreciate the relevance of the content to their own interests and 43% the accuracy of the information. On the other hand, slightly more than half of the respondents do not consider the media to be independent of political interests (61%) or sufficiently transparent about its funding (57%).

Women rate media content as more interesting than men, with 64% of women expressing this opinion compared to 58% of men, and young people aged 18-35 years old consider it interesting (66%) more than those aged 36-55 (58%). Depending on the language spoken, there are significant differences in perceptions: Romanian speakers (74%) agree to a greater extent, in contrast to Russian speakers (43%).

In terms of the perceived quality of media content, there are no differences between men and women (both groups at 57%), but young people (18-35 years old) appreciate the quality of content to a larger extent (66%) than those in the 36-55 age group (52%). Similar to the previous statement, Romanian speakers (69%), express a high level of agreement, as opposed to Russian speakers (39%). People who are studying (pupils/students) consider media content as high-quality (79%), to a higher extent than employees (56%) and the unemployed (53%). At the same time, a higher proportion of people from rural areas perceive the content produced as high-quality (61% vs. 52% urban).

Focus group participants expressed critical opinions about the quality and type of content provided by the media in the Republic of Moldova. A major dissatisfaction is related to the predominantly negative and sensationalist tone of news, especially on TV. Some participants feel that the media focuses excessively on scandals, conflicts and negative events at the expense of in-depth topics, creating stress and anxiety among the public. Another criticism concerns the lack of relevance of the content - some participants feel disconnected from the news, which they perceive as being too focused on international current affairs or political battles, ignoring the topics that really matter for the daily lives of citizens in the Republic of Moldova.

At the same time, some participants in the focus group discussions consider that there has been a positive progress, manifested through the diversification of sources and migration towards the online environment, which makes information more accessible. The emergence of influencers is seen as a factor of change for the better by some, while others are sceptical, having doubts about their credibility. However, although participants acknowledge that the number of sources of information has increased, many believe that the quality of content has stagnated or even declined, due to the much more frequent occurrence of false news than before.

- *"The news media in the Republic of Moldova has evolved a lot, but some of them are a lot of false news that present what is not really there and it is very misleading"*, (M, 20 years old, South, rural).
- *"In relation to my attitude towards mass media, previously mentioned were television sets, those old sources of information that used to present only positive news and information, so to speak. I haven't used TV as a source of information for about 7-8 years, I actually took it out of my home, just because I felt that on TV they started to broadcast only news that had a negative impact on my psychological state and caused me stress and anxiety." (F, 35 y.o., ATU Gagauzia, urban).*

- *"In recent years. the professionalism of journalists has decreased... it is predominantly towards scandals, something negative, i.e. I have not noticed anyone writing a piece, a commentary in the economic field"*, (M, 68 years old, Centre, urban).
- *"When you watch our news, it seems to you that you don't live in Moldova... There is too much content from other countries, but there is little content about Moldova itself",* (M, 33 years old, Centre, urban).

The perception on sufficient funding for the functioning of the media is similar between women and men (51% vs. 49%) and relatively constant across age groups (around 50%). People from the South region (62%), as well as those of Gagauz ethnicity (63%) tend to believe more frequently that funding is sufficient.

The relevance of media content to their own interests is higher among young people (18-35 years old) and people over 55 (50-51%) compared to the 36-55 age group (41%). Women (48%) tend to feel slightly better represented than men (46%), and regional differences are moderate, with the highest levels of agreement in the South (56%) and Centre (52%), compared to the North (41%) and Chișinău (44%). The perceived relevance of the content is higher among Romanian speakers (60%) compared to those who declare they speak "Moldovan" (39%) or Russian (32%). Differences are also visible according to occupational status: students and pupils (62%) and people on parental leave (65%) are more likely to agree with the media content, while the unemployed report a lower level of agreement (39%).

Women believe to a slightly greater extent than men that the media in the Republic of Moldova informs the public correctly - 45% compared to 41%. Young people aged 18-35 years old tend to have a more positive perception of the accuracy of information (48%) compared to people in the 36-55 age group (38%). The perception of accuracy differs significantly according to the language spoken: 56% of Romanian speakers consider that the media informs accurately, compared to 38% of those who declare speaking "Moldovan" and 23% of Russian speakers. At the same time, the positive perception increases among people in a better economic situation: 53% of those who say that their income is sufficient and they manage to save money, say that the media informs correctly, compared to 34% of those who say that they have a very hard time with the income they have.

As regards the perceived independence of media sources, young people aged 18-35 are slightly more confident (41%) than other age groups. Significant differences appear between Romanian speakers (47%) and those who declare that speak "Moldovan" (30%) or Russian (17%). Confidence levels are also higher among students (55%) compared to employees (32%) and retired people (34%). Similarly, a lower share of perceived media independence is recorded among those with very low incomes (25%).

One aspect frequently mentioned in the focus group discussions is the political and financial control exercised over media institutions - most media outlets are perceived as "coloured," reflecting the interests of political parties or donors.

This lack of independence is seen as the main cause of the poor quality of journalism and public distrust.

- *"My opinion is that the media is very coloured in our country, according to the colours of the parties, i.e. every, almost every TV or radio station follows the interest of one party"*, (M, 35 years old, South, urban).
- *"At the moment I think that the media in Moldova is very much controlled by the current government.. the other channels that were not... that used to speak a bit more truthfully have been shut down,"* (M, 54 years old, Centre, rural).
- *"Today's media is biased and paid to support certain interests"* (W, 45 years old, ATU Gagauzia, urban).

Women are slightly more sceptical than men about the transparency of media funding (23% vs. 28%), and perceptions do not differ significantly by age. Higher levels of trust are found among students (43%), Romanian speakers (32%) and high-income earners (37%). Conversely, the least convinced are Russian speakers (15%) and those with very low incomes (15%), while 21% of those who identify as "Moldovan" language speakers consider the media to be transparent in terms of its funding.

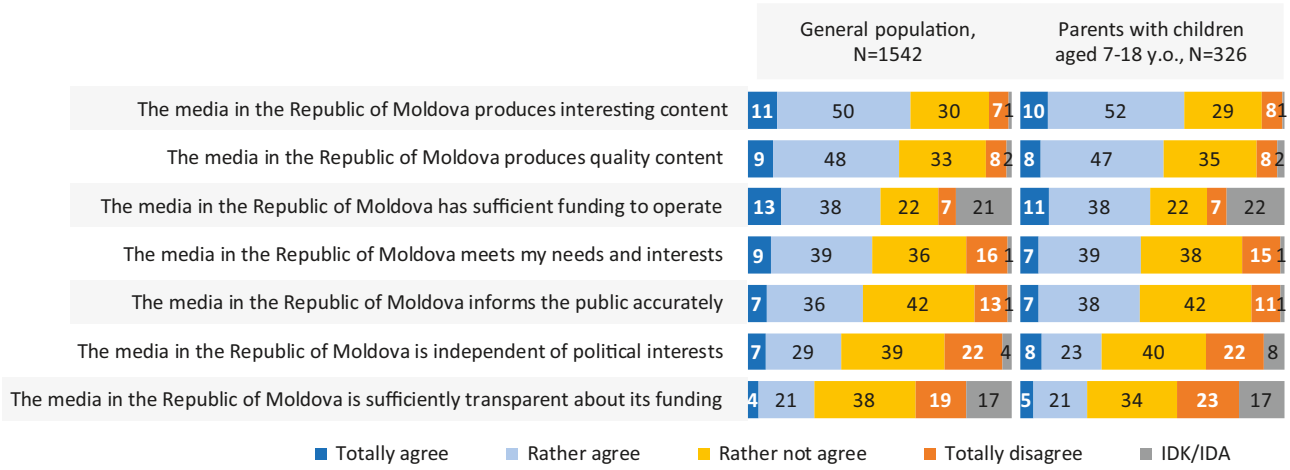

Figure 2.1.3: *"Q8. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements. For each statement, please use the following scale: Totally agree, Rather agree, Rather disagree, Totally disagree). (one answer at a time)", %*

Social media networks are the main source of daily information for 64% of the general population, followed by traditional TV (41%) and communication with friends and family (31%). Other sources such as online TV, news websites and radio are used daily by 22-24% of respondents.

Social media networks are used daily to an equal extent by women and men (64%), but the differences by age group are very high: 86% of young people (aged 18-35) inform themselves daily via social media networks, compared to 41% of people over 55 years old. People in urban areas (70%) are more active on social media networks than those in rural areas (59%). Usage is also significantly higher among those with higher education (73%), but also among pupils/students (88%) and people on parental leave (82%). At the other end of the spectrum, 37% of retired people inform themselves daily via social media networks.

Classical TV is preferred daily by the elderly (66% of over 55 years old) and retired people (67%) in particular, while only 15% of young people watch it daily. There are no gender differences, but daily consumption is higher in rural areas (44%) than in urban areas (37%). Only 7% of students say they get their daily news from TV, in contrast to 67% of retired people who watch TV daily for news. A smaller proportion of Russian speakers say they use TV daily (31%), compared to 45% of "Moldovan" or Romanian speakers (42%).

However, some participants in the focus groups say that TV has become a secondary or even irrelevant source of information. The reasons given are practical: news programs are at fixed hours, considered inconvenient, and the internet offers instant and flexible access to information. Some have given up television completely: "*I disconnected the TV 11 years ago, I don't regret it,*" (M, 68 years old, Centre, urban).

Communication with friends and family is a daily source of information slightly more frequent among women (32%) than men (31%), and more present in the South region (48%) than in other regions. Young people (18-35 years old) use this channel to a greater extent (35%) than older people (23%), and those living in large households (5+members) or with three or more children (40%) seem to rely more on this informal way of obtaining information.

Online TV is preferred by 31% of young people and 29% of those in urban areas, but only 17% of the elderly access it daily. Usage is significant in Chișinău (31%) and among people with higher education (33%). A higher share is also observed among people on parental leave (43%) and those with above average income (29-31%).

News websites are used daily by 30% of urban respondents, compared to only 18% in rural areas. Gender differences are insignificant, but the elderly use them less (14%) compared to those aged 36-55 years old. (30%). Access is significantly higher among people with higher education (41%) and ethnic Romanians (43%), as well as among those who declare a decent economic situation.

Radio is used more by men (25%) than by women (19%), and more frequently in rural areas (26%) than in urban areas (15%). It is more listened to by those over 55 years old (29%) and by retired people (31%). Daily use is much lower among young people aged 18-35 years old (10%), pupils/students (5%), ethnic Gagauz people (6%) or people on parental leave (7%).

For parents with children aged 7-18 years old, social media networks have an even higher share - 80% use them daily for information. This is followed by friends and family (37%) and traditional TV (34%). News websites (26%) and online TV (32%) are mentioned to a lesser extent.

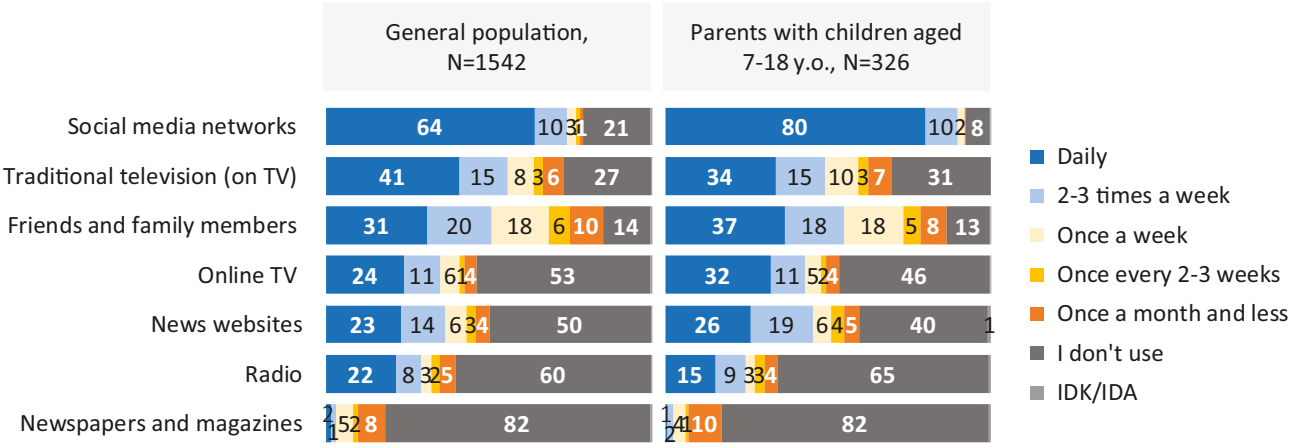

Figure 2.1.4: *"Q9. How often do you use the following sources/channels to keep informed about current events? (one possible answer at a time)", %*

In terms of news consumption, for the general population, social media networks are the main source of information for news and events in the country (39%), followed by traditional television (31%) and news websites (12%).

Social media networks are the main source of information about news and events for most young people (67% of 18-35 year olds), with usage decreasing with age (45% for 36-55 year olds, 16% for those over 55 year olds). Gender differences are minimal (36% for women vs. 42% for men). Russian speakers (52%) and ethnic Gagauz (54%) and Ukrainian (53%) respondents are more likely to report social media networks as their main source. Students (63%), the unemployed (52%) and people on parental leave (54%) also inform themselves using these channels.

Classical TV is more frequently used by people over 55 years old (60%), while 3% of young people use it daily for information. Women and men use TV for information equally (31%), and in rural areas TV is used more frequently than in urban areas (37% vs. 24%). Classical TV has high popularity in the Centre region (40%) and among retired people (63%). Those who declare they speak "Moldovan" (41%) indicate this source more often than those who say they speak Romanian (29%) or Russian (17%).

News websites are mostly used by people with higher education (26%) and from urban areas (18%), but also by young people (18%) and respondents from Chișinău (21%). Romanian speakers (17%) use this source for news more frequently than those who declare that they speak "Moldovan" (17%). Students (22%) and those with above average incomes (19%) frequently report news websites as their main source.

Online TV is less commonly used as a main source overall, but slightly more frequent among those with higher education (12%), people from Chișinău (11%) and ethnic Russians (15%).

Parents with children aged 7-18 years old indicate to a greater extent social media networks as the main source of information about news and events in the country (52%). Classical TV is mentioned by 19%, and news websites and online TV by 12% and 8%, respectively.

Focus group participants said they prefer online because it is more accessible and offers flexibility. Several mentioned the fact that whenever they have a little free time, they can access the phone and find out the latest news or what specifically interests them. For example, a participant from ATU Gagauzia states: *"For the most part, I use the internet most often for information, because television is not the most convenient option for me, news bulletins are broadcasted at inconvenient hours for my schedule. The Internet, on the other hand, is always at my fingertips and I can get information whenever I need it"* (M, 51, ATU Gagauzia, urban). Social media networks, such as Facebook, Telegram and Instagram, are perceived as a portal or news aggregator, whether the information simply appears in their feed or they see it distributed by the news pages they follow. Participants appreciate the accessibility and continuous flow of news they get, which saves them time.

- *"For me it's very practical, I mean, you look there, you browse around, you see what's new with your friends and, at the same time, you see the latest news, that is you save time, you don't have to go to other sites - you have browsed there one, two, three pages and you're already up to date with all the latest news"*, (M, 35 years old, South, urban).
- *"I think the internet comes first, because we are all at work indeed and when you have a break or 5 minutes of free time you automatically go on Facebook"*, (M, 35 years old, North, urban).

Besides social media networks, news portals are also very popular. Some participants use them as main sources and are subscribed to various publications, both national and local. Among the most frequently mentioned are:

- Realitatea.md,
- Ziarul de Gardă,
- Point.md,
- Agora.md,
- Diez.md,
- Paranteze.md,
- Ziua de Azi (Cahul).

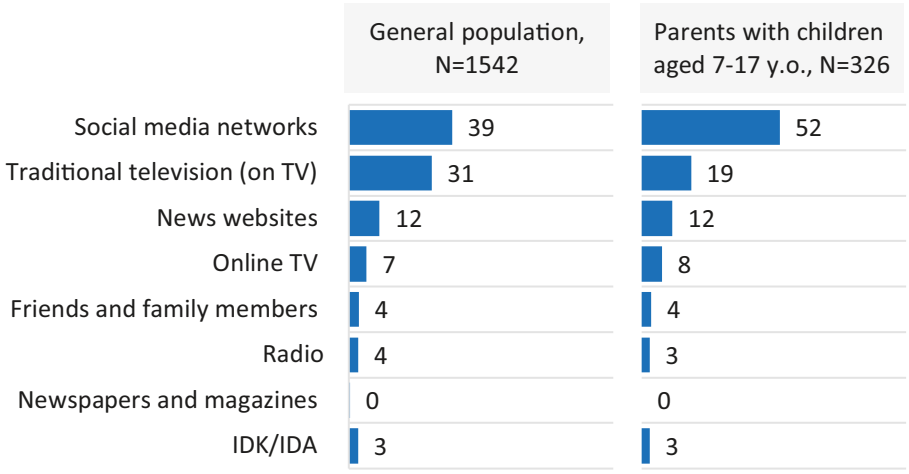

***Figure 2.1.5**: "Q11. What is your main source/mode of information about news and events in the country? (one answer)", %*

Although the majority of Moldovans get their information from social media networks, traditional television (at TV) remains the main trusted channel for the general population (28%), followed by social media networks (24%) and news websites (12%). At the same time, 15% say they do not trust any source.

Television remains the channel most trusted especially by people aged over 55 (49%), retired people (48%) and respondents in the rural areas (32%). At regional level, classical TV enjoys a high level of trust in the Centre region (36%). Also, those who declare that speak "Moldovan" (35%) have a higher level of trust in this channel more than those who speak Romanian (29%) or Russian (14%). The share of trust is lower among young people (9% for 18-35 year olds) and students (5%).

Social media networks are the channel most trusted by young people (18-35 years old) (36%), followed by those aged 36-55 (29%). It is also trusted by students (39%), people on parental leave (33%) and the unemployed (32%). In terms of language and ethnicity, social media networks are the dominant source of trust for Russian speakers (34%), ethnic Gagauz (34%), Russians (33%) and Ukrainians (36%). In urban areas, trust in networks (27%) exceeds classical television (22%).

Trust in news websites is higher in Chișinău (20%), in urban areas (17%), but especially among people with higher education (23%) and students/pupils (24%). At the same time, Romanian and Russian speakers (16% each) express a higher level of trust than those who declare that they speak "Moldovan" (4%).

For parents with children aged 7-18, social media networks are the source they trust the most (33%), followed by traditional television (21%) and news websites (11%). A 17% share say they do not trust any of the sources mentioned.

Several people stated in the focus group discussions that TV channels are not always objective or hide certain information. Therefore, they prefer to get their news from the internet, where they feel that the information is more real, straightforward and easily comparable. Hence, a key point that emerged is people's need to check and compare information. Some participants said that they do not always rely on one single source, but look for the same news in different places to make sure it is true and to form a complete picture. At the same time, one participant mentioned that he uses television to verify or validate the news he reads online. According to him, a piece of information found on the internet is considered credible only after it is confirmed by a TV station that he trusts.

- "I *personally get my information more from TV channels, similarly frequently from the internet. Still, I try to verify the news from multiple sources - If I see something online, I wait to see if it appears on a TV channel as well. If I see or hear the news again there, I consider it credible, otherwise I have doubts*", (W, 47 years old, Centre, rural).
- "*Once we do a Google search, we get more answers and we have the possibility to read both from one source and from another source, maybe it's one with video, maybe it's one that's only written,*" (W, 39 years old, North, urban).
- *"I personally inform myself from several sources, most often on the official sites of TV stations. I compare the news, and if I see the same story there, I know it is reliable,"* (W, 29, Centre, rural).

Another aspect mentioned is the possibility to check the information "live," directly from people or from the community. This on-site verification gives local or regional news portals a higher degree of trust: *"In terms of trust, I can say that if we are talking about regional/local news in our neighbourhoods, I can ask witnesses who were present there, i.e. this information is easier to verify... if, let's say, we refer to something that happened in Comrat or in another village, I can ask people in that area and that way I will find out for sure whether it is true or not. From this point of view, it is simpler here. The area is small."* (W, 30, ATU Gagauzia, urban).

In addition to all this, some participants mention that they also rely on colleagues, friends or relatives when informing themselves.

- "*Most often I get informed at work, when I go to work, well, I work in a government organisation and there I find out all the news, and I already come home and I can still look on social media networks, but most reliable, I get my information at work,*" (M, 33 years old, Centre, urban).
- *"Most of the time I hear news from relatives, acquaintances, close friends who are abroad and when we talk, they recount what is happening there, globally,"* (W, 35 years old, ATU Gagauzia, urban).

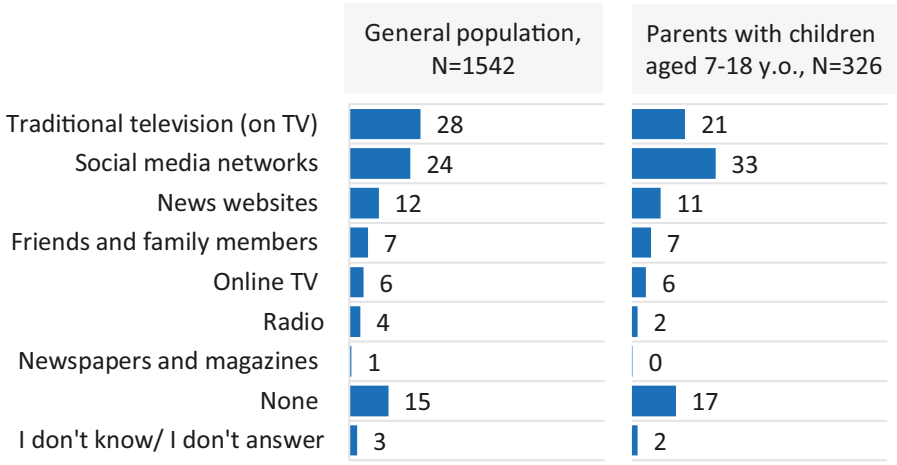

Figure 2.1.6: *"Q12. Which source of information do you trust the most? (one answer)", %*

The main reasons why respondents choose a particular source as their main source of information are accessibility/ ease of use (42%) and familiarity (40%).

At the same time, 29% consider the chosen source to be the most credible and 27% appreciate the speed with which they provide information. Among parents with children aged 7-18, the same reasons for selecting the main sources of information are evident.

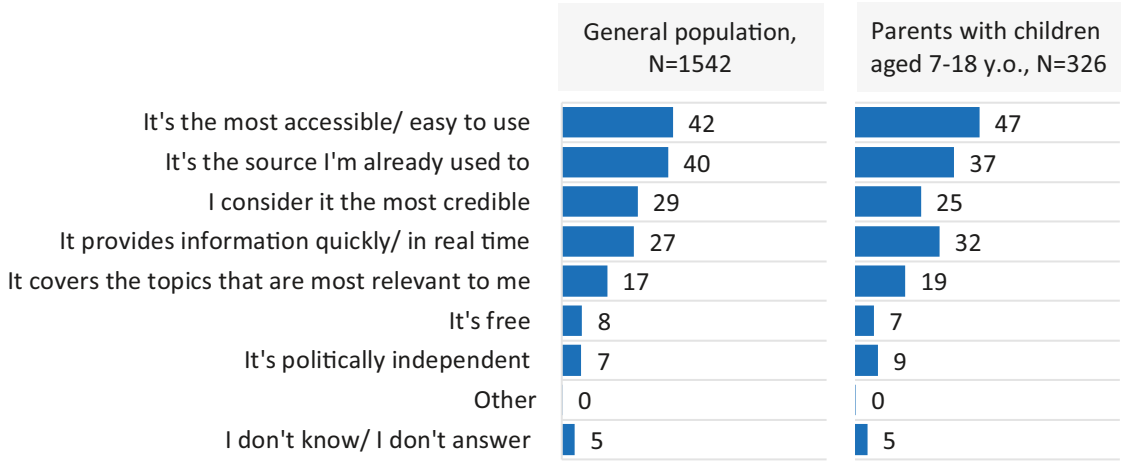

Figure 2.1.7: *"Q13. Why did you choose this source as your main source of information about news and events in the country? (multiple answer)", %*

2.2 TV news consumption

Among those who get informed from TV at least once a week, 34% say they watch the entire news bulletin without doing other activities in parallel, while 18% say the TV is on in the background and they watch closely only when they hear something interesting. Another 16% of respondents watch the news only when it comes on between other programs, and the same proportion say they watch the news and do other things at the same time. A further 17% mention they do not watch the news on TV at all.

Those who stated to a larger extent that they use to watch the news without doing other things at the same time are those aged over 55 (51%) and retired people (56%). This behaviour is also more common in one-person (47%) and two-person households (39%), as well as in the Centre and North regions (39% and 35%). On the other hand, this type of dedicated consumption is less common among young people aged 18-35 (9%), students (7%) and people in

Chișinău (27%). Also, Russian speakers (22%) say they watch TV news in its entirety to a lesser extent, compared to those who speak Romanian (36%) or declare that they speak "Moldovan" (35%).

Among parents with children aged 7-18, the share of those who watch the entire bulletin attentively is lower (22%), while 22% say the TV is on in the background and they react to the content only if they hear something interesting. Another 17% say they partially watch the news while doing other activities, and 18% watch it only accidentally, when it appears between other programs. The share of those who do not watch news on TV at all is 22%.

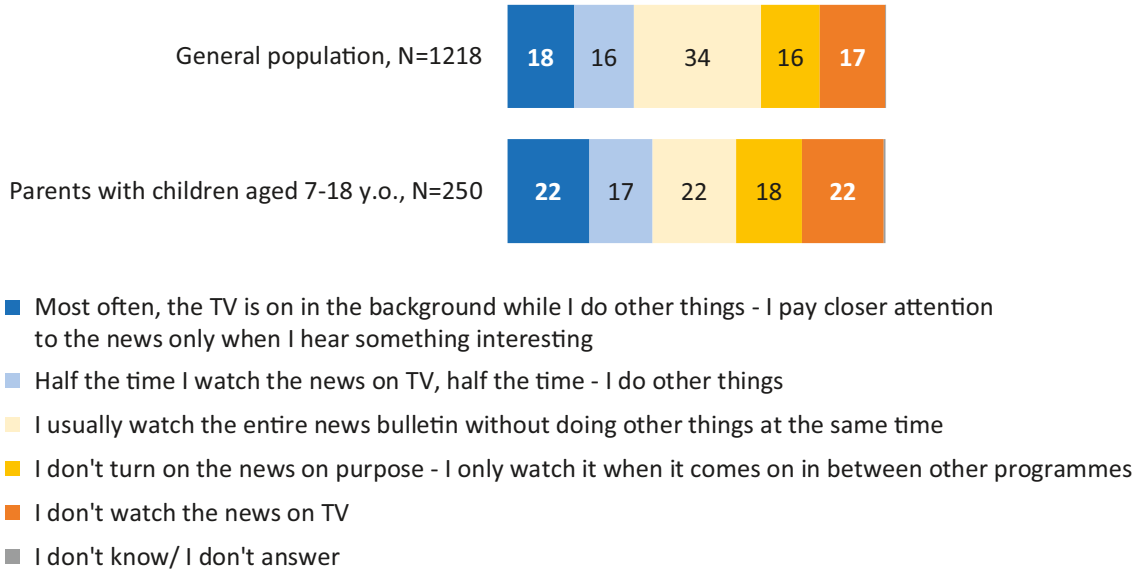

Figure 2.2.1: *"Q14. How do you usually watch the news on TV? (one possible answer)," % among those who get their information from TV, at least once a week*

For the majority of those who get their news from TV (56%), watching the news is a daily habit. One in four (28%) say they watch the news 2-3 times a week, and the rest less often.

Daily TV news watching is most frequent among those aged over 55 (71%) and retired people (75%), while young people aged 18-35 (26%) and students (15%) watch the news much less often. Daily consumption is higher in the South (61%), among ethnic Russians (74%) and Gagauz (67%).

Among parents with children aged 7-18, daily watching of news on TV is mentioned by 46%, while 30% say they watch it 2-3 times a week.

14% indicate that they watch the news on TV once a week, while 9% say they watch it once every few weeks or even less.

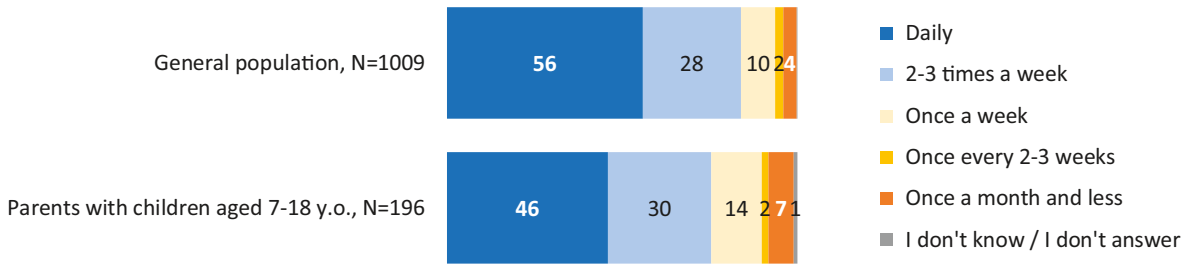

Figure 2.2.2: *"Q15. How often do you watch TV news (either on TV or online)? (one possible answer)," % of people who watch news on TV*

In general, news bulletins are the most watched type of content on TV (63%), followed by films and arts series (54%). Health, lifestyle and personal development programs are mentioned by 28% and entertainment by 23% of respondents. Cultural content is watched by 22% of respondents, and the other categories - political (17%), sports (16%), documentaries (13%) and cooking (12%) - are mentioned to a lesser extent.

News bulletins are the most watched type of TV content, being mentioned by 63% of respondents who watch news on TV. They are particularly popular among people aged over 55 and retired people (83%). They are also pursued more often in households with 1-2 members (73-74%) and in households without children (70%). Those who speak "Moldovan" (66%) or Romanian (68%) consume this type of content more frequently than Russian speakers (43%).

Films and artistic series are watched by 54% of respondents, with a slight preference among women (57%). Age does not seem to significantly influence preferences, but this type of content is particularly popular among respondents with a high school or specialized secondary education (up to 62%) and among those who say they are unemployed (58%). Respondents who speak Russian also stand out with a high frequency of consumption (67%).

Programs on health, lifestyle and personal development are watched by 28% of respondents, especially women (36%), retired (43%), and people from the South (40%). In contrast, men (20%) and young people aged 18-35 (17%) watch these programs much less often.

Entertainment shows (humour, talent, reality shows, etc.) are mentioned by 23% of respondents. Women (26%) and the middle-aged (36-55 years old - 25%) are slightly more interested in this type of content. There is a slight increase in interest among those with children (30% in households with 3+ children) and among pupils or students (26%).

Cultural programs (music, art, literature, etc.) are followed by 22% of respondents. Interest is slightly higher among women (25%), retired people (26%) and those with higher education (26%). People living alone (31%) and ethnic Ukrainians (27%) are also frequent consumers of this type of programs.

Political programs and talk shows are watched by 17% of respondents, in particular men (20%), by people over 55 years old (26%), retired people (25%) and ethnic Romanians (31%).

Parents with children aged 7-18 say that they most frequently watch films and art series (56%) and news bulletins (56%) on TV, followed by children's programs (32%) and entertainment programs (29%).

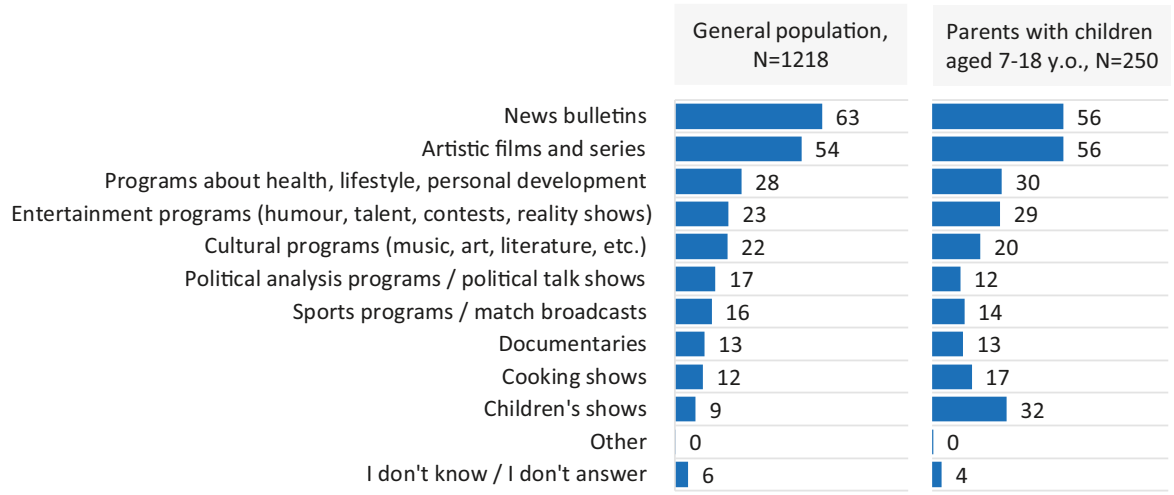

Figure 2.2.3: *"Q17. What type of programs do you watch most often on TV? (multiple answer)," % among those who get their information from TV at least once a week*

The majority of the general population would like to see more local entertainment content on TV (78%) and support the idea of 80% of local content being in Romanian (73%). 62% think that too little local content is produced on TV channels in the Republic of Moldova and 45% say there is insufficient content in Russian. Almost half believe there are too many TV channels in the Republic of Moldova - 45%.

The main supporters of the idea that 80% of local content should be in Romanian are Romanian speakers (92%) or those who say they speak "Moldovan," in strong contrast to Russian speakers (22%) and ethnic minorities - Russians (27%), Ukrainians (25%), Gagauz (17%). At the same time, support is higher in the Centre region (82%) and among people with higher education (83%).

During focus group discussions, the government was criticized by some Russian-speaking participants for adopting laws imposing mandatory quotas for audiovisual content in Romanian. On the other hand, some Romanian-speaking participants in the focus group discussions consider that there is not enough quality content in Romanian, especially in terms of entertainment, which pushes them towards Russian alternatives.

The lack of local content is primarily supported by people aged 36-55 (65%), employees (65%) and ethnic Gagauz (66%). By areas and regions, the perception is relatively uniform, but slightly higher support comes from the North (65%) and Centre (62%) regions.

Insufficient content in Russian is especially noted by Russian speakers (79%), and ethnic minorities - Gagauz (81%), Ukrainians (78%), Russians (75%). These values contrasts with low support among Romanian speakers (32%).

An important theme, especially among participants from Gagauzia, is the lack of quality Russian-language media content produced in the Republic of Moldova. They feel that in order to inform themselves, they often have to choose between media sources from the Russian Federation (which some recognise as having their own agenda) and local sources of poor quality.

Participants point to a lack of clear and detailed information in Russian about the activity of the government, ministries and about legislative changes. They perceive that in the absence of this information, a significant part of the population remains poorly informed or vulnerable to misinterpretation.

- *"I wish there was more information in Russian... Yes, I support the learning of the state language, that is to say, I take a positive view of it, but it is a difficult transition and, temporarily, I think that a step should be taken to meet Russian-speaking citizens and offer them an alternative, because if they are not offered it, they will watch content in Russian, only the information will be presented from a different perspective and in a different form, as they say."* (M, 27 years old, ATU Gagauzia, urban).

79% of parents with children want more local entertainment content on TV and also 79% support the 80% quota of Romanian content. 65% believe that too little local content is produced, 39% say that there is insufficient content in Russian, and 44% think that the number of TV channels is too high.

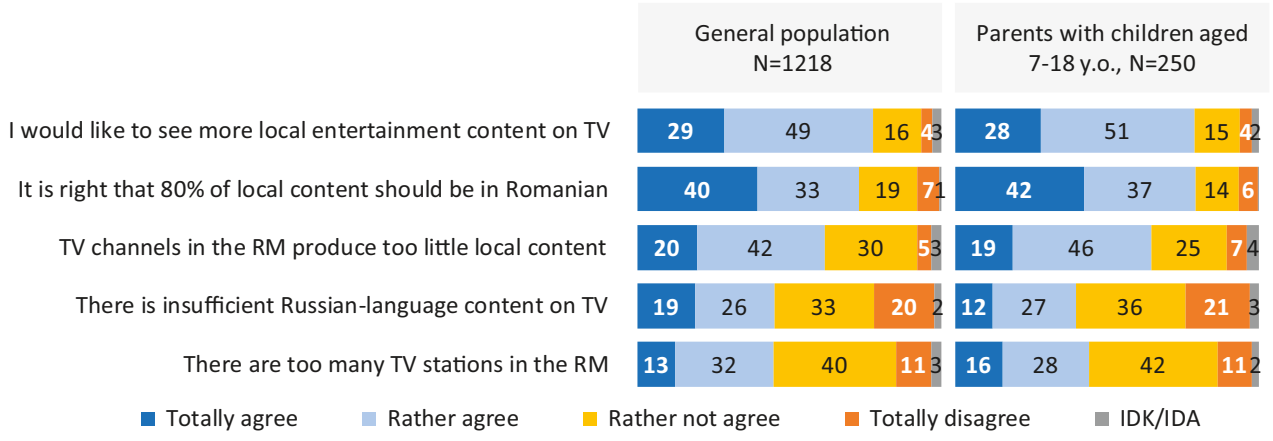

Figure 2.2.4: *"Q18. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (one answer at a time)," %*

2.3 Radio news consumption

Among radio users in the general population, 58% listen to radio news every day and 24% say they listen to it 2-3 times a week. A weekly frequency is mentioned by 8%, and 5% of respondents say they do not listen to radio news at all.

For parents with children 7-18 year olds, who listen to the radio at least once a week, 53% follow the news daily, 34% 2-3 times a week, and 8% once a week.

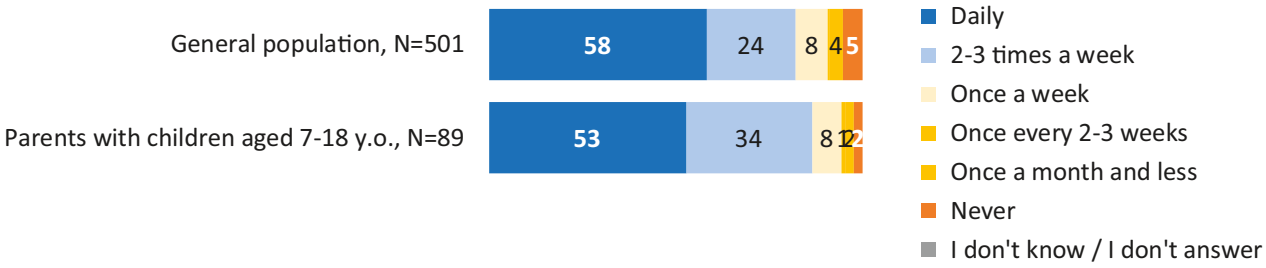

Figure 2.3.1: *"Q20. How often do you listen to the news on the radio? (one possible answer)," % among those who use the radio at least once a week*

The general population that listens to the news on the radio several times a week prefers, in particular, Radio Moldova (41%), Radio Noroc (37%) and Radio Plai (34%). Other stations, such as Hit FM (18%) and Jurnal FM (14%), are mentioned to a lesser extent, while the remaining options appear in isolation, below 5%.

Parents with children aged 7-18 most frequently indicate Radio Plai (38%), followed by Radio Noroc and Hit FM (31% each). Radio Moldova is mentioned by 18%, and other stations - such as Jurnal FM (16%), Kiss FM (8%) or Russcoe Radio (6%) - register lower rates.

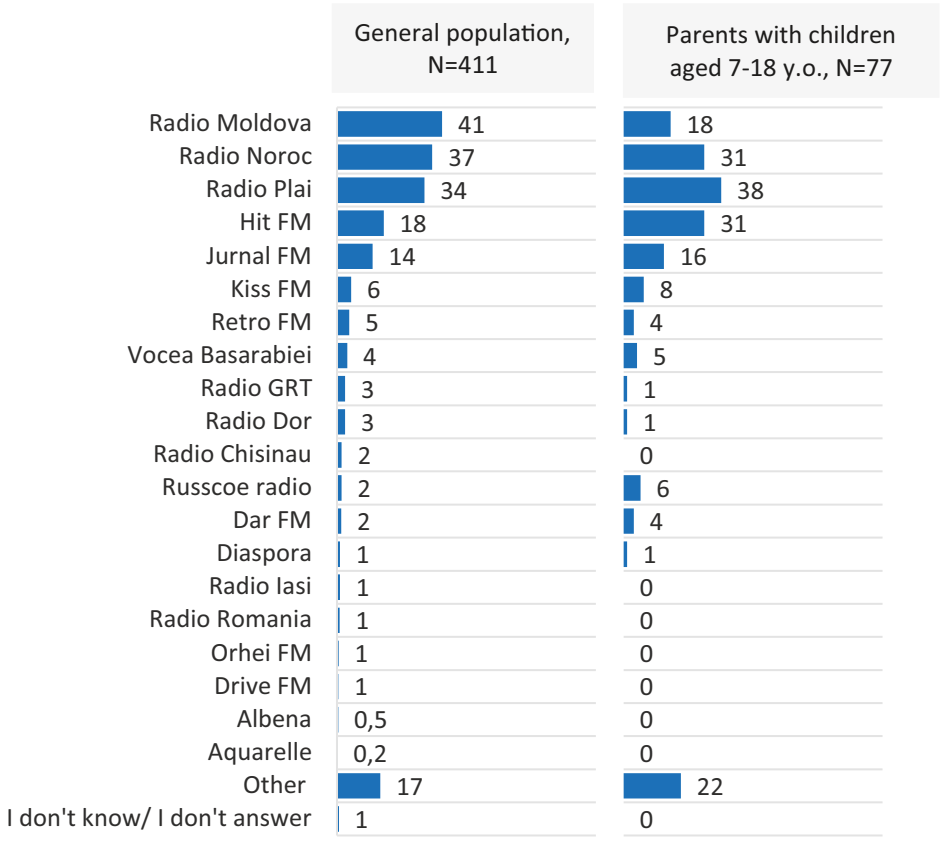

Figure 2.3.2: *"Q21. On which radio stations do you usually listen to the news? Please name up to three stations. (free answer, maximum 3 mentions)," % among those who listen to radio news at least a few times a week"*

Radio is used as a an information source much less frequently than online sources or television, by Focus Group participants. According to them, radio listening takes place almost exclusively in the car; radio may provide information during commuting or business trips.

None of the participants mentioned radio as their main source of information.

- *"Me, from social media: Facebook, TV in the morning, radio during the day when I drive by car,"* (M, 40, South, rural).
- *"I listen to the radio in the car, for professional reasons."* (M, 30 years old, ATU Gagauzia, urban).

2.4 News consumption on news websites

Among the general population, 48% of those who access news websites at least once a week mention that they read news online daily, and 32% do so 2-3 times a week.

Parents with children aged 7-18, who access news sites with the same regularity, report similar behaviour: 48% read daily, 33% 2-3 times a week and 8% once a week.

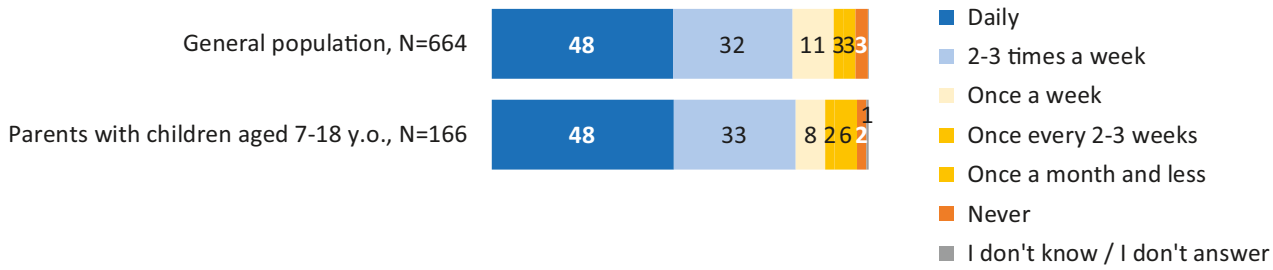

Figure 2.4.1: *"Q22. How often do you read the news on news websites? (one answer)," % among those who use news sites at least once a week*

News aggregators like stiri.md or point.md are the most popular among users (31% and 23% respectively). Other popular websites for news consumption are protv.md (21%), jurnaltv.md (10%), zdg.md (8%), tv8.md (8%) and unimedia.info (5%).

Parents with children aged 7-18 most frequently mention protv.md and point.md (24% each), as well as stiri.md (30%) and tv8.md (16%).

Focus group participants emphasize that loyalty to a particular website or portal is built over time, based on experience. A portal gains public trust when it proves that it presents information objectively and that the news published prove accurate over time.

- *"Probably because they are sources that have been verified over time, that is I followed the news published by these sources for a long time and, in principle, they reflected the truth."* (W, 28 years old, ATU Gagauzia, urban).
- *"The point is that when we choose what to read, we usually check back later, maybe even after a week or a month. And the sources we follow generally report the news quite objectively."* (W, 49 years old, ATU Gagauzia, rural).
- *"I could say about the Ziua de Azi, because it is a local news site, it has gained trust with everyone because, as residents of Cahul city, we see it and automatically by posting they gain trust."* (M, 23 years old, South, urban).

In the Gagauz region, a preference is observed for local sources such as Nokta, Laf.md, Gagauzinfo and Tuk.md: *"I watch different channels, for example Moldovan channels like Nokta, but also Gagauz channels. However, most often I watch the Gagauz channels, because I am more interested in what is happening in our region."* (W, 22 years old, ATU Gagauzia, rural).

Trust in investigative journalists is also high, with some participants stating that they provide details and depth, helping them to better understand the context of events: "*I trust investigative journalists more because they somehow tend to take a topic and describe it in more detail and, by having the details, already I just have to operate on the information told,*" (M, 27 years old, Centre, urban). An example of an investigative portal mentioned by this participant is Ziarul de Gardă.

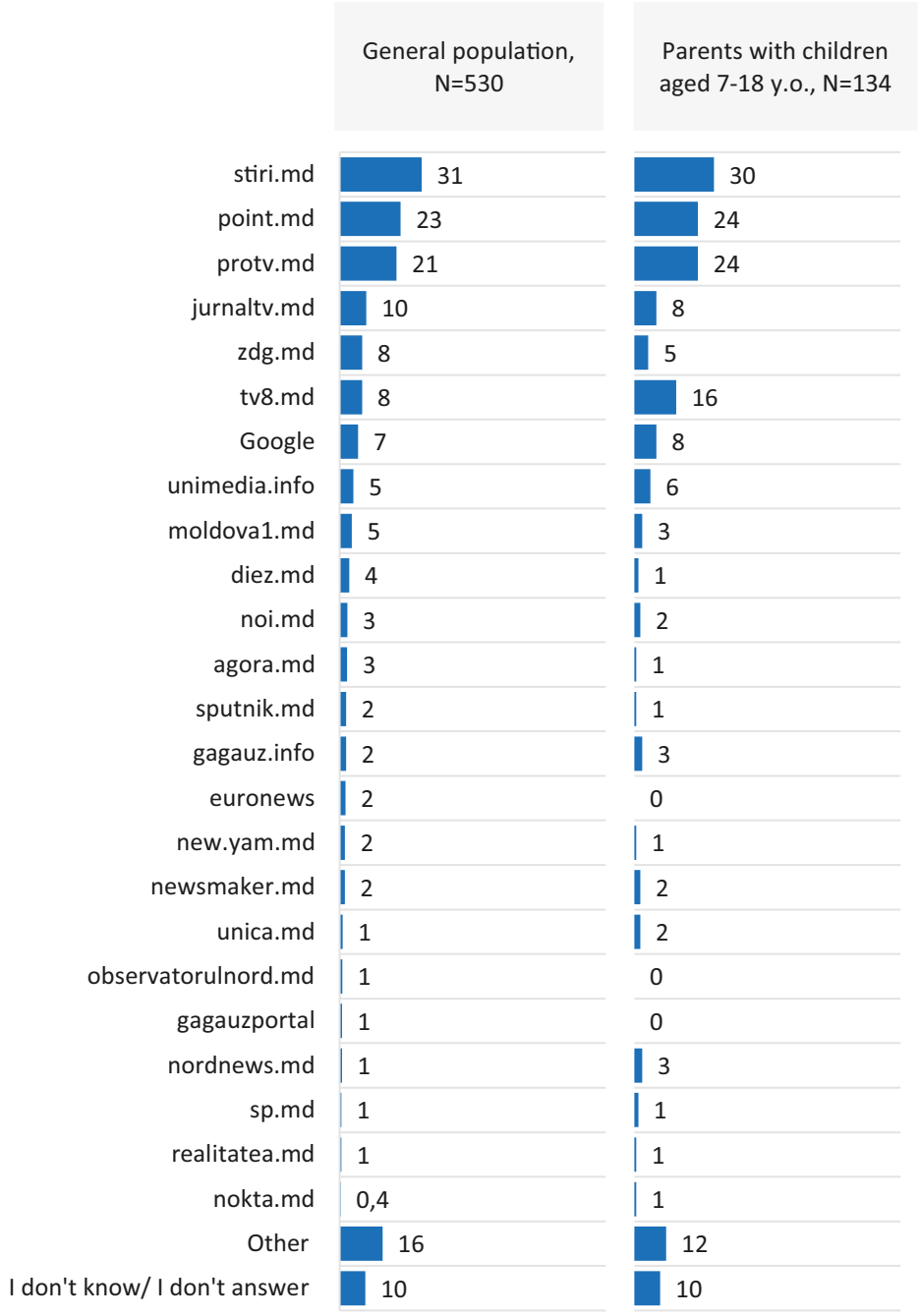

Figure 2.4.2: *"Q23. On which websites do you most often read the news? Please name up to three websites. (free answer, maximum 3 mentions)," % among those who read news on news websites at least a few times a week*

2.5 News consumption on social media networks

Among active users of social media networks 48% mention that they read news on these platforms daily, and 32% do so 2-3 times a week.

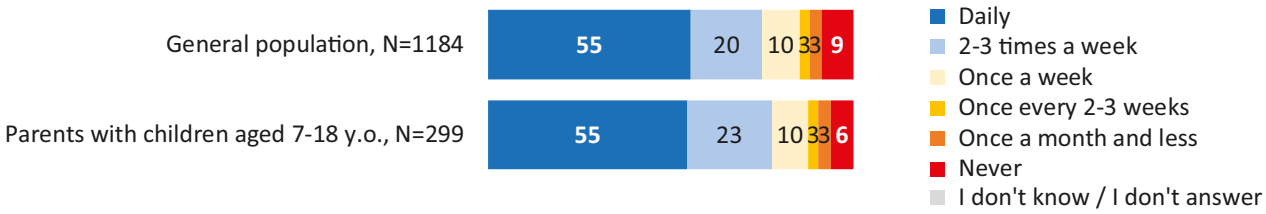

Figure 2.5.1: *"Q24. How often do you read the news on social media networks? (one possible answer)," % among those who use social media networks at least once a week*

Most use Facebook (80%), TikTok (35%), Instagram and YouTube (29% each) to follow the news. Parents mostly follow Facebook (84%) and TikTok for the news (40%).

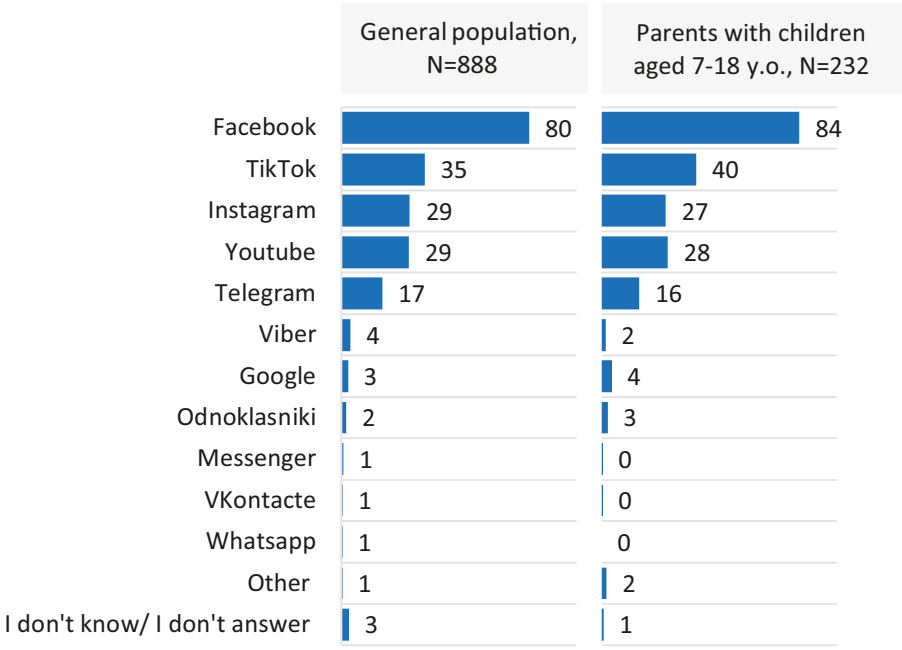

Figure 2.5.2: *"Q25. Which social media networks do you use most often to follow the news? Please name up to three networks (free answer, maximum 3 mentions)," % among those who read news on social media networks at least a few times a week*

Facebook is predominantly used by Moldovans to follow news about politics and current events (61%) and Instagram to communicate with friends and relatives (20%). YouTube is used for informational and educational content (53%) and entertainment content (53%) alike. TikTok, on the other hand, is predominantly used for entertainment content (50%). Telegram is popular both for communicating with close contacts (17%) and for news and political content (16%). The messaging platform Viber is almost exclusively used for communication with others (66%). Most respondents say they post content on Facebook (41%), followed by TikTok and Instagram with 14% each.

In the case of parents with children, communication with loved ones takes place mostly through Viber (65%) and Facebook (63%). For entertainment content, TikTok (50%), YouTube (49%) and Facebook (48%) have the highest popularity. Watching informative or educational content takes place predominantly on YouTube (58%) and Facebook (55%). In terms of information about politics and current events, Facebook is mentioned by 67% of respondents, followed by TikTok (27%) and YouTube (25%). Posting content is mostly done on Facebook (47%), followed by Instagram (17%) and TikTok (16%).

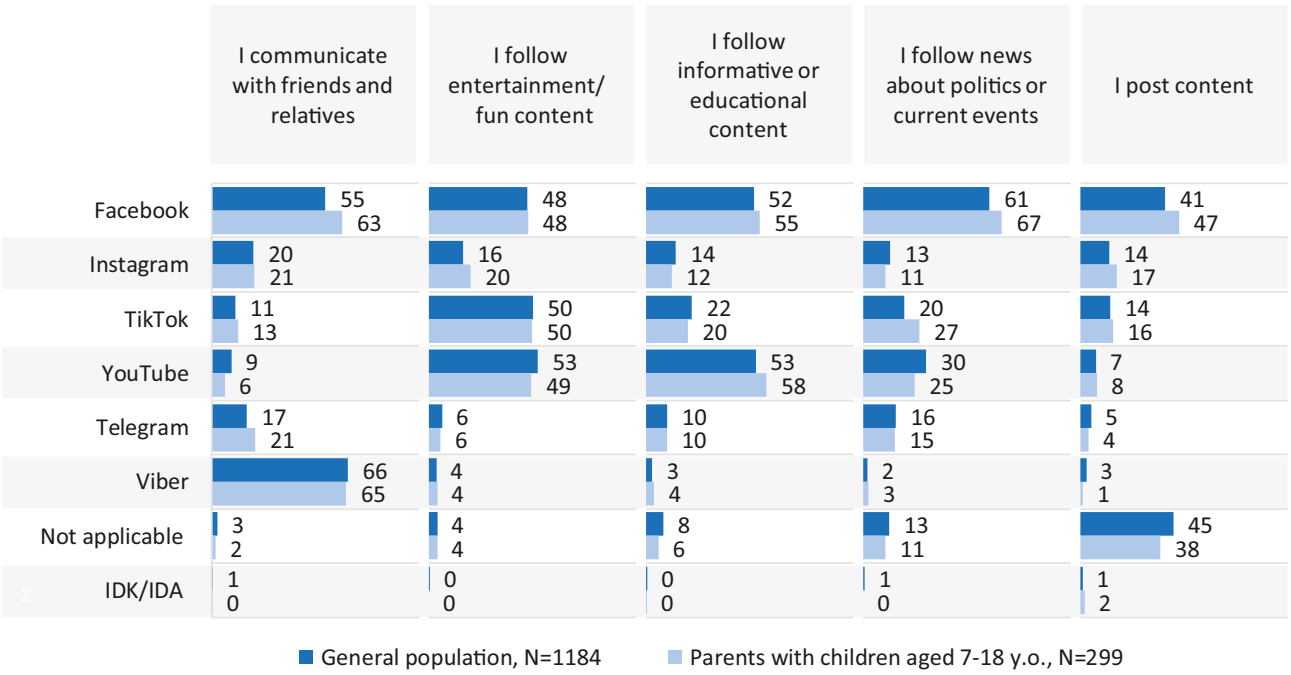

Figure 2.5.3: *"Q26. Next I am going to read a list of activities. Please tell me which social media networks you use for each activity (multiple response)," % among those who read news on social media networks at least a few times a week, % per column*

Respondents were asked to name pages or groups on social media networks that they trust for news. Page weights were aggregated regardless of platforms. Thus, among the general population, the top 5 trusted news sources are: Ziarul de Gardă, mentioned by 9% of the respondents, ştiri.md (7%), Pro TV and Facebook (in general), without mentioning specific pages, (5% each), and Jurnal TV is mentioned by 4% of the survey participants. The rest of the pages, groups or personalities are mentioned by 2% or less of respondents.

For parents with children aged 7-18, the top 5 trusted sources are: Ziarul de Gardă, Ştiri.md, Pro TV, Facebook (in general) and Jurnal TV, all enjoying the trust of 6% of respondents. TV8 is mentioned by 4%, while Dorin Galben, Emilian Crețu, Vasile Costiuc and the TikTok platform are each considered trusted sources by 3% of parents. The other sources record 2% or less of mentions.

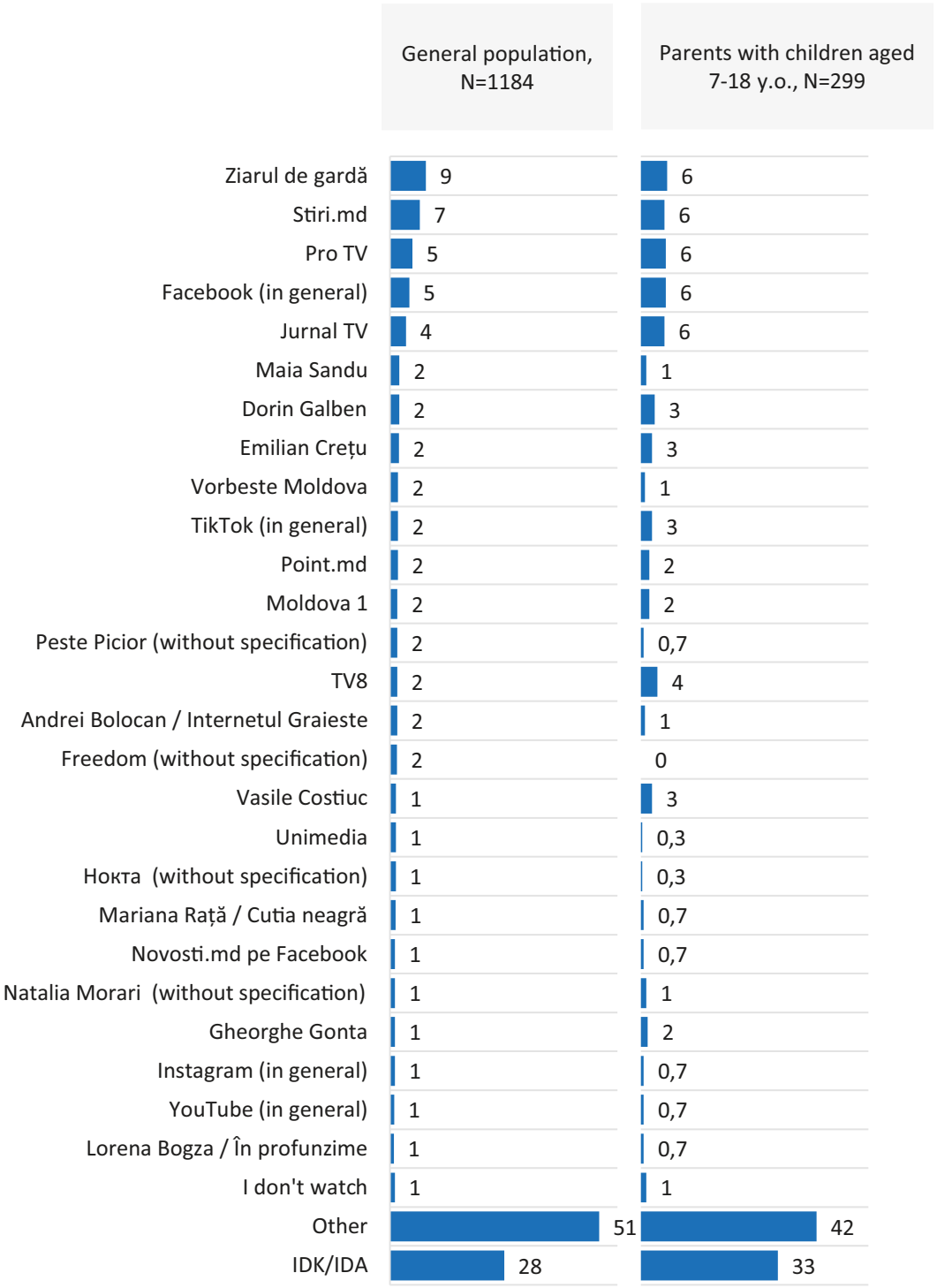

Figure 2.5.4: *"Q27. Please name up to three names of pages, groups or personalities on social media that you trust to follow the news (free answer)," % among those who read news on social media networks at least a few times a week*

2.6 Consumer preferences

Among the general population, the most frequently preferred types of content consumed in the media are news (56%) and films (45%), followed by music (concerts or music videos - 36%) and health and medical-related content (30%).

For parents with children aged 7-18, news (55%) and films (47%) are also among the most popular types of content, followed by music (39%) and health and medical-related material (30%). Children's programs are mentioned by 21%.

From the focus group discussions it emerges that the language in which people choose to consume media content depends very much on the type of content: informative or entertainment. When it comes to news and information about events in the country, the majority of participants prefer to consume it in the language they know best. For native Romanian speakers, Romanian is the natural choice, although a few participants mentioned that they prefer Russian:

- *"I watch more in Russian, even though I am Moldovan, because I live in a Russian village and it comes easier to me, I understand better. I also watch in Romanian,"* (W, 62, North, rural).
- "*Mostly in Russian, because in Romanian there is very little information, that is truthful or real, [...] in our country the news in Romanian is done in such a way that it is not understandable to us, [...] I don't know how they make it longer or make it bigger. In Russian it is understandable, but our people use Moldovan terms, that is Romanian ones, which not everyone understands, and people start to read and they understand the essence but they don't understand what is there and that is where all the misunderstandings start,"* (M, 33, Centre, urban).

On the other hand, in the case of participants from Gagauzia, they inform themselves almost exclusively in Russian, although some also inform themselves in Gagauz, or less frequently, in Romanian. Even when a news item is published in another language, some of them mentioned that they use translation tools to read it in Russian, the language in which they feel most comfortable: *"I mainly read in Russian... it doesn't matter what language the news is written in, I read it in Russian, because it's easier for me to understand it,"* (W, 30 years old, ATU Gagauzia, urban).

However, a Russian-speaking person from Gagauzia mentioned that when it comes to a law or a decision of the authorities, she intentionally looks for the original source in Romanian. She does this to ensure that she understands the information correctly, without it being altered or misinterpreted through translation. As the participant herself emphasized, her knowledge of Romanian allows her to do this: *"I have several possibilities. I read in both Russian and Romanian. And in Romanian I read especially when I need to check the information, when they talk about the authorities, what happened, who did what or what they said"*, (W, 49 years old, ATU Gagauzia, rural).

Regarding entertainment content, such as films, TV series, etc., the preferences are different. Almost all participants, regardless of region or mother tongue, stated that they watch this type of content predominantly in Russian.

The reason is not always cultural, but rather practical. The participants explain that there is a much wider choice of dubbed Russian-language films and TV series on the internet or on TV. In contrast, Romanian-language content is often only subtitled, which many find more tiring and less enjoyable.

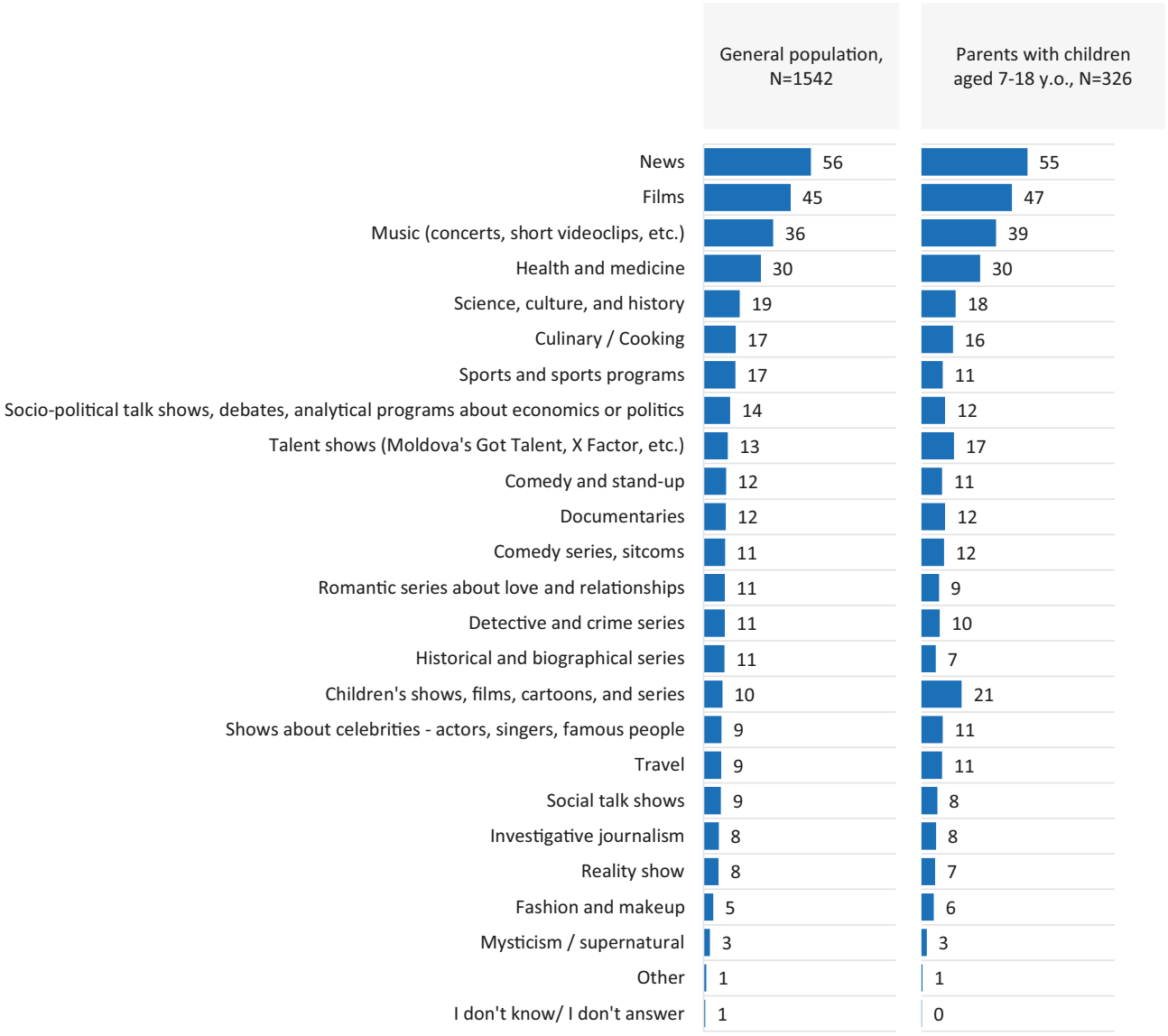

Figure 2.6.1: *"Q28. Please tell me what type of content do you prefer to watch or listen to in the media (TV, online, radio, etc.)? Please look at this list and choose up to 5 types of content you watch or listen to most often. (multiple answer, maximum 5 answers)", %*

The programs with the highest share of viewers who trust them are "Vorbește Moldova" with Natalia Cheptene (35%), followed by "Ora de Ras" with Anatol Durbală (28%) and "O Seară Perfectă" with Anișoara Loghin (26%). The level of notoriety is high for most of the programs analysed, but the actual consumption and trust differ. Programs such as "Cabinetul din Umbră," "Peste Picior" or "Internetul grăiește" are unknown to more than half of the respondents.

Among parents, the most watched and appreciated programs are "Monolog" with Dorin Galben (34%), "Vorbește Moldova" with Natalia Cheptene (32%) and "O Seară Perfectă" with Anișoara Loghin (27%). As for the level of unawareness, the highest proportions are recorded for the program "Peste Picior" (61% are unaware), followed by "Secretele Puterii" (57%), "Internetul grăiește" (57%) and "Cabinetul din Umbră" (49%).

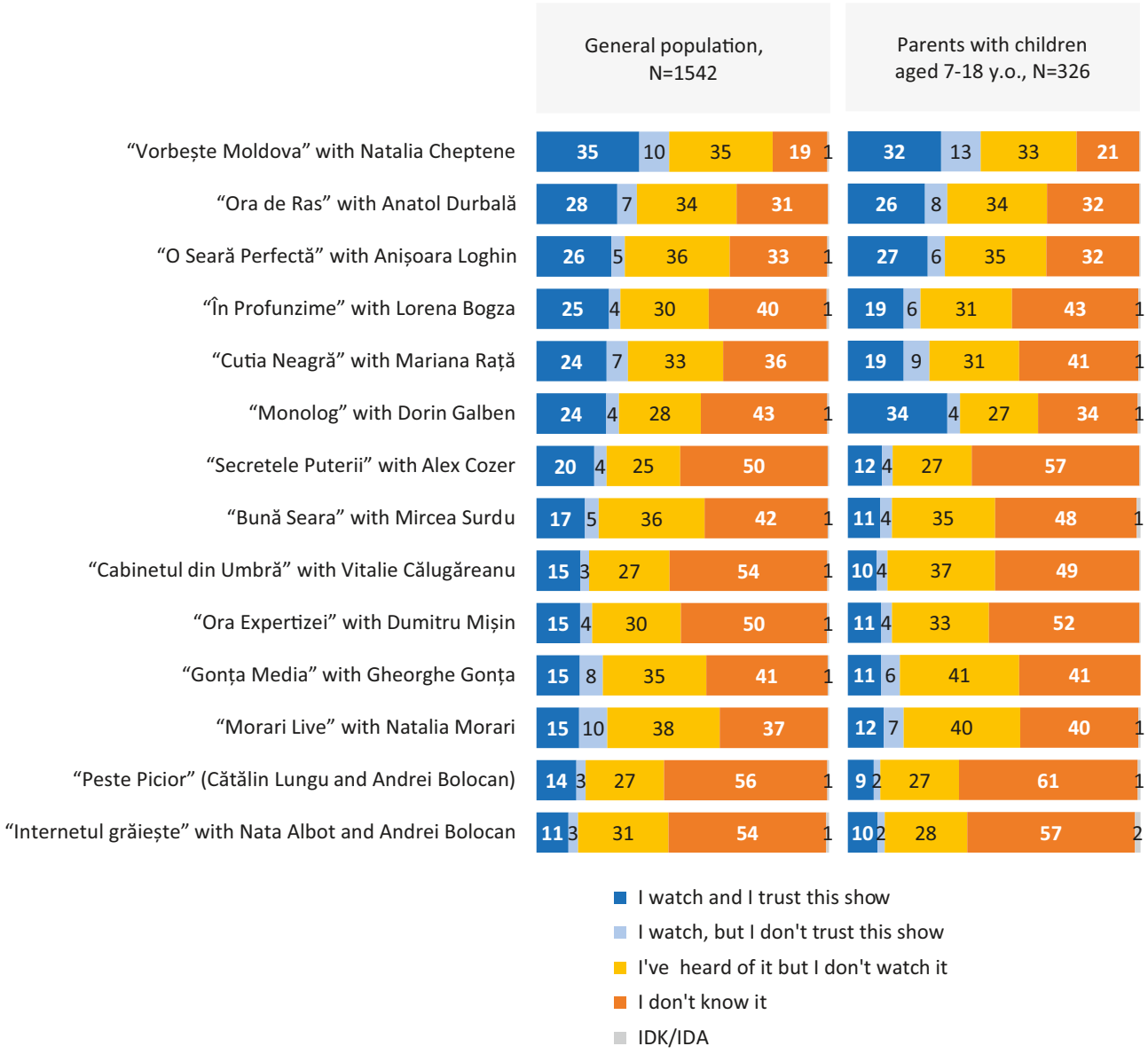

Figure 2.6.2: *"Q29. Do you know about the following programs? (one possible answer at a time)," %*

Chapter III:

Disinformation and false news

This chapter presents respondents' perceptions with regards to false news and information manipulation in the media. It analyses the level of awareness, the frequency with which people report encountering such content, the sources considered most problematic, information verification behaviours, the degree of trust in the media, and the level of knowledge of the institutions that can intervene in such circumstances.

3.1 Perception of independent press

Among the general population, half of the respondents say they follow the news but are not sure which sources are independent (50%). A further 31% say they get their news from both independent and other sources, and 15% say they get their news exclusively from independent sources.

The category of people who most frequently report this uncertainty regarding the independence of sources includes those who speak "Moldovan" (64%), people with very low incomes (64%), respondents with low levels of education (64% of those with secondary education), and those from rural areas (53%). Greater uncertainty is also observed among the unemployed (59%) and people living in the Centre region (56%).

On the other hand, those who say that they watch the news exclusively from independent sources in a higher proportion are: people with higher education (23%), those who say that they have sufficient income and manage to save money (20%), respondents from Chișinău and the South region (17%), those from the urban areas (17%), Romanian speakers (18%) and students/pupils (25%).

For parents with children aged 7-18, 53% say they follow the news without having the certainty that the sources are independent. At the same time, 32% say they get their information from a mix of independent and other sources, while 13% say they follow only independent sources.

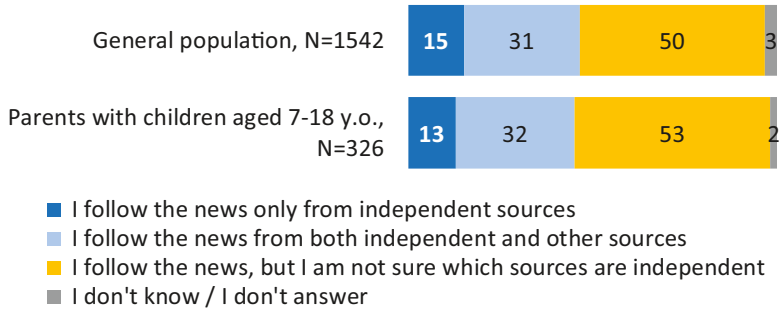

Figure 3.1.1: *"Q31. Which of the options below best describes your situation? (one answer)", %*

When asked what an independent media source means to them, participants mentioned the following characteristics: for them, the most important is that the press be free from any outside control; no influence from the government, political parties or business environment; balanced presentation of all points of view without biased interpretations; transparency regarding sources of funding; as well as an editorial team that is not politically affiliated. **Some respondents also mentioned that an independent source is one that is not afraid to tell the truth without being a "puppet in the hands of power."**

- *"An independent source is one that is not paid by the state, nor by any legal or public entity; it is independent, somehow supported by the citizens to create and do work for citizens" (M, 30 years old, North, urban).*
- *"I believe that in Moldova we could call independent those media that are not influenced by the government, the state, political parties, the business environment, and so on. Those who nowadays can, without fear, not be subject to censorship or not use it",* (M, 51 years old, ATU Gagauzia, urban).
- "*A source that does not depend on anyone, on any party or anything like that, which is represented by free people"*, (M, 20 years old South, rural).

Participants also emphasized that an independent source is one that just states the facts without interpreting them in a certain way. They believe that an independent source should present the views of all parties involved in a situation and let the audience form their own opinion without being influenced to adopt a certain conclusion.

- "*The media, in principle, should not have an opinion of its own. They must present the different opinions of people and parties involved... and people themselves must think based on these opinions and choose for themselves,"* (M, 32 years old, ATU Gagauzia, rural).
- *"You have to be impartial, to reflect things as they really are, but not interpret them and redirect them in certain directions or contexts,"* (M, 40 years old, South, rural).

The source of funding for a media platform is considered important for its independence. Many participants understand that an editorial office requires financial resources to operate and therefore achieving total independence is difficult. According to participants, ideally, an independent media institution should secure its funding from several sources, for example from advertising or people's donations, and openly communicate where the money comes from. However, according to some participants, this is difficult to achieve under the current conditions in the Republic of Moldova.

- *"In our country media sources do not have a very wide audience, they cannot make their income only from advertising or other sources and that is why they often need sponsorship... until the income issue is solved, there will never be independent Moldovan media... An independent media source would be, one that is funded by donations... and that very transparently tell about their editorial policy... and the leaders of course have to be with no political affiliation,"* (M, 27 years old, Centre, urban).
- *"I think in Moldova this is impossible. We have people who are too poor to be independent. Because, after all, journalism still requires some financial investment. And this is not possible in our country, because someone has to finance you,"* (W, 30 years old, ATU Gagauzia, urban).

Even if they know what an independent source should be like, many participants are of the opinion that truly independent media is difficult to find in the Republic of Moldova, and some are of the opinion that the media has always been dependent on those in power. When asked to give concrete examples of independent media institutions, many hesitated, saying that it is difficult to identify such institutions in the country. However, a few media sources were named that people trust more, even if sometimes with some reservations.

- Ziarul de Gardă: It is the most often mentioned, being seen as an example of independent and reliable press;
- Diez.md;
- TV stations such as: Pro TV, TV8, Jurnal TV, Moldova 1;
- Local press: Publications such as Ziua de Azi (Cahul) and Laf.md (Gagauzia) are appreciated because they are dealing with local issues and not getting involved in politics, which makes them more credible for the people in the region;
- Journalists and vloggers: There was also mention of people who have left TV stations and made their own online shows, being considered by some participants as more independent;
- Other sources: Realitatea.md, Independent.md, Presscheck.md, Point.md were also mentioned.

3.2 Perception of false news

Among the general population, 96% of the respondents agree with the statement that it is important for Moldovans to be able to distinguish correct information from materials that aim to manipulate or misinform citizens. Among the parents interviewed, the trend is similar.

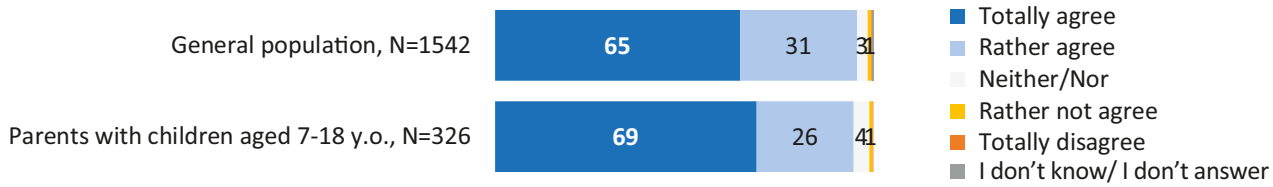

***Figure 3.2.1**: "Q30. Please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statement: "it is important for Moldovans to be able to distinguish news that is intended to manipulate or misinform citizens"? (one answer)", %*

59% of the general population believe they find it easy to identify whether a news source is trying to misrepresent or manipulate opinion, while 40% say that this is difficult for them.

The most confident segment is represented by people with higher education - 77% say it is easy for them to identify manipulation. Also, ethnic Romanians (78%), Romanian speakers (68%) and those living in Chișinău (68%) or in urban areas (66%) feel more able to distinguish manipulation. From an economic point of view, those who say that their household income is sufficient and they can put money aside - 79% - feel the most secure.

On the other hand, the most vulnerable groups are people with secondary education - 62% say it is difficult for them to identify manipulation. High levels of insecurity are also found among people who declare that speak "Moldovan" (52%), those living in rural areas (46%), retired people (47%), the unemployed (42%), people on parental leave (45%) and those on very low incomes (53%).

61% of parents say they can easily distinguish manipulative content and 38% find this process difficult.

When they read a news story, Focus Group participants say they pay attention to a few signs that help them spot a false information. These help them filter the news and decide whether the news is worth paying attention to or believing what they read.

- One of the first things that catches their attention is the way the headline is written and the language used. Headlines that sound exaggerated, with words like "Shock!", "Scandal!" or "Incredible!" raise suspicion. Several participants noted this, realizing that these words are used to arouse strong emotions, such as fear or anger, and to make them click, even if the news is not important. Similarly, an article that praises someone too much or, on the contrary, criticizes them excessively, is viewed with distrust.
- *"Usually, manipulations start with a headline like Shock or Scandal. I mean sensational headlines that cause strong emotions... You have to pay attention to the headline and the emotions the news arouses,"* (M, 27 years old, ATU Gagauzia, urban).
- *"If it's too positive or too..., if the narrative is too simple that explains everything very well, it still makes you doubt a bit,"* (M, 27 years old, Centre, urban).
- Another filter I use is logic and common sense. If a news story seems absurd or hard to believe, participants stop and think whether such a thing is possible in real life. One participant brought up the example of a news story that circulated in the media a few years ago: *"First of all one has to see whether what is said there makes even a little bit of sense, i.e. just like with that news that if we want to join the EU we have to accept 30,000 Syrians, just as an example. There is no logic in that statement"* (M, 35 years old, South, urban).
- People also pay attention to the source of the information. A news item becomes suspect if it does not have a clear author, if it is not clear where the information was taken from, or if reference is made to "experts"

without mentioning their name or the institution they work for: *"I also watch if videos or news posts appear, where an expert in a certain field says something, and if there is no mention of the name of the expert or where he works, which organisation or company he works for, then I immediately understand that it is clearly a manipulation."* (M, 27 years old, ATU Gagauzia, urban).

- Last but not least, participants mentioned that they try to be very careful with pictures and videos. They check whether the pictures are of bad quality, if they appear to be altered or whether they look unnatural, as if generated by artificial intelligence.
- *"I sometimes also draw attention if pictures are shown, if they are not edited with artificial intelligence, because it's noticeable,"* (W, 18 years old, South, urban).
- *"More and more often now, I'm noticing images generated by artificial intelligence... You can clearly see it's not a real person. On the one hand, this is scary, because technology is evolving more and more."* (W, 30 years old, ATU Gagauzia, urban).

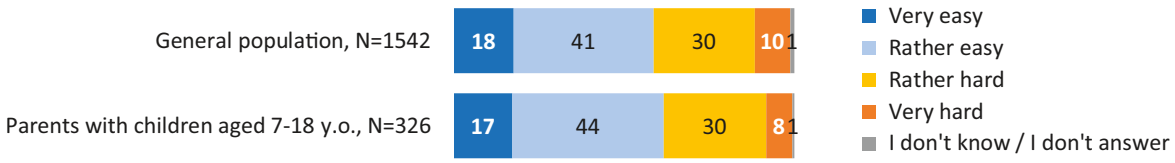

Figure 3.2.2: *"Q32. How easy is it for you to understand if a source of information (TV, press, radio, internet news portals, etc.) is trying to present you with a fake or manipulate your opinion? (one answer)," %*

However, as for the rest of the population, the majority of Moldovans (70%) are more pessimistic about their fellow citizens' ability to distinguish disinformation. Parents of children aged 7-18 are even more pessimistic (72% say that others find it harder to distinguish the truth from false information).

When asked why some people find it difficult to distinguish false from true information, focus group participants identified several reasons. They see the difficulties as stemming from personal and psychological factors, as well as from a lack of media literacy and blind trust in certain sources or people.

- Elderly people are seen to be particularly vulnerable for several reasons. First of all, they are accustomed since Soviet times to fully trust official sources such as television, and have not developed a critical attitude towards the media. Second, they lack the digital skills necessary to navigate and verify information online.
- "*Yes, people who are older, I think, they used to have two channels on TV, television and so they know that everything that is shown on TV, everything is right, I mean it's a kind of, I don't know, naivety on their part,"* (M, 35 years old, South, urban).
- *"Older people don't really know how to make use of more modern technologies, that's why they are prone to polarized opinions, so to speak,"* (M, 23 years old, South, urban).
- Another factor mentioned in the discussions is of a psychological nature: participants are of the opinion that people tend to believe what confirms their own beliefs or what they want to hear. Creators of false information exploit this predisposition by offering the audience exactly the narratives they expect. Thus, many people, once they have found a piece of information they like, are no longer interested in checking whether it is true, either out of convenience or because they are preoccupied with their day-to-day worries.

- *"We want to believe in certain things. **I mean, we believe in what we want to hear.** And the people who create these news stories are after exactly that - to give people what they want to hear. And some don't even want to question whether it's true or not."* (W, 30 years old, ATU Gagauzia, urban).
- *"Given that people are in an information bubble, they are captivated by one reality that they don't want to accept another, they don't want to get out of their comfort, because to get out of comfort, you need to do a little bit of searching, study on your own."* (M, 30 years old, North, urban).
- Lack of media literacy and critical thinking is another reason mentioned in the discussion. Some participants believe that the level of education, and not necessarily age, is the decisive factor in the ability to analyse information. People have not been taught how to properly analyse information, how to identify sources and how to question what they read or hear. This lack of training makes them more vulnerable to manipulation and disinformation.
- *"The level of media literacy in the country is very low. People are not developed from this point of view. Everything has developed very fast and they just couldn't keep up."* (M, 27 years old, ATU Gagauzia, urban).
- *"My opinion, that it all depends on where the level of education, education I'm considering studies... age doesn't matter, what matters is the level of education, the level of studies and critical outlook."* (M, 68 years old, Centre, urban).
- Closely related to lack of critical thinking is also the blind trust in certain authority figures. According to the participants, an information, even if it is "obvious nonsense", is accepted as absolute truth if it comes from an opinion leader, a politician or a priest whom people trust. **The authority of the person delivering the message becomes more important than the content of the message itself.**
- *"Especially if an opinion leader said it, that's it, it's the letter of the law. Even if it's obvious nonsense. If in their mind this is a leader or a hero, then for them this information is 100% sure."* (M, 27 years old, ATU Gagauzia, urban).
- *"If a priest would come and tell a blunder or a lie 90% of Orthodox Christians would believe that this is the truth,"* (M, 40 years old, South, rural).
- *"There are a lot of people who have relatives, neighbours, in-laws and so on, because in our country there are a lot of connections.... And that's how groups come together, where one is more dominant with their opinion and the rest support them because that's how they got used to." (W, 39 years old, North, urban).*
- Finally, participants believe that some people are vulnerable simply because they get their information from one source. Whether they live in an area where they don't have access to multiple TV stations, or they have become accustomed to reading a single newspaper or website, the lack of comparing information from different perspectives makes them a target for manipulation: *"I think some people just watch certain news channels or read a certain source and that's all they get information from and they don't check anymore, and they believe what they found out from the first source."* (M, 41 years old, Centre, rural).

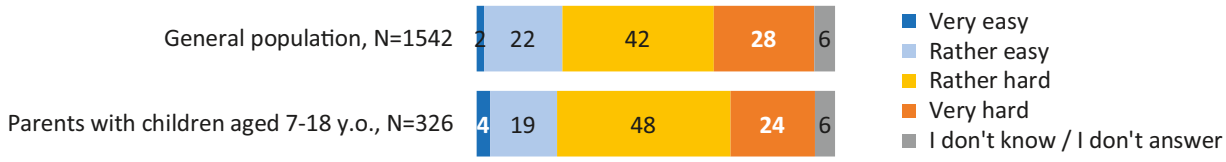

Figure 3.2.3: *"Q33. But how easy or difficult do you think it is for other citizens to differentiate between false news and true (truthful) news? (one possible answer)", %*

For the general population, the most commonly accepted definitions of false news are those involving journalists' deliberate intention to present untrue information as real (88% agree with this definition), as well as presenting news without checking all information (81%). Also, a share of 79% believe that disinformation can mean influencing content

to promote a particular point of view. Other forms of disinformation, such as partial presentation of information (71%) or superficial treatment of the subject (61%), are recognized as false information to a lesser extent.

Among parents, perceptions of disinformation are in line with those of the general population. Thus, 89% of parents believe that false news are deliberately created by journalists, while 80% agree that they occur as a result of the publication of unverified information. The statement that false news are the influencing of content to promote a point of view is supported by 79% and selective presentation of information is perceived as disinformation by 73%. The share of those who think that news treated superficially can be considered disinformation is 59%.

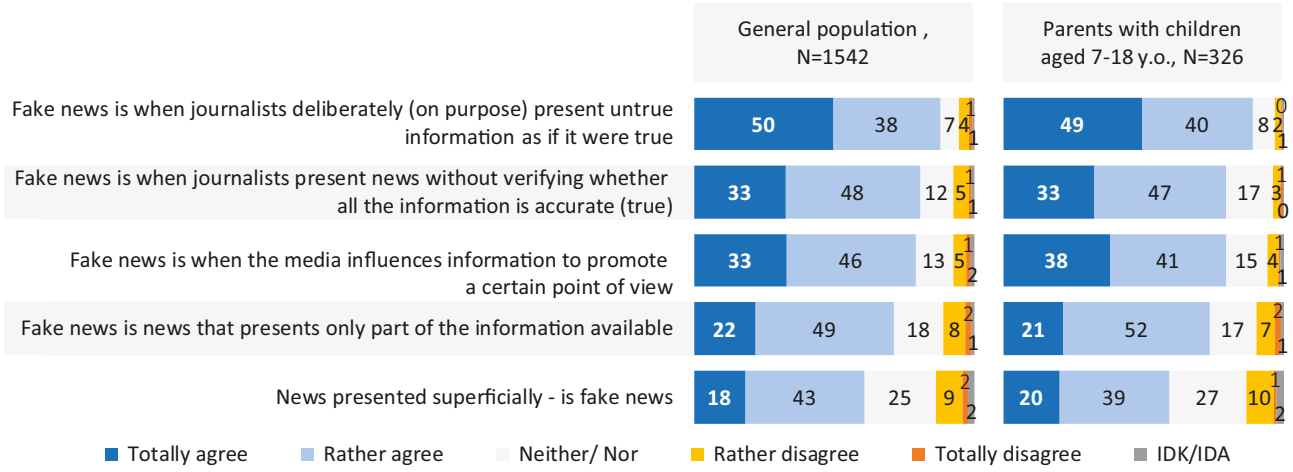

Figure 3.2.4: *"Q34. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the fact that the following statements describe disinformation? (one answer at a time)", %*

73% of the general population state that they encounter, at least weekly, false or manipulative information in the Moldovan media, of which 31% encounter such news on a daily basis.

The perception of high frequency of these types of content is more prevalent among people with higher education (80%), those with high incomes (79%), pupils/students (79%) and professionally active (78%). Also, residents of Chișinău (78%), men (78%), but also certain ethnic groups such as Romanians (77%) and Gagauz (77%), say they encounter false news at least once a week. In contrast, this frequency is perceived to be lower among people with secondary education (59%), retired people (65%) and those who say they are finding it very difficult on their current income (69%).

68% of parents say they frequently encounter false or manipulative content, stating that they encounter them at least once a week.

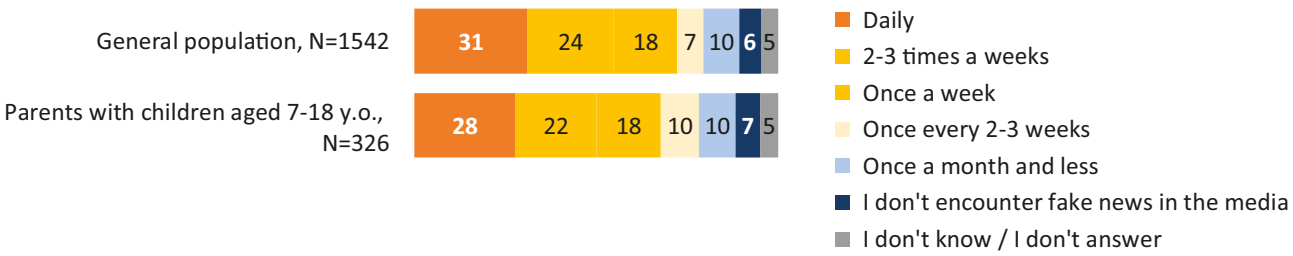

Figure 3.2.5: *"Q35. How often do you personally encounter false or manipulative news in the media in the Republic of Moldova (TV stations, radio, news websites, etc.)? (one answer)", %*

According to respondents' opinion, social media networks are the main source of spreading false or manipulative information, being mentioned by 70% of the participants. Other sources mentioned to a lesser extent include

traditional television (28%), news websites (20%) and online television (14%). Radio, print media and informal sources such as friends or family are mentioned by less than 10% of respondents.

Social media networks are perceived as the main source of disinformation especially by young people (77% of 18-35 year olds) and by Romanian speakers (79%). Traditional TV is associated with the spread of false information especially by Russian speakers (38%) and by Chișinău residents (35%), while 21% of respondents from the Centre region share this opinion. A similar trend can be observed for news websites: 29% of Chișinău residents and 25% of Russian speakers consider them sources of disinformation, in contrast to the population in the South region, where 10% have the same perception.

For parents, social media networks are also the main source of circulating false information, with 74% reporting it. This is followed by traditional TV (30%) and news websites (25%), while online TV is mentioned by 17% of respondents. The other sources - radio, newspapers and magazines as well as close circle of acquaintances - are mentioned to a significantly lesser extent.

Participants in the focus group discussions acknowledged that although they inform themselves quite a lot via social media networks, these are often full of false news. The reason why social media networks are considered the main source of disinformation is the sheer volume of information distributed. As people spend a lot of time online, they inevitably end up being exposed to a large amount of information, including a lot of disinformation. Another reason for mistrust is network-specific content, such as videos on TikTok, which can be easily edited or taken out of context. Moreover, some respondents mentioned that the platforms' algorithms contribute to the formation of an "information bubble," where users are repeatedly exposed to the same types of content until they can no longer distinguish truth from manipulation: *"In terms of social media networks, it is not really correct to believe in everything that is shown, broadcast on TikTok, there are many misleading videos, it induces us in an information bubble, where day after day we use the same content and we no longer know by ourselves what is right and what is not,"* (M, 30 years old, North, urban).

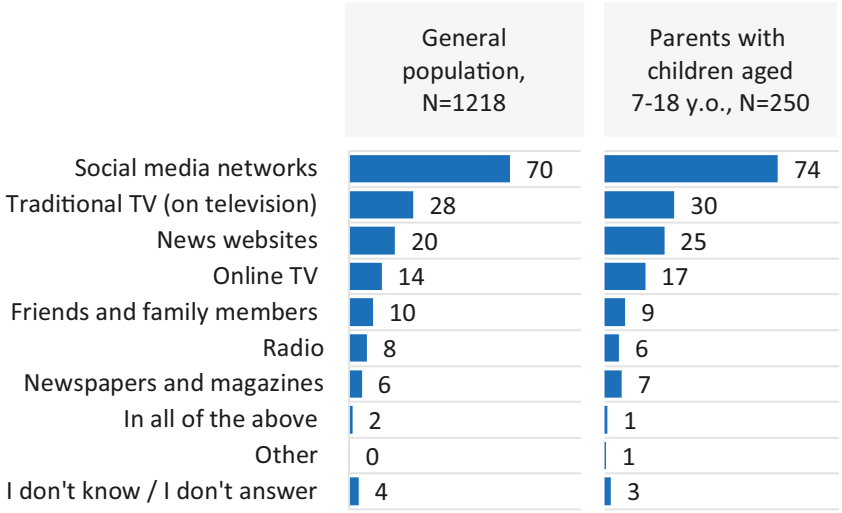

Figure 3.2.6: *"Q36. In which of the following sources do you think most false or manipulative information circulates in Moldova? (multiple answer)", %*

In participants' view, the spread of false and manipulative information in the Republic of Moldova is fuelled by political, financial and, in some cases, external interests. Participants consider disinformation as a tool used to achieve certain goals.

Disinformation is perceived as the result of political infighting, in which parties, regardless of their orientation, resort to disinformation to discredit opponents and influence public opinion. Information manipulation is considered particularly common during periods of political instability or during election campaigns. Both

the government and the opposition are accused of trying to control public discourse by hiding inconvenient truths and promoting only those messages that serve their own interests.

- *"Spreading false information is a weapon. When parties fight with each other, they spread a lot of disinformation. Candidates also spread a lot of lies during campaigns."* (M, 64 years old, ATU Gagauzia, rural).
- "*The goal could also be instigating hatred towards someone or towards a particular party.*" (W, 50 years old, South, rural).
- *"I think that when it comes to politics, like with Maia Sandu, I think it's to destroy the party, that is, to give information as if Maia Sandu promises money and as a result, for example, something like that is not true,"* (M, 38 years old, Centre, rural).

In addition to political interests, financial motives behind the spread of disinformation have also been identified. On the one hand, some content creators, especially on platforms such as TikTok, do it simply to accumulate views and likes, which can later be monetized. On the other hand, there are scammers who use false information, for example about fictitious financial aid, to mislead users and extract their personal data or money. In this context, the principle is simple: "whoever pays, chooses the news."

- *"It's the interest of accumulating views and likes, usually on TikTok"* (W, 18 years old, South, rural).
- *"When it comes to news about making money, yes, scammers often benefit, including local ones, because now, yes, it's a very good way to make income, to extract money"* (M, 27 years old, Centre, urban).

Last but not least, some participants explicitly mentioned the existence of interference from external actors in the Republic of Moldova for the spreading of false information. The Russian Federation was frequently mentioned as the main external actor that would benefit from the spread of disinformation, especially in the context of the internal political situation. According to these opinions, the objectives pursued would be to influence the election results and keep the Republic of Moldova within its sphere of influence.

- *"I believe that there are also external interests, not least, that can influence our domestic politics through disinformation attacks and many other things like that,"* (M, 30 years old, North, urban).

3.3 Verification of information and trust in the media

Among the general population, 36% of respondents say they do not take any action to verify the information they encounter in the media. A share of 27% say they verify information from multiple sources, and 19% compare it with their own experiences or knowledge and discuss it with friends or family to assess the accuracy of the content. Other verification methods, such as consulting comments, checking the credibility of the person who shared the information, or identifying the original source of the information, are mentioned to a lesser extent.

The lack of any action to verify the information encountered is more common among people with secondary education (51%), those who say they speak "Moldovan" (49%), retired people(43%), unemployed people (44%), and those with very low incomes (46%). In contrast, verifying information from multiple sources is more common among students (51%), people with higher education (48%), Romanian speakers (37%), and those in Chișinău (41%). Comparing information with one's own knowledge is specific mostly to people with higher education (25%) and students (26%), while consulting friends or family is more common among retired people (24%). Reading comments to see other people's opinions was mentioned by 32% of people on parental leave.

Among parents with children aged 7–18, 32% say they do not check the accuracy of information. Also, 32% of respondents say they get info from multiple sources, and 18% compare the content with their own knowledge or experiences. Consulting comments is mentioned by 19% of respondents, while other methods, such as checking the original source, the credibility of the author, or how the information is distributed, are mentioned to a lesser extent.

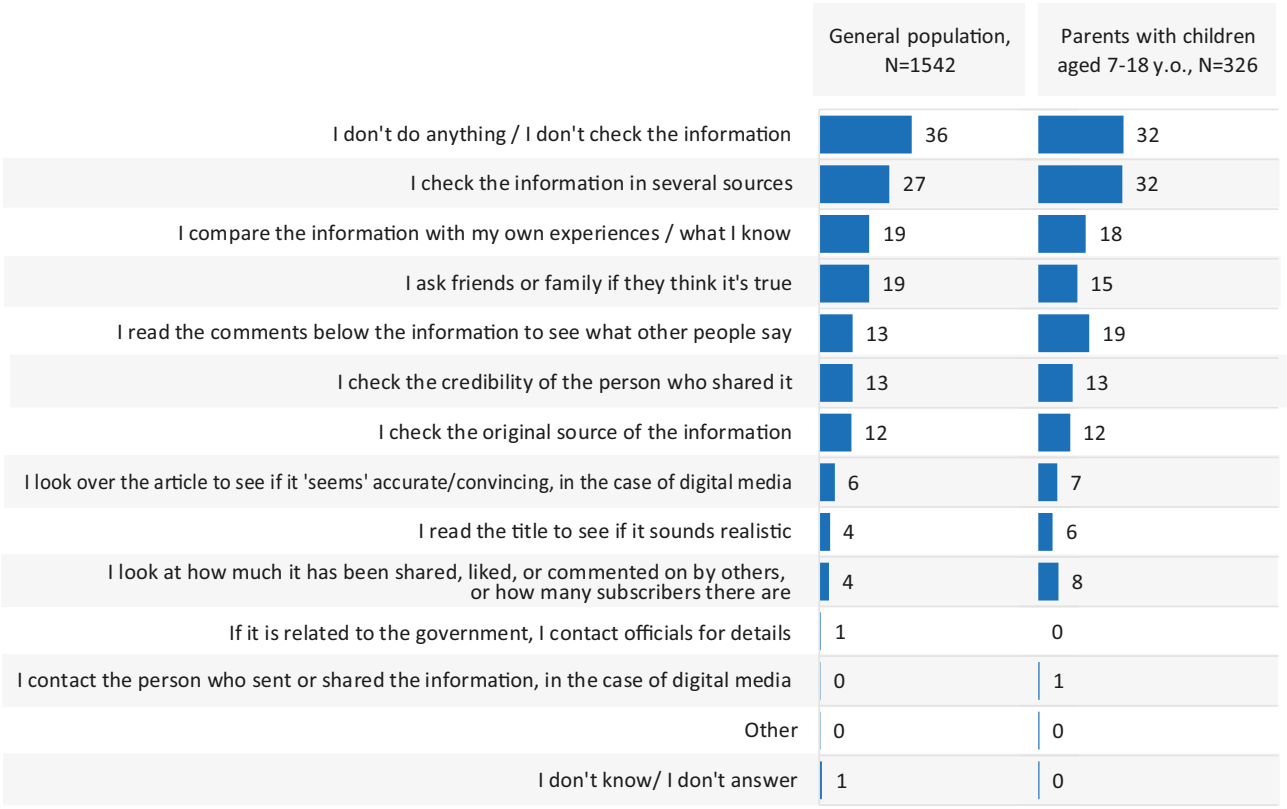

Figure 3.3.1: *"Q37. What steps do you take to verify how accurate or truthful the information you encounter in the media is? (multiple answer)", %*

When information seems suspicious, most participants in the group discussions say that they do not ignore it but try to verify its accuracy using various methods.

- The most frequently mentioned method is to search for the same news item in other sources. People visit other websites, watch other television channels, or search for the information on Google. If a news item appears in only one place and is not picked up by other sources, then they most likely consider it to be false.
  - *"If there is any news or event that interests me, I go on Google and try to access several links, websites, more opinions, and it becomes clear where and whether it is a lie"* (M, 35, South, urban).
  - "*We listen to a news report and it tells us one thing, we listen to another and see where it's right, where it's not right... and we try to draw conclusions*" (M, 69, North, urban).
  - *"First, I look at the first news item, the most recent one, let's say. Then I check other sources, including the international press and so on. Only after that I reach some conclusion."* (M, 25, ATU Gagauzia, rural).
- Another method, considered reliable, is to verify the information directly through acquaintances. If a news item is about an event in a particular village or town, some participants prefer to contact friends or relatives who live there to find out directly what happened. This information from the scene, from people close to them, is considered more reliable than what is written in the press. For international news, some do the same, contacting friends and relatives in the countries concerned. Others also use their own knowledge and experience to evaluate a news item. If the information is in a field they know well, they can figure out for themselves whether the news makes sense or whether it is an exaggeration intended to scare people.
- *"I also check from several sources — I visit other websites, I check, I sometimes call acquaintances, I ask questions, I try to find out more, to get as much information as possible."* (W, 36, ATU Gagauzia, rural).

- *"I have good friends in Russia and relatives in Ukraine... Once the war is over, from what they tell me, I think we will be shocked when we find out the truth."* (M, 56, ATU Gagauzia, rural).
- *"But, more precisely, if I have someone I know in those regions, I call them on the phone and ask them if the situation is normal over there, that is, I look at where it happened and if I have someone I know, I'd rather call them and better find out from the source."* (M, 33, Centre, urban).
- Some also use more technical methods, such as checking images. One participant said that she takes a screenshot of an image from a news article and searches for it on Google Images to see if the photo is real and where it was taken from: *"Most of the time, a news story comes with an image. I take a screenshot of that image and use reverse image search, for example, Google Images... and by scanning the image, my phone shows me where it was taken from."* (W, 21, Gagauzia, rural).
- Others look carefully at the comments on social media posts, believing that they can find clues about the veracity of a news story there. Finally, some participants added that if a news item is clearly false or offensive, some people react directly on the platform where they found it. For example, they report the post or simply decide to never follow the page or portal that published the false news again:
    - *"If there is a news item on Facebook and I consider that it violates social norms or incites something, then of course I report it to support. And if it's portals that allow such things every day, I simply don't open them and don't use them at all."* (W, 45, ATU Gagauzia, urban).
    - *"I would say that among friends, we should discuss, report, and block all sources of false news,"* (M, 20, South, rural).
- Some participants go even further, using advanced tools to verify sources—one example is the use of Artificial Intelligence: *"Artificial intelligence is something similar to ChatGPT, Gemini, except that Perplexity focuses more on information, finding the source an information came from, so to speak, finding the link, and then you click on the link and get informed, you are more confident,"* (M, 30, North, urban).

More than half of respondents say they do not fully trust any media source (55%). This lack of trust is more pronounced among Russian speakers (70%) and people with very low incomes (66%).

Almost half of the respondents (48%) say they trust sources recommended by people they trust. This behaviour is more pronounced among pupils and students (65%).

Forty-five percent say they check how the news is presented in multiple sources, especially those with higher education (65%) and those who say their income is sufficient to save money (63%). On the other hand, 40% indicate that they have a few news sources they trust and do not consult other points of view. This behaviour is observed among those over 55 years old (47%) and those in the South (46%).

When it comes to trust in information provided by government officials, opinions are generally divided based on the language spoken. Those who trust the information provided by the authorities are Romanian speakers (49% agree), as opposed to Russian speakers (67% disagree).

About one-third believe that their trust in the media has improved over the past five years (34%). The statement that information widely distributed on social media is likely to be true is supported by 25% of respondents, while 42% disagree. Fifteen percent say that any information appearing in the media is automatically true, while 68% reject this idea.

Parents with children aged 7-18 are even more distrustful of media sources, preferring either to check multiple sources or to rely on recommendations from their close circle. Almost two-thirds say they do not fully trust any media source (63%). A total of 47% trust sources recommended by trusted individuals, and 43% say they use to check how the news is reported in multiple sources. At the same time, 42% say they rely on a few sources they trust without checking information from other sources. When it comes to trust in representatives of the authorities, 33% say they agree that they provide credible information, while 44% disagree with this statement. 32% believe that their trust in the media

has improved over the last five years, while the rest do not perceive a significant improvement. The share of those who believe that the widespread distribution of information on social media indicates its veracity is 29%, while 42% do not support this statement. The idea that any information appearing in the media is true is accepted by 14%, while 67% reject it.

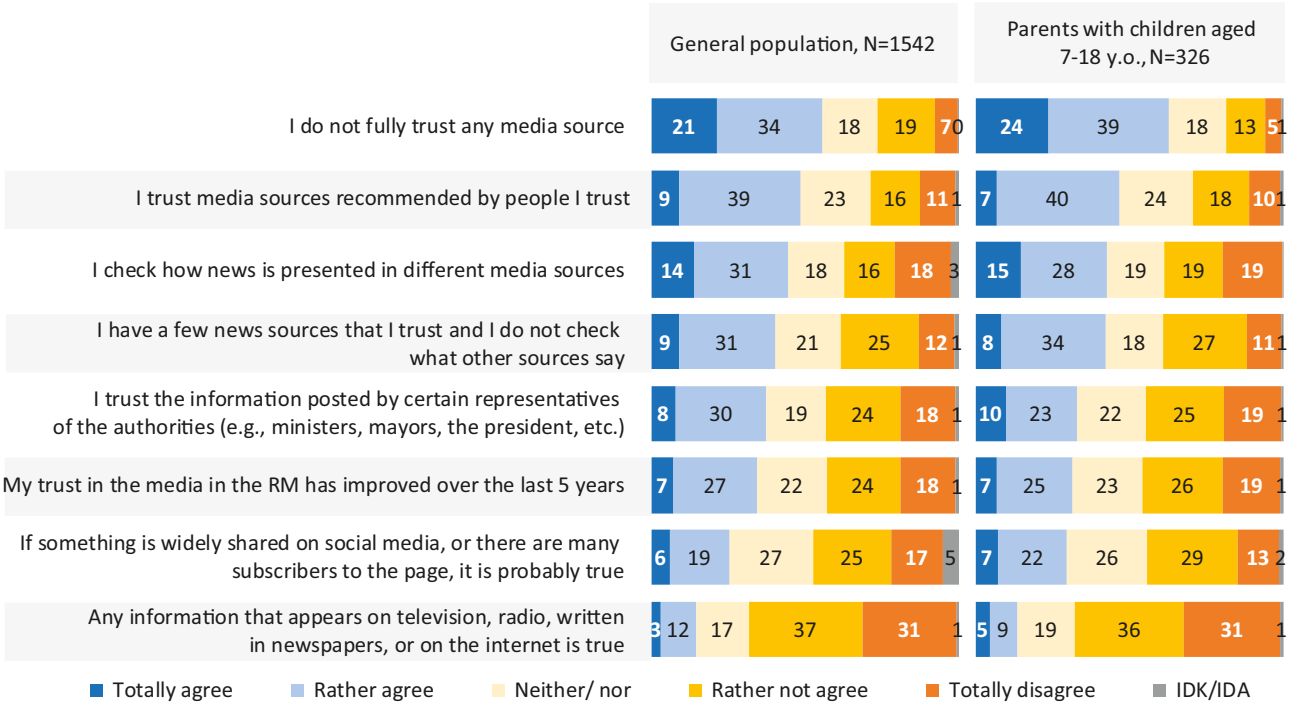

Figure 3.3.2: *"Q38. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (one answer at a time)," %*

3.4 Competent institutions

For most citizens, when it comes to reporting a news item that is considered false, offensive, or infringing on someone's rights, the police are perceived as the main competent institution where a report or complaint can be filed. One in three respondents believes that they can report false news to the police. Other options are reported to a lesser extent: The Audiovisual Council and the Stop Fals platform (11% each), and the media institution that published the material (10%), respectively. Almost half of respondents (44%) say they do not know where they could turn in such a situation.

In the case of parents with children aged 7–18, perceptions are similar. The police are the most frequently mentioned institution where disinformation or offensive news can be reported (28%), followed by the Stop Fals platform (13%), the Audiovisual Council and the media institution that broadcasted the content (11% each). As with the general population, the majority say they do not know where they could file a complaint in such cases – 45%.

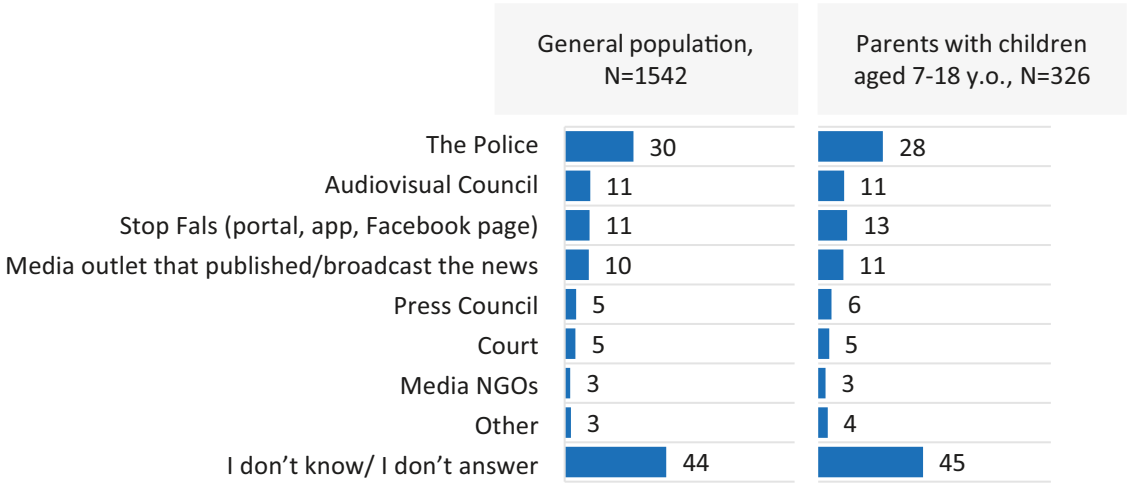

Figure 3.4.1: *"Q39. From what you know or have heard, where could citizens report or submit an official complaint if they see a news item that is untrue, offensive or violates someone's rights? (multiple answer)," %*

Knowledge of institutions active in the field of media monitoring is relatively low among the general population. The most recognized entities are Stop Fals and the Audiovisual Council, each mentioned by 24% of respondents. This is followed by the Press Council (13%), the Association of Independent Press and the Independent Journalism Center (11% each).

In the case of parents with children aged 7–18, the level of familiarity is slightly lower. The best-known institutions are Stop Fals and the Audiovisual Council, each indicated by 21% of respondents. The Press Council and the Independent Journalism Center are known by 10% each, and the Association of Independent Press by 9%.

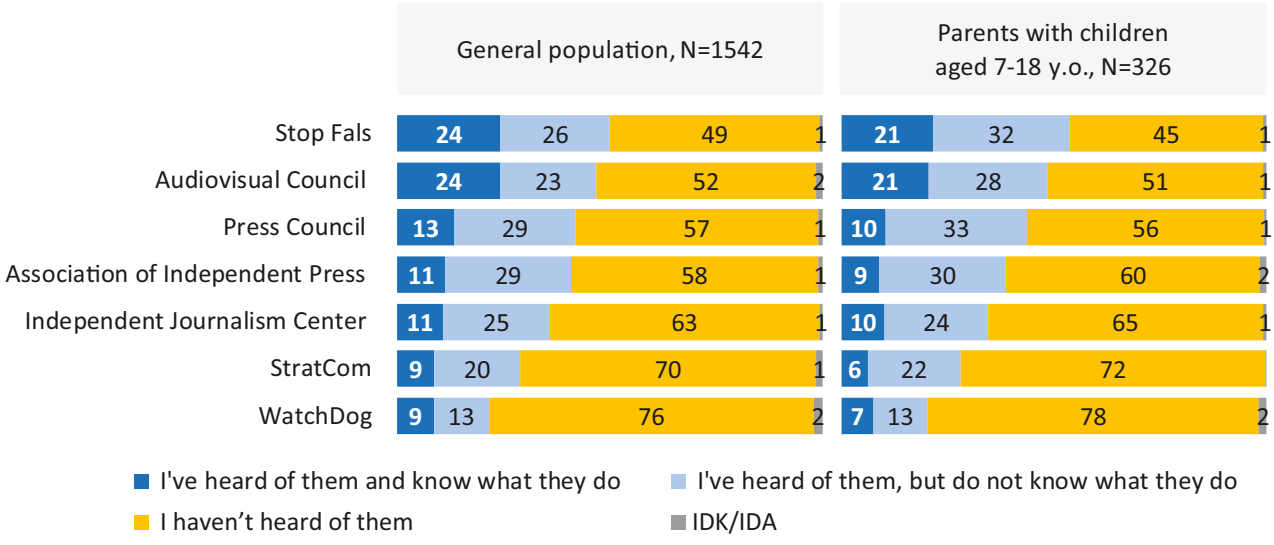

Figure 3.4.2: *"Q40. Have you ever heard of the following institutions and what they do? (one answer at a time)," %*

When asked what measures should be taken to help people distinguish between truth and lies, participants offered several solutions ranging from government intervention and sanctions to education, information, and personal responsibility.

One idea mentioned by several participants is that the state should be actively involved in combating disinformation. Many participants believe that the problem is too significant to be left to the people alone and that a clear legal framework and functional institutions are needed to monitor the media and intervene directly. One concrete proposal is to introduce sanctions and penalties for those who spread disinformation, whether they are media institutions or individuals.

In addition to penalties, some participants want the state to provide support tools. For example, it has been proposed that an official website be created to verify news stories, or that public television broadcast special programs debunking false news. However, there is also some mistrust: some fear that if the state is given too much control, it could use these measures to censor inconvenient media sources or control public opinion.

Another important direction is media education. Participants believe that people need to be taught how to identify false material. One proposed solution was to introduce education and information programs, especially for older people and those in rural areas: *"I think there should also be preventive measures, I mean various educational programs, organising seminars to be held in every locality, especially in rural areas."* (W, 35 years old, ATU Gagauzia, urban/rural). Another idea was that when misleading information is detected, it should be marked publicly, visible to everyone, with a clear warning such as "Warning, disinformation!" It was also proposed to create information points in public places, such as the post office or the clinics, where older people could call to verify information.

In addition to the role of state institutions, participants also emphasized the importance of personal responsibility. Several participants emphasized the need to take care of their close ones: children and grandchildren should help their parents and grandparents understand which information is false and which is true.

One aspect discussed by participants from Gagauzia was who delivers the message (the source of the message). They explained that people in their community do not trust experts coming from Chișinău, whom they perceive as outsiders. For a message about combating disinformation to be accepted, it must be delivered by a person respected in the local community, an opinion leader whom people already trust: *"For example, in Gagauzia, we had the experience that no matter how many mentors or experts we brought in to talk about fighting propaganda and so on, people just did not listen. They would say "well someone came from Chisinau to teach us how to live." What is needed is someone from Gagauzia, someone they know, who comes forward and says, „guys, this is how you spot false news, do not let yourselves be fools."* (M, 27, ATU Gagauzia, urban).

Chapter IV:

Media literacy education

This chapter presents the respondents' opinions on media education initiatives, the level of participation in such courses, interest in involvement in media skills training activities, and perceptions regarding the introduction of an optional media literacy education course in schools.

Only 4% of the general population mention they have personally participated in or know someone who has participated in a media education course. The majority of respondents say they have had no direct or indirect contact with such training – 95%. The same low rate is observed among parents with children aged 7–18. Those who said they had participated in such courses come mainly from among pupils and students (13%), people with higher education (8%) and young people aged 18–35 (7%).

Similarly, only a small number of participants in the group discussions had direct contact with media education courses, either personally or through their workplace. Those who participated describe the experience as positive and useful. Some appreciated the free and interesting format, different from the school one, which increased their curiosity: *"Well, it was interesting. The trainers... It was in a fairly informal format, not like at school, you know. The atmosphere was pleasant and so on."* (M, 27, ATU Gagauzia, urban). Another person who participated in training sessions lasting a few hours mentioned that they learned concrete information, even if they did not remember all the details: *"Yes, we were told something about the legal framework and how to differentiate. It's clear that we don't remember everything from one day only, but it's good for people to know,"* (W, 50, South, rural).

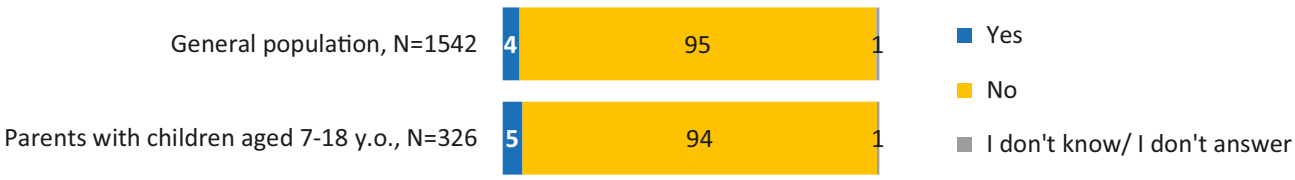

Figure 4.1: *"Q41. Some organisations in the Republic of Moldova offer media literacy courses. In these courses, people are taught to verify the credibility of the information they consume, to detect false news and manipulation, to analyse media sources, and more. Have you or anyone you know ever participated in such a course? (one possible answer)", %*

Interest in participating in a media literacy course is moderate among the general population - 35% of respondents say they are interested, while 64% say they are rather uninterested or very uninterested.

Interest in participating in such courses is higher among pupils and students (56%), Romanian speakers (47%), young people aged 18-35 (43%), those in the Central (38%) and Southern (37%) regions, and people with sufficient income to save money (46%). Women show slightly more interest than men in participating in media education courses (38% compared to 32%). On the other hand, those who say they are less interested are "Moldovan" and Russian speakers (73% each), people of Gagauz ethnicity (72%), those with very low incomes (72%), retired people (68%), but also residents of Chișinău (68%).

During the Focus Groups, participants, including those who had not heard of such courses before, were generally open to participating in media education programs. They explained that their main motivations would be the desire to be better informed, the need to protect themselves, and curiosity to learn new methods of analysing information. Some see participation as an opportunity to pass on the knowledge they have acquired and to help others. However, a significant obstacle identified is the cost. One participant mentioned that, although such courses are necessary, in his experience, many of them are fee-based, which makes them inaccessible to retired people or people with low incomes: *"The idea of the course is welcome, it is necessary, especially under the current conditions. But there is a problem, I follow, there are courses even for older people who want to learn how to use the internet and social media networks, but most of them require payment,"* (M, 68 years old, Centre, urban).

Over a third of parents with children aged 7-18 express interest in participating in such a course (36%), while 64% say they would not be interested. The values are similar to those recorded for the general population.

During the Focus Groups, a consensus was reached that such courses are necessary for the entire population, not just for young people. Participants believe that the ability to analyse information is essential for all age groups, as it is a prerequisite for protecting against scams and manipulation. Particular attention was paid to the elderly, who are perceived as being much more vulnerable to disinformation because they have greater trust in traditional media sources, such as television. However, it was emphasized that these courses should be optional, based on the personal interest of participants, and not mandatory, *"It should be optional, and those who want to participate should be able to do so."* (W, 35 years old, ATU Gagauzia, urban/rural).

Regarding the content, participants provided a list of topics they considered useful:

- Identifying disinformation and scams: Clear methods for detecting signs of false information and online scams.
- Analysis of media sources: Information about who owns certain media channels, so that people understand where the information comes from and what interests may be behind it.
- Clarifications on political issues: People want tools or skills to be able to analyse politicians' promises in electoral campaigns, to distinguish between what is real and what is not.
- Information of national interest: Some consider it useful for these courses to provide accurate information about new laws, infrastructure projects, and what is happening in the country, in order to combat rumours and disinformation at the local level.

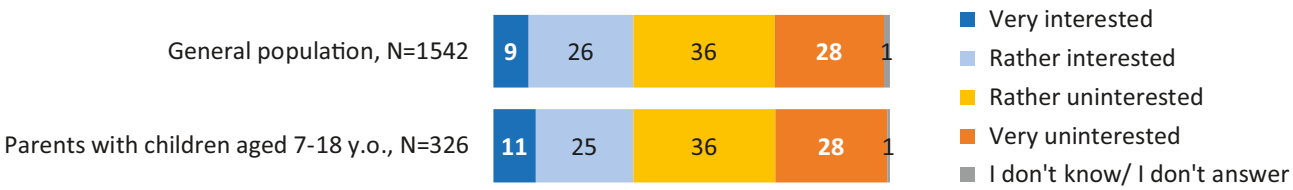

Figure 4.2: *"Q42. How interested would you be in participating in such a course? (one possible answer)," %*

The idea of introducing an optional media literacy education course in schools is well received by the majority of the general population, with 72% of respondents expressing a favourable opinion. A total of 16% adopt a neutral position, while 12% declare themselves opposed.

Among parents with children aged 7–18, the majority opinion is also positive, with 65% of respondents supporting this proposal. 14% express a neutral position, and 19% are rather or totally opposed.

Participants in the discussions have a mostly positive opinion about introducing media education lessons in schools, considering them a necessary initiative. However, the general perception is that, although the idea is excellent, the Moldovan education system may not be ready to support it effectively. In general, participants from ATU Gagauzia were more vocal in this regard.

The main argument why participants consider these lessons a good idea is the belief that media education would develop critical thinking and help students distinguish between false and real news. Furthermore, there is hope for a ripple effect, in which children, once educated, can become a source of accurate information even for their parents: *"If... schools teach children how to distinguish false news from real news, they will be able to tell their parents about it too."* (W, 28 years old, ATU Gagauzia, urban). The usefulness of this is also emphasized by the fact that young people are constantly connected to the online environment anyway, and a dedicated course would help them consume information correctly.

On the other hand, some doubts and concerns have also been identified. First and foremost is the acute shortage of qualified teachers, a problem recognized by many. Participants doubt that there are enough teachers prepared to teach such a new and specific subject. Also, some participants are not sure if there are enough or good enough teaching materials for such a subject: *"There is little teaching material available to teach these courses to pupils. To be able to teach a course, you need to have a better developed material base"* (W, 38 years old, South, rural).

A second major concern, expressed mainly by parents, is the overburdening of pupils, whose school schedule is already very dense: *"As a parent, I want to say that the curriculum is already quite demanding and should not be further burdened with such matters."* (W, 45 years old, ATU Gagauzia, urban).

Last but not least, concerns were expressed regarding political instrumentalization. There is a real concern that these courses might be used for propaganda rather than for objective and impartial education. Participants insist that they must be independent: *"I believe that these courses are important, but only on one condition: they must be independent, not, say, funded by a political party that uses them to teach only what benefits them. I believe they should be completely independent."* (W, 22 years old, ATU Gagauzia, rural).

In the context of these uncertainties, some participants propose alternatives that are more flexible than a new, stand-alone course. One possible solution would be to integrate media education topics into homeroom classes or as modules in other existing disciplines. Another idea is to organise specific training sessions, supported by specialists from outside the school.

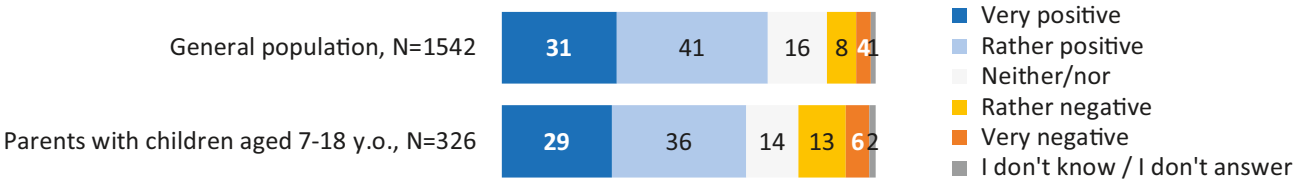

Figure 4.3: *"Q43. What is your opinion on the introduction of an optional media education course in schools? (one possible answer)," %*

Conclusions and recommendations

The study Media Literacy Assessment in the Republic of Moldova shows that the media sector in the Republic of Moldova is undergoing rapid changes, defined by three major trends: users are increasingly turning to the online environment for information, distrust of the media is widespread, and although everyone recognizes the danger of disinformation, the response to it is often passive. Media consumers in the Republic of Moldova are therefore increasingly connected to the online environment, are sceptical, and choose their sources of information more out of convenience and habit.

Consumption habits

News consumption in the Republic of Moldova has shifted decisively to the online environment, with social media networks becoming the main channel for accessing information, especially for young people. This trend is driven by pragmatic considerations such as speed, convenience, and flexibility of access to information via mobile phones, which are available at any time. In this context, traditional television, with its fixed programming, is losing ground, especially among the active audience, although it remains a main source of information for older people. Parents with children are even more oriented towards the online environment compared to the general population, with social media networks being their dominant source in terms of both use and trust.

When it comes to the language in which they consume the news, people choose the option they feel most comfortable with, either Romanian or Russian. Another tension is reflected in the debate about language quotas: the proposal that 80% of televised content should be in Romanian is strongly supported by Romanian speakers but rejected by the majority of Russian speakers, who criticize the government for adopting such regulations. At the same time, even some supporters of the 80% Romanian-content quota emphasize that this measure does not solve the problem of content quality, as they still have to choose Russian-language content for entertainment.

Trust in sources and disinformation

The biggest problem defining the public's attitude toward the media is mistrust. Most people believe that the press in the Republic of Moldova is not free/independent, but politically biased and controlled by the financial interests of the owners. This perception is considered the main cause of poor journalism quality, the emphasis on scandal and negativity, and, ultimately, widespread public scepticism. Trust in a particular source is earned slowly, gradually, based on personal experience, when consumers find that those sources provide accurate and objective content. Even so, in the fast pace of everyday life, many continue to choose their sources of information out of habit and convenience, not necessarily based on an analysis of credibility.

People generally agree that disinformation is a serious problem, and most are found on social media networks. According to participants in the group discussions, this perception is mainly explained by the large volume of information available on these platforms, but also by the long time spent online, which increases the likelihood of encountering false news. Some methods for detecting false information, mentioned in both the survey and the Focus Groups, are: checking information from multiple sources, comparing it with prior knowledge, and looking out for exaggerated headlines, nonsensical news stories, or altered images. Interestingly, most respondents believe they have the skills to identify disinformation, but think that other people are easily manipulated. The most vulnerable are considered to be the elderly, due to their tendency to believe and accept without reservation the information

conveyed through television and their lack of digital skills, but also people with a low level of education or those who blindly trust certain political or religious leaders. Although they are aware of the phenomenon of disinformation, a significant proportion of citizens admit that they make no effort to verify the information they consume, adopting a passive attitude.

Media education

Most people consider media education to be a necessary solution, but they see it more as something for the future, especially for the children generation. They support the introduction of such a course in schools, believing that it would help children to think critically and even teach their parents in this regard. However, this enthusiasm is accompanied by practical concerns, such as the lack of well-trained teachers, the overload of the school curriculum, or the risk that these courses could be used for political propaganda purposes. As for adults, interest in participating in media education courses is low, with some mentioning that they would be too expensive. An important aspect, especially in Gagauzia, is that people would have more confidence in learning from someone local, known and respected, than from an expert from Chișinău.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, a series of strategic directions take shape for strengthening a more resilient and balanced information space in the Republic of Moldova. The recommendations focus on four main pillars: improving media content offer, restoring trust through strategic communication, developing citizens' media skills, and supporting quality journalism.

1. Adapting and improving domestic media content

- **Stimulating the production of local entertainment content in Romanian:** There is a significant unmet demand for domestic entertainment content. Investments in the production of films, series, comedy shows, and other quality entertainment formats in Romanian are essential to offer the public a viable alternative to the predominantly Russian-language content, thus contributing to balancing the cultural and media space.
- **Increasing the supply of quality informative content in Russian:** In order to balance the influence of external sources and to meet the need for objective information of Russian speakers, it is necessary to support the production of quality, relevant and equidistant informative content (news, analyses, talk shows) produced in the Republic of Moldova. This can reduce dependence on external sources and increase trust in the national media landscape.

2. Building trust through strategic communication and transparency

- **Adapting the strategic communication of authorities with minority language groups:** Focus group discussion with participants from Gagauzia highlighted a reluctance toward messages delivered by authorities through experts or officials from outside the region. Participants emphasized the importance of having messages on sensitive topics, such as disinformation, come from trusted local figures. In this context, it may be beneficial for authorities to explore ways to collaborate with local opinion leaders (mayors, activists, cultural figures, teachers, librarians etc) to ensure more effective and better-received communication within such communities.
- **Continuous promotion of transparency regarding media ownership and financing:** Since political influence and financial control are major factors in distrust of the media, the continuous support of initiatives and platforms is essential (e.g. media NGOs) that monitor and publish information about the real owners and sources of funding of media institutions. Public awareness campaigns dedicated to this topic can contribute to strengthening citizens' critical thinking and improve their ability to assess the credibility of news sources.

3. Generalized development of media literacy and resilience

- **Media education in schools:** Given the broad support for introducing media education into the education system, it is recommended that a flexible curriculum be developed that can be taught both as an optional subject and as a module integrated into homeroom classes or other subjects. Priority attention should be given to specialized teacher training and the development of high-quality support materials in order to address concerns about teaching quality and student overload.
- **Development of media education programs for adults:** There is a need to develop and implement accessible, free, and practical training programs tailored to the specific needs of adults, with a particular focus on vulnerable groups (the elderly and those on low incomes). These programs should focus on the acquisition of practical skills, such as identifying online scams, information about media owners, access to accurate information on topics of national interest (laws, projects), verifying the credibility of media sources and content, and developing tools for critically analysing political discourse and promises. For increased receptivity, courses could be organised through trusted local actors (libraries, community centres, etc.).
- **Strengthening reporting mechanisms for disinformation:** Through collaboration between authorities, the media and civil society, it is necessary to increase public awareness of existing platforms (e.g. Stop Fals), as well as of procedures for reporting false or manipulative content to competent institutions.

4. Supporting quality and local journalism

- **Supporting local and investigative journalism:** The study shows that in certain regions of the country, trust is strengthened at local level, by providing accurate and relevant information for the community. It is recommended to establish support mechanisms (grants, mentoring programs, technical assistance) for local newsrooms and investigative journalism projects, which play a vital role in informing citizens correctly and objectively.

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